



A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir

Ting-xing Ye

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Ting-xing Ye was born in Shanghai in 1952, just three years after the People's Republic of China was officially created. In her enthralling memoir, she weaves together her personal history with the larger history of Mao's China to create a tale both intimate and epic, colored by deep family bonds and the constant foreboding presence of a totalitarian government. Ye's father, a successful factory owner, had his business taken away at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. His death in 1962, followed by his wife's two years later, left behind a family of five children, a beloved servant known as "Great-Aunt," and the potentially fatal tag of "capitalist." In telling her story, Ye gracefully combines idyllic memories of her childhood on Purple Sunshine Lane with harrowing tales of harassment by the feared Red Guards. As a teen, Ye was sentenced to a prison farm; the book traces her journey from prisoner to university student, her work as a police agent and a translator, and the love affair that led to her dramatic defection to the West.

Already a bestseller in Australia, "A Leaf in the Bitter Wind" is a true story with all the characteristics of a great novel—danger, romance, smart social commentary, and a liberal dose of wry humor. Anyone seeking out an intimate view of Asian culture will find it in this "rare uncensored glimpse of life in China during one of the worst times in its history." —"Calgary Sun"

"A gifted narrator with a photographic memory, Ye records, in riveting detail, the capricious existence of the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution." —"Bloomsbury Review"

"Compelling . . . laced with irony and surprising twists of fate." —"Maclean's"

A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review A Leaf in the Bitter Wind: A Memoir for online ebook

Peggy says

I picked this one up at a thrift store and it was a great purchase for 25 cents! It is the autobiography of a woman who grew up in Maoist China, and gives a first hand look at what it was like when even the smallest misstep was made. The punishment was harsh on both the individual and their entire family. Excellent read.

Kms says

Ye Ting-Xing published two version but similar personal memoir of her early life in China.

Although some info is incorrect, such as Hai Rui Removed From Office is by Wu Han not Hu Han. Some experiences is kind of fictional to me, such as caricatures of John F Kennedy. In 1960s, where and when did she see the caricature of JFK with Xs in China? I still like her memoir.

I am curious about the answer to the questions in the EPILOGUE. Waiting for her third memoir about her life in Canada.

Bailey Olfert says

There is much to learn about China during the cultural revolution in this memoir, and none of it good: a lot of difficult reality.

[spoiler] Not having the author's experiences I cannot judge her, but the choice to leave her daughter is difficult for me as a reader to accept.

Halime Yaz?c? Mimarolu says

kitapl???mda yeni buldum üniversitede okudu?um farkl? bir kitapt?....Her ?eyi de okumu?um.. ?uan kendimden dahas? bilinçalt?mdan korkar oldum :))))))

Liz Neale says

Good memoir about her life growing up in China.

Mishelle says

A memoir of the hardships the author endured living in China throughout Mao's cultural revolution. A heartbreaking and touching life told compellingly, I really enjoyed this book.

Marcy says

A Leaf in the Bitter Wind is a memoir worth reading. It depicts the life of a young child who grows up during the Cultural Revolution. Ting-Xing Ye faced all of the hardships of a child born to a "capitalist" father. She is treated like dirt in her elementary school; When Xing Ye is sent to a prison farm as a young girl, she is terrorized and psychologically tortured by the superiors. Her crime throughout her young life is that she was born to a "capitalist."

As the Cultural Revolution nears its end, Xing Ye is accepted as a student at Beijing University. She becomes an English translator, a job that will change her life. She marries and has a little girl. Most of her money is given to her husband, and of course, the bank account is in his name only. It does not take long for Xing Ye's love for her husband to quickly ebb. (There are hints that her husband is gay with an old time friend who has become very much a part of their household from the moment Xing Ye and her husband were married, much to the dismay of Ying Ye).

Ying Ye's life is filled with unhappiness in her marriage and is tired of her superiors at work who constantly look over her shoulder and criticize her for being kind to "foreigners." (Ironically, this IS her job). Xing Ye changes her life for the better, but the ending is bittersweet.

The last 100 pages was the most riveting part for me. The first part of the book I found not as powerful. While I recommend this book, it in no way compares to Wild Swans or the Red Scarf Girl. I did, however, feel for Xing Ye during this horrible time of China's history.

Carol says

A Chinese Cinderella story except the protagonist in the book is not as adorable. Towards the end of the book, the story starts looking like one of the Chinese communism guerrilla war movies I watched when I was a kid. They won the war, and entered the utopia, except the movies didn't have such scenes as long and hard kisses (I wonder if they flossed their teeth before doing so). The abrupt ending of the biography can't help leaving one wonder how this fairytale would end! How will Leaf repay 'Uncle' Bill for all the trouble he went through to get her out of China? She didn't seem to have any opportunity to master some cooking skills since she was either too busy working in the fields or with foreign delegates.

