



# Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter

by Adeline Yen Mah

Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### Chapter 1: Top of the Class

Four-year-old Adeline brings her top-of-the-class medal to Aunt Baba, who is thrilled. Adeline learns from Aunt Baba that her real Mama died of a fever shortly after Adeline's birth. Big Sister says Mama and Aunt Baba were best friends long ago, and that Adeline is bad luck for causing Mama's death.

### Chapter 2: A Tianjin Family

We learn of Adeline's family life, and the place where she lives. She has four older siblings: Big Sister, six and a half years older, and three brothers, five, four, and three years older. They all blame Adeline for their mother's death. When Adeline is one, her father, a wealthy thirty-one-year-old businessman, marries a seventeen-year-old half-Chinese, half-French beauty whom he introduces to people as "my French wife." The children are ordered to call her "Niang," which means "mother" in Chinese. Niang speaks English, French, and Chinese, and has a taste for expensive jewelry and designer clothes and perfume. She and Adeline's father subsequently have two children, a son (Fourth Son) and a daughter (Little Sister). The household also includes Ye Ye (Adeline's paternal grandfather), Nai Nai (her paternal grandmother), and Aunt Baba, who—as a meek, shy, unmarried woman with no money of her own and little status in the household—has been ordered to care for Adeline since the girl's infancy. The Japanese control Tianjin; Adeline's family lives in the city's French concession. At a school run by nuns, Adeline learns French as well as Chinese.

### Chapter 3: Nai Nai's Bound Feet

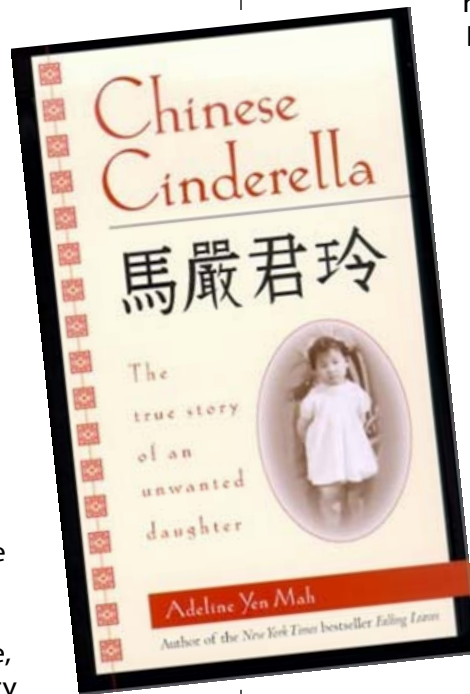
Nai Nai's feet were bound when she was three, and

they have hurt her ever since; she tells Adeline she is fortunate that foot-binding was abolished thirty years ago. At dinnertime; Niang's "real" children are too young to eat at the table, but they get special foods sent up to the nursery, and the whole family already assumes they are "special"—better-looking and brighter than Adeline and her full siblings. One evening at dinner, Adeline basks in Father's notice of her medal—the first time she can

remember that he has ever singled her out for notice and praise—but her jealous older siblings treat her spitefully in retaliation for this special treatment.

### Chapter 4: Life in Tianjin

Adeline attends St. Joseph's Convent School. She and Big Sister travel to and from school in their Nai Nai's rickshaw, which was a fiftieth birthday present from Father. Adeline loves everything about school, including her classmates, who treat her as if she belongs. She wins the class medal every week, which angers Big Sister, inspiring abusive behavior. At the end-of-the year assembly, Adeline is the only honoree whose family members are absent.



The Japanese occupy much of China, including Tianjin. They are iron-fisted and brutal, and the locals hate them, though nobody expresses this openly for fear of reprisals. Trouble comes to the household when Japanese officials begin demanding to become Father's business partners. Finally, to avoid the Japanese, father disappears one day, taking Niang and Fourth Brother with him. The trio are gone for over a year. During this time, Father's business shuts down, causing the Japanese to lose interest. Meanwhile, Ye Ye runs the household, which includes the remaining children, Aunt Baba, and Nai Nai. One day, after taking her bath, Nai Nai has a stroke and dies. The family holds a traditional

Buddhist funeral.

**Chapter 5: Arrival in Shanghai**

Six weeks after Nai Nai's funeral, Father returns to take the older children to Shanghai, where he has relocated; Aunt Baba, Little Sister, and Ye Ye will follow later. The new house is sumptuous and huge, filled with priceless antiques and run by servants, and father has acquired a German shepherd, Jackie, who he claims is safe but of whom Adeline is afraid. Niang immediately establishes ground rules meant to segregate the "old family" from the "new" one. The stepchildren must live on the third floor and will be subject to unannounced inspections, while Father, Niang, and Niang's children will live on the second floor, which the older children are forbidden to enter uninvited. The older children must leave and enter through the back door, and are not allowed to have friends over. The restrictions prompt Big Brother to remark angrily that, to Niang, he and his siblings from Father's first marriage are not real people—they are a despised unit known as "all of you."

**Chapter 6: First Day at School**

The first day of school is the Monday following the children's arrival. All are going to different private missionary schools—Big Sister to a middle school, the brothers to a boys' school across town, Adeline to another school for first grade. Since Aunt Baba has not yet arrived, a servant helps Adeline get ready in the morning, and Adeline waits by the front door for someone to take her to school. Nobody appears, and she finally realizes that she has been forgotten. The cook passes by and takes pity on her, giving her a ride on the handlebars of his bicycle on the way to the market. After school, Adeline waits anxiously for a ride home, and is again forgotten. She decides to try to walk home, but gets lost in the huge city. She passes a *dim sum* shop and debates going in to ask directions. As the little girl ponders what to do, the restaurant's owner notices her and insists she come inside where it is safe. She is clearly scandalized that the little girl's mother would allow her to wander alone in the dangerous city. Fortunately, Adeline has just learned her new telephone number, and she reaches Father on the phone. He comes to pick her up. His only response to the incident is to give her a map of Shanghai so she won't get lost the next time she is alone. Adeline realizes that nobody at home even missed her, and that, even at her

young age, she is truly on her own.

**Chapter 7: Family Reunion**

After Aunt Baba, Ye Ye, and Little Sister arrive, an incident illustrates the change in family dynamics since Nai Nai's death. Two-year-old Little Sister doesn't remember her biological mother, Niang, and consequently treats her like a stranger. Of course, this is perfectly natural, since Niang left when the little girl was an infant, and has been absent for most of her young life. Niang, however, doesn't understand this, and reacts with fury at the toddler's rejection and "disobedience," viciously beating her on the head and shoulders. To Adeline's shock, nobody intervenes; instead, the whole family cowers during this brutal display. Finally, Adeline can take no more, and she tells Niang to stop. Niang does, but then gives Adeline a tongue-lashing, sending her out of her room and telling her she will never be forgiven, and will "pay" for her "arrogance." This incident demonstrates the extent of Niang's tyranny in the household.

**Chapter 8: Tram Fare**

Father and Niang start an austerity program for the older children "to teach them the value of money." They get no pocket money, have no clothes other than their school uniforms, and must wear ugly and unfashionable haircuts. These are worse for the boys—they are required to get their heads shaved like Buddhist monks, and are teased mercilessly for it at school. Even though the tram goes virtually door-to-door between the house and the children's respective schools, the siblings don't receive tram fare, either.

For two months, Aunt Baba and Ye Ye give the children the fare, until their money runs out. At dinner one night, Aunt Baba suggests she go back to work at the bank—a veiled reference to her lack of spending cash—and Ye Ye tells father and Niang that the children should be given spending money and tram fare. Father tells Ye Ye he has only to ask for money, and persuades Aunt Baba to stay home. Niang predictably rages at the children—their sin now is "going behind our backs" to get money from Ye Ye and Aunt Baba—but, with mock magnanimity, she tells them they will receive the tram fare if they are "truly contrite" and ask forgiveness. Ye Ye remains silent, and Adeline is stunned at his lack of courage and Niang's new power. She also wonders how it is that her grandfather—the right-

ful head of the household, according to tradition—must now beg his wealthy son for money.

