

Li Hua Transcript 2026

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JH: Okay. Can you tell me about what you've been doing? I know that you graduated from Syracuse, is that right?

Li Hua: Yes.

JH: Great, tell me about that.

Li Hua: I went to... well, initially, I wasn't going to do college, I was going to do, like, a whole gap year and travel, but then COVID happened and then I actually committed to UConn. And... but some part of me was like, this is too close. Like, this is not... I didn't really want to go to UConn. And then I got into Syracuse, and I was like, oh my gosh, this is perfect. And I double majored in, like, film and TV and Italian Language Literature and Culture. Initially that was a minor, but then I brought it out to a major, and...yeah, and then I graduated, and then I moved to New York. So that's where I am now.

JH: What made you choose Italian Languages Literature and Culture?

Li Hua: So, that was, basically, I would say it's because of my family and my mom. She's Italian, and I've been lucky enough to have been going to Italy, like, quite frequently growing up my whole life. I've... I wouldn't say I've been every year, but I have been, like, every two years, or every three years. And in middle school... yeah, I just love learning new languages and learning about new cultures. In middle school, when I didn't have to take Spanish anymore, I chose French, but I only chose French because Italian wasn't an option. Chinese was an option, Mandarin, but I decided to do French.

JH: Wow, okay. So, you graduated when? In the spring? In, in, in.

Li Hua: Yes. No, sorry, May 2024, and I started in 2020, like, so right when, like, COVID was happening, I didn't have a high school graduation.

JH: Oh, what a bummer. Yeah.

Li Hua: It's a bummer, but low-key, I was not mad about it, because I didn't want to sit in, like, our gymnasium for, like, five hours. So, it was like a drive-by outside, you pull up, get out of your car, take your picture with the diploma, and then you get back in, and honestly, it was great.

JH: So, are you living in New York City?

Li Hua: Yes, I just moved here in November, so a couple months ago and I moved in with, I have two roommates, and I moved in with my roommate who I have known since kindergarten, since when he moved to my school, and we were, like, best friends ever since, so... it's great.

JH: Oh, wow, that's awesome. And, and what are you doing? Are you working? Are you job hunting? Are you thinking about graduate school?

Li Hua: Currently, I am looking for work, when I moved in November, I was obviously looking around and seeing what was available and the different options that I had. But I went to Italy for, like, all of December, so even if I had gotten something, I didn't want to be like, oh, by the way, like, I'm leaving for a full month, like, so I kind of... I was looking and applying, but I wasn't, like, doing it, like, at my most, because I was thinking, like, no one's going to accept me if I'm leaving for a full month. So, now I'm, like, really on it, and I've been applying to tons of stuff. I really want to work in the entertainment industry, and that's, like, really broad, but not just, like, TV and film, I really want to do, like, something in guest services and experiences, like venue management. I'm really into music and art and theater and things like that.

JH: Oh, that sounds really cool. So, you're looking, like, maybe you would work for an institution, or you would work for an agency, I guess?

Li Hua: Definitely something like an institution or, like, like, an event space, something like that. I don't really think I would work at an agency. I mean, I... I did... when I studied in LA for a semester. I interned at a talent and literary management agency, and it was fun to, like, see how everything worked, but I really... I don't think, like, a 9-to-5 inside office,

like, job is... for me.

JH: I feel ya. That's why I became a journalist for 20 years. And then, you know, the next 17 a college professor, no one really can tie you down too much, and it's... I'm just not made for it either, so I completely get it.

JH: So, so, let me ask you about our first interview. I'm curious about, first of all, what you remember about it, and also how you felt about doing it at the time. What was that like?

Li Hua: Okay, so I re- I did listen to it. And I kind of, like, blocked it out of my memory entirely, not because it was a bad experience or anything, but I just have, like, a bad memory, but also I found the interview so, like, cringey because of what I was saying and my voice and everything, but from what I can remember at the time of when I did it. I thought it was really cool to be interviewed for something that, like, was out of my, like, hands, like, completely, like, I was just put in a situation, and now I'm put on, like, a spotlight for like, what happened to me and everything. And also I can remember mostly that, like, my mom and my brother, they were super into what was happening, the interview, the whole thing, the search, which then, like, motivated me and made me become, like, interest... more interested in the whole mission, because it wasn't my idea initially, but... because they were excited, I was definitely excited.

JH: And so, at the time, I remember we talked about, I know that your mother was very interested in searching for biological relatives, parents. And you and your brother, your older brother, had actually gone back to China and sort of decided pretty spontaneously to, okay, let's go see if we can find birth parents. And I wonder if you reflect on that now, what that whole experience was like for you, and also your feelings about looking for birth parents, and maybe how that has changed, if it's changed at all.

