

# Chinese Cinderella



By: Adeline Yen Mah

## Chapter Summaries

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## Preface

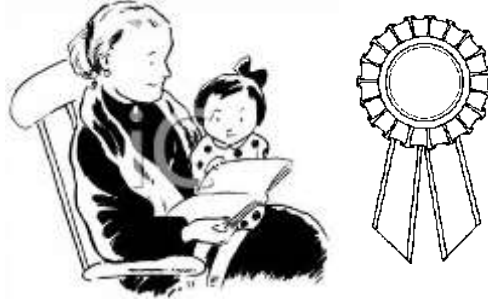


Chinese Cinderella is the true story of my childhood up to the age of fourteen. It was difficult and painful to write, but I felt like I had to do it. My family considered me bad luck because my mother died giving birth to me. They were cruel to me and made me feel unwanted all my life.

In China, many parents preferred sons to daughters. When I was growing up, daughters were actually despised, or hated, because they were not sons.

I am writing this story for the children in the world who feel the way that I felt. For those who were neglected and unloved as children, please be convinced that each of you has within you something precious and unique.

## Chapter 1: Top of the Class



**Autumn 1941**

Four-year-old Adeline comes home to tell her Aunt Baba that she has won an award after only one week in Kindergarten. Her Aunt Baba treasures Adeline's award by placing it in her special safe-deposit box. *"She...placed my certificate underneath her jade bracelet, pearl necklace an diamond watch, as if my award were also some precious jewel impossible to replace."*

Adeline asks her Aunt Baba if she has a picture of her dead mother. Aunt Baba says she only has a picture of her stepmother, Niang, but Adeline doesn't want to see that. Aunt Baba tells Adeline that her mother died from a fever, but Adeline's Big Sister tells her that "Mama died giving birth to you. If you had not been born, Mama would still be alive. She died because of you. You are bad luck."

## Chapter 2: A Tianjin Family



Adeline has one sister, Big Sister, who is six and a half years older than her. She also has three brothers who are five, four, and three years older than her. She is the youngest. All of her siblings hate her because they think she is the reason that their mother is dead.



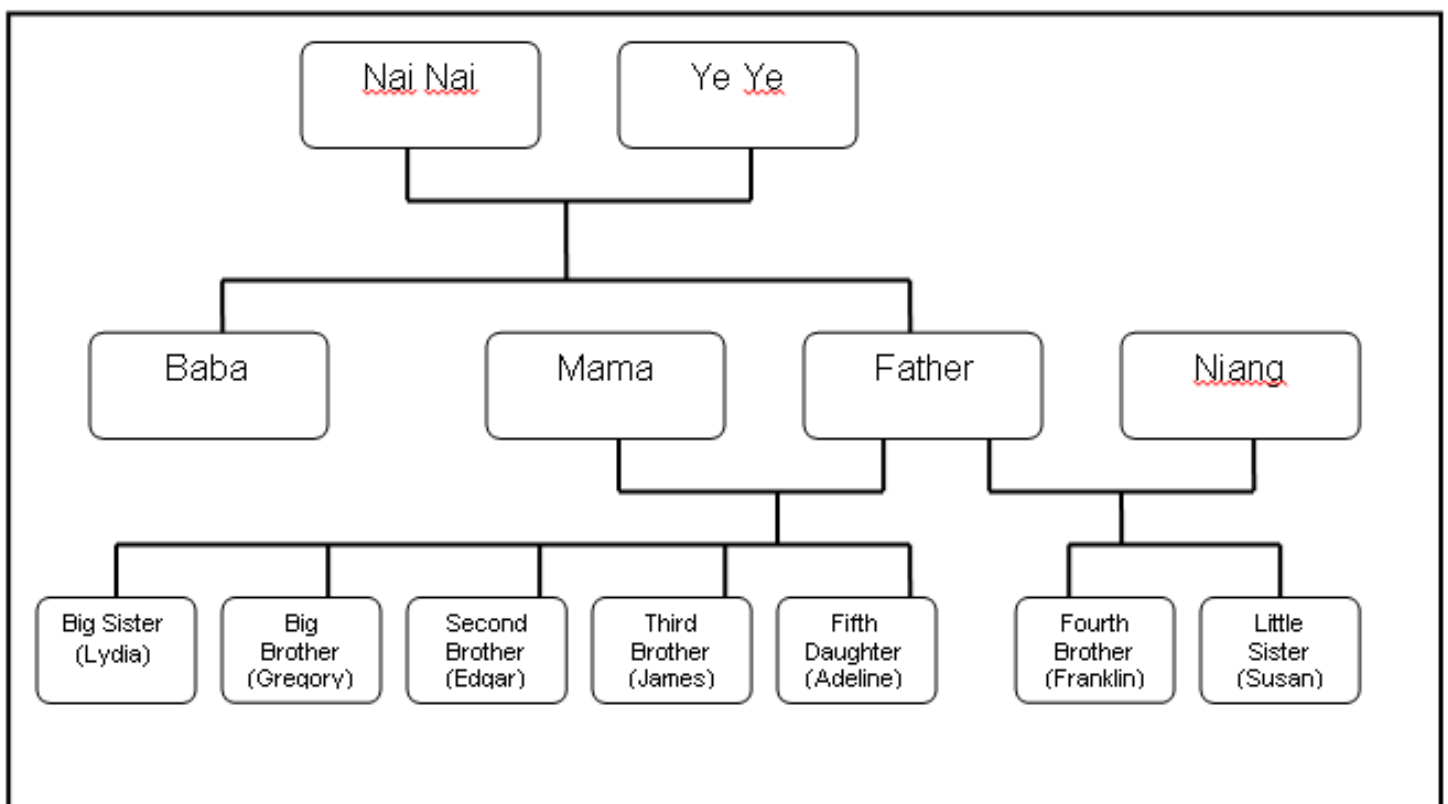
After their mother died, their father married a seventeen year old. He is fourteen years older than her. She is half French, half Chinese. She is very beautiful and classy. She wears expensive clothes and jewelry and lots of makeup. They call her Niang.

