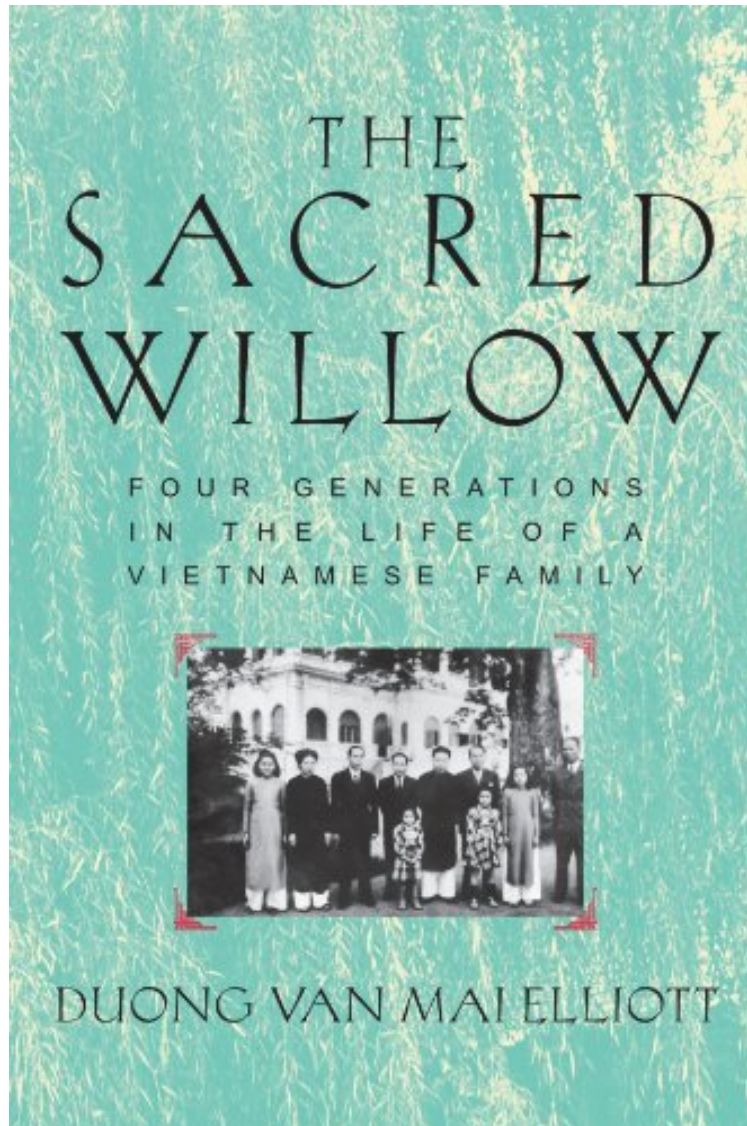


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# The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family

Mai Elliott

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**Mai Elliott : The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A page-turner insider history of Vietnam over four generationsBy

Cornelia Jensen Unlike the standard history from an outsider perspective, this book is a page-turner. The author skillfully weaves together the larger picture of Vietnamese history with the moving and insightful story of her own family. It provides rich detail grounded in the authentic experiences of family members whose diverse life choices illustrate the complexities and challenges of a country and people in times of colonial oppression, war, revolution, and emigration. Highly recommended for anyone wishing to learn about the history and culture of this fascinating country from the perspectives of the Vietnamese themselves. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Highly recommended By Margaret Licosati This is amazing story written by the author who lived it! Although long and complex, it helped me gain a greater understanding of the scenario behind the Vietnam war. That was a confusing time for me and for many Americans who lived during that period. I highly recommend this book for those interested in gaining clarity about that war and the culture behind it. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By MCwell written

