



## Petals from the Sky

*Mingmei Yip*

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### **Petals from the Sky** Mingmei Yip

When twenty-year old Meng Ning declares that she wants to be a Buddhist nun, her mother is aghast. In her eyes, a nun's life means only deprivation - "no freedom, no love, no meat." But to Meng Ning it means the chance to control her own destiny, and to live in an oasis of music, art, and poetry far from her parents' unhappy union.

With an enigmatic nun known as Yi Kong, "Depending on Emptiness," as her mentor, Meng Ning spends the next ten years studying abroad, disdaining men, and preparing to enter the nunnery. Then, a rare fire breaks out at her Buddhist retreat, and Meng Ning is carried to safety by Michael Fuller, a young American doctor. The unprecedented physical contact stirs her curiosity. And as their tentative friendship grows intimate, Meng Ning realizes she must choose between the sensual and the spiritual life.

From the austere beauty of China's Buddhist temples to the whirlwind of Manhattan's social elite, and the brilliant bustle of Paris and Hong Kong, here is a novel of joy and heartbreak - and of the surprising paths that lead us where we most need to be.

### **Petals from the Sky Details**

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## From Reader Review Petals from the Sky for online ebook

**hanna says**

2/5 stars

This was an odd read for me; I don't know what made me pick it up. Perhaps it was the alluring cover, none the less I read it with a bit of a struggle. It started off quite choppy and the protagonist often strayed from the subject at hand leaving you like "okay, okay hold on what are we talking about here?". So we have Meng Ning, beautiful 20 year old who comes from a broken family. She's attracted to Buddhism and respects the concept of leaving worldly desires and life to dedicating one's life solely to Buddha. She seems to be confused throughout the entire novel, not knowing whether she wants to be a nun. Knowing that if she does become a nun, she is never to love so basically that's the entire conflict throughout, "shall I love a man or shall I shun men because they only bring about misery and trouble and pursue buddhism?". What I took from this novel aside from cheesy lines was a little bit of new knowledge on Buddhism and Chinese superstitions and the misogyny that is often propagated in these superstitions.

(view spoiler)

## Nicole says

This one had mixed reviews on Goodreads so I wasn't sure if I'd like it, but I'm glad I gave it a chance. It's a story of a Chinese girl who is torn between becoming a buddhist nun and marrying the American doctor she falls in love with. Good story with lots of buddhist stories and references.

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## Pygmy says

Ugh. It started out with a sort of a slightly jumpy literary-vibe, jumpy in the sense that the topics covered by the protagonist's POV tended to bounce around a lot. But it was okay, I've read worse...

Then when the protagonist goes to Hong Kong for a Buddhist retreat, I kept wondering if this was supposed to be some sort of facetious commentary or satire of commercialized Buddhism...except the main character's voice remained deadly serious. She spouted sound-bites of Buddhist philosophy, but half the time it seemed as if they were just thrown out there as window-dressing without trying to explain any inconsistencies, with no real sense of conviction.

The fire that got the interracial romance portion of the story rolling was rather baffling in its suddenness. The romance that occurred afterward was perfunctory, with very spare dialogue. I figure the author is trying to aspire to artsy films like *In the Mood For Love*, where the characters can just say the most mundane things to each other and sizzle away in cigarette smoke and red-hued upholstery. HOWEVER, the author overrates her ability to evoke any sort of atmospheric setting or romantic inclinations in her descriptions, and the romance had already sizzled out for me right as it was beginning. Also, the random insinuations of lesbian nun-love were confusing the heck out of me.

Then I got bored.

Will not finish this book.

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## Katherine ??? says

Meng Ning sebenarnya wanita terpelajar, cantik walaupun dari keluarga miskin. Sejak usia 20 thn dia mau menjadi biksuni, tetapi ibunya menentangnya dan minta mempertimbangkannya 10 thn lagi.