Predictably, Big Sister is the first to cave in and apologize, receiving tram fare for her mile-and-a-half trip to school. The brothers hold out for more than a week, but with winter approaching and exhausted by the six-mile round-trip walk each day, they finally give in. Only Adeline—for reasons she doesn't understand—refuses to relent. Despite the urgings of Ye Ye and Aunt Baba, she cannot bring herself to apologize to Niang. Regardless of the weather, she walks the mile-and-a-half to and from school each day alone.

### **Chapter 9: Chinese New Year**

On the eve of the Chinese New Year, the five older children discuss their unequal treatment and ways to appeal to Father. Then, Third Brother discovers Niang eavesdropping. Niang crushes the rebellion by recruiting Big Sister to her side, giving special privileges to the girl and letting her move her quarters to the floor where the younger children sleep. Big Sister becomes a complete turncoat and snitch. This breaks the spirit of the other children, and they no longer meet together. In second grade, Adeline begins her writing career. Adeline ponders feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and self-loathing instilled in her by Niang.

### **Chapter 10: Shanghai School Days**

The father of Adeline's friend Wu Chun-mei insists upon driving Adeline home in the rain. A craze for Hollywood movies takes hold after America bombs Japan. Adeline finds hope by reading Wu Chun-mei's copy of *A Little Princess*. In 1946, tension eases at home when Father takes Niang, their two children, and Big Sister to Tianjin. Adeline wins first prize in a writing contest. The brothers serve Adeline juice mixed with urine as a prank; Adeline is especially hurt by Third Brother's betrayal.

### **Chapter 11: PLT**

Adeline receives a pet duckling named Precious Little Treasure (PLT). Jackie (Father's German Shepherd) bites Adeline while she digs for worms for her adored pet. PLT is mortally wounded when Father tests Jackie's obedience training. This is a terrible blow for Adeline, since PLT was her "best friend in the world." Adeline grieves terribly. She buries PLT in the garden. In a rare show of unity, Third Brother attends the early-morning funeral of

PLT. He tries to comfort Adeline that things will get better some day, and tells her he can't wait to grow up so he can be free.

### **Chapter 12: Big Sister's Wedding**

Father and Niang arrange a marriage for Big Sister to a man of thirty-one; Big Sister is seventeen. Though Big Sister is thrilled, Adeline is horrified for her, and fears a similar fate. The boys at the wedding mock Adeline's three brothers, who are forced to attend in "Buddhist monk" garb of long robes and shaved heads. Others at the wedding notice the unequal treatment of the family's children, but no one intervenes. At the wedding, Adeline overhears someone mention to Niang that Aunt Baba has given Big Sister a valuable jade pendant as a present. Adeline knows that Niang will punish Big Sister for not disclosing this gift; worried for her sister, she tips her off to the conversation. For the first time in her life, Big Sister shows Adeline kindness, thanking and praising her for her loyalty in giving this information. Adeline's kindness has unexpected consequences, however: before Niang can confront her, Big Sister "confesses" to Niang that she was sworn to secrecy by Aunt Baba. In lying about the gift in this way, Big Sister curries favor with Niang, while betraying Aunt Baba and driving a bigger wedge between her and the vicious Niang. For her duplicity, Big Sister gets to keep the pendant and enjoy her honeymoon with a clear conscience.

### **Chapter 13: A Birthday Party**

In September 1948, Adeline secretly attends a birthday party for Wu Chun-mei. A phone call alerts Niang, who abuses Adeline. Father whips Adeline and threatens separation from Aunt Baba.

### **Chapter 14: Class President**

Adeline is elected class president. Her classmates pay a surprise visit to her house and stage a celebration, which Niang angrily breaks up. Adeline is humiliated, but her friends know she is not to blame, and Wu Chun-mei loudly protests her mistreatment. At school, classmates applaud Adeline's presidency, but not at home. For her "arrogance" in allowing "hooligans" to visit the house to "mock" her parents, she is to be banished to a boarding school in Tianjin.

### **Chapter 15: Boarding School in Tianjin**

In September 1948, Father and Niang take Adeline

to Tianjin. Adeline learns that Father doesn't even know her name or birthday. Adeline is ten. Since Father can't remember her true birthday, he gives her his own when filling out enrollment forms for St. Joseph's School, which is run by French nuns. Adeline is thrilled to be given Father's birthday. Later, however, he leaves without waving goodbye. Adeline feels a terrible loneliness. Her family, she feels, has "tossed me aside like a piece of garbage."

During this time, the Communists are advancing through China, taking more and more territory from the Nationalists, and many Chinese are attempting to flee to Taiwan or Hong Kong. There are only a few boarders left at the school now, and the few remaining will soon be making their escape. Adeline is unaware of the political situation, but she learns of it the day after her arrival when Nancy Chen's mother talks to her. The woman is horrified that Adeline's parents would leave her here alone. The Communists, she says, don't believe in God and hate foreigners; they will persecute the nuns if they win, and treat any remaining students as if they, too, were foreign nuns. Now fear is added to Adeline's loneliness.

Classmates leave during the ensuing months; by Christmas, Adeline is the only one left. She eats Christmas dinner alone. Although the nuns put up a front around her, they are clearly troubled by her family's abandonment. Adeline, in turn, pines in vain for some sign she is not forgotten completely.

Finally, in early 1949, Aunt Reine Schilling—Niang's older sister, who, unlike Niang, is kind—arrives to retrieve Adeline. Adeline learns that while she has been left alone to face the Communists, most of the rest of the family—Niang, Father, Ye Ye, and the younger children—have already been in Hong Kong for three months. Big Sister and her family have escaped to Taiwan, and Aunt Baba and the older boys have stayed in Shanghai, which will soon be under Communist control as well. Now Aunt Reine and her family are heading for Hong Kong on the way to their ultimate destination, Switzerland. Adeline's parents are unaware of her impending arrival, but Reine innocently assumes they will be delighted to see her safe. Adeline, however, fears Niang's reaction when she returns.

#### **Chapter 16: Hong Kong**

On the boat to Hong Kong, Adeline gets to know

Aunt Reine's family; she is impressed by the kindness Aunt Reine's son, Victor, shows his sister. For her part, Aunt Reine treats Adeline like one of her own children. Adeline dreads the return to Hong Kong, but it is largely uneventful: she and Ye Ye have a joyful reunion, but her parents ignore her. They are, however, overjoyed to see Reine, especially since she has managed to smuggle Niang's diamonds out of Tianjin.

Adeline notices that Ye Ye seems to have given up hope, and he complains about various ailments. However, he continues to encourage Adeline to excel. To this end, he advocates studying Chinese language and literature, saying it will give her wisdom and insight not available elsewhere. In 100 years, he predicts, the three main languages will be English, Spanish, and Chinese.

Meanwhile, Victor has noticed the unkind treatment of Adeline, and he protests her exclusion from family outings. On the day of a particularly special outing, he chooses to stay home with Adeline rather than leave her alone. Overcome with gratitude for this kindness, Adeline gives Victor one of her prized possessions, a wonderful book on origami that he had admired.

#### **Chapter 17: Boarding School in Hong Kong**

Aunt Reine's family leaves Hong Kong for Switzerland. Fourth Brother—Niang's son—is angry with Adeline because she previously thwarted his plan to harm Ye Ye in a prank. That day—two days after the Schillings leave Hong Kong—Adeline receives word from a maid that she is to pack her bags, because Niang is sending her away. Adeline takes her leave of Ye Ye, who is miserable and defeated. In her heart, she vows to one day return and rescue him. On the way to their destination, Niang stops at the posh Peninsula Hotel for tea, at the insistence of the spoiled Fourth Brother. Near the entrance to the hotel, Adeline sees an obviously impoverished man literally trying to sell his small daughter. After tea, they arrive at their destination. Adeline reads the sign—"The Sacred Heart School and Orphanage"—and immediately fears that Niang is trying to abandon her entirely. However, she rejoices inwardly when she overhears Niang thanking the nuns for taking Adeline as a boarder in the middle of the year. She is not considered an orphan, she will be free of Niang.

