



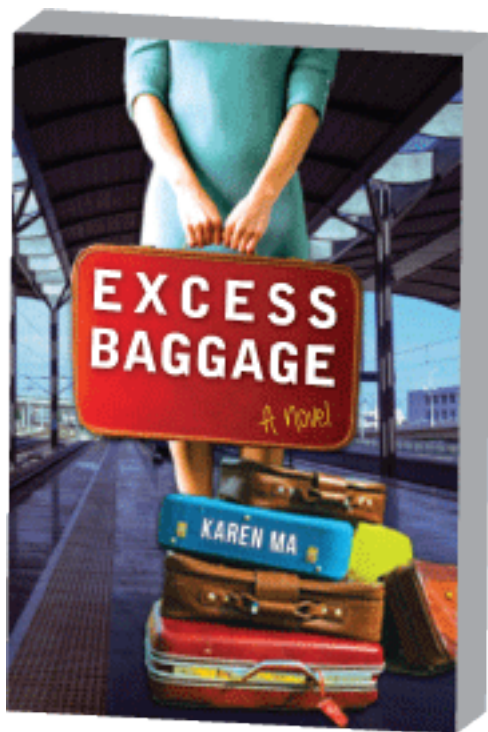
EXCESS BAGGAGE

a novel by KAREN MA

PRESS KIT



BOOK SYNOPSIS



Excess Baggage is a multi-ethnic, inter-generational, trans-national novel in the style of Amy Tan, Lisa See, and Gail Tsukiyama. It chronicles two Chinese sisters, one raised in China during the desolate Cultural Revolution; the other in Japan during the freewheeling years of bubble capitalism. They reunite as adults in Tokyo in the early 1990s and their family history soon catches up with them. Zhang Peiyin, 'the forgotten' sister left behind in China, is hell-bent on making up for lost time after growing up with little more than political slogans and has abandoned her children to join her family in Japan, imagining riches, fame and comfort. She instead receives a wary welcome from her estranged parents and insecure, competitive younger sister, Vivian, who not-so-secretly wants to drive her back to China. Not only aren't the streets paved with gold, her family is struggling financially. As the sisters circle warily, navigating their mother's death and other setbacks, their distrust grows, fueled by family lies and secrets. Ultimately each must confront a fundamental question: what's the meaning of home when your roots aren't secure?

Excess Baggage is at one level a fresh look at dislocation from an Asian perspective in an Asian setting, taking off where other immigrant stories end with a more complex look than the stereotypical happily ever after reunification tale. At another level, though, it's a universal tale about identity, alienation, love, and jealousy and family obligations in the face of adversity.

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Genre: Fiction

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karen Ma was born in China, raised in Hong Kong and Japan, and educated in the U.S. She holds a M.A in Chinese Literature from the University of Washington (Seattle, U.S.) and is fluent in English, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese.

Karen Ma has lived a combined 20 years in China and Japan working as a writer and journalist. She has authored numerous articles, which have appeared in various international publications, including The International Herald Tribune, New York Newsday, Life Magazine, More Magazine, The Japan Times and South China Morning Post; her essays, short stories and book reviews have been featured in the Kyoto Journal, Asian Cha and Tokyo Roots. She is also the author of “The Modern Madame Butterfly” (Tuttle, 1996). She currently lives in Beijing, China.

www.karenmaaauthor.com



EDITORIAL REVIEW

“I couldn’t put down this immensely readable first novel...Karen Ma takes the reader on a wild romp from China of the 1960s to the sex clubs and fashionable art galleries of the 1990s Tokyo. The book is great fun and at the same time packed with wisdom about the struggle between traditional Asian families and the imperative to get rich.”

— Barbara Demick, author of *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*

“A moving account of alienation and displacement in a Chinese family split by modern China’s political and social upheaval. With vivid prose, Karen Ma takes us on a momentous journey with a Chinese family as it tries to grow new roots in a foreign land.”

— Yan Geling, author of *Banquet Bug, White Snake and The Flowers of War*

“Effortlessly captures the suspicions and dependencies of a dysfunctional family transplanted in stages from China to Japan, unwrapping its members’ flaws, feuds and life-giving fascinations. Buoyed by brushstrokes of gentle humor and not an ounce of pretension, the author conjures up characters with an unexpected emotional charge.”

— Oliver August, author of *Inside the Red Mansion: On the Trail of China’s Most Wanted Man*

“An intensely intimate portrait of a Chinese family’s turmoil as it struggles to endure in the battered and impoverished Chinese diaspora in Japan. Karen Ma brings her deep experience in Asia to bear in penetrating into the souls of Chinese and Japanese alike, exposing the fragility of hope and the depths of cruelty, the clash of cultures and the search for identity. In prose that is alternatively gripping and wrenching, *Excess Baggage* asks the questions that haunt all exiles from their homeland: who, after all, are we?”

— Edward Gargan, author of *China’s Fate*

“I am particularly impressed with the subtle way Ma describes the relationship between mother and daughters and that of the complex feelings of rivalry and affection between the two sisters. Well done for a first novel!”

— Liu Hong, author of *Starling Moon, Magpie Bridge and Wives of East Wind*



PAST MEDIA APPEARANCES

BBC Radio 4 Open Book, 04/17/2014 (Radio)

Shanghai International Literary Festival, Reading and Interview with Tina Kanagaratnam, 03/14/2014 (Interview)

The Bookworm International Literary Festival, Reading and Interview with Barbara Demick, 03/11/2014 (Interview)

“Litfest interview: Karen Ma,” *That’s Shanghai*, 03/05/2014 (Article)

[“One Country, Two Sisters?: An interview with Karen Ma about her debut novel, *Excess Baggage*” *Cha*, 03/2014 \(Article\)](#)

“In Quest of a Home: Karen Ma’s *Excess Baggage*,” *Cha*, 03/2014 (Review)

[“Why I Write – Karen Ma,” *whyiwrite.com*, 2/27/2014 \(Article from Karen Ma\)](#)

[“Crossing Inter-Asian Cultural Divides,” *Kyoto Journal*, 2014 \(Article\)](#)

“The Tale of a Family Torn Apart,” *Hindustan Times*, 12/05/2013 (Review)

“A Youngest ‘Daughter’ Remembers Famines, Shame And Hope,” NPR, 11/10/2013 (Article from Karen Ma)

[“*Excess Baggage*,” *The Japan Times*, 11/09/2013 \(Review\)](#)

“The Puzzle of Identifying as Chinese,” *New York Times*, 9/4/2013 (Article)

“Paper Fan, Iron Fist,” *New York Times Book Review*, 05/05/1996 (Review)

[*Sinica* Podcast with Jeremy Goldkorn, Beijing, 05/03/14 \(Interview\)](#)



SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What was your inspiration for *Excess Baggage*?

What was your approach to writing *Excess Baggage* and how long did it take?

To what extent is *Excess Baggage* different from other narratives of immigration?
What about the similarities?

How does *Excess Baggage* play with the expectation that immigrating to a new country will bring a better life?

Why did you choose to focus on immigration within Asia as opposed to immigration to the West?

Can you talk a little bit about how themes of globalization and identity converge in your book?

Is *Excess Baggage* autobiographical?

Did your time living in Japan and India inform *Excess Baggage* in any way?

You previously wrote a non-fiction book entitled *The Modern Madam Butterfly*.
What was that book about and are there any themes common to both it and *Excess Baggage*?



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