Jadi Meng Ning setelah lulus sbg Doktor Sejarah dari Sorbonne, Perancis, memutuskan kembali utk menjadi biksuni. Tetapi jalan hidupnya memang tidak sesuai yg direncanakannya. Dia bertemu Michael, dokter dari Amerika yg memiliki ketertarikan khusus pada sejarah Cina. Mereka bertemu di kuil yg rencananya Meng Ning akan menjadi biksuni, tetapi kuil tsb malah mengalami kebakaran, dan Michael-lah yg menolong Meng Ning.

Meng Ning dan Michael dalam sekejap jatuh cinta. Namun saat di Amrik, Meng Ning akhirnya mengetahui masa lalu Michael dari mantan tunangan Michael, Lisa, putri dari mentor Michael. Meng Ning juga diperdaya oleh Lisa yg biseks utk bercinta. Saat upacara pemakaman mentor Michael, Meng Ning tidak tahan lagi dan memutuskan kembali ke Hong Kong.

Di Hong Kong tadinya Meng Ning mau mempersiapkan dirinya kembali menjadi biksuni. Dia mendatangi

mentornya lagi, Biksuni Yi Kong dan berteman dgn biksuni lainnya, yg memberinya pencerahan. Kedatangan kembali Michael utk menjemput dan menikahi Meng Ning tampaknya sudah bertekad bulat. Tiada badai maupun bencana yg bisa menghalangi cinta Michael pada Meng Ning.

Novel ini bertema cinta dua kultur yg berbeda walaupun kultur Cina sangat mendominasi. Dari makanan, tradisi, budaya dsb diulas di novel ini. Dari segi setting lumayan menarik. Tetapi dari segi karakter, saya merasa karakter Meng Ning ini agak mengecewakan saya. Dia tipe labil dan mudah terbujuk, sekaligus keras kepala di saat-saat yg tidak tepat.

Pada klimaks cerita, kita akan dikejutkan oleh pengakuan ibu Meng Ning yg ternyata tidak sekolot yg disangka. Tapi mungkin pengakuan inilah yg meringankan hati Meng Ning yg mungkin sangat bersalah dan merasa mengkhianati Michael. Tapi pada dasarnya saya kurang demen dgn cerita ttg seorang calon biksuni gagal ini. Ceritanya muter-muter gak jelas bagi saya. Dan intinya juga sepele, Meng Ning tidak bisa melepaskan keduniawian dan cintanya pada Michael. Titik. Itu saja.

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## **Yuska Vonita says**

Terinspirasi oleh temannya, Yi Kong, Meng Ning memutuskan untuk menjadi biksuni di usia yang masih muda. Ibunya melarangnya. Ia yang menganggap putrinya berparas cantik, mengharapkannya untuk hidup layak dan menikmati kemewahan yang seharusnya ia dapatkan, selain menikahi pria tampan yang mapan. Namun keputusan Meng Ning sudah bulat. Ia memutuskan untuk menjadi seorang biksuni. Alasannya, ia ingin terbebas dari kekuasaan pria yang menghancurkan, mendapat spiritualitas, mengendalikan kehidupan dan nasibnya sendiri, juga dapat menjalani kehidupan dalam puisi, kehidupan mistis, dan kedewian.

Musim panas 1987, sebelum terjadi Black Monday, yaitu ketika pasar saham dunia hancur lebur, Meng Ning yang sudah berusia tiga puluh tahun dan calon penerima gelar Ph.D dalam bidang sejarah seni Oriental dari salah satu universitas di Sorbonne, Prancis, mengunjungi Kuil Fragrant Spirit untuk melakukan ibadah menyepi selama tujuh hari dan merasakan pengalaman sebagai biksuni sementara. Sebuah insiden memalukan membuatnya berkenalan dengan seorang pria asing bernama Michael Fuller, dan mereka curi pandang saat makan siang dalam kebisuan.

