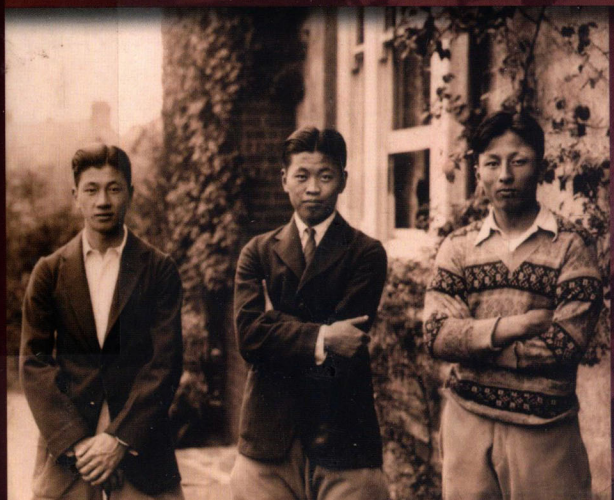
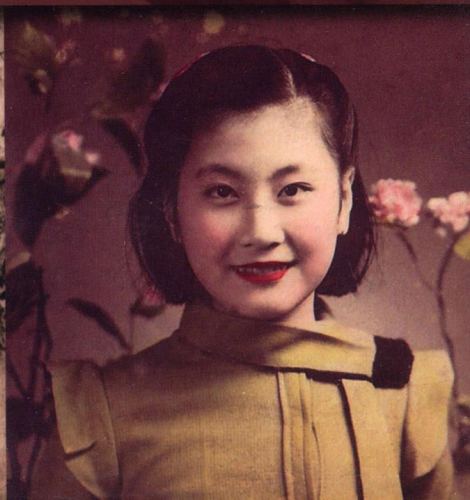
THE LIUS OF SHANGHAI

SHERMAN COCHRAN & ANDREW HSIEH





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For Macu and Ming

Preface

On a cold winter day in 1992, I saw letters in the Liu family's correspondence for the first time. I was seated in a solid, wooden, straight-backed chair at the Center for Research on Chinese Business History in the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) when Professor Huang Hanmin, the director of the Center, delivered the letters to my desk. By the standards of American archives and libraries, it was not a comfortable place. According to China's policies at the time, public buildings south of the Yangzi River were not heated in winter, and since Shanghai is located on the Yangzi River, it was one of the northernmost cities wholly lacking in this amenity. But if my personal discomfort initially distracted me, I became completely focused as soon as I opened the first box of the Liu family letters and began to read.

Instantly I felt transported into the world of the Liu family. Four hours later I was startled when Professor Huang pointed out that it was time for lunch. I had sat through the morning without moving a muscle except to turn the pages of the old and fragile onionskin paper on which the letters were written. At that moment I resolved to write a book about the Liu family that would somehow allow readers to share with me what I had experienced on that bitterly cold and utterly exhilarating day.

Why was I immediately drawn into these letters? Admittedly, I had preexisting reasons for taking an interest in the Center's holdings in general and its materials on the Lius in particular. I had been visiting SASS regularly for nearly a decade (since 1983), and in the early 1990s I had teamed up with two of SASS's most distinguished Chinese scholars,

Professors Zhang Zhongli and Ding Richu, in applying successfully for a grant from the Luce Foundation to build the Center that now housed the Liu family letters. Moreover, I had just finished research at the Center on the family's father, Liu Hongsheng, whose career became the subject of a chapter I was writing for a book in Chinese business history. My research on Liu had convinced me that he was a major historical figure—significant for his political relations with Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, and Zhou Enlai as well as his economic success as a dynamic and wealthy industrialist—but in learning about him I had consulted financial accounts, internal memos, legal contracts, and other business records that had not mesmerized me as his family's letters did.

Some of the Liu family letters captured my attention because they made me feel like a voyeur peering into intimate scenes that were being described by one family member for another and were not intended for readers like me or anyone else outside the family. Other letters caused me to imagine that I was a member of the family who could see into the future, because I had read many of them out of chronological order and learned about later outcomes before I read about earlier decisions that led to them. As I came upon the letters dated earlier, I wanted to warn the writers: "Don't marry him!" "Don't go abroad!" "Don't make that investment!" "Father is right this time—take his word for it!"