Niang and their father had two more children, Fourth Brother, and Little Sister. Now there are seven children all together. They also live with their Grandfather Ye Ye, Grandmother Nai Nai, and Aunt

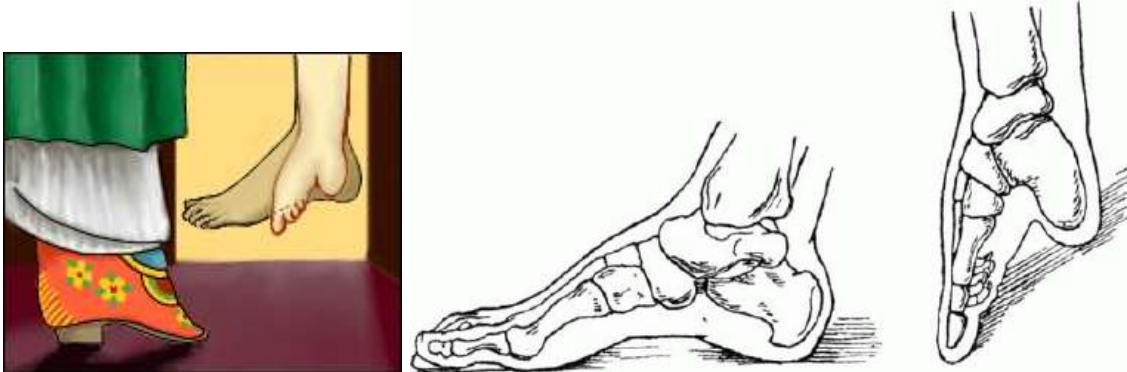
Baba. They live in Tianjin, a city on the northeast coast of China. The French took over this city after the Opium War, and there is still a lot of French influence there, even though it is in China. Aunt Baba and Adeline share a room, and Aunt Baba cares for Adeline. They have become very close.



### The Yen family tree



## Chapter 3: Nai Nai's Bound Feet



Adeline looks at her Grandmother Nai Nai's feet and can't believe how small they are. Nai Nai tells her that her feet were wrapped with a tight bandage when she was little so that her feet would never grow. It was considered beautiful and lady-like to have small feet. However, this caused her a lot of pain, and she has never been able to run or jump like a normal person.

*"It hurt so badly I couldn't sleep. I screamed with pain and begged my mother to free my feet, but she wouldn't. In fact, the pain has never gone away. My feet have hurt every day since they were bound and continue to hurt today."*

Adeline happily shares the news of her achievement, but her siblings are mean and are jealous of her. Second brother hits her

and tells her to stop “showing off”. For the first time ever, Adeline's father talks to her and praises her in front of the family. This makes her siblings even angrier though, and they all steal her dessert.