Teman lama Meng Ning, Yi Kong, menjadi pembicara tamu di kuil tersebut. Setelah sekian lama berpisah, mereka bertemu kembali lewat tatapan mata.

Terjadi kebakaran yang disebabkan oleh seorang anak yatim secara tak sengaja. Michael menyelamatkan Meng Ning dan yang lainnya. Timbul perasaan di hati Meng Ning.

Setelah kejadian itu, Michael mengajak Meng Ning berkencan, namun Meng Ning masih menutupi kedekatannya dengan Michael dari ibunya.

Menggunakan alur maju-mundur, Meng Ning menceritakan tentang orangtuanya yang kerap bertengkar karena ayahnya suka berjudi, lalu Meng Ning yang terjatuh ke dalam sumur. Di situlah ia bertemu dengan Yi Kong, seorang biksuni yang dipercaya oleh penduduk desa sebagai titisan dari dewi Kwan Im. Lalu diceritakan juga bagaimana ayah dan ibu Meng Ning bertemu (yang sesungguhnya menarik jika dibuat novel spin-off-nya).

Sebelum Michael kembali ke New York, ia meminta Meng Ning untuk menemaninya menonton opera Cina. Ditengah-tengah pertunjukan, Michael menyodorkan secarik kertas berisi haiku dan ajakan untuk menikah. Meng Ning yang masih bimbang langsung mengatakan tidak. Michael mendapat kabar bahwa profesor Fulton masuk rumah sakit di Lhasa. Dan ia segera berangkat ke sana.

Untuk beberapa saatm Michael menghilang dari peredaran. Meng Ning diminta Michael untuk menemuinya

di New York. Di sana, Meng Ning bertemu dengan Lisa, mantan tunangan Michael, yang juga putri dari profesor Fulton. Dan Philip, mantan kekasih Lisa yang juga teman dekat Michael, memikat Meng Ning dengan pesonanya. Bersama Lisa dan Philip, Meng Ning dibawa untuk berpetualang menjelajahi area tabu yang selama ini tidak pernah dibayangkannya.

Banyak ajaran Buddha yang membuat gue mengerti kenapa seorang penganut agama Buddha tidak mengkonsumsi hewan. Alasannya karena pembunuhan makhluk hidup apa pun akan menghasilkan karma yang buruk. Karena umat Buddha percaya reinkarnasi, dan manusia bisa bereinkarnasi menjadi hewan, bisa saja ayam, sapi, ikan yang kita makan adalah keluarga atau kerabat kita. (Asli jijay banget pas baca bagian ini).

Lalu, ada adegan Michael dan Meng Ning menonton opera Cina. Tahun lalu gue baca novel *Farewell My Concubine*-nya Lillian Lee yang kental dengan opera Cina. Satu keinginan gue belum tercapai: nonton opera Cina. Harus kesampean. Selain itu, gue juga pengen nyobain nginep di biara, pengen ngerasain hidup zen.

*Petals from the Sky* bercerita tentang cinta dari berbagai sudut pandang. Setiap tokoh, baik tokoh utama maupun tokoh minor memiliki jalur cinta yang manis, mengesankan, juga scandalous. Setiap tokohnya juga memiliki rahasia yang bikin shocked. Novel ini untuk konsumsi dewasa, kenapa nggak ada labelnya?

Kesimpulan, *Petals from the Sky* adalah roman yang manis dan gue suka banget. Alurnya yang maju mundur ditulis dengan apik, tidak ada plot yang bolong. Bukan hanya menyajikan cinta, namun filosofi ajaran Buddha dengan segala kesederhanaannya membuat *Petals from the Sky* begitu sarat dengan perenungan. Lalu, budaya Cina seperti penghitungan tanggal baik untuk menikah, seserahan dalam pernikahan, juga tata cara pemberian warisan membuat novel ini semakin kaya. Walau masih ada sedikit typo, namun tidak mengurangi keindahan alur kata yang ada di dalamnya.

Gue agak heran kenapa novel ini underrated.

