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- **SACEI Newsletter** updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a link between **SACEI** members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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## **SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE**



**To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture**

**NEWSLETTER # 147**

**JANUARY 2021**



### **Facebook Tracks "OceanLotus" to its Firm in Vietnam**

*Facebook tracks 'OceanLotus' hackers to IT firm in Vietnam (yahoo.com)*

By Jack Stubbs and James Pearson

LONDON/HANOI (Reuters) - Cybersecurity investigators at Facebook have traced a hacking group long suspected of spying on behalf of the Vietnamese government to an IT company in Ho Chi Minh City.

The announcement on Friday is the first time Facebook has publicly exposed an offensive hacking operation and, if confirmed, would be a rare case of suspected state-backed cyberspies being tracked to a specific organisation.

The hackers, known as OceanLotus or APT32, have been accused for years of spying on political dissidents, businesses and foreign officials. Reuters reported this year that the group had attempted to break into China's Ministry of Emergency Management and the government of Wuhan as the COVID-19 outbreak first spread.

Facebook said it had found links between cyberattacks previously attributed to OceanLotus and a Vietnamese company called CyberOne Group, which lists an address on a sidestreet in a commercial district of Ho Chi Minh city.

CyberOne Group denied being connected to the hackers.

"We are NOT Ocean Lotus," a person operating the company's now-suspended Facebook page said when contacted by Reuters. "It's a mistake."

Vietnam's foreign ministry, which handles enquiries from international media, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The ministry has previously denied connections to OceanLotus attacks.

Facebook said the hackers had used its platforms to carry out a range of cyberattacks, some of which employed fake accounts to trick targets by posing as activists, businesses and possible love interests.

Nathaniel Gleicher, Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, said his team had found technical evidence that linked CyberOne's Facebook page to accounts used in the hacking campaign, as well as to other OceanLotus attacks.

He declined to detail the exact evidence, saying to do so would make the group more difficult to track in the future. But he said it included online infrastructure, malicious code, and other hacking tools and techniques.

"The actors in this space use some very defined techniques and if we are too public about how we observe those, it really does harm our ability to catch more of this," Gleicher said.

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*“OceanLotus”...*

## MOVIE THEATRE AND YOGA

Although OceanLotus has not gained the level of notoriety in the West as some suspected Chinese and Russian state-backed hacking operations, it has been prolific in Southeast Asia.

Ben Read, a senior manager at U.S. cybersecurity firm FireEye, and Marc-Étienne Léveillé, a researcher at Slovakian software security group ESET, said the hacking activity uncovered by Facebook matched operations attributed to OceanLotus.

Read said OceanLotus had been active since at least 2013 and had "all the hallmarks of a substantial state-backed organisation acting in support of Vietnamese government".

Facebook said it did not have sufficient evidence to attribute OceanLotus beyond CyberOne Group, which it said has also used the names CyberOne Security, CyberOne Technologies, Hành Tinh Company Limited, Planet and Diacauso.

CyberOne reveals little information about itself on its website, saying only that it has around 200 employees providing a range of "essential security technologies".

A careers page that was removed shortly after Reuters contacted the company advertised positions for people with hacking skills and experience in malware analysis. Recruiters boasted of a generous benefits package, including free meals, a mini movie theatre and after-work yoga.

In Vietnam, Facebook is navigating a standoff with government officials who have threatened to ban it if it does not agree to censorship demands.

Reuters reported in April that Facebook had complied with a government request to increase its censorship of "anti-state" posts after its servers in Vietnam were taken offline, slowing traffic there to a crawl.

(Additional reporting by Raphael Satter in Washington; Editing by Peter Graff)

*Free Pham Doan Trang*

Two months after her arrest, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is launching a campaign for the release of Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang with a petition and a video in which Vietnamese diaspora colleagues voice strong support for this symbol of the fight for the freedom to inform in Vietnam.

[Arrested at her Ho Chi Minh City home](#) on the night of 6 October, the co-founder of the *Luat Kua* and *TheVietnamese* information websites is facing a possible 20-year jail sentence on a charge of "anti-government propaganda."

In the #FreePhamDoanTrang [campaign video](#) released by RSF, Vietnamese journalists, bloggers and friends now based in France, Germany, Taiwan and the United States take advantage of their exile to say what their compatriots still in Vietnam cannot say without risking long prison sentences.

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## Free Pham Doan Trang...

It's with the aim of avoiding a long prison sentence for **Pham Doan Trang** by putting pressure on the Vietnamese government that [RSF is also launching its petition](#) for the immediate and unconditional release of this courageous journalist, who was [awarded the RSF Press Freedom Prize for Impact in 2019](#).

