

Document 1.4: Excerpts from memoir by Li Xiuwen (1890–1992), describing life in the village where she grew up, early 20th century

Born in rural Guangxi Province to a poor peasant family, Li Xiuwen's life spanned a tumultuous century in China's history. She was the wife of one of China's most famous twentieth-century generals, Li Zongren. Li Zongren was also elected vice president of China in 1947 and became the country's acting president from 1948 to 1949. After the Communists took power, Li Xiuwen lived in Hong Kong, then Cuba and the United States. In 1973 she returned to Guilin in China. She dictated her memoirs to the wife of her nephew, and they were serialized in Chinese newspapers. Her son translated the text into English.

Usually farmers ate rice cooked with sweet potatoes or white potatoes with one dish of home-grown vegetables three times a day. Meat, mixed with vegetables, appeared at the table only on the New Year. People thought of eating melon or vegetables as producing cold in the body, so they ate hot peppers to counteract it. Therefore each family had a hot pepper stone grinding bowl in the house. Some nights, the farmers, after their hard day's work, went out to the river to catch fish, shrimp, and frogs. They would eat the frogs, and dry the fish, to save for meals in later days. In the busy farming season, farmers usually ate a little better. At dinner, they added a dish of fried soybeans, cooked dried fish, vegetables, and they might even drink some rice wine. Only the male workers drank rice wine, not female workers. Usually the men and women ate separately. The men's table had better food than the women's table.

*Note: Li Xiuwen was the grandmother of Leslie Li, author of *Daughter of Heaven* (1.5) and *Bittersweet*, which is based on the memoir. Leslie Li traveled with her father to visit her grandmother on her one-hundredth birthday in 1990 and also visited the village where her grandmother grew up.*

Source: Li Xiuwen, unpublished memoir. Used courtesy of the Li family.