## Chapter 4: Life in Tianjin



Winter, early 1942. When Adeline started kindergarten at St Joseph's French Convent School, her Big Sister was already in fifth grade. Adeline loved everything about school. It was a place where they were all equals and a place where nobody looked down on her. Finally, she felt like belonged.

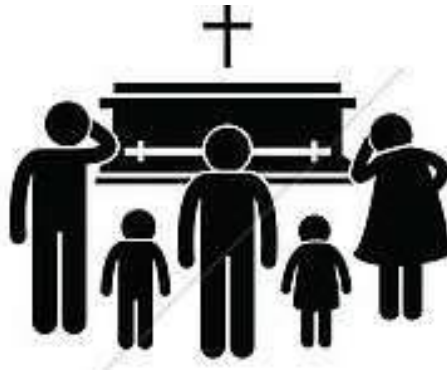


Adeline wins the medal for leading her class every week. She desperately wants her father to continue paying attention to her. Her sister gets very angry one day, hitting her, calling her a "teachers pet" and telling her to stop showing off. She is jealous of Adeline's success in school.





The Japanese have taken over part of China. The Japanese soldiers get very angry if the Chinese do not respect them. The Japanese are insisting that Adeline's father make them his business partners. Father, Niang and fourth brother go away to get away from the Japanese. Without them around, Adeline is free to go to restaurants, attend parties, and go to the movies. She says "Life seemed better than ever".



After Adeline's father has been gone for over a year, Nai Nai dies of a massive stroke. A grand funeral was held for her.

## Chapter 5: Arrival in Shanghai

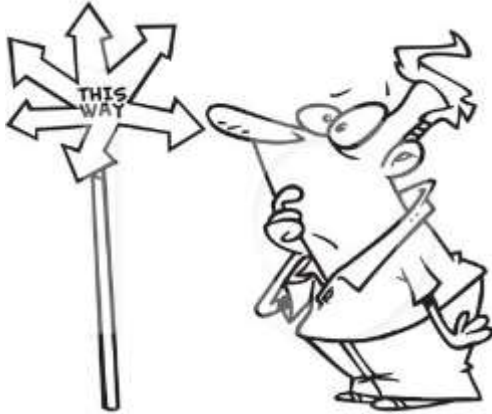


Adeline, Big Sister and Big Brother are taken to the railroad station to meet their father. Together, the four go to the house in Shanghai, where father has been hiding from the Japanese. Father, Niang and Fourth Brother had been living there for one and a half years. Niang gives the stepchildren a long list of rules to follow:

1. They can only use the back door
2. They are not allowed in the living room
3. They are not allowed to invite friends over or go to friends' homes
4. Niang, Father, and their two youngest children will live on the nicer top floor. Adeline and her other siblings are not even allowed on the second floor without permission.
5. They must keep their rooms tidy at all times



## Chapter 6: First Day At School



At Shanghai, Adeline starts first grade at a new school called Sacred Heart. Everyone forgets about her, so she has to ask Cook to take her to school on his bike. After school, Adeline is forgotten about so she tries to find her way home by herself. Of course, she doesn't know where she lives, so she gets lost. Luckily a lady from a restaurant spots her and Adeline calls her father to pick her up. No one had even noticed she was missing. Her father tells Adeline that in future she needs to use a map.

*"With Aunt Baba still in Tianjin, there's obviously no one looking out for me. I'll just have to find my own way."*



## Chapter 7: Family Reunion

Last Sunday of October. Ye Ye, Aunt Baba, Third Brother and Little Sister arrive at Shanghai. Little Sister hasn't seen her mother for one and a half years so she doesn't remember her. When Little Sister throws a tantrum and won't go to her mother, Niang starts beating her viciously. Adeline finally says, "Don't beat her anymore! She is only a baby!" This makes Niang furious with Adeline. She says, *"Get out! I shall never forgive you...You'd better watch out from now on! You will pay for your arrogance!"* After that, the children realize that because Nai Nai is dead, Niang is now the one in charge.