### Chapter 18: Miserable Sunday

Adeline has been at the school for two years, and has never received a visitor, a package, or a letter from home. It is Sunday, a particular day of misery for Adeline, because it is also the day the girls receive eggs, which are a special treat that must be sent from home; the egg distribution always draws attention to Adeline's neglected state. To everyone's surprise, Adeline's name is called (she learns later that another classmate had painted Adeline's number on the shell of one of her own eggs, as a surprise). However, sure there's been a mistake, and with her low self-esteem now an ingrained habit, Adeline refuses the egg; when the nun is disbelieving, she claims to hate them.

Sunday is also visiting day, the only day the girls can wear normal clothes instead of uniforms, and the other girls get visits and gifts of clothing from their mothers on that day. Again, Adeline is the exception. She is embarrassed by her isolation and shabby clothing. Earlier, we have learned that Adeline has skipped a grade and is now in direct competition with the beautiful Monica, previously considered the smartest girl in the school. In the bathroom, she overhears some girls discussing her: her "egglessness," her clothes (which are shabby and too small), the unkind treatment inflicted by the jealous and popular Monica, the lack of visitors. However, they seem to have genuine affection for Adeline, and decide that she'll be all right because of her academic achievement and because she has a "special spirit." After they leave, Adeline goes back to her room and changes into her school uniform, since at least it fits correctly.

### Chapter 19: End of Term

It is time for summer holidays. All the girls gather together, and one by one, they are collected by their families. Finally, Adeline and her two special friends, Rachel and Mary, are the only ones left, and Adeline knows they are only remaining with her out of kindness, since they know Adeline will be spending the summer alone at school. Before Rachel and Mary leave for the summer, the three girls make a pact of solidarity.

### Chapter 20: Pneumonia

Adeline contracts pneumonia and is admitted to the hospital. She has one visitor, her friend Mary, who lives nearby. She gets better, and Father comes to take her home for one week to recuper-

ate. There, she sees Ye Ye and Third Brother and catches up on the news: her older brothers are already in college in England, and Third Brother will soon join them. Aunt Baba is working in the family bank in Shanghai, and Big Sister, against everybody's advice, has returned from Taiwan to Tianjin with her husband and baby daughter. Adeline worries again that she herself will be forced into an arranged marriage. Ye Ye is sick and hopeless, but still has energy to encourage Adeline and tell her she is precious and special. She knows that his faith in her has motivated her to succeed.

### Chapter 21: Playwriting Competition

Adeline enters an international playwriting competition. Sometime during the months when she's waiting to hear the results, Ye Ye dies. An inconsolable Adeline attends the funeral with Niang, Father, and Niang's children; Adeline is the only one who cries. As they are leaving, Niang loudly tells Father that Adeline is getting "uglier and uglier." Later, at home, Niang tells Adeline she will be quitting school in the summer, after she turns fourteen, and will need to find a job, since she can't "live in luxury at Father's expense forever."

At school, the girls play a game called "best feature," in which they write down their most admirable traits and then share what they've written. All are surprised when Adeline writes "nothing." In fact, they tell her, they have voted her "most likely to succeed." Time passes. Finally, on a Saturday eight weeks before the dreaded end of the term, Adeline is informed that her father's car has arrived to take her home. Once there, she is escorted to her father's room (an unprecedented event), where he shows her a newspaper clipping naming her as the winner of the international playwriting competition. He is radiant, because her success has given him "face" in front of his esteemed colleague, who had seen the newspaper story. In one breathtaking moment, Adeline sees her future change: she asks Father to send her to England to study like her brothers, and he agrees. However, he scoffs at her idea of being a writer, and tells her that instead she will attend medical school to become an obstetrician. She readily acquiesces, feeling that going to England, under any circumstances, is like going to heaven.

### Chapter 22: Letter from Aunt Baba

In September of 1952, Aunt Baba sends Adeline a

wonderful letter. In it, she offers congratulations on her medal and her upcoming studies at Oxford. She assures Adeline of her love, and reminisces about the girl's sad childhood. Finally, she tells her the story of Ye Xian, which is almost identical to the western story of Cinderella. Both, she says, are tales of mourning for dead mothers, as well as talismans against despair. Aunt Baba praises her for overcoming her horrible childhood through her own efforts, tells her that her future is limitless, and reminds her that she will always be proud of Adeline—her “Chinese Cinderella.”

### Author Sketch

A survivor of child abuse and war, Dr. Junling “Adeline” Yen Mah turned her experiences into bestselling memoirs and novels. Born in 1937 in Tianjin, China, she is the daughter of Joseph Tsi-rung Yen, a wealthy importer/exporter and realtor, and Ren Yong-ping, an accountant at the Shanghai Women's Bank. When her mother died of puerperal fever two weeks after her birth, Mah was blamed and labeled “bad luck” by the family. After her father's marriage at age thirty-one to seventeen-year-old Jeanne Virginie Prosperi, A French-Chinese trophy bride, Mah grew up under duress with four older siblings, first in Tianjin, then in Shanghai, and finally in Hong Kong. Jeanne (called “Niang,” or “mother”) fed the children of her predecessor rice gruel and pickled vegetables, while her own children ate choice foods and were allowed to mock their half-siblings as ugly and unloved. Although the family was extremely wealthy, the children of the “first family” were subjected to austerities and forced to beg for essentials, such as tram fare to travel to their distant schools. Adeline was habitually scapegoated and mistreated by her parents and siblings, and subjected to much emotional cruelty. For instance, Adeline's father allowed his German Shepherd, Jackie, to kill his daughter's beloved pet duckling as part of the dog's “training.” The only consistent love and support young Adeline received came from her paternal grandfather, Ye Ye, and her Aunt Baba, her father's spinster sister. However, these two had very little power within the family and were able to do little to shield Adeline from cruelty.

For escape, Adeline read voraciously, consuming everything from the classics to kung fu novels to

her favorite book, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. She learned the story of the Chinese Cinderella from her kind Aunt Baba, and Chinese characters and wise sayings from the devoutly Buddhist Ye Ye, who gave her calligraphy lessons and let her play in peace on his balcony. Both Aunt Baba and Ye Ye chipped in for tram fare and movie tickets when Niang tried to exclude Adeline. Although she spent much of her childhood separated from these substitute parental figures after being sent away to boarding schools, they still managed to instill in young Adeline traits of kindness, decency, and love that were lacking in her own father and stepmother.

In kindergarten, Adeline began showing evidence of the scholarship that ultimately enabled her to escape her abusers. During her career in a succession of Catholic boarding schools, Adeline excelled academically; she earned many awards and was promoted several grades, although she never received a visit, package, or even a letter from her parents, and even spent summers at school. In 1952, at age fourteen, her efforts finally paid off when she won first prize in an international playwriting competition. What ensued was a reversal of fortune worthy of Cinderella herself: Adeline saw her dreams realized when her father—in an uncharacteristic fit of generosity spurred by the realization that his daughter's achievement had made him look good (given him “face”) with important business associates—agreed to allow her to go to college in England like her brothers, rather than stay in Hong Kong to work and be forced into an arranged marriage. For Adeline, this was “like entering heaven” after a lifetime in hell.

Studying first at Oxford and then at the London Hospital Medical School, Adeline earned a medical degree and became a practicing physician, first in Hong Kong and then in the United States. In 1985, she became chief of anesthesiology at a hospital in California. After an unsuccessful first marriage, Adeline married Dr. Robert “Bob” Mah (a professor of environmental microbiology at UCLA). When Adeline's father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, Adeline brought him to California for treatment. At his death in 1988, Jeanne concealed the distribution of his \$30 million estate, claiming he died penniless. When Jeanne died two years later, it was discovered that her husband had indeed left all the children—including Adeline,

who had been led to believe she was cut out of the will—a large sum. Although Jeanne had stolen the money, Adeline placed great importance on this discovery, taking it as a sign that her father did love her.

Instead of an inheritance, Adeline returned to California from Jeanne’s funeral with a personal treasure—a photo of Ye Ye—and the determination to write down the story of her life. She did so, in the acclaimed adult bestseller *Falling Leaves: the Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter* (1997), and later in *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter* (1999), the young adult version. After these successes, Adeline retired from medicine to be a full-time writer and advocate for abused children. She and her husband have two adult children, a daughter and a son, and live in California and London.