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, Duong Van Mai Elliott's *The Sacred Willow* illuminates recent Vietnamese history by weaving together the stories of the lives of four generations of her family. Beginning with her great-grandfather, who rose from rural poverty to become an influential landowner, and continuing to the present, Mai Elliott traces her family's journey through an era of tumultuous change. She tells us of childhood hours in her grandmother's silk shop, and of hiding while French troops torched her village, watching while blossoms torn by fire from the trees flutter "like hundreds of butterflies" overhead. She makes clear the agonizing choices that split Vietnamese families: her eldest sister left her staunchly anti-communist home to join the Viet Minh, and spent months sleeping in jungle camps with her infant son, fearing air raids by day and tigers by night. And she follows several family members through the last, desperate hours of the fall of Saigon—including one nephew who tried to escape by grabbing the skid of a departing American helicopter. Based on family papers, dozens of interviews, and a wealth of other research, this is not only a memorable family saga but a record of how the Vietnamese themselves have experienced their times.

.com Most books about Vietnam focus on the French who colonized it or the Americans who sought to "save" it. This combination of memoir and family history shows the Vietnamese "as they saw themselves as the central players in their own history." The author's perspective is particularly enlightening because her relatives, though unquestionably better-educated and better-off than the typical Vietnamese, made a variety of political and social choices over the course of the turbulent century she chronicles. Her great-grandfather was a mandarin and member of the imperial court; her father was a government official under French rule; her older sister married a Communist. Elliott herself enrolled in Georgetown's School of Foreign Service in 1960, married an American, and supported the U.S. crusade in Vietnam until her experiences interviewing Vietcong prisoners of war for a Rand Corporation study convinced her that the corrupt Saigon regime failed to offer a convincing alternative to Communism. Because she had family on both sides, Elliott's portrait of the war is subtler and less didactic than previous accounts by proponents of either ideology. Her prose is a bit formal and dense for the casual reader, but by telling her relatives' personal stories and explicating their culture's traditional values, her reflective narrative makes humanly complicated a history too often oversimplified. --Wendy Smith From Publishers Weekly In this deeply moving family saga, Elliott offers a microcosm of the history of modern Vietnam. Her great-grandfather passed the grueling tests through which unpropertied Vietnamese men tried to advance by entering the government as mandarins. More than half a century later, in 1947, when the author was six, her family fled their smoldering ancestral village while Ho Chi Minh's troops battled the French. After spending her childhood in Hanoi and her adolescence in Saigon, she studied at Georgetown University in the early 1960s. She and her future husband, David Elliott, moved to Saigon, marrying in 1964; there Elliott took a job with the Rand Corporation in a U.S. Defense Department-sponsored project, interviewing communist prisoners and defectors. Though her parents were staunchly anti-communist (her father served as governor in the puppet kingdom run by the French and later worked in South Vietnamese dictator Ngo Dinh Diem's regime), the author scorned Diem as well as the communists and, by 1969, called for an end to U.S. intervention. Family loyalties were divided: her eldest sister became a hard-core communist, while one of her brothers spent more than three years in Vietcong "reeducation" prison camps. Elliott writes with unsparing candor about forging a new identity, about her nation's destruction and its partial revival with the reintroduction of free-market mechanisms and, above all, about her family's harrowing passage through a long and difficult history. Author tour. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Family bonds are the core of Vietnamese society, so there can be no better vehicle for understanding the modern history of Vietnam than the microcosm of the family. The Duong clan of Van Dinh village in northern Vietnam contributed several generations of high-ranking officials to the service of the imperial, colonial, and postcolonial state from the late 19th century to the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. The story of this family is the story of modern Vietnam, viewed from the perspective of the elite, well educated, and powerful. With deep insight and empathy, Elliott skillfully weaves the life stories of her great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers, and cousins into the intricate tapestry of modern Vietnamese history. This is a beautiful and utterly absorbing work, a book of extraordinary emotional power that is also a major contribution to

historical understanding. It deserves the widest audience and belongs in all libraries. ?Steven I. Levine, Univ. of Montana, Missoula Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.