# Biography of Lily Qi




# From Red China to Blue Maryland

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# Chapter 1
# A Daughter of Shanghai (1963–1989)




Lily Qi was born in Shanghai, China, on 4 November 1963. A city closely connected to the global economy since its opening as a treaty port, Shanghai provided the foundations for her early openness to the wider world and her resilient character. Publicly available sources offer little information about her childhood and family background, but it is clear that she grew up in an environment marked by profound social upheaval. In her later memoir, she described this period as the starting point of a journey “from Red China.” Behind those words lay the experiences of a girl raised amid political movements, whose earliest understanding of politics was associated with fear, alienation and a powerful instinct to keep her distance from it.

In 1989, at the age of twenty-six, Qi made a decision that would transform her life: she travelled alone to the United States to pursue further education. Carrying her hopes for the American Dream, she boarded a flight across the Pacific. She was a young woman from Shanghai without an influential family background, political connections or even an established network of relatives and friends upon whom she could depend. What she possessed was a master's degree and a simple belief in the possibilities of the future.

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# Chapter 2
# The Years of Study: From Ohio to Washington (1989–2001)

After arriving in the United States, Lily Qi enrolled at Ohio University, where she pursued a master's degree in Organisational and Interpersonal Communication, graduating in 1993. This training equipped her with an essential ability: understanding how people establish trust and how dialogue can bridge differences. In later years, when she encountered a predominantly white electorate or an Asian-American community that felt disconnected from politics, this ability became one of her most important strengths.

She subsequently entered the Kogod School of Business at American University, earning a Master of Business Administration in 2001, with a concentration in Marketing and Global Information Technology Management. Her two master's programmes, one focused on people and the other on business, produced a distinctive combination of skills. She could understand individuals' emotions and aspirations while also applying business principles to the analysis of public policy and economic issues.

During her student years, Qi held a wide variety of jobs. In her own words, “My American life was one chapter of struggle after another,” as she searched for her identity, discovered what she

was capable of achieving and worked to overcome each successive obstacle.

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# Chapter 3
# A Career in Public Service: From Montgomery County to the State Legislature (2001–2018)

Lily Qi's professional career was characterised by a gradual progression through public-sector responsibilities.

Her first significant appointment was as Vice President for Business Development and Marketing at the Washington, D.C., Economic Partnership from 2001 to 2005. She subsequently served as Public Information Officer for the District of Columbia Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking from 2005 to 2008. These positions provided her with her first substantial understanding of how government operates and how economic policies affect people's everyday lives.

In 2011, she joined the Office of the Montgomery County Executive as Director of Special Projects. She was subsequently promoted to Assistant Chief Administrative Officer, serving from 2016 to 2018 with responsibility for economic and workforce development. Montgomery County was the most populous county in Maryland and one of the areas with the highest proportions of Asian residents in the United States. In this position, Qi acquired direct experience managing major government operations. She was no longer simply implementing public policy but had become involved in formulating policies and allocating resources.

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She also served on the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation from 2016 to 2019 and was deeply involved in Asian-American community affairs as a member of the Asian Pacific American Advisory Commission from 2007 to 2015. These responsibilities made her one of the most recognisable public figures within Montgomery County's Asian-American community even before she entered the race for the state legislature.

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# Chapter 4
# 2018: A Historic Breakthrough

In 2018, Lily Qi made a decision that surprised many people: she ran for a seat in the Maryland House of Delegates.

For a first-generation immigrant born in China, this appeared to be an almost impossible path. She had no established political base, no trade union endorsement, and even her two-letter surname, “Qi,” presented a pronunciation challenge for many voters. She later acknowledged her uncertainty: “Nobody like me had done this before. Where were my role models?”

Her campaign strategy became an important example of Asian-American political participation in Maryland. Rather than defining herself exclusively as a Chinese-American candidate, she actively built relationships with Korean-American and Vietnamese-American community leaders, assisted residents with voter registration at community events and met potential voters individually. She understood that most members of the Asian-American community were immigrants who often possessed an instinctive reluctance towards politics and political party membership.

Qi adopted an approach that many candidates had previously overlooked: directly contacting unregistered and unaffiliated voters instead of concentrating exclusively on those

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considered likely to vote. She used WeChat to communicate with hundreds of residents and wrote columns in Chinese-language newspapers explaining the American political party system. University of Maryland Professor Janelle Wong observed: “Her ability to communicate across multiple platforms gave her a capacity to reach non-English-speaking communities that very few campaigns possess.”

In November 2018, Lily Qi was successfully elected to represent Maryland's District 15 in the House of Delegates. She became the first Chinese-born, first-generation Chinese immigrant elected to the Maryland House of Delegates.

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# Chapter 5
# The Legislator: From Legislator of the Year to Manufacturing Star

Since taking office on 9 January 2019, Lily Qi has established a distinctive legislative record in the Maryland General Assembly. She has served as a member of the Economic Matters Committee, Chair of the Business Regulation Subcommittee, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Federal Relations, and Chair of the Maryland Asian American and Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus.

Her legislative initiatives have consistently reflected a central objective: using institutional reforms to support people and communities at a disadvantage in the marketplace while continuing to promote economic growth.

