

Book review on Chinese Cinderella

By Chantel Leung

Chinese Cinderella is an autobiography written by Adeline Yen-Mah, a woman in her fifties, about her own childhood. The story is set during the Japanese occupied period of China and the civil war between the communists and nationalists. The book also shows some fascinating pictures and information about the old way of life such as the binding of Grandmother Nai Nai's feet, which had been the custom in China for over a thousand years. But the main story line is about how Yen Jun-ling, a child that brought 'bad luck', continued to study hard hoping that it will win the respect and admiration of her family. Despite that Yen was living in solitude; she found ways to express her feelings. It was some consolation that she was able to find a soul mate like Aunt Baba, who always encouraged her efforts, and her schoolwork. A hard-working and talented student, Yen consistently won class medals and awards, and was even elected as class president, though none of her family members ever showed up on presentation days. She continued to study hard hoping that it would win the respect and admiration of her family. Although this was never the reality, her tenacity paved her way to a bright future.

The most intriguing part of the story is that when Yen was brought to school and eventually left alone by the end of the day. This part provides a hidden line to readers. It catches the attention of readers and makes them want to read on. When it was Jun-ling's first day for school, nobody cared for her or brought her to school. Instead, she had to beg the Cook to take her. However, no one came to meet her when school ended. And Jun-ling ended up getting lost in the big city in an effort to find her way home. I am deeply attracted to the fine description of feelings made by the author. Every single word touches my heart. The following is a quote from the book.

"After school was let out in the early afternoon, I waited with all the other first-graders by the school gate. One by one they were greeted and led away by their anxiously hovering mothers. Eventually, I was the one left. Nobody had come for me."

I reckon the author can illustrate the idea comprehensively. I am able to feel the loneliness and disappointment of little Jun-ling. The term 'greeted' used in the above quote is indeed quite meaningful. It served as a contrast between the status of children in the family. Compared with other children, Jun-ling was neglected and hated by the family. Nobody cared for her, not even mentioned about greeting her. She was almost nothing to her family. I am attracted to the fate of her future. As her family did not accept her, I would like to know how could she be able to overcome obstacles. Besides, I am totally immersed to the environment while reading. I even cried in some scenes. I finally realized how lucky I am. In the past I always take things for granted. However after learning the experience of Yen, I understand that I have to cherish what I have got now, especially my parents and my family. Once we have lost them, nothing in the world can be able to replace them.

Moreover, the character I like most is Jun-ling and the dislike one is Niang, the stepmother of Yen. For Jun-ling, I think that she was a very strong girl with dreams and determination. As her born was treated as 'bad luck', she was mostly neglected

all the time. Her siblings had also teased her in many ways. However, she did not give up and continued to work very hard in order to gain respect and admiration of her family. Her perseverance and will to achieve dreams were great and should be learnt from. Although she could not gain much respect at the end, her scholarly abilities ultimately paved her way to success. This shows that, on the surface, we might seem to lose but in depth and long term, we actually gain out of it. Jun-ling was also quite optimistic. She was willing to share her thoughts. This made her open-minded. In fact, I think this is far more important than good academic results.

I dislike Niang at most. I despise her selfishness. After marrying Jun-ling's father, she took over the place of being the owner of the family. Once she had two children of her own, the different treatment of the two sets of children was quite pronounced. Little Jun-ling and her siblings had to share rooms on the third floor in their house, while; her stepbrothers and sisters each got a room of their own. The younger ones could eat whatever they want, the older children were kept to a strict and boring diet. The older ones usually had limited activities while the youngsters were given freedom. I think this was quite unfair. Niang was too self-centered and was completely inconsiderate.

Chinese Cinderella indeed captures the pain and desires of a young girl. It is a long way to go for her to find the love and affection she deserved. The story is heartbreaking and inspirational, simple... but full of surprises!

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