Still other letters drew me in because they were intellectually engaging. While some seemed full of emotional outbursts, others contained closely reasoned arguments. Were these written words transparent expressions of inner feelings and thoughts? Or were they crafty maneuvers carried out by skilled and self-posturing negotiators? I found it challenging to try to discern which passages were spontaneous and which were calculated, guarded, or manipulative.

How could I write a book that would do justice to the Liu family letters? This question became more and more challenging as I read more and more letters. On each subsequent research trip, I was greeted with the news that Professor Huang and his successor as head of the Center, Professor Lu Xinglong, had discovered more family letters that had been buried in the vast business records of the Lius' firm.

Before long I began to experiment with possible approaches for framing and presenting the Liu family letters. First, I collected a selection of them in a documentary history, adding editorial comments to

each one and photocopying them for distribution to students in my courses. Then I experimented with the form of an epistolary novel, except in this case I selected authentic historical letters written by the Lius rather than making up letters and attributing them to fictional characters in correspondence with each other. After that, I tried extracting bits of data from the letters and using them as a basis for addressing social scientific theories.

My experiments yielded results that have found their way into some of the following chapters, but after reading more of the Lius' letters, I began to have doubts about adopting the form of the epistolary novel or structuring the book exclusively or even primarily around social scientific theories, especially when I consulted my friend Andrew Hsieh about it.

In 1997, after I had been collecting and studying the Liu family letters for five years, I told Andrew about them. By then I had made two research trips to SASS in search of more Liu letters, and I had found some that I could not read because of the idiosyncratic calligraphy used in the Lius' handwriting. Ever since we had been classmates in graduate school during the late 1960s and early 1970s, I had known about Andrew's deep learning and remarkable ability to decipher the most difficult Chinese texts and discern allusions and multiple meanings in them, and I asked him to take a look at some of the Liu letters. As he pored over them, he also became engrossed in them, and we decided to collaborate as we had done on a previous book.

From then on, between 1997 and 2008, sometimes together and sometimes separately, we made research trips to SASS almost every year, ultimately finding about two thousand family letters written by the father, the mother, and their twelve children between the late 1920s and the early 1950s. We agreed that I would organize and write the book and that he would translate letters and other documents to be quoted and cited in it. Since then, as I have drafted chapters, he has commented on them, and along the way he has consistently expressed his preference for a focus on the letters themselves rather than on fictional forms or social scientific theories.

It is easy to see why Andrew believes that readers should have direct access to the Liu family letters. The collection is unlike almost any other in Chinese history because it includes letters from all members of a family during a tumultuous period in Chinese history that spanned

the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945 and the Communist Revolution of 1949. In the course of their educations, almost all of the Lius learned to write fluently and even elegantly in two languages, Chinese and English. Although the father never studied abroad, he acquired his languages as a student in Shanghai at St. John's Middle School and St. John's University, which were sponsored by the American Episcopal Mission and offered courses in English as well as Chinese. After leaving St. John's, he used English on the job, at first holding a full-time job and later a part-time position with a large Sino-British coal company, Kailuan Mining Administration, where he spoke both languages on a regular basis throughout nearly his whole career in China.

By the time his eldest children reached school age, the father had worked for Kailuan for several years and had come to recognize the advantages of having full command of both Chinese and English. Determined to give his nine sons an early start as language learners, he had them tutored in Chinese and English at home before sending each of them to the same schools he had attended, St. John's Middle School and St. John's University, or other bilingual institutions in Shanghai. In addition, he sent them abroad to colleges and universities where all, except one (the youngest son, who had learning disabilities), spent between four and seven years in the English-speaking countries of England or the United States or studied English as well as Japanese in Japan. He also enrolled his three daughters in Shanghai schools that offered courses in both Chinese and English and then sent them abroad—one to Japan and one to England for less than a year each and one to the United States for four years.