### Critic’s Corner

Adeline Yen Mah first gained international attention in 1997 with the publication of *Falling Leaves: the Memoir of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, a tale of triumph over a miserable childhood at the hands of her neglectful father and abusive step-mother. The book prompted lawsuit threats from her angry siblings but was a *New York Times* best-seller and was translated into eighteen languages. *Falling Leaves* was followed in 1999 by *Chinese Cinderella: the True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*, an abridged version of *Falling Leaves* for young adults. *Chinese Cinderella* won critical acclaim for its moving depiction of Adeline’s mistreatment and ultimate triumph. *Publishers Weekly* wrote, “The author recreates moments of cruelty and victory so convincingly that readers will feel almost as if they’re in the room with her”; *Booklist* called it “[a] captivating read”; and *School Library Journal* praised its “rich depiction of a very different world.” *Chinese Cinderella* was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 2000, and also won awards from the Children’s Literature Council of Southern California and the National Christian School Association.

### Timeline of Chinese History, 1912-1956

**1912** Collapse of China’s last royal dynasty, the Qing dynasty. The anti-Qing political exile Sun Yatsen returns to China, founds the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party, or

KMT), and, in a gesture of appeasement, offers the presidency to Yuan Shikai, former head of the Qing armies and war-lord in control of Northern China.

- 1913** Yuan Shikai dissolves the new Republican government and sends Sun Yatsen into exile once again.
- 1916** Yuan Shikai’s sudden death sends Northern China into civil war; Sun Yatsen returns to take control of a Kuomintang government in South China.
- 1921** The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is formed. Early members include Mao Zedong (Mao Tse Tung), Zhou Enlai (Chow En Lai), and Li Dazhao (Li Ta-Chao), the head librarian of Beijing University. At the behest of the Soviet Union, the CCP joins the KMT in fighting the Northern warlords.
- 1925** Sun Yatsen dies; Chiang Kai-Shek takes control of the KMT.
- 1927** Chinese Civil War begins in April. After jointly defeating the Northern warlords, the CCP conduct a strike against Chiang and the KMT. The KMT retaliate brutally, and around 5,000 people are killed.
- 1932** Japan invades Manchuria (Northern China).
- 1934** In what becomes famous as the Long March, the surrounded and outnumbered Communists flee more than 6,200 miles and across more than a dozen mountain ranges into exile. Many die, but they succeed in regrouping and establishing a base in Yan’an, Sha’anxi.
- 1936** There is strong dissent within the KMT leadership: Chiang Kai-Shek, who famously says that “(t)he Japanese are a disease of the skin, the Communists are a disease of the heart,” wants to defeat the Communists before dealing with the Japanese invaders. However, his general, Zhang Xueliang, disagrees, kidnapping him and forcing him to agree to a United Front with the Communists against the Japanese.
- 1937** The Sino-Japanese War (the largest Asian war during the twentieth century) begins on July 7. Under Chiang Kai-Shek, Chinese troops fight the Battle of Shanghai. In an event known as the Rape of Nanking or the Nanking

Massacre, Japanese troops rape, mutilate, torture, and kill as many as 300,000 civilians in Nanking alone, and hundreds of thousands more in the surrounding countryside.

- 1937-41** China fights Japan alone. Despite Japan's vastly superior military strength, Chinese resistance is fierce, and by 1940, China and Japan have fought to a stalemate. Also during 1940, the shaky United Front breaks down completely. The tide begins to turn in favor of the Chinese in 1941, when the United States enters World War II and incorporates the Sino-Japanese War into the greater war. Chiang Kai-Shek becomes Allied Commander for China.
- 1945** The Japanese surrender. At least 20 million Chinese have been killed during the more than eight years of war. The KMT has played a critical role in the defeat, but has bankrupted China in the process; the CCP, in contrast, has fought little, instead building a war chest through the opium trade and amassing a strong following in the Chinese countryside. The Chinese Civil War resumes.
- 1949** Mao takes Beijing and declares the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Chiang flees to Taiwan.
- 1949-56** In what are generally seen as the "good years" of Chinese socialism, land is redistributed to the peasants and the economy grows.

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## Other Works by Adeline Yen Mah

*Falling Leaves* (1997)  
*Watching the Tree: A Chinese Daughter Reflects on Happiness, Traditions, and Spiritual Wisdom* (2000)  
*A Thousand Pieces of Gold: A Memoir of China's Past through its Proverbs* (2002)  
*Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society*

(2005)

*China: Land of Dragons and Emperors* (2008)  
*Chinese Cinderella: The Mystery of the Song Dynasty Painting* (2009)

## The Importance of Setting

The setting of *Chinese Cinderella*, in urban China and Hong Kong in the mid-twentieth century, is integral to understanding much of the book. Historical events intrude on the action to provide insight into Adeline's situation, and these events often have a direct effect on her life. For instance, the family's lengthy respite from Father and Niang in Tianjin came about because Father was evading the Japanese occupiers; the extent of Adeline's family's disdain was made shockingly clear when she was abandoned in Tianjin during the Communist takeover; and Adeline was able to enter and win the crucial playwriting contest because she was an English-speaking resident of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong after World War II. As well, the setting in a somewhat traditional Chinese family, where parents must never be questioned, is integral: it dictates the form the abuse takes, as well as providing (through Ye Ye and Aunt Baba) a fund of traditional values that give Adeline strength in the face of mistreatment.

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Adeline Yen Mah's style, present the following terms and applications to her memoir:

**Suspense:** anticipation of the outcome of an action or the solution to a mystery, puzzle, or uncertainty. With each vignette, the narrative builds suspense as the reader tries to imagine how Adeline will overcome and triumph in the face of each succeeding instance of her family's stunning cruelty and neglect. How will six-year-old Adeline make it home safely after being left to walk home from the first day of school in the unfamiliar, dangerous metropolis of Shanghai? How will Adeline escape when she is abandoned in the boarding school in Tianjin during the Communist takeover of China? How will Adeline survive such blows to her spirit as the capricious killing of her beloved pet by her father, or her realization that he does not even know her name or age? How can she continue to spur herself to achievement when she



is ignored, or even punished, for showing evidence of excellence? How will Adeline avoid an arranged marriage like her sister's? Even though the outcome is already known, the child's perspective and the outrageousness of Adeline's mistreatment enable the reader to experience the little girl's own feelings and doubts about her future.

**Universality:** a quality or theme that applies to all people at all times. Child abuse and neglect; dysfunctional families; reading and fantasy as means of escape from misery; hard work and academic achievement as tickets to a better life; even the loving support of trusted adults such as Ye Ye and Aunt Baba; all are universal motifs that cut across cultural barriers. Similarly—as the book's title and the last chapter make clear—the Cinderella theme, of overcoming cruelty and adversity to win ultimate glory and triumph, is universal as well.

