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STAYS ALIVE  
WHEN ITS CUL-  
TURE IS ALIVE.  
HOPE NEVER  
DIES IN THE  
INDOMITABLE  
VIETNAMESE  
MIND

- 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.

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Georgia's First Vietnamese State Rep Wears Ao Dai to Swear-in 1
- Hate Crime Against Asian-Americans on the Rise 2
- Vietnam Buys Indian Rice for the First Time in Decades: Industry Officials 4
- Peace and Prisoners of War, A South Vietnamese Memoir of 5
- Tiger in the Barbed Wire 5

## SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

NEWSLETTER # 149

MARCH 2021



## Georgia's First Vietnamese State Rep Wears Ao Dai to Swear-in

*Georgia's First Vietnamese American State Rep Wears Áo Dài to Swear-In (yahoo.com)*

Editorial Staff

Fri, January 15, 2021, 12:26 PM

Bee Nguyen, Georgia's first Vietnamese American state representative, donned an áo dài to her **swearing-in ceremony** on Tuesday. Regarded as the most popular national costume of Vietnam, the áo dài for women is a long dress with a contoured top that flows over loose-fitting trousers that reach the sole of the feet. Nguyen, 39, decided to wear the garment in response to the Capitol siege on Jan. 6, in which rioters carried the South Vietnamese flag.



**"I decided to wear my Viet áo dài because they don't get to speak for me."**

"When I saw the South Vietnamese flag flown during last week's attempted coup, I felt deep anger and shame. I decided to wear my Viet áo dài to take the oath of office — because they don't get to speak for me," Nguyen [tweeted](#). "While my family couldn't be here, I'm grateful for my beloved colleagues."

The South Vietnamese flag represented a pro-Western democratic republic that fought communist North Vietnam in the Vietnam War. Its latest use recalls the country's **"own 'failed' democracy"** and the people's **"struggle to save their nation,"** according to [The Conversation](#). Nguyen is a daughter of war refugees, her father being a political prisoner of three years. Her parents resettled in Iowa in hopes of a peaceful life.

**"That framed my perspective in terms of what empowerment meant for my family,"** Nguyen told [NBC News](#) last month. **"It was important to me that I found a space where I could support other people who didn't feel like they had a voice at the table."**

In 2017, Nguyen became Georgia's first Vietnamese American state representative (House District 89),

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## Georgia's First Vietnamese State Rep...

according to the [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). The post also made her the second Asian American Democrat in Georgia's Legislature.

After winning her re-election bid in November, Nguyen was instrumental in disproving President Donald Trump's claims of voter fraud in battleground Georgia. She scoured through public records and visited voters in question to verify their identities. In a hearing, Nguyen [confronted](#) a pro-Trump data analyst who came up with a list of "questionable" voters. She determined that at least 128 people -- over 10% -- in that list voted legally. Nguyen also condemned the Capitol invasion as soon as it happened.



**"Domestic terrorists are trying to overthrow our country.**

**We knew all along that Trump was a danger to America — Republican leaders knew, too. And they let this happen. They continue to let it happen every day,"** Nguyen [tweeted](#). **"Put your country first before it's too late."** Feature Images via [Bee Nguyen](#)

## Hate Crime Against Asian-Americans on the Rise

[Asian American Attacks: What's Behind the Rise in Violence? | Time](#)

When Amanda Nguyen saw the video, she was horrified. In the Jan. 28 security footage, 84-year-old [Vicha Ratanapakdee](#) was shoved to the ground while taking his morning walk in San Francisco; just two days after the assault, he died. (Nineteen-year-old Antoine Watson has since been charged with and pleaded not guilty to murder and elder abuse.) It was one of several incidents of physical violence against Asian American elders in recent weeks across the U.S., but Nguyen had yet to see coverage by a major news outlet about the concerning increase in violence towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, following a year of [xenophobic rhetoric](#) and [racist attacks amid the pandemic](#).