While still in their early teens, the Liu children wrote to their parents and each other in somewhat stilted Chinese as though following models for letter writing (which were then available in Shanghai), but by the time they reached their late teens, their written Chinese became smoother. In learning English, they followed a similar pattern. In their early teens, their written English was initially awkward—far less expressive than their written Chinese—and they did not begin to write letters confidently in English until after they had lived for a while abroad. In their first letters home from England and the United States, they apologized to their father for writing in Chinese rather than following his instructions to use and practice their English. But in every case their English soon improved, and throughout their lives, they cor-

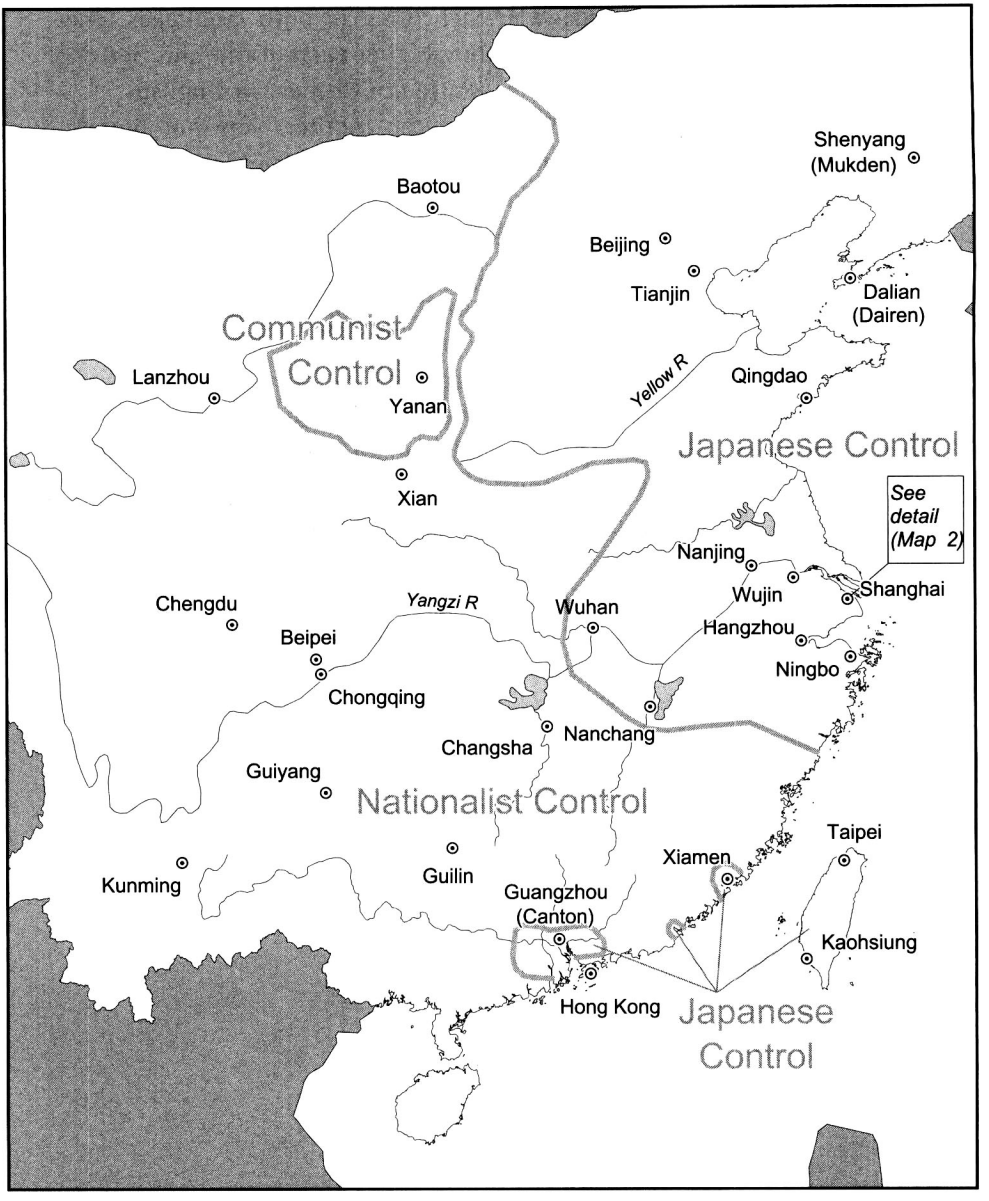
responded with their parents and each other in both languages. The notes at the end of this book indicate whether each of the Lius' letters quoted or cited here was originally written in Chinese or English.

Only one member of the family, the mother, was not literate enough to write letters in Chinese, English, or any other language, and even she was a prolific correspondent. Unable to write for herself, she dictated her letters to a secretary, Song Guanlin, a blind former English teacher who took the mother's dictation in Shanghai dialect and simultaneously translated and typed it in English-language letters.