Li Hua: I think that my opinion has stayed the same because you asked me, oh, like, what if someone came to me for advice if they were adopted and they wanted to look for their birth parents, or... and I said, like, it just depends on the person, the situation, and everything, and I still feel the

same way. It's really up to that person and not anyone else, like, in their family or friends, like, persuading them. And I still to this day part of me, or I mean, all of me, is, I think, glad that we didn't find anyone? I don't know if that sounds, like, bad, but, I think, like, I'm just really appreciative of what I have and what I know now, and I just feel like I'm not... no part of me is, like, missing, or... and I don't really think about like, my birth parents or family that much at all. I mean, not never, I mean, obviously I think about them sometimes, but I'm never like, oh, like, I wish we found someone, or oh, like, there's still a chance. I've just completely, like, dropped the whole thing. We did go back to China, to the orphanage in 2017, and I think we said the interview was 2015? I think... so, yeah, I did go back one more time, and I think that experience... my mom came with me that time, and that experience was more fun because, you know, the first time, I was just with my brother, and he was, like, the only, like, American, like, white person that, like, that whole village, like, not ever seen, but they were so fascinated with him. And now I'm here with my mom, and she's got, like, bleached blonde hair, and, like, I ended up with two people who are American, and they were coming to me to talk to me, and I'm like, I have no idea what's going on, so... yeah.

JH: So, it sounds like you're... I guess I wonder, and tell me if this is, you know, a question you're not comfortable with, but I guess I wonder if you ever felt that you were being pushed back then?

Li Hua: Right. I will say, back then, I did not feel pushed, and to this day like, I don't... I don't... I still don't think that I was pushed. I mean, they definitely introduced the idea to me, and I wasn't opposed. Like, they told me before everything, before we started anything, like, oh, if you don't want to do this, like you don't have to, like, we can just drop it. And I didn't, like, push back or resist or anything, and I was into the idea. And... I thought it was cool.

JH: Yeah, okay, great. And so it's not... it's... it sounds like it... you've explored this, you've had the opportunity of exploring it with your... with your family, with your mom, with your brother. You've come through that and you're really fine. You don't feel like there's this sort of primal wound or missing piece because of the fact that you're adopted.

Li Hua: Yeah, exactly.

JH: Yeah. How do you think about your identity?

Li Hua: Um, wait, let me think. I think about my identity as like, the experiences of which I've had who has, like... that have made me who I am today. I mean, yes, I'm Chinese, because I was born there, and I... my ethnicity is Chinese, but I usually just say, like, I'm American, but, like, whenever I'm filling out forms and stuff online, you have to, like write like, are you Asian or non-Hispanic or whatever, obviously I don't, like, not think that I'm not a Chinese person, that's definitely a part of who I am. But people assume... I think a lot of people assume that I'm, like... like, in college, I went, like, at Syracuse, like, I want to say, I don't know a large chunk of people, like, the student population is international and mostly from Asia, like India and China. I would say a lot of people thought maybe I was def... there was a good chance that I was an international student, which is funny to me. But... I definitely think of my identity as, like... I wouldn't... I see, I wouldn't say that I'm Italian, because... I don't know, I just don't feel like that's my identity. I feel like that's more of my mom and my family's identity, and they live there, and they have citizenship, and I just don't see myself like that, but I do see that I have Italian connections, and... but yeah, basically that I'm, like, Chinese-American.

JH: So, you're really talking about a... an identity and a family identity that is multicultural, and biracial, and it doesn't sound like, and correct me if I'm wrong, that that fact makes your family feel less unified.

Li Hua: No, yeah.

JH: No, we do feel... we do not feel less unified or anything by the fact that I am adopted, or Chinese, or anything like that. And the fact that your... your mother is... is... is from an Italian background, and I know you, you said they have citizenship, and we had talked, they recently relocated to Italy.

Li Hua: Yes.

JH: So, it sounds like this is... this is not something that feels like your little pieces stuck together. It sounds like you've got this, like, mosaic, this

kind of really shared experience across these different identities, and you're all very... I know you're a very close family.