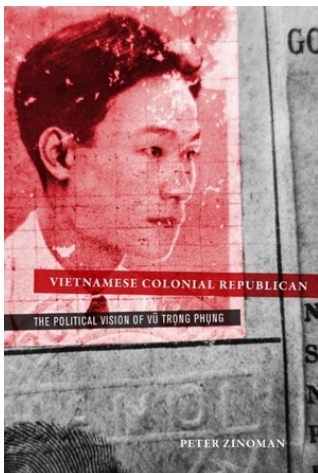


*"Because of her bravery and her generosity, Pham Doan Trang has become a symbol of the fight to provide her fellow Vietnamese citizens with reliable, independent journalism,"* said Daniel Bastard, the head of RSF's Asia-Pacific desk.

*"By signing this petition for her release, you demonstrate a commitment to press freedom in a country where all the media are strictly controlled by the communist party's propaganda bureau. You also express your solidarity with Vietnamese civil society, which is now very active despite state censorship."*

Suggested by Bill Laurie

## Vietnamese Colonial Republican: The Political Vision of Vu Trong Phung Peter Zinoman



This volume is a comprehensive study of Vietnam's greatest and most controversial 20th century writer who died tragically in 1939 at the age of 28. Vu Trong Phung is known for a remarkable collection of politically provocative novels and sensational works of non-fiction reportage that were banned by the communist state from 1960 to 1986.

Leading Vietnam scholar, Zinoman, resurrects the life and work of an important intellectual and author in order to reveal a neglected political project that is excluded from conventional accounts of modern Vietnamese political history. He sees Vu Trong Phung as a leading proponent of a localized republican tradition that opposed colonialism, communism, and unfettered capitalism—and that led both to the banning of his work and to the durability of his popular appeal in Vietnam today.

[Available on Amazon](#)

<https://www.amazon.com/Vietnamese-Colonial-Republican-Political-Vision/dp/0520276280/>

## Brittanya Karma, German-Vietnamese Social Media, Dies at 29

*Brittanya Karma, German-Vietnamese Social Media Star, Dies at 29 - The New York Times (nytimes.com)*

Brittanya Karma posted [her bucket list](#) on Instagram last year.

Featured in a magazine? Check. Appear on German TV? Check. Appear on Vietnamese TV? Check. Acquire one million views on Facebook? Check.

The number of check marks on the list is testimony to the fullness of her short life. Ms. Karma, a Vietnamese-German rapper and reality television star, died on Nov. 29 in Hamburg, where she was born and where she lived. She was 29. The cause was complications of Covid-19, her agent said.

Ms. Karma was first noticed several years ago when a Vietnamese-language Facebook post in which she gently mocked her mother went viral, garnering more than a million clicks. She quickly acquired a Vietnamese following by candidly describing her life in Germany and speaking out against body shaming. She soon added a YouTube channel and an Instagram account. Two years ago she started a TikTok account with her fiancé, Eugene Osei Henebeng, who goes by the name Manu.

Ms. Karma used her YouTube channel to communicate with her many Vietnamese followers, while on TikTok she would generally speak to her German fans. In the many videos she posted on those channels, as well as on Instagram and Facebook, she told stories, made irreverent jokes or — during this year's lockdowns — just danced around the house with Manu.

"Self-confidence is my superpower," she said in one of her TikTok videos.

A [music video](#) filmed in Hamburg and released last year embodied many elements of Ms. Karma's appeal: She dances with her sister and friends and raps in Vietnamese about positive self-image in a song whose title roughly translates as "Confidence."

The video has been viewed more than 3.7 million times.

She also appeared on German television as a commentator on a reality show about parenting. In Vietnam she was featured in that country's version of "The Bachelor."

"She was so generous, almost to a fault," said Charila Tchagnaou, a friend who frequently appeared in Ms. Karma's videos and who was her co-commentator on reality TV. "If she had a hundred euros, and they were her last hundred euros, she'd take us all out to dinner and make sure we all had plenty to eat."

After falling ill with Covid in November, Ms. Karma posted [a selfie on Instagram in which she wears what appears to be an oxygen mask](#). "Corona should be taken more seriously," she wrote.



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## Brittanya Karma dies at 29...

Ms. Karma was born Phuong-Linh Nguyen in Hamburg on March 22, 1991. Her mother was Lu Nguyen Tran; her father was Lee Tran. She grew up in a middle-class neighborhood, not far from the harbor, that was completely rebuilt after World War II and worked odd jobs in high school to help support her family, she said in a TikTok post.

After high school she studied hip-hop dance and worked in restaurants, holding as many as three jobs at a time. She briefly ran her own Asian restaurant before handing it to her mother.

Ms. Karma kept ties with Vietnam. She traveled there every few years, and more frequently once she started to gain notice on social media and to receive job offers there, including roles [in music videos](#). She performed with the singer and rapper Bao Anh on some of Vietnam's largest stages.

She is survived by her parents and two younger siblings, Marc and Nicole.

In a [TikTok video](#) shot during the early days of Germany's November lockdown, Ms. Karma talks to her followers about self-confidence while eating a bowl of boiled prawns.

Let even your haters see you, she advises: "Watch how I enjoy my life."