Untuk penggemar Asian Lit, baca deh.

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## **Tom LaVenture says**

*Petals From The Sky*

Author: Mingmei Yip

Kensington Books, March 2010

\$15.00 Paperback

A different kind of love story

A Book Review by TOM LAVENTURE

*Petals From The Sky* (Kensington Books) is the third novel from Mingmei Yip, who says she puts a lot of her own life into her stories whether as events or composites of people who have shared her life.

*Petals From The Sky* is a spiritual, physical and emotional journey with the central character, Du Meng Ning, drawing on her life of hard work and devotion to her family and faith to see her through a time of doubt.

She is born to parents that endure one disaster after another with a loving but gambling father and a stable but dominating mother. As a child Meng Ning is knocked down a well and amidst the frenzy of panicked faces above, she is comforted at the brief look down from Dai Nam, a Buddhist nun who tosses down a pendant of Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, and is then drawn to the compassionate teaching at the Golden Lotus Temple.

Many of the nuns, Dai Nam in particular, display physical and emotional scars that hint of tragedy leading

them to the temple. Meng Ning notices the seemingly overt gestures the nuns would take to reject worldly desires as a flaw to the beauty of their simple and disciplined lives.

When her adult nun mentor, Yi Kong, shows an ambitious side in the secular world, Meng Ning begins to question whether the pursuit of non-attachment is an attachment in itself. Not all is as it seems, however, as Yip skillfully shows merit in purpose when walking a parallel path.

Meng Ning returns to Hong Kong to attend a Buddhist conference just prior to earning her doctorate in art in Paris, with the idea that she would finally follow through with her decision to “enter the gate” and become a nun.

Again, disaster postpones her decision – as she is instead quite taken by a young American physician, Michael Fuller, an aspiring Buddhist who is also a fan of Chinese art. Equally taken by Ming Mei, he pursues her from New York as she refuses his proposal and returns to Paris to complete her doctoral work, and perhaps to distance herself from the sudden and unexpected confusion.

Meng Ning is riddled with doubt and guilt for allowing herself to love a man, and again returns to Hong Kong to consider her sense of obligation to the nuns that mentored her through a tragic childhood and into a beautiful life of art and peace. With this sense of security Meng Ning is confused when she agrees to visit Michael in New York.

The story is set just before the transfer of Hong Kong back to China in 1997, and parallels the love story as Meng Ning is both dazzled and dismayed by a sophisticated but decadent New York. She meets Michael's mentor, an aging 'Orientalist' professor and father figure to Michael, but dislikes him as a snob – someone she says knows everything about China from books but nothing about its people.

Meng Ning decides to accept a project to document ancient Buddhist ruins in mainland China. It is again a chance to separate from her dilemma and to take on her first professional experience. As she works with a young nun who reminds her of herself she begins to come to terms with her situation and all paths converge in an enlightening conclusion.

Can Meng Ning continue on a path of spirituality while also accepting a man and marriage into her life?

Yip notes that her experience is related in the book that cultures are not so much barriers between people with common values and interests. She met her own spouse at a Buddhist conference and the two later moved to New York. She said that love conquers all when it is more than an “illusory” passion.

Meng Ning hesitates to express her painful dilemma to her nun mentors – who she fears would discourage her worldly relationship as “the illusory of human passion.” She turns inward for guidance – to afraid to talk to the nuns about her sudden but deep passion for a man.

She is equally reluctant to tell her mother that she was serious about a “gweilo”, a Cantonese term for foreigner.

A series of exciting and sometimes steamy adventures in New York, Hong Kong and mainland China, help to develop the relationship of Meng Ning and Michael. One more disaster looms that not only threatens their relationship but their very lives.

Yip strikes a balance between the idea of attaining wisdom and compassion through a solitary life of devotion to the temple, and attaining merits in a more worldly path along “ten thousand miles of red dust.”