## Related Reading

William Armstrong, *Souder*  
 Joseph Bruchac, *Bowman's Store*  
 Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*  
 Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*  
 Chris Crutcher, *Whale Talk*  
 Michael Dorris, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*  
 Robin Lee Graham, *Dove*  
 Esther Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*  
 Gish Jen, *Who's Iris?* and "Fish Cheeks"  
 Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John*  
 Joseph Krumboltz, *And Now Miguel*  
 Margaret Langdon, *Anna and the King of Siam*  
 Gus Lee, *China Boy*  
 James Vance Marshall, *Walkabout*  
 Ben Mikaelson, *Touching Spirit Bear*  
 Walter Dean Myers, *The Glory Field*  
 Ann Petry, *Tituba of Salem Village*  
 Conrad Richter, *The Light in the Forest*  
 Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*  
 Art Spiegelman, *Maus*  
 Jane Wagner, *J.T.*  
 Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*  
 Gene Yang, *American-Born Chinese*  
 Lawrence Yep, *Dragon's Gate*  
 Jane Yolen, *The Devil's Arithmetic*

## Cross-Curricular Sources

For related reading, consult these sources:

### Audiocassettes

*The Light in the Forest*, Conrad Richter (Listening Library)

### Audio CD

*A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Michael Dorris (Audio Bookshelf)

### Autobiography

*Annie John*, Jamaica Kincaid  
*Bowman's Store*, Joseph Bruchac  
*China Boy*, Gus Lee  
*Dove*, Robin Lee Graham  
*The Endless Steppe*, Esther Hautzig  
*Farewell To Manzanar*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston  
*So Far from the Bamboo Grove*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins

### Fairy Tale

*Cinderella Tales from around the World*, Ila Lane Gross  
 "Ye Xian," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ye\\_Xian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ye_Xian)

### Historical Novels

*The Devil's Arithmetic*, Jane Yolen  
*The Glory Field*, Walter Dean Myers  
*The Good Earth*, Pearl S. Buck  
*The Light in the Forest*, Conrad Richter  
*No Promises in the Wind*, Irene Hunt  
*Serpent's Children, Mountain Light, and Dragon's Gate*, Laurence Yep  
*Tituba of Salem Village*, Ann Petry

### Internet

"Child Abuse Prevention," <http://www.childabuse.com/>  
 "Chinese Culture," <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travel-guide/culture/>  
 "Culture of China," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_culture)

### Legends and Myths

*The Legend of Mu Lan: A Heroine of Ancient China*, Wei Jiang and Chen an Jiang

### Novels

*The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver  
*The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan  
*A Little Princess*, Frances Hodgson Burnett  
*Walkabout*, James Vance Marshall

**Plays**

*J.T.*, Jane Wagner  
*The King and I: A Musical Play*, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II

**Poetry**

“The Ballad of East and West,” Rudyard Kipling

**Themes and Motifs**

A study of the central issues and situations in Adeline Yen Mah’s *Chinese Cinderella: the True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*, should include these aspects:

**Themes**

- rejection
- tolerance
- discipline
- abuse
- secrecy
- bullying
- sexism
- friendship
- rescue
- compassion
- grief
- overcoming adversity

**Motifs**

- yearning for a parent’s love
- trying to fit in
- overcoming a terrible childhood
- working hard to achieve goals
- recovering from loss and grief
- standing up to oppressors

**General Objectives**

1. To identify standard values and behaviors
2. To characterize the effects of child abuse on children
3. To discuss the nature of child abuse and neglect, bullying, and family dysfunction
4. To outline the antipathies in Adeline Yen Mah’s family
5. To contrast various means of “getting ahead” portrayed in the book
6. To note the value of hard work and striving to achieve goals
7. To analyze the effects of family mistreatment and rejection

8. To analyze sources of inner strength

**Specific Objectives**

1. To describe the problems of the Yens’ blended family
2. To recount how and why Adeline came to be mistreated in the family
3. To speculate why Father participates in his wife’s program of cruelty
4. To show how the support of Aunt Baba and Ye Ye helped compensate somewhat for Adeline’s mistreatment
5. To speculate how Adeline’s experiences gave her the courage to protest Niang’s beating of Little Sister and to thwart Fourth Brother’s dangerous “prank” against Ye Ye
6. To discern the source of Ye Ye’s hopelessness after the move to Hong Kong
7. To enumerate how Adeline’s victory in winning Father’s permission to attend Oxford affected her self-image and subsequent life.

**Meaning Study**

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from *Chinese Cinderella: the True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. They blamed me for causing Mama’s death and never forgave me. (Chapter 2, p. 4)  
*(This statement sets up the entire story of Adeline’s mistreatment at the hands of her family; “they” refers to her older siblings, but the hostility and indifference Adeline face are permitted and perpetuated by adult family members as well; the adults are responsible, even when they aren’t active participants. Adeline’s mother contracted puerperal fever and died of it when Adeline was only two weeks old. Most rational people would recognize the inherent illogic and unfairness of blaming a helpless newborn for such an event; but, incredibly, Mama’s death is used by the entire family to both justify and overlook neglect and abuse. None of the responsible family members seems ever to have admitted that their actions and attitudes were cruel in the extreme.)*
2. The whole tram-fare issue was obviously some-

how tied up with the establishment of a new hierarchy within our family. (Chapter 7, p. 39) *(When Adeline is a first-grader, she and her older sister and brothers all attend private schools in distant sections of Shanghai, miles from home. In one of many instances of Niang's bullying, the stepchildren are forced to beg for tram fare to school, and admit their "error" in previously receiving the fare from Ye Ye, who had taken pity on them and given them his own money for rides. Adeline's brothers hold out for a week, but they eventually give up. Adeline, however, refuses to cave in; her sense of personal injustice, and her loyalty to Ye Ye, prevent her from apologizing. This episode shows Niang establishing her power over both the children and Ye Ye, who ordinarily would outrank her in the household.)*

3. I was overwhelmed with horror. My whole world turned desolate. (Chapter 11, p. 82) *(In perhaps the most heartbreaking cruelty related in the book, Adeline's father uses her beloved pet duckling, PLT (for "Precious Little Treasure") to demonstrate his German Shepherd's hunting and retrieval skills, resulting in PLT's death. These words describe Adeline's feelings at the murder of what is essentially her only friend.)*
4. "Let her study! She won't disappoint you. When you've reached my age, you know which children are weak and which are strong. Don't ask her too many questions. Don't criticize her or tear her down. I don't want her to grow up like Big Sister. She is going to be different!" (Chapter 14, p. 110) *(Ye Ye is speaking to Aunt Baba, who has been on the receiving end of an angry outburst by Adeline in response to questions about a recent punishment from Father. Adeline refuses to discuss it; she wants to forget her family situation and lose herself in her studies. Instead of the expected scolding for her disrespect, Ye Ye orders Aunt Baba to give Adeline some peace. His admonition reveals both his faith in Adeline's innate ability to overcome her terrible childhood, and some insight into the mistreatment the family's other children—especially girls—may have faced.)*
5. Now they knew the pathetic truth! Unloved and unwanted by my own parents! How long did it take for a person to die of shame? (Chapter 14, p. 116) *(These are Adeline's feelings as she stands in front*

*of her classmates, bleeding and unable to speak because she is crying so hard, after being slapped by Niang for the "crime" of having classmates throw an impromptu party at her house in honor of her being elected class president. Although Adeline's friends are well aware that her parents' behavior is reprehensible and cruel, Adeline, as is typical of abused children, takes the shame on herself. This incident precipitates one of her parents' most shameful acts: sending her away to a boarding school in Tianjin during the Communist takeover of China—a virtual sentence of death or slavery for the daughter of a wealthy family—while they themselves escape to Hong Kong. Although Adeline is told she is being sent away because of the party, readers might wonder if this was just an excuse used to justify a preplanned act of breathtaking cruelty.)*

6. I had seen infants wrapped in newspapers left to die in doorways. Beggar-children in rags routinely rummaged the garbage cans searching for food. Some were reduced to eating bark peeled off the trees along the street on which we lived. (Chapter 14, p. 117) *(Adeline's father has just informed her that she is to be sent away, but he has not yet told her where. She reflects on the horrors she has seen inflicted on poor children in China, and wonders if that is now to be her fate. Later, Niang suggests they might send her to an orphanage—almost as bad as being left on the streets to beg or starve. Ironically, these observations of Adeline's underscore the fact that, despite the cruelty inflicted upon her, she is infinitely better off than many children in her society.)*
7. Which is the true me? (Chapter 14, p. 119) *(A party honoring her in school prompts Adeline to question her own identity. Is she the terrible daughter who let down her parents and was humiliated by them in turn? Or is she the popular and honored friend elected class president by her peers at school? Her parents' cruel and unpredictable behavior causes her to painfully doubt herself.)*
8. So far, they had not addressed me at all. Theirs was the gaze that glances but does not see. (Chapter 16, p. 148) *(This is the response of Niang and Father to Adeline's return after Aunt Reine rescues her from*

*the Communists in Tianjin. They are thrilled to see Reine, however, since she has managed to smuggle Niang's jewels into Hong Kong. Her parents' non-response, though painful, is still better to Adeline than the all-too-likely alternative: Niang flying into a rage and sending her away again.)*