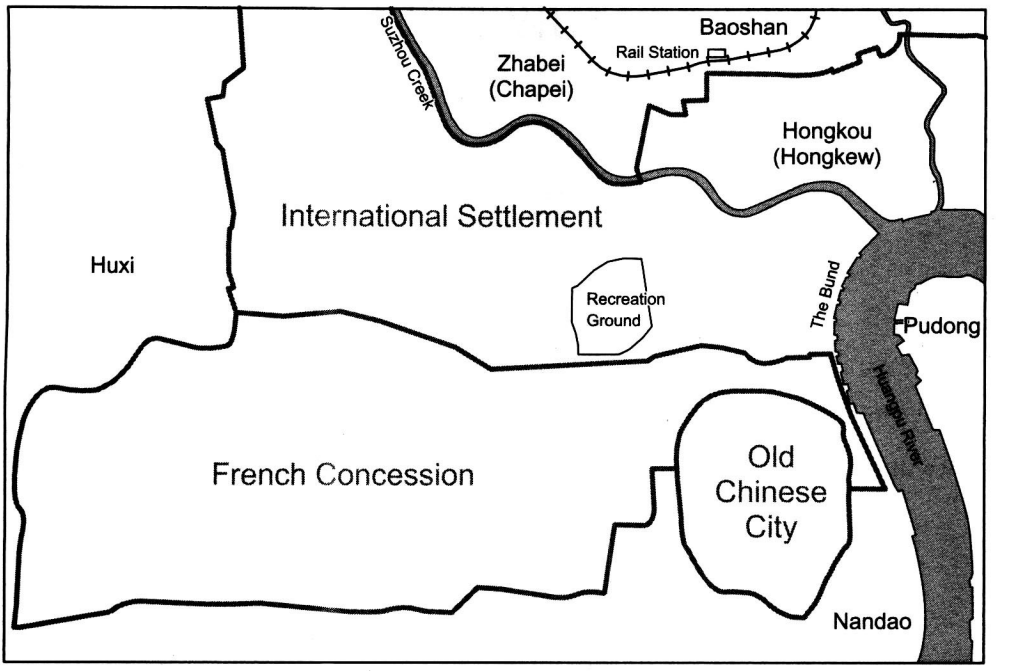
If the collection is extraordinary for its inclusion of letters from all members of a big family, it is also extraordinary for its size. It is by no means the only collection of letters that has survived in China, but as far as we know, it is the largest readily available one that reveals interactions within a rich and powerful elite family based in China. Reading these letters is a rare privilege, and Andrew has convinced me of the importance of allowing the letter writers' distinctive voices to be heard, especially in relation to each other.

Fortunately, he and I have been able to find an approach to the Liu family letters that is acceptable to both of us. We have structured each chapter around a debate between two or more members of the family, and we have quoted extensively so that the Lius can be heard making their arguments in their own words. We prefer this form because it takes us inside the family, reveals what its members argued about, and shows who had the power to make its decisions.

