



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

*Duong Van Mai Elliott*

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Duong Van Mai Elliott's *The Sacred Willow*, an extraordinary narrative woven from the lives of four generations of her family, illuminates fascinating--and until now unexplored--strands of Vietnamese history.

Beginning with her great-grandfather, who rose from rural poverty to become an influential mandarin, 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 blossoms torn by fire from the trees flutter "like hundreds of butterflies" overhead. She reveals 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 with her infant son in jungle camps, 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. At times haunting, at times heartbreaking--it is always mesmerizing--*The Sacred Willow* will forever change how we view the history of Vietnam and our own role in it.

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