Mingmei Yip was born in China, and also lived for some time in Vietnam. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Paris, Sorbonne, and eventually settled in New York to marry in 1992 after working as faculty at Chinese University and Baptist University in Hong Kong. She was a print and radio columnist and authored five books in Chinese before writing her first two English language novels, “Peach Blossom Pavilion” (Kensington 2008), and “Petals From The Sky” (2010).

Yip states that there is a third novel about a woman adventurer during the time of the Silk Road, now in its final stages of development and expects to publish later this year.

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## **Brandi says**

Beautifully written story. I was not expecting to be drawn into the story and fall in love with the very

sensitive characters, Meng and Michael. Although, overall the story was well developed, I felt that some of the supporting characters could have either been excluded or better drawn; I would liked to have seen a little bit more development.

Don't want to give anything away, so open yourself for a wonderful journey into Chinese culture and Buddhism. Worth reading.

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### **Sandra Young says**

#### **A Spiritual awakening.**

A spiritual awakening! Mesmerizing and sensual. I have never read a book that has so affected me. Cannot wait to read more from this author.

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### **Faith says**

I found the story of Meng- Ning very captivating from the beginning to the end. The author explores the inner struggle of the protagonist to become a Buddhist nun and pursuing true love. I loved the humour and the characters.

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### **Kristina says**

This book showed a lot of promise in the beginning, and I would have enjoyed it more had it stayed truer to the Buddhist elements and skipped the whole New York adventure. I think the encounters between Meng Ning and both Philip and Lisa were completely superfluous and had no real purpose except maybe to add some drama. To me it just seemed ridiculous that all these beautiful Americans were suddenly like vultures on this one woman trying to seduce her... It made me dislike Meng Ning not only for allowing it to happen, but also for being able to return to Michael without any apparent guilt.

This book just wasn't what I was expecting and to be honest I was kind of put off by the whole Lisa/Meng Ning encounter and unfortunately that ruined the rest of the book for me.

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### **Natalie says**

MingMei Yip writes a beautiful, lyrical story about a 30 yr old woman, Meng Ning who is torn between her love to be a Buddhist nun and Michael. Meng Ning joins a retreat to " test her karma to be a nun". When she pays her fee for the retreat, she is told that her \$500 dollar bill is a fake. When she was in Paris, she had asked a friend to exchange her Hong Kong money in the black market. How could she have known it was fake? As she was trying to talk to the registration about her situation, a man asked if he could help. Meng Ning explains to him the situation and he pulls out his wallet and pays the lady the money. Meng Ning thanks him repeatedly and tells him she'll pay him back. His name is Michael Fuller and this is the starting of Meng Nings confusion.

The story doesn't slow down, it keeps moving with beautiful descriptions of China and the exotic life of

Buddhist nuns. I loved every minute of it and am looking forward to reading her other books.

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### **Sheila says**

The book was a bit slow in the beginning. A lot easier to read compared to the Peach Blossom Pavilion. A lot of the twists started in the middle of the book and towards the end. It's a bit twisted.

It's about a young woman who went to school and got her degree. For some time now, she thought of being a nun in a Buddhist temple. She was taught by her mentor who is trying to rebuild and expand the temple to help preserve their history. The young woman decides to enter a retreat when she meets a man. This man has saved her from a fire that broke out. (From this part in the book, I figured out what the end would be.) The young woman became confused as to become a nun or be with this man. During this time, the young woman experiences life in America while on vacation but also learns more about her man.

This book does have some lessons about one's path to happiness and life. Every experience we learn there is a reason for it. Sometimes the events in our lives guides us to where we are supposed to be.

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### **Jenny says**

This book was so disappointing! I was really enraptured the first few chapters. Meng Ning wanted to be a Buddhist nun and I was really hoping I'd learn some interesting things about Buddhism through this book.

Unfortunately, she meets a man right away in the book. He's super weird and clingy with her almost right off the bat so I kept wondering what his issues were.

