FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORY

Eye Witness History in the Making 1888-2009

Ann Lee Wang
George Chung Wang
Xlibris (May 29, 2009)
Unknown $29.99 (294pp)
978-1-4415-0616-0

Born in the mid-fourteenth century to into an ethnic Chinese Han family, Confucian scholar and salt tax bureau manager Wang Tsong founded the Wang clan at KuHsien village and raised his family. Through tumultuous historical periods and family upheaval, the clan survived and expanded. And during each generation, good fortune placed a Wang ancestor at the vantage point of major historical events as they unfolded and shaped two centuries of Chinese and world history.

This three-generation family saga, which begins in the eighteenth century, is not a typical memoir. It features many elements of a successful novel: family tragedy, betrayal, joyful births, heart-wrenching deaths, romance, and heartbreak. But its value lies in the mini history lessons seamlessly woven, like multicolored fibers, throughout the fabric of the story. The Wangs explain in pithy detail Chinese social and cultural norms throughout the past century. Readers who are unfamiliar with China beyond the lessons in Western history books and the basic goods sold in local stores should come away enlightened about the five sources of Chinese family names, medicinal herbs, classic literature and poetry, militia groups and their use of martial arts during the Boxer Rebellion, arranged marriages and astrology, the rise and fall of ruling war lords and governments, cuisine styles by region, the tea tradition and its pet birds, the five major ethnic races, major changes in family traditions, festival celebrations, music styles, and more.

George Chung Wang studied at St. Johns University in Shanghai and holds a doctorate in economics from Columbia University. He also received a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in Hong Kong. Jo Anne Lee Wang was educated at Fudan University, Shanghai, and has worked as a music librarian at the University of Southern California. This is their first memoir.

Alluringly constructed, the book makes generous use of folk sayings and mythological anecdotes common to Chinese culture. They are paralleled with similar real-life circumstances that better convey the situation and lend a sense of magical realism to the story. Fantastical anecdotes usually end with something like, “So they said” or “Legend has it.” And in these moments, one senses a sly smile and a wink from the storytellers.

There’s a generous subject index for easy identification of passages, and the bibliography is segmented into short lists at the end of applicable chapters, making it easy to identify consulted works without fuss.

This engaging story evokes compassion, joy, laughter, and sadness and would make a good book club pick. The authors’ clear Chinese-accented writing style creates a unique voice with a sense of intimacy that makes one feel as if the story were being told only to them. It’s unfortunate that such a lovely story is marred with too many errors in English grammar, punctuation, and spelling, which often distract from the book. Despite these glitches, *Eye Witness History* is a worthy read.

ANGELA BLACK (August 5, 2010)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.