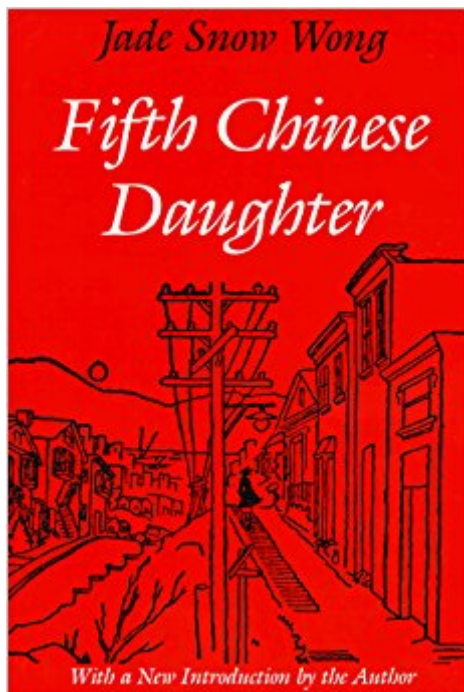


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Fifth Chinese Daughter



Synopsis

Originally published in 1945 and now reissued with a new introduction by the author, Jade Snow Wong's story is one of struggle and achievements. These memoirs of the author's first twenty-four years are thoughtful, informative, and highly entertaining. They not only portray a young woman and her unique family in San Francisco's Chinatown, but they are rich in the details that light up a world within the world of America. The third-person singular style is rooted in Chinese literary form, reflecting cultural disregard for the individual, yet Jade Snow Wong's story also is typically American. We first meet Jade Snow Wong the child, narrowly confined by the family and factory life, bound to respect and obey her elders while shouldering responsibility for younger brothers and sisters - a solemn child well versed in the proper order of things, who knew that punishment was sure for any infraction of etiquette. Then the schoolgirl caught in confusion between the rigid teaching of her ancestors and the strange ways of her foreign classmates. After that the college student feeling her way toward personal identity in the face of parental indifference or outright opposition. And finally the artist whose early triumphs were doubled by the knowledge that she had at long last won recognition from her family.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A sensitive and revealing story of a Chinese American girl's coming of age in America. It is unique." *New York Herald Tribune* "A fascinating narrative, not only because of the courage and humour which shine through every page of the book, but also because it shows how

the members of a typical Chinese family can adapt themselves to American conditions and take their part in the national life of the United States without losing the essentials of the cultural heritage which they rightly prize." — Times Literary Supplement

I first encountered Jade Snow Wong's work in an anthology about cooking that I recently read. One of the chapters of this book was included in that book, and it was so charming, it made me curious to read more. I really enjoyed *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. The author was born into a traditional, hard-working Chinese family in San Francisco in the 1920s. Her early life was spent mostly around those of her own race, but once she entered kindergarten, her world opened up considerably. Her parents demanded quite a lot - unquestioning obedience, hard work, little play (it's easy to see where today's so-called Tiger parents got their ideas) and little emotional support. Jade Snow eventually finds other people to help her deal with growing up in two worlds and reconciling them as best she can. You find yourself rooting for her every step of the way - through school (including nine grueling years of Chinese school AFTER regular school), college - which was quite a struggle to get into, the working world, through to her discovery of her life's work. The story is told in the third person, reflecting cultural disregard for the individual, and covers roughly 25 or so years of the author's life. It's a wonderful journey, and I highly recommend it to anyone interested in Chinese-American culture.

Classic. This memoir will still be read 500 years from now. Can't say same for every memoir on the market. I read several times and recommended to many people. Bought a copy for my daughter and friends' daughters. Excellent portrayal of San Francisco Chinatown during the Interwar years. Exceptionally accurate illustrations by Kathryn Uhl. Poignant story of childhood and coming of age of a second-generation Chinese American female forging her way into American society, straddling expectations of Old World China and New World American freedom. Jade Snow Wong spoke Cantonese exclusively the first five years of her life, and her world was wholeheartedly Chinese. From her parents, especially her father, she developed strict discipline of what was proper for a Chinese girl. As she grew older and assimilated into American schools, she began to question her traditional Chinese upbringing. This sharp observation intensified and was further encouraged when she entered college: two years at community college and the final two years at Mills College, a prestigious women's college in Oakland, California. At Mills, she further developed intellectually as professors challenged her to think independently and not just take notes and regurgitate on exams. She took her sociology class on a field trip to her father's garment sweatshop in the heart of

Chinatown. Jade Snow lived with the Dean to save money so she could continue to attend Mills College. Jade Snow Wong was a trailblazer not only as an pioneer Asian American author. She became one of America's finest ceramists, an interest she picked up during her senior year at Mills College, and continued to pursue after she graduated. Her spinning wheel at the storefront window of a Chinese herbalist was an odd spectacle in Chinatown, but Americans loved her pottery, and her unusual presence also drew foot traffic for the herbalist. That was a true symbiotic entrepreneurial relationship! In her sequel, "No Chinese Stranger", Jade Snow Wong and her husband started the first travel agency to take American tourists to China. This second installment of her memoir is an equally fascinating read for those interested in how she spent her adult years as a wife, mother, professional ceramist, and fascinating human being.

I like true stories about real people. This fit the bill but was so extremely painful to get through that I almost put it aside. The autocratic, tradition-bound father who falls in love with a teen-age Eurasian beauty and begins a new family after the death of his first wife in childbirth calls all the shots for the entire blended family. The new family is the only one that really matters to the selfish and greedy stepmother. The baby girl who was blamed for the death of her mother becomes the scapegoat for the whole family, especially the stepmother who is perhaps an all-time classic of the evil variety, but the only mother this child has ever known. Her intelligence, ability to escape into reading and learning, and her exclusion from close association with her parents is perhaps what saves her in the end. This provided some real insight into the Chinese family, the problems experienced by immigrants and the difficult role of a young woman faced with a changing world, discrimination and personal betrayal of those closest to her.

This is a book that I remember my mother enjoying when I was a preteen. Remembering that, I bought it in Chinatown in San Francisco in my 20s and after reading it I gave it to my friends third daughter. This time I bought it for someone interesting in going to Mills College. I grew up with a school friend who was this generation of Chinese. I was never invited to her home. After reading it years later I felt closer to her. I hope the recipient of this copy is as impressed by it as I was. It is a truly memorable book.

This a great and simply written story of a Chinese girl growing up in America. This book reminds me of books that we would read in school, but has much more meaning and character. As an Asian American, I really related to the story, feeling the pinches of the stifling and strict ways of her

traditionally Chinese parents. I felt the struggles, as she relayed them to me, of trying to break free and be an independent American. This book also shows us the importance of discipline and perseverance (something that her parents instilled in her). This is a great coming of age story as well as a story of cultural struggles and generational differences between parents and their children. It was a great joy reading this book!! I'll probably buy copies for my Asian American nieces!

I FIRST READ MRS WONGS MEMIOR NOVEL WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL IT WAS A BOOK FOR THE GIRLS IN CLASS TO READ I LOVED IT. IT WAS WONDERFUL.

I ordered this book to replace my mother's worn-out copy. She grew up w/the same family customs as Jade Snow and really enjoys reading this book continually. It's a really nice well written true story.

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