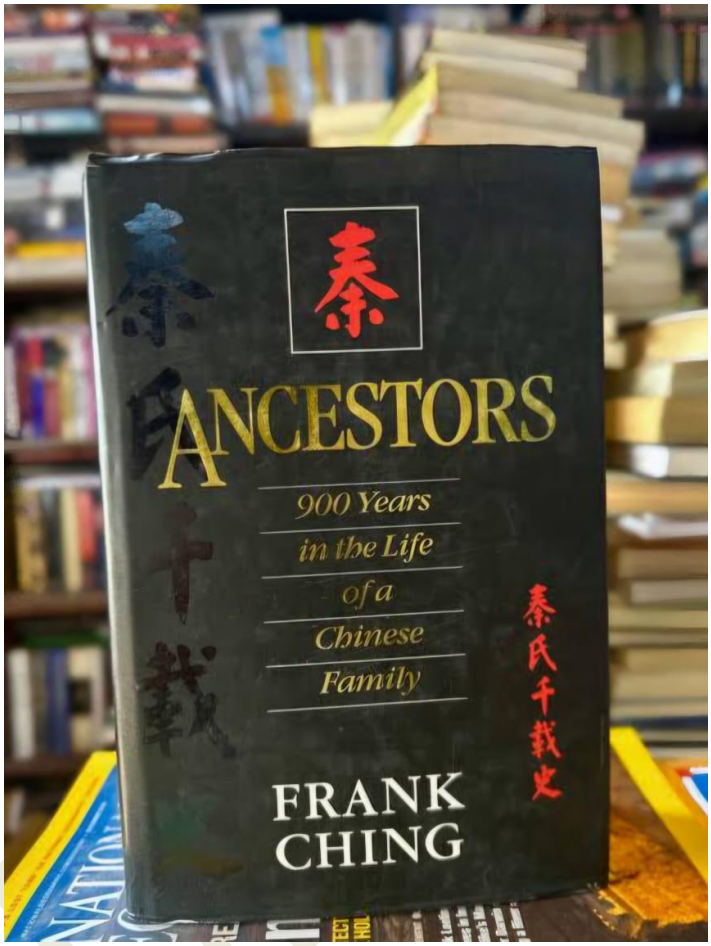
Biography of Frank Ching



Echoes Across a Thousand Years

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Chapter 1
Hong Kong: Birth and Early Years in the 1940s (1940–1950s)



Frank Ching was born in Hong Kong in 1940. Publicly available sources provide little detailed information about his childhood and family background, but it is known that he grew up in a family whose history was closely intertwined with the fortunes of modern China. His father, Ching Lien-kuei, had practised law during the Republican era, and the family's memories were deeply connected to the upheavals that shaped China throughout the twentieth century.

Ching later wrote in his book Ancestors that his narrative extended to the death of his father in 1959. This endpoint suggests both the importance of his father in his life and the passing of an era during his youth. From Hong Kong's colonial environment to the profound transformations of modern Chinese history, Ching's early experiences planted the first seeds of a question that would later become central to his intellectual life: “Who am I?”

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Chapter 2
Crossing the Pacific: From Hong Kong to America (Late 1950s–1970s)

In the late 1950s, Frank Ching left Hong Kong to pursue his education in the United States. He studied at several universities and eventually obtained a degree from Harvard University. His journey from Hong Kong to America, and from a Chinese-speaking environment into the English-speaking world, represented more than a geographical relocation. It also involved a profound adjustment in culture and identity.

During the 1970s, he joined The Wall Street Journal as a journalist. For a Chinese-American journalist seeking to establish himself within the mainstream American media of that period, linguistic competence alone was insufficient. He also needed a deep understanding of the differences between the two worlds. His subsequent achievements in journalism, spanning Hong Kong, Beijing, Wall Street and Asia, were built upon this ability to cross cultural and intellectual boundaries.

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Chapter 3
Beijing: A Historic Correspondent Posting in 1979 (1979–1980s)

In 1979, The Wall Street Journal assigned Frank Ching to establish its bureau in Beijing. That year, China and the United States had only recently established formal diplomatic relations, and China had begun opening its doors to the wider world. Ching became one of the earliest American correspondents stationed in the People's Republic of China following the normalisation of diplomatic relations.

For a Chinese-American journalist born in Hong Kong, educated in the United States and employed by a major American newspaper, Beijing in 1979 was a place filled with contradictions and possibilities.

He was simultaneously an outside observer, equipped with the methods and standards of Western journalism, and someone with a personal connection to China. His appearance, language and family memories linked him to the country in ways that could not easily be separated from his professional identity.

Through his reporting, Ching sought to explain to American readers a China undergoing profound transformation. At the

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same time, the experience of working in Beijing fundamentally reshaped his own understanding of the country.

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Chapter 4
Searching for His Roots: From a Family Genealogy to Nine Hundred Years of History (1980s–1990s)

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Frank Ching began an undertaking that would occupy more than a decade of his life: tracing his family's ancestry.

The starting point was a genealogical record left by his father. Ching had previously known little about his ancestral history, but this document opened a door into an unfamiliar world. He later recalled that the family genealogy awakened his desire to investigate his origins and understand the history of his ancestors.

His search took him across different parts of China. He visited elderly relatives and members of his extended clan, travelled to ancestral villages and burial grounds, carefully studied genealogical records and historical documents, collected relevant books and archival materials, and examined accounts and anecdotes from successive dynasties.

In the late autumn of 1982, Ching and his elder sister, Ching Ka-ying, undertook a difficult search through the wooded foothills of Huishan in Wuxi. After considerable effort, they finally located the tomb of their ancestor Qin Guan. The tomb

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had remained largely forgotten for many years, making their discovery a genuine act of historical recovery.