Sherman Cochran
Cornell University

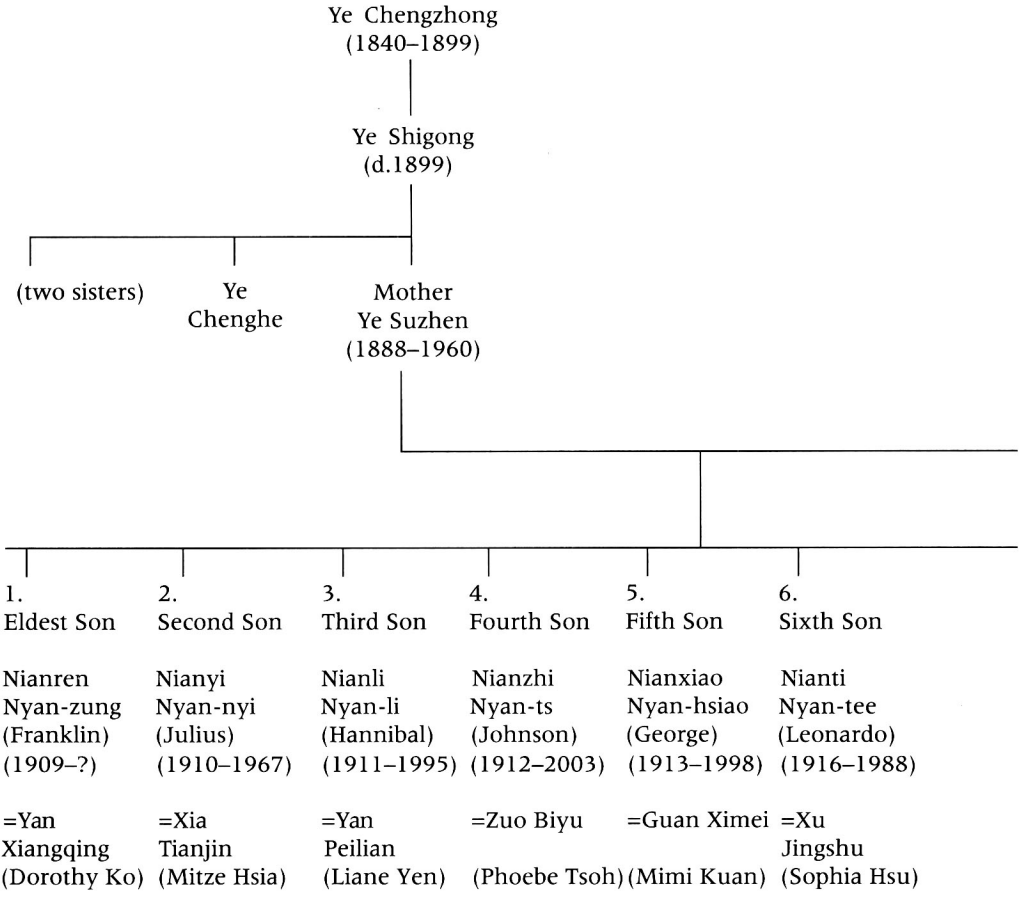


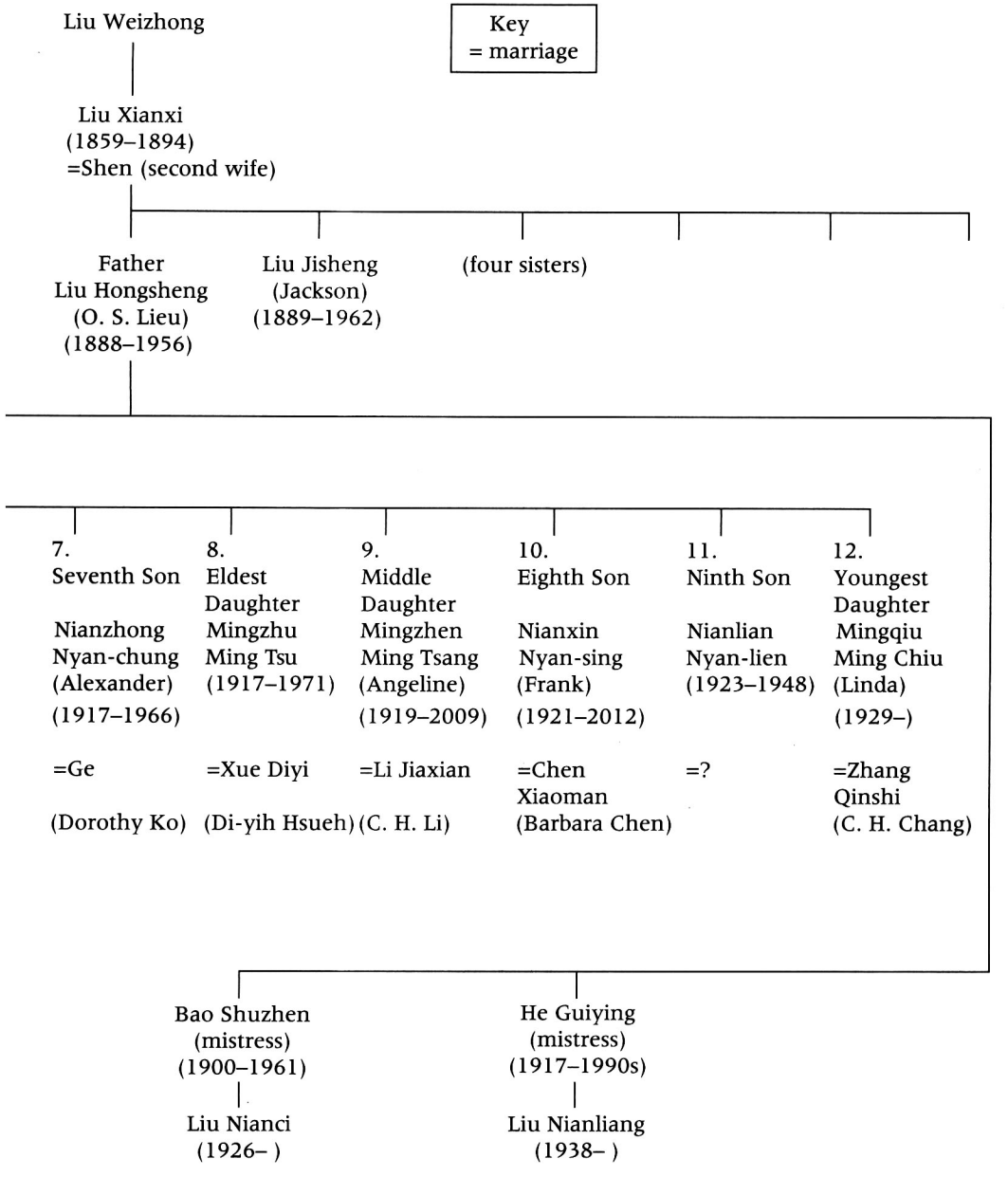
Map 1. Wartime China.