Li Hua: Yeah, it's kind of funny because my... one of my brothers, he lives in Hong Kong and he is married to a Chinese woman, and, like, and he is surrounded by, like, her family, who's, like, all Asian, like, all Chinese, and it's... I don't know if... weird isn't the right word, but him being in China, and he speaks fluent Mandarin, he basically speaks fluent Cantonese now, because in Hong Kong, they speak Cantonese mainly. But I just feel, like, more connected, I definitely would say, with him, that... it's funny because he's, like, halfway across the world from me right now, but he is so immersed in Chinese culture and, like, everything that there's definitely... I feel a deeper connection with him. That sounds weird.

JH: It doesn't sound weird, actually, and it's something I wanted to ask you about, because this is the brother who you went back to China with when we first talked, and I was very struck by the fact that he had decided to learn Mandarin. He's older. I think he was a college student, tell me if I have that right.

Li Hua: Yes, he... the age is, like... it's like a 12-year age gap.

JH: And so, he decided to learn Mandarin because you were joining the family. And I wanted to know, and I think you've kind of answered it, but I wanted to understand how that made you feel to have this brother who decided, I'm... I'm going to... I'm going to... really not just go to events or, you know, read a couple of books, but I'm really going to learn about this. I'm going to learn this language so I can have a better understanding of this culture.

Li Hua: Well that obviously feels great, like, that he really cares, and he really loves me, and not just me, but, like, everything, like, the whole culture, everything, the history, the language, the food. Like, he's probably spent... Oh, wait, no, this doesn't accurate, but he's, like, almost spent most of his life, or at least almost half of his life in China than he has here in the States. I don't know if that's, like, completely accurate, but, like, he's been there for over 10 years now. So at least a third of his life. And...

don't want to speak for him, but it was my understanding that he already had some, like, passion and, for learning about China and Chinese culture and everything, like, in the language, before I was...before, like, I joined the family. But maybe that's because my parents, like, were talking about adopting. Like, it took them... I can't even remember, it took them years, like, at least three or four years to do, like, this whole process to even get me, so I feel like maybe just talking about it and the idea, and I guess she had... my mother had friends who were... who also had adopted children from China, like, I guess growing up for him, it just instilled this like, deep, passionate interest in learning more. And then when I came along, of course, it amplified it.

JH: Yeah, it's really, I think, very beautiful, actually, that he... he... committed himself in that way.

Li Hua: Yep.

JH: Yeah. Why did... did your parents, when they talked about, adoption to the extent that they did, maybe when you were younger, why did they say they decided to adopt you?

Li Hua: They have said that I think it's... Okay, from what I can remember, they have told me that they just have had friends and family who have adopted from China before. And other places, but mainly in China and she... my mother has... just heard about these amazing stories, and... experiences with adopting, and I guess you just had a really strong interest in one... like, I always joke around and say that she wanted a daughter, or whatever, because she has two sons before me. But I think it's because she's just heard about other... through other people's experiences, like, how amazing it is, and my dad was just as equally is interested in adopting as she was. And my dad, he actually... his side of the family, I think his sister, her... her children have adopted, I think, over ten children from China. I think all China, but definitely they have adopted over, like, ten children from Asia all with disabilities, actually, yeah.

JH: Oh, wow. And I met most of them.

Li Hua: Yep.

JH: Okay, so this is something that your family's really, really familiar with, and really... okay, wow. So you have cousins who were adopted from China?

Li Hua: Yes, but, we don't... they live in Arizona, so we don't, like we're not super close, but I have, met them, and I have been to Arizona a couple of times, and...yeah.

JH: What do you understand about, or what have you learned, if anything, and maybe you've just been paying attention to a lot of other things, about China's international adoption program? As you've gotten older, and about, you know, the reasons for why children. Of course, the program has been ended now by the Chinese government, so...I'm interested in what you know about it. And how you think about it now.

Li Hua: To be honest, I have not given it much thought. Like, at all. I don't know what that says about me, but...I haven't looked into it or done any research on it.

JH: As you kind of got older and went to college and met people, you were saying that other students would sometimes how has it been with other people your age? Have they pretty much, kind of, has it not been a topic of conversation? Have you had to answer intrusive or difficult questions, or as you've gotten older, has it become just less and less relevant?

Li Hua: I want to say that it's become less and less relevant, but with people that I've met, like, I don't just spread off the bat, be like, oh my gosh, I'm adopted, and I say, like, the whole thing. But if it comes up, I am more than happy to talk about like, everything, and I tell people, and I tell them about the birth surge, and then they're, like, so fascinated, and I'm like, yep, and then now we're here, and that was it. And yeah, and then they just walk away, and they think, oh, what a cool story.

JH: I think sometimes people are very interested in these, sort of, dynamic tales of reunion with biological families, but, you know, that's very rare.