Michele says

Reality stories are so much better than reality TV. This is a fascinating memoir by a young woman who came of age during the Cultural Revolution in China. Her family history, inauspicious birth and cultural pressures make for a challenging life that includes time on a prison farm. Her intelligence and strong will enables her to maintain her sense of self and overcome these obstacles. This book provides an interesting personal commentary on life in Communist China from the 60s through the 80s.

Linda Tuplin says

I love biographies and autobiographies about women's lives. This one was harder to relate to because I couldn't remember the unfamiliar names, but still fascinating to have such an intimate glimpse of China.

Megan says

Well written memoir from the Cultural Revolution onwards. I read this at the same time as Jan Wong's "Red China Blues" and was interested to note the difference between the two books - one, Jan Wong's, about an idealistic Canadian choosing to come to China - and the other, this one, about a girl who had no choice but to suffer through the Cultural Revolution.

The ending surprises me - especially when I realized who her husband was (having read his books as well). I don't think the narrative accurately details the agony through which her decision to leave her child was likely made - that process was completely toned down and sanitized.

Emily says

I learned about Chinese culture, politics, and perspective from this book. It had a good plot at the same time. It is the memoir of a woman who lived through the Chinese cultural revolution.

Chelsea says

This book is a memoir of the author's experiences during China's cultural revolution. Unfortunately, the writing doesn't go very much further beyond "this is what happened to me and it was really hard." Once I'd read the ending, I felt like the purpose of her book was to say, "My life was really hard, and that's why I decided to move in with my Canadian English teacher." Kind of a weird moral to the story.

Sverre says

== The heart and spirit of an enduring optimism ==

A potential reader trying to assess the content of this memoir of almost four hundred pages by looking at its title, the portrait and back-cover summary would perhaps categorize it as a dreary tale of woe by an escapee from the chaotic social and political nightmare that comprised the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Yes, it is about that: a tale of horrendous suffering and deprivation, denial of justice and human compassion, a family torn apart by poverty and displacements enforced by the arbitrary decisions imposed by a dysfunctional autocracy. It is about how an ancient civilization ingrained with quaint superstitions and Confucian principles tries to adapt to new ways; but the rules are constantly changed in worshipful obedience to a

dictatorial despot, Chairman Mao. But this is never a dreary tale.

The author, whose familiar name is Ah Si, Number 4—designating her birth order—born in 1952, grows up in Shanghai not long after the Communist takeover in 1949. She loses her parents at a young age and becomes dependent on her unmarried aged Great-Aunt. She and her four siblings exist in poverty, trying to sustain themselves during famines, economic disruptions and social chaos. Because her father had been a factory owner she is labelled as belonging on the wrong side of the factional struggles. This is a shadow that hangs over her no matter how much she tries to overcome her hardships. She is sent away to work on a prison farm where conditions are inhumanely primitive and authority carries a big stick for anyone who fails to toe the line. But Ah Si is a survivor who against all odds eventually is placed in a position of influence as a translator and becomes a co-ordinator of receiving and entertaining foreign dignitaries. In the meantime she has married and become a mother. But curiously she has to accede to having a second male, who is infatuated with her husband, to be their constant companion.

This is a well written book. It does not linger on setbacks and futility but moves on to take in the main events, the changes, the challenges, the twists of fate, the glimpses of hope that keep Ah Si struggling towards a better life. The book has the heart and spirit of an enduring optimism. The last third of the book provides absorbing reading towards what we know will be a well-deserved happy ending.

Louise says

Ting-Xing Ye's memoir is unbelievable, I couldn't put it down. The woman has led a life wrought with sadness and tragedies we can only read about in the lives of others. Ting-Xing is an amazingly strong woman, and a true survivor who deserves all the good the rest of her life can bring.

From back cover:

"Spanning 35 years, this enthralling memoir chronicles the life of a survivor who has been buffeted by the winds of history. Ting-Xing Ye was born in Shanghai, the fourth child of a factory owner who had his factory taken from him. By the age of thirteen, her parents were dead.

The Cultural Revolution then tore Ye's family apart. With grim irony, she offers a riveting account of her work on a prison farm, where, as the child of a "capitalist," she was subjected to humiliating psychological torture. Ye then wryly relates how she found herself accepted into Beijing University and assigned to the Foreign Ministry as a translator for the delegations of such dignitaries as Queen Elizabeth, Ronald Reagan and Imelda Marcos.

In a moving and dramatic final section, Ye writes about her feudal-style marriage, her falling in love with a Canadian, and her eventual defection to Canada. Her former husband has refused her all access to her daughter. Now a Canadian citizen, Ye continues to attempt to contact her child, hoping to bring her to Canada where she too may be free.

Born in Shanghai in 1952, Ting-Xing Ye was an English interpreter for the Chinese government before leaving China in 1987. The author of several books, Ye lives in Orillia, Ontario with author William Bell
