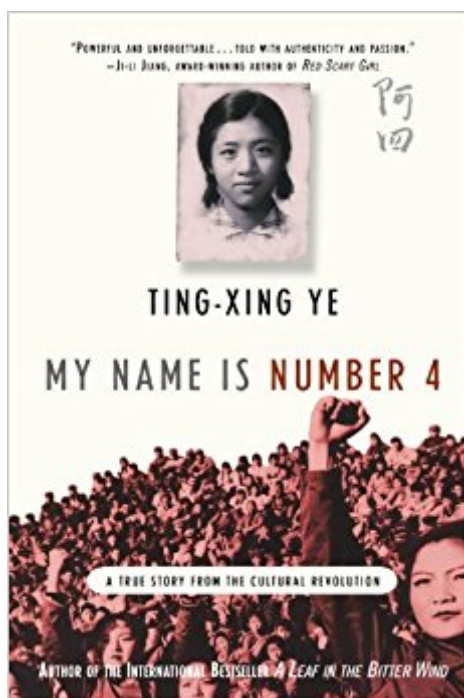


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# My Name Is Number 4: A True Story From The Cultural Revolution



## Synopsis

Number Four will have a difficult life. These are the words that were uttered upon Ting-xing Ye's birth. Soon this prophecy would prove only too true. . . . Here is the real-life story about the fourth child in a family torn apart by China's Cultural Revolution. After the death of both of her parents, Ting-xing and her siblings endured brutal Red Guard attacks on their schools and even in their home. At the age of sixteen, Ting-xing is exiled to a prison farm far from the world she knows. How she struggled through years of constant terror while keeping her spirit intact is at the heart of *My Name Is Number 4*. Haunting and inspiring, Ting-xing Ye's personal account of this horrific period in history is one that no reader will soon forget.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 8 Up  
•This compelling memoir, an abridgment of *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind* (Anchor, 1998), describes the brutality that many people faced during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Ting-xing Ye, called Ah-Si because she was the fourth child in her family, was born in 1952. Her father was the prosperous owner of a Shanghai factory, which was confiscated by the government in 1959. The authorities promised compensation, but when he demanded that it actually be paid, he was forced to do menial work in the factory. Paralyzed by a fall, he died three years later. Ah-Si's mother suffered a painful death soon after. Their children were labeled capitalists and landlords, automatically signaling trouble for them. When Ah-Si was 16, she was sent to a prison farm near the Yellow Sea, where she survived for six years. Eventually, people left the countryside, and Ah-Si passed the entrance exam for Beijing University, the only person in the prison camp to do so. This book includes a bit of insight into the infighting that was going on in China between the forces

backing Mao and those backing Lin Biao, his second in command. Nothing is pretty about Ah-Si's description of the life she led, but she did what she was asked and survived because of the strength of her character and her resilience. This book joins such titles such as Da Chen's *Colors of the Mountain* (Random, 2000) and Moying Li's *Snow Falling in Spring* (Farrar, 2008) to give teens a realistic picture of the way the terror of the Cultural Revolution played out in many people's lives. © Barbara Scotto, Children's Literature New England, Brookline, MA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Ting-xing Ye is the author of the international bestseller *A Leaf in the Bitter Wind*. Once an English interpreter for the Chinese government, she now lives in Canada.

Thanks~!

Poignant and touching story of a trying time in China's recent history.

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 labeled 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. This review is for the same book also issued with the title "A Leaf in the Bitter Wind"

When Ting-xing Ye was born her aunt stated: "Ah Si shi ge lao lu ming" meaning that "Number Four will have a difficult life because the signs were unlucky". It wasn't long before Ting-xing would find out how true those prophetic words would be. Her life was soon turned upside down due to China's Cultural Revolution. Ting-xing and her four siblings lost both their parents and it was shortly after that their lives changed forever. Her family's home was attacked by the Red Guard's as well as their schools. Already drowning in hunger and poverty, Ting-xing, at the age of sixteen, was sent to a prison farm far from her home. There she suffered more brutality, long hours of labour and unending meetings with Guards. At one point Ting-xing is forced for hours upon hours to write down her sins against the Revolutionists but she hadn't made any and her captors would hear none of it. They slapped her, punched her and yelled at her for hours and hours to write something down on the paper they provided. Ting-xing is spirited and audacious and keeps fighting to save herself in the midst of events that she had no control over. An engaging, edge-of-your-seat read. At times you can't believe your eyes and what you're reading. To think that human beings had to endure the hardships that Ting-xing did. This is a story of bravery and survival.

I learned a lot about the Chinese cultural revolution -- something I knew very little about in this book. I had no idea that people went through such suffering. I could not put this book down until I was finished. I definitely would recommend this to a friend. It only took me a couple days to read, so it's an easy read, and it is a stunning, chilling Memoir.

I was eager to read this book because of a new interest in China in the mid twentieth century, especially in what life was like for ordinary people. My Name is Number 4 definitely did not disappoint on that front! It is a fascinating story about Ting-Xing Ye's adolescence during the Cultural Revolution, and is just one example of how someone with a "capitalist" family background

fared during that time. It is a nice counterpoint to Adeline Yen Mah's story *Falling Leaves* and its abridged YA version *Chinese Cinderella*, where Yen Mah is in Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution and thus escapes the worst of it. As interested as I was in the details of Ye's story, I found the narrative itself to be somewhat lacking. It felt rushed and confused at times, as though it were trying to encompass too much in too little space, thus leaving many of the anecdotes without any real depth. But perhaps this is by design: there is no doubt that as I read the book, I was able to imagine the fear and confusion that Ye must have felt during the Cultural Revolution herself. In all, I found *My Name is Number 4* to be interesting and enlightening, but not completely satisfying. I suspect that the version of Ye's story meant for adult readers will fill in many of the gaps left by this abridged version.

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