Li Hua: Yeah, a lot of people come up to me... not a lot, but, like, people do come up to me and be like, oh, have you heard this story? Or they'll recommend a book, or they'll, like, send me a news article of, like, people that were separated at birth, like, not even, like, from China, just, like, people who are adopted and separated at birth or whatever, and then they find each other, and I'm like, well, that's great for them. Like, I don't know.

JH: Yeah, but it's not been... it's not been a huge focus for you, so it's, you know, it's something in a way that people are interested in that they're almost kind of superimposing onto other people's experience, or projecting onto it. So...you know, your... your you, living in New York, thinking about your career and events and doing other things.

Li Hua: Yeah, I don't blame them. I mean, like, when I meet people who are adopted I have these questions. I mean, I don't go and, like say everything that's on my mind, but I definitely probably have the same questions as everyone else that...have questions for me about the same thing.

JH: So, at this point in your life, let's put aside adoption and all of that. What... what is occupying your mind? What are you thinking about? And as we kind of move to the end of this conversation, how do you, how are you looking ahead? You're, you're, you know, we've talked about the fact you've got one brother living in Hong Kong, and your parents have relocated recently to Italy. You're in New York. You're kind of... Quote-unquote, adult life has begun. What's on the agenda for you?

Li Hua: Well, aside from getting a job, I do think about, a lot of traveling, but I also think about, like, what if I moved abroad like, like the rest of my family has. I just feel like there's a whole other world out there that, like... I always joke around and say that I would move to London and live in London because I've been there, and I... I absolutely loved... I've been there a couple times, and I loved every time that I've been there, and I definitely could see myself living there. And having spent long periods of time in Italy I could see myself living there as well. There's nothing wrong with New York or anything, it's just, I feel like this is where I needed to go, because there's a pipe... there's, like, a pipeline of not only Syracuse

students going straight to New York or LA, but also from, like, the town that I'm from in the United States, there's also a pipeline, because I live so close to the city that you definitely just moved to the city, that's what everyone does. All my friends are here, that put the job that I want to work or the industry that I want to work in is all here, it's also in LA. I would definitely move to LA. I was thinking about it, but then the huge Palisades virus happened, and, then I was like not going do that. But yeah.

JH: So, yeah, so you're thinking kind of about where you want to be.

Li Hua: Yeah, I love being here. I definitely... I mean, I just moved here I can't just leave now, but not that I want to leave, but I... it's not...I don't... I'm not closing out the idea that I would move abroad and totally like, do something crazy out there. I see videos of people online all the time, just, like, leaving their corporate lives, or whatever, and traveling the world, or working on farms. A lot of my friends have done, like, the [inaudible] program, I don't know if you know about that.

JH: No.

Li Hua: It's like...it's, like, a work trade situation. I forget what it really stands for but it's, like, worldwide, like, working on foreign farms or something. A lot of my friends did that during COVID. They didn't go to college at the same time I did. They took a gap year.....Most of my friends did it in the United States because traveling was difficult, but it's meant to be, like, you know, go to Asia, or you go to Europe, and you work on a farm, they give you, like, a place to stay, and food, and then you just work on their farm. Like, you do, like, chores for them. Yeah, stuff like that.

JH: Wow, that is cool. That sounds actually very appealing.

Li Hua: Yeah, and, like, peaceful, that's something that I'd be interested in now, and I was just talking to my sister-in-law. She was asking me about how the job, the one in Hong Kong. She was asking me about how the job search was going, and I've, you know, been doing random things, and I mainly do, like, events jobs, and working at a concert venue, or, like, I have experience working, like, managing concert venues, and working box offices, and managing venues, but sometimes I look at other jobs that are more for fun rather than for, like I mean, I still have fun doing the other

things that I was saying, but I have worked I had a bagel store, and I really loved doing that. That's what I did for the first year after I graduated up until, like, December. And I would love to work in a bakery. Like, that sounds so fun to me. Making bread all day, or sweets. And my other brother, who lives in Spain, he has lived in New York City for over, like, 15 years, but he just moved to Spain, I think, about a year ago, because he wanted to get away from, like, the fast-paced, chaotic life of New York City, and now he's just living very peacefully in Spain. He's doing a lot of, like, remote stuff, he's a writer, and he... is just, like, swimming every day, going to the farmer's market. He has friends there, just traveling around, like, riding a bike. It just sounds really nice.

JH: Yeah, kind of a less... a less... ramped-up, frantic pace.

