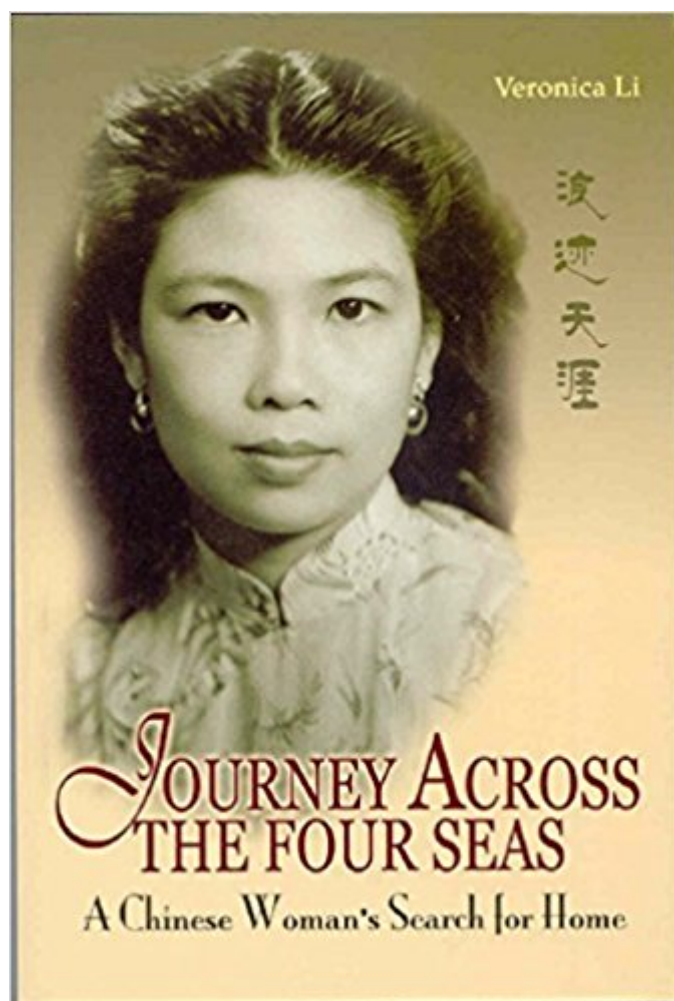


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# Journey Across The Four Seas: A Chinese Woman's Search For Home



## Synopsis

This is a true and touching story of one Chinese woman's search for home. It is also an inspiring book about human yearning for a better life. To escape poverty, Flora Li fought her way through the education system and became one of the few women to get into the prestigious Hong Kong University. When the Japanese invaded, she fled to unoccupied China, where she met her future husband, the son of China's finance minister (later deputy prime minister). She thought she had found the ideal husband, but soon discovered that he suffered from emotional disorders caused by family conflicts and the wars he had grown up in. Whenever he had a breakdown, Flora would move the family to another city, from Shanghai to Nanking to Hong Kong to Bangkok to Taipei and finally across the four seas to the U.S. Throughout her migrations, Flora kept her sight on one goal: providing her children with the best possible education.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a young girl, Flora Li asked her mother when she was going to school. Her mother said, "You're

a girl. Girls don't go to school." That might have sealed her fate, except that she was determined to better herself and her circumstances. A memoir of Flora Li's life as told to her youngest daughter, Veronica Li, *Journey Across Four Seas* depicts Flora as she struggles to get an education and go to college in China. Eventually, she gets accepted to college, graduates and works at various companies. What I liked most was that she triumphed over many obstacles--from fending off her husband's girlfriend to raising her five children. In addition, the book captures the tone and events of the turbulent times: the Japanese invasion of Nanking, British colonialism, World War II, with important historical persons such as Chiang Kai-shek. I loved this memoir!

Veronica Li is a compelling author with the right blend of a rich vocabulary, details and story. Her taped conversation with her mother takes the reader through several generations of not just the personal episodes of the family but also dramatic Asian history of the 1900's. She takes the reader with her on the journey through time, looking through the windows of real people in Hong Kong, China, Thailand and Taipei. They move often so the story opens the reader to cultures from many directions. It was a book I had a hard time putting down!