9. There was no need to say any more. ... We understood each other's predicament only too well. (Chapter 16, p. 148)  
*(As soon as Adeline returns from Tianjin, Ye Ye has a cot set up in his room for her to sleep on. He advises her to quickly move her things into his quarters so Niang will forget about her and let her stay. Adeline sees the new air of defeat in Ye Ye, and realizes that he has given up, and that they are both under Niang's thumb.)*

10. "Though life has to be lived forward, it can only be understood backward. Reading Chinese history will enlighten you in ways no English writing can." (Chapter 16, p. 151).  
*(These wise words come from Ye Ye, who is encouraging Adeline to study Chinese language, culture, and history. The statement itself refers to the idea that it is only possible to fully understand life's events in hindsight. To this end, studying history—especially the history of a land as ancient, huge, and varied as China—will yield insights and understanding that can be found in no other way.)*

11. "You mustn't talk like that! You have your whole life ahead of you. Everything is possible! I've tried to tell you over and over that far from being garbage, you are precious and special. Being top of your class merely confirms this. But you can vanquish the demons only when you yourself are convinced of your own worth." (Chapter 20, p. 181)  
*(Ye Ye is simultaneously admonishing and encouraging Adeline after she confesses that she sees herself as "less than nothing" and "a piece of garbage to be thrown out." He tells her she is "precious," but that she must believe this herself to overcome her painful past.)*

11. "I had given him face." (Chapter 21, p. 192).  
*(In one of the few moments of affirmation she has ever received from him, Adeline is commended by her father for winning a prestigious*

*international playwriting contest when she is fourteen. He has been informed of the victory by his esteemed colleague, who in turn learned from a newspaper article lauding Adeline; this move has given Father public honor and status, or "face." Father is delighted, and on this basis grants Adeline's request to be sent to college at Oxford. It is the big moment that changes her future and ensures her deliverance from her horrible past.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

### Characters and Setting

1. Describe Adeline's family at the beginning of the memoir. Where do they live? What family members live together? What is the socio-economic level of the family?  
*(At the beginning of the memoir, little Adeline lives at the family compound in Tianjin with her father, stepmother, paternal grandmother (Nai Nai), paternal grandfather (Ye Ye), Aunt Baba, three older brothers and an older sister, and two younger half-siblings, a boy and a girl. Her household also includes seven maids, a cook, a chauffeur, and a rickshaw puller, since this is an extremely wealthy family. In fact, Father is such a successful businessman that the Japanese occupiers want to force him to become their business partner.)*
2. What is the significance of Father's recognition of Adeline's kindergarten medal? What does the scene say about the relationship between Adeline and her father, and about her position in the family?  
*(Adeline is ecstatic, since this is the first time Father has singled her out for praise, or, really, for any attention at all. Her older siblings respond to this attention by bullying and mistreating Adeline. We are introduced to a family dynamic in which Adeline is utterly ignored by her father, whom she adores, and is subjected to jealous and spiteful treatment by her older siblings, all of whom are, presumably, also starved for Father's attention and resent any*

notice given to her.)

3. What is the political situation in Tianjin at the start of the book? Who controls the area of the city where Adeline and her family live? Who controls most of China at this time? *(Tianjin is occupied by the Japanese invaders, who by this point control most of China. At the start of the memoir, Adeline and her family live in the French concession of Tianjin, a portion of the city still controlled by French officials.)*
4. Adeline mentions a “craze,” or trend, that swept Shanghai after World War II. What was it? Is this typical behavior among school kids? Can you think of any comparable “crazes” today? *(The “craze” Adeline refers to is to a demand for anything American, including movies and pictures of movie stars. America was wildly popular in Shanghai because the United States had ended the war by bombing Japan. This seems like typical group behavior, and students should be able to recognize similar behavior in themselves, and to provide many examples of similar crazes in contemporary culture.)*

**Interpretive Level**

5. When Adeline is in the first grade in Shanghai, she is forgotten at school at the end of her first day and forced to begin the long walk through the dangerous city alone. What is her father’s response to this episode? What does this tell you about Father? What does Adeline conclude about herself? *(For a small girl such as Adeline to walk several miles home alone in huge, bustling, post-war Shanghai was terribly dangerous—just as it would be dangerous in a modern American city. In addition to the simple physical dangers for a small child walking in city traffic and other hazards, there would also be a real danger from human predators. This might perhaps be even more true in a culture such as Adeline’s, in which female children were devalued and frequently abandoned, and homeless children eked out a meager living on the streets while the more prosperous ignored them. In this context, normal parents would never have forgotten their small child in the first place, but if the child had become lost, they would have been frantic with worry and launched an all-out search. Not so Adeline’s family, however. When*

*Adeline is reunited with her father after a shopkeeper takes pity on her and lets her call home, his only response is to give her a map of Shanghai with the advice to pay better attention to her location the next time she is out! Father is revealed as a neglectful parent at best, if not a willfully callous one. Adeline correctly concludes from this incident that, even at her tender age, she is on her own.)*

6. How does Little Sister respond when she is reunited with her mother, Niang, after not seeing her for a year and a half? How does Niang react? How does Adeline intervene? What does the incident say about Niang’s character, and about Adeline’s? About the rest of the family? *(Little Sister is a baby when Niang departs with Father and Little Brother to set up a new household in Shanghai; they are gone for many months. When she returns, Little Sister understandably prefers Aunt Baba, the only adult female caregiver she remembers; this is a normal response for a child that age. Niang, however, takes it as a personal insult, and begins screeching and beating the baby, while the rest of the household looks on. After waiting in vain for the adults to intervene, Adeline finally takes matters into her own hands and tells Niang to stop. Niang stops, but turns her hatred on Adeline with verbal threats.*

*This entire incident reveals several things: 1. Niang is not only astonishingly self-centered, but is also a terrible mother, with evidently no understanding of child development and little ability to bond with others; she is also violent and abusive. 2. Adeline has unusual decency and courage, especially for a small child raised in such an unloving family. 3. The adults and older children are either too cowed by Niang to intervene, or are themselves hardened to her cruelty. Perhaps the kindest conclusion to be drawn about the rest of the family is that they are cowards.)*

7. At one point after they return to Shanghai, the stepchildren meet to discuss protesting their mistreatment by Niang in an effort to get Father to notice and take action. What methods do the children suggest? Would they work? Why or why not?

*(The children discuss conducting a hunger strike, going to the kitchen and eating whatever they want in contravention of Niang's rules, using subterfuge or diplomacy, having a private conference with Father, or writing him an anonymous letter in Chinese. Based on Niang's vicious rule of the family and Father's total acquiescence to her every whim, none of these would seem to have any chance of succeeding.)*

8. Discuss Adeline's composition, "My Best Friend." How does she describe Aunt Baba's behavior? How would children be treated in Adeline's ideal world?  
*(Aunt Baba is Adeline's best friend, and represents her only connection to her dead mother; Aunt Baba cares for Adeline and cherishes her successes, making her feel special. In Paradise, no one is mistreated, girls are treated the same as boys, and any child can enter.)*

**Critical Level**

9. A *Little Princess* and the story of the Chinese Cinderella are very important to Adeline. Why might that be? What aspects of the two stories might appeal to a lonely and mistreated little girl?  
*(Both are rags-to-riches stories depicting motherless girls triumphing over poverty and mistreatment through their own efforts and good attitude. Although Adeline comes from a wealthy family, she is poor in terms of family support and love. She desperately needs proof that adults can make wrong judgments about children, that girls can succeed as well as boys, and that a better life is possible. These stories feed her spirit and give her hope in otherwise hopeless circumstances.)*
10. The political situation in China is unstable when Adeline is sent to Tianjin. How does Adeline's family react to these political changes? How does Adeline escape? What does her parents' treatment of Adeline say about them?  
*(In 1948, the Nationalists are losing a civil war against the Communists, who are on the verge of taking over the country. It is well known to everyone that the Communists hate foreigners and religious people, and that those associated with either will be subject to persecution, including torture and execution. As the daugh-*