Li Hua: Yes, but at the same time, where our house is in Italy that my mom and her sister just bought, it's very, very, very, very secluded, and it's, like, in the... it's in the country. There's nothing wrong with that, but I don't think I could live there, like, full year- round at any age, honestly, even if I was much older, because I feel like I do love the hustle and bustle of the city. I need, like, the best of both worlds. Which is why it's good that they have the house there, so I can visit whenever I want.

JH: Yeah, well, you can visit Spain, you can visit Hong Kong, you can visit Italy, and you have places to stay, so that sounds pretty great.

Li Hua: Yeah. My brother always jokes about, the one in Spain, he always jokes about me and him should open up a sourdough bakery in Italy, because not only is Italy's, like, bread, like, their basic plain bread, it's not very good, at least in Florence, because they don't use salt. He thinks that we could really do something if we opened up a sourdough bakery somewhere. But yeah, I... yeah, I follow a lot of people who, like, celebrities who are like, oh, we've left America, and now we live in, like, the middle of nowhere Scotland, and we're living our best lives now. And it just looks amazing.

JH: It does look amazing. I wonder, you know, is there...has the current state of, sort of, the political reality in the United States, does that inform your thinking at all about...about moving abroad, or is

it...pretty much just kind of a slower, more relaxed pace of life thought.

Li Hua: I will say it's both. I'm not a super political person and honestly, I don't read the news about politics, like, that much because I just don't want to... I just don't want to, but that definitely has to do with part of it, but...I don't know, I really am into...like, food. I would definitely work in the food industry, I just don't have experience, like, other than working in, like, a bakery. I would... I could not probably work in a restaurant. I mean, I would love to, but again, I wouldn't pay, like, for culinary school, I would go to some amazing, like, apprenticeship, like, 3-,4-month program somewhere in Ireland, or, like, in the country, in Italy, or France, even. That sounds more appealing to me.

JH: Yeah, oh, that sounds fantastic. I think you have really great ideas about things you want to explore. I want to revisit this conversation in a minimum of five years.

Li Hua: Yeah, and see what happens.

JH: Yeah, see what happens.

Li Hua: Yeah.

JH: Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about, or any questions I haven't asked that you wish I had?

Li Hua: No, but I will say that before, when I said that I don't see myself as Italian I would say that my mom would say that, like, I'm Italian, or she would... I say my family is Italian, so I don't know how people take that, because obviously when they see me, they see a Chinese person, but my mom...and my... I don't know about my brothers, but my mom definitely sees me I think, as...Italian, and also, she did try to get my citizenship for Italy, but this was, like, years ago. Like, when... when we did the first interview, she was trying to get this all done, but it's... we had a lot of obstacles, because my original documents are all in Chinese and they have to be translated to English by... and then translated into Italian, and they have to be translated by, like, a government official. And then there was also a bunch of other stuff, and

I don't know, the laws just changed about who can become a citizen in Italy and not... So, all this crazy stuff. But...

JH: That's really interesting. So, so your mother... thinks of you as Italian. It sounds like in the sense that, and again, we don't want to put words in... I'm sorry?

Li Hua: Because she is, so therefore I am.

JH: Right. Because she... right, because she is so, therefore you are. And, so, what... how do you... how do you feel about that?

Li Hua: I'm not opposed. I mean, I don't think it's... I think it's a great thing to be, like, Italian and stuff like that. I just know that when people look at me, they're like, oh, like, how? Or...

JH: Well, yeah, so it's interesting, because she's... she's... it sounds like, again, and I don't want to put words in her mouth anymore that you want to, you know, speak to your brother, but the way I interpret what you're saying is that she's... This is a connection that is very important to her, and is part of her identity, and as her daughter she considers that you share it, whether or not it's biological.

Li Hua: Yeah. I mean, she also says things like, oh, that I'm Italian, or that, like, I'm basically Italian, because I've studied it for, like, over ten years, and I've lived there for, like, 6 months, and I've been there basically every year of my life, and... it's like, all... I know more about Italy than I do know about China.

JH: Now, you've inhaled the culture.

Li Hua: Yeah.

JH: And you've studied the language, and that's, you know, that's... that's real, that's sort of... It, it, it... it connects you in a way that is real and concrete.

Li Hua: Yeah.

JH: So, I think, it's great to talk to you, and to hear everything that you've been up to, and to hear you reflect about things that we talked about earlier, and I just want to wish you the best with everything that you're doing, and thank you so much for being part of this project over the past decade.

Li Hua: Thank you for including me, and I can't wait till the next... talk to see what happens.

JH: I can't either. All right, until then...