Flora Li is a young girl growing up in Hong Kong in the 1920's, and this book consists of her taped recollections of her life, which her daughter then published. This was a refreshing change of pace for me. I found myself astounded, disappointed, surprised, and even angry reading the saga of Flora as she struggled with an impoverished childhood after her father died when she was very young, married a man who she obviously didn't love, and went from home after home, having child after child, and never seem to be fulfilled until she eventually came to the US, saw her children all graduate from college and become accomplished adults despite some of their childhood struggles. Those of us who were born and raised in the U.S. have never really known what it was like to be displaced from your home and become a refugee during time of war. We are so lucky in that regard. As Japan invaded China in 1931, Flora's family was torn apart. Flora was very much on her own, and through the help of friends she made her way out of Hong Kong and into China, and continued her education. Later reunited with her family, she makes a marriage with the son of a very wealthy and influential man, but she is never happy. Her husband is temperamental, suffers from manic depression, and can't hold down a job. Flora sometimes has to resort to help from her family and his to find her husband employment and to raise her five children. Eventually, in 1967, she and her husband and kids move to the U.S. The parents deny themselves every luxury so that they can provide for their children's university educations. I think that those of us living in the US have all

heard of the excellent students turned out in the Asian schools. We are also well aware of the extreme importance that the Chinese and Japanese put on education. After all, a well-educated child will earn a good income and therefore be able to take care of his parents in their dotage. Flora's goal of university educations for all her children never wavered; even when one of them appeared to be a rather mediocre student in his younger years she tutored him herself or hired tutors for him. What I liked about this book was that the narrative was quite easy to read. I sometimes had difficulties remembering all the Chinese names, but thankfully, since Flora had converted to Catholicism, they also had Christian names which made them easier to remember. The other thing I liked about it was the history it entailed. Not only the Japanese invasion of China, but also the communist take-over in China, when Chiang Kai-shek and his followers fled to Taiwan in 1949 and set up their government there. Flora's father-in-law followed Chiang, and became the Deputy Prime Minister of his administration, although he never officially joined Chiang's Kuomintang. It was interesting to read about these political occurrences (although they were not the main focus of the book nor covered in great detail), and to see how a Chinese citizen dealt with and lived through those eras. I have only read about them in history books and never had an "inside peek" into how it affected citizens of China. There was really nothing I did NOT like about this book. Sometimes Flora was a bit unlikeable, but her personality should not detract from the general readability of this work. While I greatly admired Flora's fortitude, at times I was disappointed in her inability to simply dump a husband who she obviously had little respect (or love) for. But then again, I'm judging her by U.S. standards, and not Asian ones. This was a very nice change from a lot of my usual reading material, and I found myself eagerly looking forward to climbing into bed so I could continue reading. I would definitely recommend this book as an historical look into Chinese culture, politics, and life in general in the first half of the 20th Century.

Flora Li was born in Hong Kong, lost her father at an early age, and fought against society and family alike for her right to a good education. Her life story spans China's invasion by the Japanese, and the subsequent civil war with the communists - and through marriage to the son of Chiang Kai-Shek's deputy prime minister, she finds herself unwittingly thrust into the heart of national politics. The first part of the book tells of childhood hardships and extended families; connections which will prove invaluable when the war starts. Indeed, the impression from this book is that almost everyone in China has relatives in every town. This all takes place before the "one child policy" - in Flora's world, a man isn't even limited to one wife! Then war makes Flora a refugee, and she has to leave her hard-won place at Hong Kong university to look for safety in mainland China. Once she is

married, Flora dedicates herself only to her family, throughout the chaos which carries her across China, to Thailand and Taiwan, and finally America. She feels she has wasted her education, spending her life instead as a refugee and then as wife and mother, and her enduring commitment is to give her five children every chance she never had. This is a fascinating autobiography (or possibly a biography, as it's technically written by the subject's daughter, based on her mother's stories), and gives a number of insights into a turbulent period of Chinese history.

This is the story of a Chinese woman. It tells of her life which began in poverty and abuse, and her struggles to survive during years of upheaval and war in China and finally her years of marriage and motherhood during which she struggled to make life better for the children. I couldn't put it down and the pages seem to fly by. As a white American I found it very interesting to see inside the mind of a Chinese person. We have many dear friends who are Chinese and this was helpful in understanding their culture. It's always very interesting to learn about other cultures and their values.

It's just an amazing story of endurance in the face of adversity. I'd recommend it for readers, 17 and above.

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