*ter of a rich merchant with international connections, boarding at a Catholic school run by foreign nuns, Adeline clearly falls into both disfavored camps by association. Aware of this, after dumping Adeline in Tianjin, the rest of the family escapes to Hong Kong, while Big Sister—who actually lives in Tianjin but never bothers to visit Adeline—flees with her family to Taiwan. Adeline barely makes it out of Tianjin due to the efforts of Aunt Reine, Niang's kind sister, who is heading to Hong Kong with her own family. Adeline's parents make no effort to rescue her, and barely acknowledge her when she returns. What they have done amounts virtually to attempted murder.)*

11. Discuss the game of "best features" that Adeline plays with her classmates in Hong Kong. How do they see her? How does she see herself? With whom do you agree? Why is the way Adeline sees herself so at odds with the way her classmates see her?  
*(Her classmates see Adeline as most likely to succeed, in recognition of her determination, scholastic ability, kindness, courage and strength. By contrast, Adeline sees herself as nothing, and is unable even to name a best feature for herself. The classmates seem to recognize the real Adeline; by contrast, Adeline's self-image is so distorted by years of abuse and neglect that she is unaware of her own worth.)*
12. How does Adeline's life change in a moment when she wins the contest and is congratulated by her father? Why does she not argue when he chooses her future career for her? Before she won the contest, what had she feared would become of her? How has Adeline's life to this point mimicked her favorite stories?  
*(Adeline is overjoyed when Father commends her for winning the award; it is one of the few times in her life that he has truly noticed her. Her success is meaningful to him because it has enhanced his status in the community and with his esteemed business colleague. Emboldened to ask to be sent to college in England with her brothers, Adeline is overjoyed when Father agrees. Although she dreams of becoming a writer, she readily acquiesces when Father insists she go to medical school instead; after all, she thinks, "Does it matter what you do after*

*you get to heaven?" Her joy is mixed with tremendous relief, since she has escaped Big Sister's fate of an arranged marriage, and will now be able to continue her studies, rather than being forced to quit school at fourteen to work. The parallels to Cinderella and A Little Princess are obvious—from a life of toil, obscurity, and abuse, the heroine is suddenly elevated when her great virtue—in this case, her academic talent and effort—is recognized and rewarded by those in power, completely changing her life.)*

## Across the Curriculum

### Art/Music

1. Create a collage of pictures based on Adeline's descriptions of her neighborhood.
2. Explore the Japanese art of origami. Then make your own paper objects. Form a class display.

### Speech/Drama

1. Adeline likes to imagine when she writes. "...I was the female warrior Mulan, who would rescue her aunt and Ye Ye from harm." (p. 53). Research the original Mulan. How did the story begin? What qualities are similar in Mulan and Adeline? Present your findings in class discussion.
2. Working in groups, research kung fu. Write a scene for a play about a kung fu hero, then perform the scene for classmates.

### Language Arts

1. Write a paragraph describing a family gathering you attended, including the major personalities.
2. Write a paragraph about a time you were lost or confused.
3. Write a composition titled "My Best Friend."
4. Begin a list of metaphors and similes and add to the list as you read.
5. Create a diary entry explaining how you felt at the time you lost a beloved person, object, or pet.
6. Working with a partner, explore the plot of William Shakespeare's King Lear.
7. Research Chinese folklore, then choose a story to retell for the class.

### History/Social Studies

1. Research the Qing Dynasty in China. Make a list

- of facts. Then write a summary of the facts.
2. Research the life of Sun Yat-sen. What were the key accomplishments of his life? How did he change China?
3. Research the lives of Chinese political leaders (and adversaries) Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong. Write a short encyclopedia entry on each man's life.
4. Working in pairs, research the rise of Communism in China. Create a time line of important facts and dates.
5. Research the history of British rule in Hong Kong. Is Hong Kong a British colony today? Use your findings to write a brief historical overview of Hong Kong for a travel brochure.

### Culture

1. Find recipes for Chinese meals in a cookbook. Then write a newspaper column about Chinese foods.
2. Culture: Research the Chinese custom of binding women's feet. How did the custom end? Share your findings with the class.
3. Working in small groups, explore the customs of Chinese New Year. Then choose a student from each group to report findings in a panel discussion before the class. How do the customs differ from Western New Year's customs?
4. Find pictures or photographs of traditional Chinese clothing styles. Create a clothing catalog that includes traditional Chinese styles along with Western styles for comparison. Identify the styles in captions.
5. Research the custom of arranged marriages. Share your findings.
6. Working in small groups, find photos or pictures of Buddhist monks. Research the origin of Buddhism in China. Create a presentation for the class.
7. Working in groups, learn about the Chinese concept of filial piety, then prepare a report for the class about whether or not Father and Fourth Brother observe filial piety toward Ye Ye. Support your claim with evidence from the text.

### Geography

1. Trace the train journey from Tianjin to Shanghai on a map. How far does Adeline travel?
2. Locate Taiwan on a map showing major cities and landforms. What are its key physical char-

acteristics? What role did Taiwan play in the politics of the 1940s and 1950s, the time during which Chinese Cinderella is set?

## Alternate Assessment

1. *Chinese Cinderella* is full of painful reminders of girls' lower status in traditional Chinese society, yet Adeline's grandaunt became a business success, and Adeline herself overcame a terrible childhood despite unfair treatment. What personal characteristics and advantages allowed these two to succeed? Would it be easier for them to be successful nowadays? Research the status of women in China, both historically and in the present, and comment about how things have changed.
2. Read *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and write an essay comparing the novel with *Chinese Cinderella*. What are some parallels between the two tales? What are some differences?
3. Explore cultural beliefs about bad luck. What things or situations are traditionally considered bad luck in Western culture? In other cultures?
4. Discuss the ideas of luck and destiny as touched on in *Chinese Cinderella*. From babyhood, Adeline is told she is "bad luck," yet her grandfather, Ye Ye, and her Aunt Baba both try to instill in her the idea that she can overcome her unhappy childhood and create her own destiny. Which of these ideas do you agree with? Which appears to be true for Adeline?
5. Select an aspect of Chinese culture such as food, clothing, customs, music, or calligraphy. Write a report and present it to the class.
6. Adeline has a narrow escape from Communist rule and the persecution she would have faced for her association with foreigners and religious people in a foreign-run convent school. Another Chinese author, Ji-Li Jiang, was not so lucky; her family stayed in China, and they suffered greatly during the so-called "Cultural Revolution" of 1966-1976 (when many Chinese lost their freedom and even their lives for exhibiting "capitalist" tendencies), because her grandfather had been a landlord. Read her memoir, *Red Scarf Girl*, and compare it to *Chinese Cinderella*.



## Vocabulary Test

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. concession    | a. good reputation; dignity; prestige                      |
| _____ 2. prowess       | b. urgent advice or recommendations                        |
| _____ 3. agility       | c. surreptitiously, stealthily; secretly                   |
| _____ 4. hooligan      | d. a grant of land controlled by the government            |
| _____ 5. tremulously   | e. prolonging another's suffering for fun; teasingly cruel |
| _____ 6. dumbfounded   | f. slowly, carefully, deliberately                         |
| _____ 7. methodically  | g. crowd around; surround                                  |
| _____ 8. anonymous     | h. astonished; struck speechless                           |
| _____ 9. cat-and-mouse | i. branch of medicine concerned with childbirth            |
| _____ 10. humility     | j. characterized by trembling, as from fear                |
| _____ 11. "face"       | k. unnamed; unacknowledged                                 |
| _____ 12. besiege      | l. exceptional strength or ability                         |
| _____ 13. exhortation  | m. ruffian; hoodlum  |
| _____ 14. furtively    | n. ability to move quickly and easily; nimbleness          |
| _____ 15. obstetrics   | o. not having a big head; humble                           |

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions to the names or places each refers to:

