

Book Review on Chinese Cinderella

By Tavie

No fairies. No castle. No pumpkin carriage. Chinese Cinderella is an autobiography of an unwanted Chinese girl, named Adeline Yen Mah(Jun-ling). In her book she shared the struggles in her life ever since she was born. This is in fact an account of the relentless neglect and loathing which was heaped on Jun-ling during her excruciating childhood, and the way she chose to deal with it. Her account is delivered with many insights of life. Like the renowned Cinderella, Jun-ling struggled and endured hardships before she gained her glory at the end. Her personal efforts and spirits motivated her to strive till the end despite the lack of parental love and being despised by her siblings. The western Cinderella has more or less the same spirit as Jun-ling's. But the main difference is that Jun-ling's success didn't depend on a pretty outlook, and she wasn't so lucky to be a princess who get married with a prince charming and lived happily ever after. Jun-ling continued struggling and fighting for her whole life. Jun-ling is a heroic fighter, obviously braver than the western Cinderella, and she deserves everyone's praise and respect.

Jun-ling's story touched my heart. Growing in a modern and open society, I could scarcely taste the bitterness of being unwanted by my own family, nor could I know someone having similar experience as Jun-ling's. But I could imagine how desperate she was when she wished that she herself could disappear in her family. From the pessimistic words or phrases she used in her story, I could feel the sorrowful tears in her eyes.

Many would put the blame on Niang, Jun-ling's stepmother, attributing Jun-ling's pathetic childhood to her cold-heartedness. This is undoubtedly true. But I think the traditions and culture of China deserve the largest blame. Jun-ling's sorrowful experience is in fact a tip of the iceberg in the heavily populated China, with the public's view mainly dominated by conservatism. Chinese traditions of preferring sons to daughters and associating disliked items with misfortune have saddened millions of hearts and darkened countless childhoods. Jun-ling's adversity is actually a representative reflection of plenty other unfortunate cases. Behind Jun-ling's story there must be some other similar or even more mournful stories of other kids who aren't able to have their miseries brought under the spotlight.

It's big relief that the trace of many unreasonable Chinese traditions is disappearing gradually, especially in modern cities like Hong Kong. Under the influence of westernization, Hong Kong people develop a relatively more open and flexible mind. Many of us are no longer bounded by traditional thoughts of preferring sons to daughters, dominance of men and so on. Increasing emphasis is placed on western thoughts such as human rights and equality. Honestly speaking, I feel that I am so fortunate to grow in a fair society and be raised by open-minded parents.

Nevertheless, traces of miseries caused by Chinese traditions can still be found in many villages on the mainland of China. For instance, it was reported that in some rural areas in China, baby girls were thrown away immediately after birth by their parents whose minds were under the influence of traditional thoughts. Chinese conservative traditions still exert considerable influence on many superstitious Chinese, molding and shaping their minds and thoughts with numerous unnecessary bindings and rules. Therefore, I believe that there are many other Chinese Cinderellas in China who lead miserable lives similar to Jun-ling's. Perhaps they aren't even lucky enough to receive education, not to mention writing down their tragedies in words.

As an old English song goes, 'It's a long road to freedom.' Obviously in some rural areas of China, more time and patience are needed to replace the people's old way of thinking with a more open and flexible mind. I really hope that in near future, people living in this world can treasure every child and give him/her a happy childhood. It need not be a materialistic or luxurious one with piles of toys or yummy candies. The most essential component of a happy family is love and care from parents and siblings.

With a view to express my feelings further, I composed the following poem.

The quest for true love in the depth of Jun-ling's heart,
But her family's coldness torn her heart apart.

The serene happiness of a child and parents together
is a pleasure that she can't taste forever.

No mummy's hugs as the north winds blow chill,
No daddy's greetings during the season's festive thrill.

Day after day she strives to succeed,
Even without parents' support to nurture her soul's need.

May all cold hearts and stubborn minds disappear?
So every child can grow with love, but not sorrow and fear.

-End-