Economic Development and Manufacturing. Qi played a leading role in advancing Maryland's Manufacturing 4.0 programme, which provides matching funds to manufacturers committed to adopting Industry 4.0 strategies, including equipment upgrades and workforce training. The Regional Manufacturing Institute of Maryland recognised her as a 2024 Maryland Manufacturing Star, praising her efforts to place Maryland's manufacturing sector on a path towards the future.

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Workers and Families. She promoted legislation establishing Maryland's Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance programme and reforms to the regulatory framework governing worker cooperatives, making it easier for such enterprises to be established, operate and obtain capital within the state.

Energy and the Environment. She helped establish Maryland's Green Bank to finance clean energy projects, advanced rooftop solar incentives for low- and moderate-income communities, and supported reforms to the EmPOWER energy efficiency programme that incorporated greenhouse gas reduction objectives.

Social Equity. She promoted the establishment of the Governor's Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs and strengthened data privacy and consumer protections relating to genetic testing. She also worked to eliminate language barriers in voter registration by supporting multilingual registration forms for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Her work received recognition across several sectors. She was named Legislator of the Year by the Maryland Technology Council in 2020, the Maryland Retailers Association in 2022 and the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce in 2023. She was also recognised as a Green Champion by the League of Conservation Voters. Receiving major distinctions from organisations representing technology, retail, business and

environmental interests reflected the breadth of her legislative work.

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# Chapter 6
# Challenging the Model Minority Stereotype

One of the central critical perspectives in Lily Qi's political thinking is her concern about the model minority stereotype.

During a discussion of her memoir in 2026, she explicitly challenged the widespread assumption that Chinese Americans are uniformly highly educated and financially successful. She argued that this stereotype often obscures the experiences of families who continue to struggle economically. As she explained: “If Chinese Americans pursue only individual economic success without transforming that success into community influence and political representation, those achievements will ultimately be castles in the air.”

Qi invoked historical examples to illustrate her concerns. She referred to the experiences of European Jews in 1938 and the suffering of Asian-American business owners during the Los Angeles riots, arguing that communities lacking political influence can become especially vulnerable during periods of crisis. This perspective reflected both her personal experience as an immigrant and her assessment of the challenges facing Asian-American communities in political life.

Her decision to run as a Democrat was also grounded in specific policy considerations. She explained that she wanted

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to support business development while providing institutional assistance to disadvantaged communities. In her account, this was not simply an abstract ideological choice, but a practical judgement shaped by her immigrant experiences.

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# Chapter 7
# 2026: From Elected American to Democracy Needs You

In 2026, Lily Qi published her memoir, Elected American: From Red China to Blue Maryland.

The title itself conveyed a complete personal narrative. “Red China” represented the society from which she had departed, where her early experiences had left her fearful of politics. “Blue Maryland” represented the political environment in which she had established herself, where she now participated in legislation, negotiation and the protection of public interests. The phrase “Elected American” carried both a personal and symbolic meaning. It described her own transformation while expressing a broader conviction: an immigrant need not remain merely a guest accepted into a new society, but can become an elected participant in shaping that society's future.

At several public discussions in 2026, she repeatedly emphasised that voting has significance beyond the immediate outcome of an election. “A single vote may not directly change an election result, but your voting record is preserved over time. Participating in the democratic process is far more important than whom you vote for.”

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On the opening page of her new book, she wrote the words: “Democracy Needs You.”

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# Chapter 8
# Concluding Reflections: A Political Life of Cultural Translation

Lily Qi's life can be summarised through one word: translation.

She has acted as an interpreter between two political cultures. Having left a political environment that had instilled fear and distrust, she entered a democratic society in which civic participation is regarded as a fundamental responsibility. Her own background helped her understand why many immigrants instinctively resist political involvement and why such reluctance can carry consequences. Through her campaign practices, discussing political positions on WeChat and publishing columns in Chinese-language newspapers, she provided a means for immigrants whose everyday communication occurred largely within Chinese-language networks to understand and participate in American politics.

She has also sought to bridge the relationship between business development and social equity. Her legislative record includes industrial policies such as Manufacturing 4.0, designed to support enterprises, alongside social protection measures such as paid family leave, intended to benefit workers. Rather than fitting neatly into a purely pro-business or pro-labour category, she has pursued a pragmatic approach

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aimed at finding a sustainable balance between economic development and social protection.

She has further challenged the distance between the model minority stereotype and the actual diversity of experiences within minority communities. Rejecting the assumption that all Chinese Americans are economically successful, she has consistently drawn attention to families who continue to face financial hardship. Her public career illustrates how a Chinese-American political representative can address the interests of Asian-American communities while also working on issues affecting a wider population.

From Shanghai to Ohio, from Washington, D.C., to Montgomery County, and from Montgomery County to Annapolis, Lily Qi's journey has extended across nearly six decades, carrying her from Red China to Blue Maryland. Her contributions have included a memoir, more than thirty legislative measures and countless debates in the state legislature. Beyond these achievements, her life offers a narrative of how an immigrant can move from seeking acceptance in a new country to participating directly in its democratic institutions.

Her story reflects the belief expressed in the opening pages of her memoir: democracy requires the participation of the people

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who live within it. Through her career in public service, Lily Qi has sought to answer that call.

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