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. What Adeline dreamed of becoming                           |
| _____ | 2. Adeline's cruel stepmother                                 |
| _____ | 3. Aunt Baba's best friend before Adeline was born            |
| _____ | 4. People who persecuted foreigners and religious believers   |
| _____ | 5. Adeline's paternal grandfather                             |
| _____ | 6. Sibling whose betrayal hurt Adeline deeply                 |
| _____ | 7. Adeline's beloved pet                                      |
| _____ | 8. The true mother figure in Adeline's life                   |
| _____ | 9. City of Adeline's birth                                    |
| _____ | 10. What Father told her to become                            |
| _____ | 11. Friend who witnessed Adeline's parents' bad behavior      |
| _____ | 12. Bustling city where Adeline got lost as a first-grader    |
| _____ | 13. What Adeline's classmates labeled her                     |
| _____ | 14. Where Adeline's family lived after the Communist takeover |
| _____ | 15. Elderly relative who had bound feet                       |

- |                  |              |                           |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| a. Ye Ye         | f. Hong Kong | k. most likely to succeed |
| b. Nai Nai       | g. Niang     | l. Wu Chen-Mei            |
| c. Third Brother | h. Mama      | m. Communists             |
| d. Tianjin       | i. Aunt Baba | n. obstetrician           |
| e. Shanghai      | j. PLT       | o. writer                 |

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Name the following characters.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Told Adeline the story of Chinese Cinderella                                 |
| _____ | 2. Rescued Adeline from Tianjin   |
| _____ | 3. Tried to play a mean trick on Ye Ye  |
| _____ | 4. Told Adeline that she could overcome her demons                              |
| _____ | 5. His dog killed PLT   |
| _____ | 6. Wealthy girl who became jealous when Adeline's essays were picked over hers. |
| _____ | 7. Wore a lot of French perfume   |
| _____ | 8. Kept a jade pendant and lied about it  |
| _____ | 9. Won a playwriting contest at fourteen  |
| _____ | 10. Founded the Shanghai Women's Bank   |

- a. Ye Ye
- b. Big Sister
- c. Aunt Reine
- d. Adeline
- e. Father
- f. Niang
- g. Grand aunt
- h. Aunt Baba
- i. Fourth Brother
- j. Monica

**Part III: Settings (20 points)**

Use the clues to identify places referenced in the book.

1. Where Adeline gets forgotten at school \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where Adeline is born \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where Big Sister goes when she flees Tianjin \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where Adeline's family finally settles \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where Aunt Reine's family goes after Hong Kong \_\_\_\_\_
6. Where the stepchildren must sleep in Shanghai \_\_\_\_\_
7. Where Aunt Baba remains \_\_\_\_\_
8. Where young Adeline plays in peace \_\_\_\_\_
9. Where Father grants Adeline's request \_\_\_\_\_
10. Where Adeline dreams of going to college \_\_\_\_\_

**Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)**

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What makes Adeline such an admirable character? Isolate and analyze at least three of her best traits.
2. What is the memoir's primary theme or message about life?
3. Compare and contrast the memoir's two primary mother figures, Niang and Aunt Baba. Who provides true mothering to Adeline? Does the villainous Niang have any admirable qualities or strengths? Conversely, does the loving Aunt Baba have areas of weakness that prevent her from being the best mother to Adeline?
4. What role does the setting play in *Chinese Cinderella*? Why is the setting so important in this story?

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: True/False (30 points)

Mark each statement either **T** if it is true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Adeline had five siblings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Monica was wealthy and beautiful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Big Sister was a good friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Niang favored her own children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Adeline's family was extremely wealthy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. PLT was killed by Father's dog.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Father was an attentive parent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Adeline's family sent for her when the Communists overran Tianjin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Adeline thought she was "most likely to succeed."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Father didn't think girls should get an education.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The threat of an arranged marriage terrified Adeline.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Aunt Baba was Adeline's dead mother's best friend.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Ye Ye was a devout Christian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Fourth Brother defended Adeline from abuse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Despite her unhappy childhood, Adeline grew up to be a success.

### Part II: Fill in the Blanks (20 points)

Fill in the blanks with terms that make a true statement:

- 1. Adeline's classmates vote her most likely to \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2. Father couldn't remember Adeline's \_\_\_\_\_ or birthday.
- 3. Niang always wore expensive designer clothes and \_\_\_\_\_ perfume.
- 4. Adeline didn't want to be forced into an \_\_\_\_\_ marriage like Big Sister.
- 5. Father agreed to send Adeline to study in England to become an \_\_\_\_\_.

### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose the correct answer to complete each statement below:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Adeline was born in
  - a. Shanghai
  - b. Tianjin
  - c. Hong Kong
  - d. Beijing
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. In 1948, China was taken over by the
  - a. Socialists
  - b. Nationalists
  - c. Monarchists
  - d. Communists
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Nai Nai was in constant pain from her
  - a. liver
  - b. arthritis
  - c. bound feet
  - d. pierced ears
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When Adeline arrived at the boarding school in Hong Kong, she was grateful she wasn't going to
  - a. an orphanage
  - b. a concentration camp
  - c. a prison
  - d. a spiritual retreat
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. PLT was a
  - a. dog
  - b. duck

c. lizard

d. cat

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. Ye Ye was a devout

a. Confucian

b. Hindu

c. Buddhist

d. Christian

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Aunt Baba was the best friend of

a. Niang

b. Mama

c. Big Sister

d. Grandaunt

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. Niang and Father exiled Adeline because

a. she talked back to them

b. she wouldn't do the dishes

c. she was in trouble with the law

d. her friends threw a party to celebrate her election as head of the class.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. Father left Tianjin because

a. the Japanese occupiers wanted to take over his business

b. he was a wanted man

c. he was looking for better schools for his children

d. he had decided to try another line of work

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. In contrast to their older siblings, Fourth Brother and Little Sister got

a. better food

b. nicer clothes

c. special privileges

d. all of the above

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Although Adeline yearns in vain for the attention of her biological father, she has a more true father figure in her grandfather, Ye Ye. Compare and contrast these two men and their parenting of Adeline. Does Father exhibit any redeeming qualities as a parent? Conversely, are there any areas where the supportive Ye Ye fails to provide Adeline with the love and protection she needs?
2. Discuss Adeline's relationship with her sometime ally Third Brother. Account for their occasional solidarity, and for her sorrow at his betrayal. How would you describe Third Brother's character?
3. Adeline, influenced by years of mistreatment, does not think she is special in any way, yet it is plain that she is. Discuss at least three examples from the memoir that show that Adeline is not a typical little girl.
4. Review the plot of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*, and compare it to the memoir *Chinese Cinderella*. How are the stories similar? How are they different? Speculate as to why *A Little Princess* would be a favorite of Adeline's.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY TEST

1. d
2. l
3. n
4. m
5. j
6. h
7. f
8. k
9. e
10. o
11. a
12. g
13. b
14. c
15. i

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (30 points)

1. o
2. g
3. h
4. m
5. a
6. c
7. j
8. i
9. d
10. n
11. l
12. e
13. k
14. f
15. b

#### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. h
2. c
3. i
4. a
5. e
6. j
7. f
8. b
9. d
10. g

#### Part III: Settings (20 points)

1. Shanghai
2. Tianjin

3. Taiwan
4. Hong Kong
5. Switzerland
6. Third floor
7. Shanghai
8. Ye Ye's terrace
9. Father's room
10. England

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: True/False (30 points)

1. F
2. T
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. T
7. F
8. F
9. F
10. F
11. T
12. T
13. F
14. F
15. T

#### Part II: Fill in the Blanks (20 points)

1. succeed
2. name
3. French
4. arranged
5. obstetrician

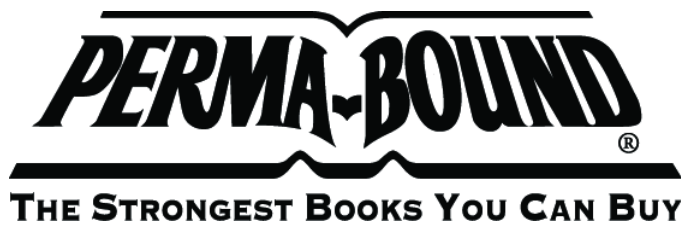
#### Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. b
6. c
7. b
8. d
9. a
10. d

#### Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)

Answers will vary.





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