Map 2. The Chinese districts of Shanghai were under Japanese occupation for the duration of the Sino-Japanese War, from 1937 to 1945; the International Settlement was under Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945; and the French Concession was not under Japanese occupation.

THE LIU FAMILY TREE




Liu Weizhong
Key
= marriage
Liu Xianxi
(1859–1894)
=Shen (second wife)
Father
Liu Hongsheng
(O. S. Lieu)
(1888–1956)
Liu Jisheng
(Jackson)
(1889–1962)
(four sisters)
7.
Seventh Son
Nianzhong
Nyan-chung
(Alexander)
(1917–1966)
=Ge
(Dorothy Ko)
8.
Eldest
Daughter
Mingzhu
Ming Tsu
(1917–1971)
=Xue Diyi
(Di-yih Hsueh)
9.
Middle
Daughter
Mingzhen
Ming Tsang
(Angeline)
(1919–2009)
=Li Jiaxian
(C. H. Li)
10.
Eighth Son
Nianxin
Nyan-sing
(Frank)
(1921–2012)
=Chen
Xiaoman
(Barbara Chen)
11.
Ninth Son
Nianlian
Nyan-lien
(1923–1948)
=?
12.
Youngest
Daughter
Mingqiu
Ming Chiu
(Linda)
(1929–)
=Zhang
Qinshi
(C. H. Chang)
Bao Shuzhen
(mistress)
(1900–1961)
Liu Nianci
(1926–)
He Guiying
(mistress)
(1917–1990s)
Liu Nianliang
(1938–)

THE LIUS OF SHANGHAI

Contents

Introduction

Family Dynamics under Patriarchy

IN THE first half of the twentieth century, the Lius of Shanghai became one of China's preeminent business families, presiding over an industrial empire that produced matches, woolens, cotton textiles, cement, and briquettes. At the same time, the father and mother in the family prepared for the future by giving international educations to almost all of their twelve children—nine boys and three girls—sending them not only to schools in China but also to Cambridge University, Harvard Business School, University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tokyo Institute of Technology, and other leading institutions of higher learning in the West and Japan. Moreover, the father and some of his sons became politically influential, accepting appointments to high official posts and dealing in person with top leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek in the Nationalist government and Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in the People's Republic. Even during the two most tumultuous events in twentieth-century Chinese history—the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945 and the Communist Revolution of 1949—the Lius retained high positions in China's economic, social, and political life.

In all these ways, the Lius distinguished themselves, and since they were by no means ordinary, they should not be regarded as typical of all families in Chinese history. Yet this family is worth comparing with other Chinese families to see whether it fits the general characterization that has been made of them. In a concise summary of this characterization, the sociologists Martin Whyte and William Parish have observed: "Perhaps the predominant image of urban as well as rural