



From One Root Many Flowers: A Century of Family Life in China and America

Virginia C. Li

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Family history sometimes offers a glimpse of the world stage. Through the collective memories of family members a window to the past is opened and we come to know what it was like to be swept up by major events affecting whole societies. Such is the family history of Virginia C. Li. She grew up in China during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and remembers the dinner table as the briefing center where enemy aggression, shortages of food, and rescue operations were discussed. Her father, first a general and then the wartime governor of Guangdong Province under Chiang Kai-Shek, became embroiled in the final struggles of the Communist Revolution in 1949. During the war, her mother directed a rescue operation that saved the lives of thousands of orphans. Displaced from their homeland, the former chief executive and first lady of Guangdong opened up a successful restaurant in New York City. Their efforts were amply rewarded by devoted children who went on to excel in a variety of professions and services to this country.

This is both the story of Li's family and a story of modern China. An international consultant, Dr. Li today divides her time between the United States and China, offering her expertise on public health issues. She continues to maintain contact with the surviving war orphans - now septuagenarians - who gratefully remember how they were saved by her mother's efforts. She sees her original homeland as an epic country full of contradictions, a land hampered by the ghosts of the past yet ripe with exciting possibilities for the future. Virginia Li's story offers hope for the future of U.S.-Chinese relations and much insight for all Americans into an ancient land, which in the 21st century is playing an increasingly important role.

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