The author then delves into a love scene which was so awkward I could barely read it. Meng Ning is so naive that it felt like she was being taken advantage of by an older man so it really creeped me out.

And then, the whole New York scenario? I'm sorry, but how realistic is it that a father and then his daughter seduce the same person and both seem to know about it and are ok with that? And then, Meng Ning doesn't ever even tell Michael what his friends did to her?

I understand her wanting to get away and think things through, but Michael's clinginess was so freakin' annoying.

Definitely not a book I'd recommend to anyone nor will I attempt to read anything by this author again.

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### **Angelica says**

PETALS FROM THE SKY, BY MINGMEI YIP

This one was recommended to me by my cousin. I'm not sure why.

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**Synopsis:** Meng Ning, a thirty-year-old woman from Hong Kong, is determined to become a Buddhist nun. During a retreat, a fire breaks out in the temple and her life is saved by an American doctor. She falls in love with him, and questions her previous decision.

**Overall enjoyment:** To sum up this entire review in one word: nope. I don't think there was anything at all in this book that I liked. I did actually read it from cover to cover, but it was a chore.

**Plot:** Nothing happens, then stuff happens haphazardly, then those things are abandoned, then more things happen but they're so sudden and unexpected they could almost be considered bizarre. She goes on about so many things that have nothing at all do to with the story, it feels like she's trying to fill up her word quota.

**Characters:** None of them are likable. All the Western people suffer from acute yellow fever. And their personalities are very inconsistent; she describes them as having a particular personality trait in one paragraph and then contradicts herself completely in the next. The characterization is very confusing, too, with all the people reacting in ways that are completely baffling. They will over-react and have almost a nervous breakdown over the most trivial things, and then be completely serene about disasters happening to them. And they will tell each other their complete life stories at the smallest provocation, even after making sure everyone understands that they don't open up to anybody ever.

**World/setting:** I suppose this was Hong Kong in the 90s? I'm not sure, to be honest. The time frame is all over the place.

**Writing style:** It's very truncated and feels strange. But this, at least, I suppose must be because English is not her first language. Still, it's very unpleasant to read.

**Representation:** It is a story about a Chinese (Taiwanese?) girl, in Hong Kong. Still, the representation is remarkably bad. The Chinese and Taiwanese people are portrayed as being ignorant and stereotypical, much less interesting than the Western characters.

**Political correctness:** Ugh. The love story is almost as bad as *50 Shades of Gray*, with Michael being just as controlling, manipulative and emotionally abusive. He has a very severe case of yellow fever. He asks Meng Ning to marry him after knowing her for three days (I think); and they are, respectively, 38 and 30, so these are not a couple of horny teenagers overloaded with puberty hormones. There is so much slut-shaming and "the true role of a woman is to marry and have children; that's the only way she'll be happy" permeating those pages I wanted to gag. Also, very weirdly, in spite of the fact that all of the Western characters objectify Meng Ning, dismiss her, and treat her very cruelly, there's much more discussion about the prejudice Western people suffer in China than the other way around.

This was a waste of time. I don't know how much of my dislike is due to cultural shock, and how much is due to bad writing. Mingmei Yip is actually Chinese, so it would be only natural for her to have a different world view than mine. But it was just so bad to read I had to stop myself from skipping pages to finish the book faster. I hope the next one is better.

Up next: *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*, by Aimee Bender

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## **Melinda Elizabeth says**

hmmm. I was a little disappointed in this. Perhaps if I had read more of the synopsis I would have had a better idea of what it was all about. All I read was "buddhist nun, mother disapproves of choice" and I was

like hellloooo this sounds interesting. But the reality of the novel was a little lacking. It was a little whingey, she went on and on about "oh what should I do" when really she'd already made her choices. Some of the supporting characters in the novel were superfluous and could have done with more chapters and interesting side plots - Dai Nam comes to mind. So I think this could have been done better and wasn't really what I was looking for. Alas.

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