## Chapter 8: Tram Fare



Father and Niang decide that they wanted to teach the step children the value of money. They give them no pocket money, no clothes to wear besides their school uniforms, and make them wear their hair very short. When Ye Ye first arrives in Shanghai, he gives them tram fare to go to school, but two months later, all his money is spent. When Father and Niang find out that the children have been taking their money for the tram, they were furious. Adeline expects Ye Ye to stand up for them, but even he is afraid of Niang. The children are told to apologize before being allowed to receive tram fares from their parents. Although they promise each other they wouldn't give in, Big Sister holds out for ten days and her three brothers hold out for another week before giving in. Adeline doesn't give in.

## Chapter 9: Chinese New Year



Second Grade – Seven years old. Niang and Father gave Adeline and her siblings' traditional clothing ('unpopular') whilst Niang's children received stylish Western outfits ('popular'). They talk about how Niang's natural children are given better food, have better haircuts, and are generally treated better. The children feel it's unfair and plan to plot against Niang. Unfortunately, Niang overhears their entire conversation. To get back at them, she gets their leader, Big Sister, over to her side by moving her into a spare bedroom on the first floor. Big Sister begins gossiping about her own siblings and doing whatever Niang asks of her. Niang thanks her with gifts.

Adeline continues to try very hard in school to make her Aunt Baba happy and to get attention from her father. She has started

writing for pleasure, and she is very good at it. The girls at school love to listen to her tell stories. *“To me, writing was pure pleasure. It thrilled me to be able to escape the horrors of my daily life in such a simple way.”* Adeline worries that kids at school think she is pathetic because her family doesn't care about her and she has strange clothes. Adeline is depressed and lonely.

*“I simply loathed myself and wished I could disappear, especially when I was in front of my parents.”*



## Chapter 10: Shanghai School Days



### August 1945, almost eight years old

Adeline befriends a very wealthy and very athletic girl in School, Wu Chun-mei. When Wu Chun-Mei and her father offer her a ride home in a bad thunderstorm, she refuses, but the father insists. Adeline makes them drop her off far away from her house, terrified that Niang will be angry that she accepted a ride. After that, Wu Chun-Mei walks with Adeline and has her car follow next to them.



America dropped the atom bomb on Japan. This ended the Second World War. Everyone in China was very excited and very thankful. Americans had become heroes in China.





Father took Niang, Big Sister, Fourth Brother and Little Sister north to reclaim his Tianjin properties. They stayed away for three months. The remaining family had freedom once again and did as they wished, including eating whatever they wanted from kitchen. Third brother would play and laugh with Adeline as long as the other brothers weren't around.



Again, Adeline won the medal for being at the top of her class in school, and she had an article published in the newspaper. Her brothers called her down and offered her a tall glass of orange juice, saying that they wanted to congratulate her. But when she took a sip, she realized that they had put something disgusting in it. She was very sad, especially because Third Brother had betrayed her.



## Chapter 11: PLT



Mr. and Mrs. Huang came to visit not long after Father and Niang returned from Tianjin, bringing gifts (seven baby ducklings). Adeline named her duckling Precious Little Treasure (PLT). PLT becomes her first pet and a real friend. When Adeline is feeding her duckling, third brother gets angry and hits her, saying that she is spoiling her duckling and should be feeding his duckling too.

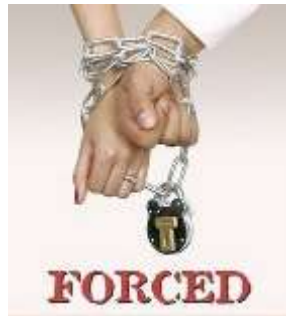


Father decides to test his dog Jackie's obedience by seeing if Jackie will harm PLC. Jackie kills PLC, and Adeline is devastated.

She buries it and has a funeral, and Third Brother comforts her by saying, "It won't be like this forever!"



## Chapter 12: Big Sister's Wedding



Niang had decided to marry off Big Sister (17) to Samuel (31). Big Sister is very happy and excited, but Adeline thinks that arranged marriage is a terrible thing. She is terrified that Niang might try to marry her off someday.

When wedding gifts start arriving for Big Sister, Niang goes through them and keeps the best ones for herself. Grand Aunt gives Niang a beautiful jade necklace, and Big Sister begs Aunt Baba not to tell Niang about the necklace so that she can keep it. Niang finds out, but Big Sister tells her that Aunt Baba had forced her to keep the necklace a secret. This way, she becomes closer to Niang but betrays her Aunt Baba.