Ching's thirty-third-generation ancestor was Qin Guan (1049–1100), the celebrated Northern Song dynasty poet. Qin Guan, whose courtesy name was Shaoyou and whose literary name was Huaihai Jushi, was one of the Four Scholars of Su Shi's Circle and a leading representative of the graceful and restrained school of ci poetry.

Yet Ching discovered far more than a single distinguished ancestor. He reconstructed a family lineage extending over nine hundred years, from the Song dynasty to modern times. Among his ancestors were senior officials, loyal ministers, devoted sons, accomplished scholars, talented writers and prominent recluses. One notable figure was Qin Jin, who served as Minister of five departments across the Ming dynasty's two capitals.

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Chapter 5
Ancestors: A Family History and a History of China (1990s–2009)

Frank Ching transformed the results of his genealogical research into a book.

The work was first published in China in 1993 under the Chinese title Zongzu Zhi Lian (The Bonds of Clan and Ancestry). It later appeared in the English-speaking world in 2009 under the title Ancestors: The Story of China Told Through the Lives of an Extraordinary Family. A new Chinese edition was published by Beijing United Publishing Company in 2016 under the title Ancestors: A Thousand-Year Story of One Family.

The structure of Ancestors was both distinctive and ambitious. Beginning with Qin Guan, his thirty-third-generation ancestor, who was born in 1049, Ching traced the lives of successive generations of the Qin family until the death of his father in 1959.

By following the individual fortunes of his ancestors, he connected the family's transformations to the rise and decline of dynasties and the broader history of China over more than nine centuries. The result was described as both an engaging

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and enduring history of a single family and a sweeping account of China's larger historical experience.

The book received considerable praise from international scholars and reviewers.

The Washington Post observed: “After reading this book, one is left with the clear impression that the starting point for studying Chinese history should not be dynasties and emperors, but a family within a society organised around family relationships.”

Orville Schell, Director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society, described the work as “an astonishing achievement,” noting that Ching had reconstructed nine centuries of Chinese history and culture in a manner that few others in the English-speaking world had attempted.

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Chapter 6
The Qin Family: Contemporary Echoes of a Thousand-Year Lineage

Frank Ching's search for his ancestors brought a distinguished family lineage extending over nearly a millennium back into contemporary public awareness. His work represented more than a personal search for origins; it also helped revive the collective cultural memory of the Qin clan.

According to Qin family genealogical records, the Qin families of Wuxi are descended from Qin Guan and are divided into six major branches: the Xishan Qin family, the Luoshe Qin family, the Mashan Fujiao Qin family, the Hudai Xixi Qin family, the Shitangwan Doumen Qin family and the Yuqi Rongxi Qin family.

In 2014, marking the 965th anniversary of Qin Guan's birth, the Chinese Qin Guan Clan Association organised a major commemorative gathering in Wuxi. Approximately four to five hundred descendants of the Qin family from China and overseas attended the celebrations.

A production team from the BBC documentary series The Story of China, together with an American documentary team working on A Thousand Years of the Qin Family, filmed the event. They also visited several historically significant locations,

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including the Qin family's ancestral residence in Xiaolou Lane, Jichang Garden, the former residence of Qin Bangxian and Qin Guan's tomb.

Ching himself was an important figure in this contemporary revival of family history.

He explained that the documentary project A Thousand Years of the Qin Family sought to transform written historical accounts into visual narratives, allowing more Western audiences to understand Chinese culture through the experiences of the Qin family.

From a Chinese-American journalist who had once known little about his ancestry to the author of a nine-hundred-year family history, and subsequently to a figure promoting cross-cultural historical understanding, Ching completed a profound journey of rediscovering his roots.

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Chapter 7
Concluding Reflections: A Translator's Echo Across a Thousand Years

Frank Ching's life can be understood through one central concept: translation.

He has translated between two languages. From Hong Kong to the United States, and from Chinese into English, his life has unfolded between two linguistic worlds. Yet his work has involved far more than literal translation. Through English-language journalism and historical writing, he has sought to explain China to Western audiences and to make the traditions of the past intelligible to contemporary readers.

He has also translated between two different scales of time.

As a journalist for The Wall Street Journal, his responsibility was to report events as they occurred: the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, the beginning of reform and opening-up, and the transformations of everyday life in China.

As a descendant of Qin Guan, however, his intellectual and emotional world was connected to a historical perspective extending across nine hundred years.

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He could appreciate both the immediate significance of a news event and the ways in which family traditions endure through centuries of political and social change. This combination of perspectives made him an unusual figure: a journalist who also became a historian of his own family.

He has further translated between family history and national history.

By reconstructing the experiences of his ancestors, Ching produced a narrative of China itself. The rise and decline of the Qin family, Qin Guan's poetry, Qin Jin's official career and the legal profession of his father, Ching Lien-kuei, provided personal stories through which broader historical developments could be understood.

These individual experiences offered a more intimate perspective on Chinese history than accounts concerned solely with emperors, dynasties and political institutions.

From Hong Kong to Beijing, from the newsroom of The Wall Street Journal to Qin Guan's tomb at the foot of Huishan, and from a single genealogical record to a history spanning nine centuries, Frank Ching devoted much of his life to answering one enduring question: “Where do I come from?”

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His answer can be found within the 521 pages of Ancestors, among the pines and bamboo surrounding Qin Guan's tomb, and in his continuing efforts to tell China's stories to the wider world through the English language.

The echoes of a thousand years have rarely sounded so clear.

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