## Chapter 13: A Birthday Party



Wu Chun-mei convinces Adeline to go to her birthday party. Adeline is not allowed to go to friends' houses. Adeline pretends that she is going to school, but goes to the party instead. Niang finds out and says, *"Nothing will ever come of you. The problem is that you have bad blood from your mother. You don't deserve to be housed and fed here. Girls like you should be sent away. You don't belong in this house!"*

Adeline is whipped by her father. Her father then tells her that he thinks that Aunt Baba is a bad influence on her, and that they will be separated. She is devastated.

## Chapter 14: Class President



Adeline is voted as Class President. The girls in her class decide to follow her home as a surprise, but Niang gets very angry and screams at Adeline. She slaps her and forces her to stand in front of her friends with a bloody nose and send them away. Adeline had always tried to pretend that she had a loving family, but now they see Adeline's true family and she is very embarrassed.

Niang and Adeline's father tell her that they are kicking her out of the house and sending her to an orphanage in Tianjin. Aunt Baba tells her that her good grades will be her secret weapon, that that will be how she will prove her parents wrong and make something of herself.



## Chapter 15: Boarding School In Tianjin



Adeline is sent to St Joseph's boarding school. Her father has to fill out a form on the airplane, but cannot remember Adeline's name or birthday. Adeline herself does not know her birthday because it has never been celebrated. Her father writes down his birthday, so now her birthday is the same as his, November 30.



Adeline's father and Niang drop her off at St. Joseph's Boarding School. Her father doesn't even say goodbye. Adeline feels like "they had tossed me aside like a piece of garbage."



There is a civil war going on, but Adeline has no idea. All of the other girls are taken away from the boarding school by their parents. She is very scared. She is very sad that she has not received any letters, but she does not know that Niang has told them to hide any letters she receives.



Adeline's Aunt Reine Schilling (Niang's older sister), comes to take Adeline to Hong kong, where Niang, her father, and her two youngest siblings are staying. Adeline thought that it would be Aunt Baba, and cries when she sees who it is. Aunt Reine is very kind and comforts Adeline, saying that she will be safe now. She has not told Niang that she is bringing Adeline to Hong Kong, and Adeline is afraid that she will be angry when she gets there.



"BOW TO MOTHER MARIE AND MOTHER NATALIE" SAID NAING. FATHER AND UNCLE PIERRE STAYED IN THE CAR AND THEY DIDN'T EVEN SAY GOODBYE TO ADELINE. THE MOTHER USED TO TEACH HER FRENCH AND ENGLISH.



ADELINE WAS SPEAKING MANDARIN TO THE MOTHERS AND THEN ADELINE WENT INTO THE ROOMS WITH MANY ROWS OF BEDS. THEY HAD TO BE VERY QUIET BECAUSE THERE WERE BEDS OCCUPIED. THEN THE MOTHERS SHOWED ADELINE'S BED. SHE HAD A TOUR AROUND THE BUILDING.



AFTER NANCY AND HER MOTHER LEFT AND ADELINE WAS THE ONLY ONE LEFT IN TAJAIN BOARDING SCHOOL.



ADELINE HAVING DINNER ALL BY HER SELF. ONE OF THE SISTERS CAME OUT WITH AN ENORMOUS DINNER AND HAVING A PLATE OF HAM, BEANS, POTATOES, BREAD, WATER, BUTTER, APPLE-SAUSE, SALT AND PEPPER. LATER THAT EVENING ADELINE HAD GOT A LETTER FORM AUNT BABA.



AUNT REINE CAME AND PICKED UP ADELINE FROM BOARDING SCHOOL. AUNT REINE TOLD ADELINE THAT THEY WERE GOING TO HONG HONG NEXT WEEK. YOU WILL BE SHARING A CABIN WITH CLAUDINE. THEN YOU WILL SEE YOUR FAMILY IN HONG KONG.



ADELINE, CLAUDINE AND VICTOR WERE PLAYING GAMES IN THE LIBRARY ON THE BOAT TO HONG KONG.



ADELINE VERY EXCITED TO SEE YE YE. RAN UP TO YE YE TO GIVE HIM A BIG HUG. ADELINE WAS DRESSED IN WINTER CLOTHES STILL AND IT WAS SUMMER IN HONG KONG. THEN SHE UNPACKED HER BAGS. THE NEXT DAY EVERYONE EXCEPT ADELINE AND YE YE SAID HOME. ADELINE MASSAGED YE YE'S BACK.



NAING, AUNT REINE, CLAUDINE, FOURTH BROTHER, AND LITTLE SISTER WERE IN THE BACK.



VICTOR AND ADELINE STAYED AT HOME BECCAUSE THERE WASN'T ROOM FOR EVERYONE. THEY MADE THINGS WITH ADELINE'S PAPER MAGIC BOOK.



## Chapter 16: Hong Kong



Uncle Jean, Aunt Reine, Victor and Claudine (cousins of Adeline) and Adeline take a boat to sail to Hong Kong. On the boat, Adeline is treated equally, like a family that she belongs to. On arrival to the new house in Hong Kong, Adeline's parents completely ignore her. Adeline notices a change in her grandfather Ye Ye – he has given up. He is still kind to her, but he does not fight against Niang or father anymore.

Niang invites the whole family to go on a trip to the beach. When she says that Adeline cannot come, Victor decides not to go so he can keep Adeline company. In return, Adeline gives him her 'Paper Magic' book.

## Chapter 17: Boarding School in Hong Kong



The Schillings left Hong Kong for Geneva. Two days later, Adeline is taken to Sacred Heart, a boarding school. On the car ride there, Fourth Brother is angry at her because she stopped him from dropping a pile of encyclopedias on Yi-Yi's head. Adeline makes a silent promise in her head that she will save Yi-Yi from this terrible family someday.



When they get to Sacred Heart, Adeline realizes that it is a boarding school but also an orphanage, where her parents could desert her forever. She is relieved when she finds out that she is going to the boarding school, not the orphanage.

## Chapter 18: Miserable Sunday



Adeline has been at the boarding school for two years. At this school, the only way to get eggs for breakfast is if a family member delivers it to the school. Adeline has never gotten an egg in 2 years, but one day she gets one. Adeline is suspicious of the sudden egg.



Adeline hates Sundays because all the other children have family members visit on Sundays. While parents are visiting, Adeline hides in the library or in the bathroom. In the bathroom, Adeline overhears that some of her classmates are sorry for her and that's why one of them had given her an egg. She decides that she doesn't want anyone's pity.

## Chapter 19: End of Term



Adeline has made two friends: Rachel Yu and Mary Suen. Each of the girls are going home but only Adeline stays behind for the summer holidays. She feels bad for herself because she is the only one staying at school. When they leave, they all make a pact “that we’ll always be there for each other, wherever we may be.”

Adeline also says that she wants to go travel to foreign countries and get away from her life in China.

## Chapter 20: Pneumonia



Adeline becomes very sick with Pneumonia. After she is discharged from hospital, her Father takes her home. Upon arrival, she learns that Third Brother has also arrived at Hong Kong. Big Brother and Second Brother left over a year ago to go to university in England. Big Sister moved back to Tianjin with her husband and their baby daughter. Adeline is afraid her parents will force her into an arranged marriage after she finishes school and she won't be able to go to England. She seems ready to give up on school.

Ye Ye is very upset when she says this, and says that she must keep trying. He says that it breaks his heart to talk about giving up. She promises him that she will try harder.



## Chapter 21: Play – writing Competition



After a week staying at home, Adeline went back to school, although it was still holidays. Upon reading in the library, Adeline finds a magazine with an announcement of a play-writing competition. She works very hard on a story and sends it in.



Then, Adeline's Grandfather, Yi Yi, dies. At the funeral, Adeline is the only one crying. After the funeral, Niang tells Adeline that she gets uglier the older she gets. Then Niang tells her that she needs to start looking for a job because she is 14, and they are not going to pay for her to go to school anymore.

One Saturday, Adeline is called home because her father has found out that she entered the International Play-writing competition

and that she won first prize. Her father is proud of her for the first time in her life. Therefore, her father agrees to allow her to go to a university in England to study medicine. She couldn't be happier.



## Chapter 22: Letter From Aunt Baba

22 September, 1952. Aunt Baba writes Adeline a letter to say congratulations on going to Oxford, England. Aunt Baba also retells the story of Chinese Cinderella. In a way, both Ye Xian and Cinderella are like Adeline: children who are mourning for their dead mothers and mistreated by their stepmothers. Aunt Baba also congratulates her on winning the prestigious international play-writing competition.

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

by *Adeline Yen Mah*

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