"I was mad, like blood boiling through my veins now, watching my community get slaughtered," says Nguyen, a civil rights activist who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in advocating for sexual assault survivors. "How many more people need to be killed in order for the news outlets, especially mainstream ones, to think that we're worthy of a story?"

In response, Nguyen made an Instagram video where she implored her viewers to speak out about Ratanapakdee's death, as well as the assault of a 64-year-old [Vietnamese grandmother who was assaulted and robbed](#) in San Jose, Calif., and the attack on a 61-year-old [Filipino man whose face was slashed with a box cutter on a New York City subway](#). Nguyen's video went viral as more reports of violent attacks and robberies emerged, including one of a 91-year-old man who was caught on camera [being thrown to the ground in Oakland Chinatown](#), where there have been upwards of [20 violent attacks and robberies reported](#) since January.

Since the start of the pandemic last spring, [Asian Americans have faced racist violence at a much higher rate than previous years](#). The NYPD reported that hate crimes motivated by anti-Asian sentiment jumped 1,900% in New York City in 2020. [Stop AAPI Hate](#), a reporting database created at the beginning of the pandemic as a response to the increase in racial violence, [received 2,808 reports](#) of anti-Asian discrimination between March 19 and December 31, 2020. The violence has continued into 2021, and President Joe Biden signed [an executive order denouncing anti-Asian discrimination](#) shortly after taking office in January. While anti-Asian violence has taken place nationwide and particularly in major cities, the uptick in attacks in 2021 has been particularly focused in the Bay Area, especially in

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San Francisco and Oakland's Chinatowns.

## Hate Crime Against Asian-Americans on the Rise...

Many attribute the 2020 uptick to the xenophobic rhetoric of Biden's predecessor; former President Trump repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as "the China virus," blaming the country for the pandemic. In doing so, Trump followed in a long American history of using diseases to justify anti-Asian xenophobia, one that dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries and has helped to shape perception of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners."

"There's a clear correlation between President Trump's incendiary comments, his insistence on using the term 'Chinese virus' and the subsequent hate speech spread on social media and the hate violence directed towards us," says Russell Jeung, a co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate and a professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. "It gives people license to attack us. The current spate of attacks on our elderly is part of how that rhetoric has impacted the broader population."

### Why the 'model minority' myth is harmful

Many have pointed out that racial violence against Asian Americans often goes overlooked because of persistent stereotypes about the community. "There is a stereotype and an assumption that Asian Americans have class privilege, that they have high socioeconomic status and education, and that any discrimination doesn't really happen or feel legitimate," says Bianca Mabute-Louie, a racial justice educator. "There are these assumptions about ways that Asian Americans have 'succeeded' in this country."

Mabute-Louie cites the pervasiveness of the model minority myth as a large contributing factor to the current climate. That false idea, constructed during the Civil Rights era to stymie racial justice movements, suggests that Asian Americans are more successful than other ethnic minorities because of hard work, education and inherently law-abiding natures. "This contributes to erasing the very real interpersonal violence that we see happening in these videos, and that Asian Americans experience from the day-to-day, things that don't get reported and the things that don't get filmed."

"The reality of Black and Asian solidarity has a long history inside the Bay Area," says Zach Norris, the executive director of the Ella Baker Center. "We want to remind folks of that and really look to the solutions that we think will be helpful in healing harm and moving forward in a way where all communities can thrive."

Jeung, the Stop AAPI Hate co-founder, says community efforts and solidarity are the only ways to curb racist attacks. He participated in a racial peace rally in San Francisco and Oakland and is helping to organize strolls through Chinatown, where locals walk to provide a sense of safety and security for merchants and senior citizens,

"We know we need that this is an issue that affects all our communities, and we have to break the cycle of violence," Jeung says. "And we're calling not necessarily for more punitive measures but restorative justice models that break the cycle of violence, ethnic studies to teach people about racial solidarity, community mediation efforts to not only hold people accountable, but to work together to resolve issues."



## Vietnam Buys Indian Rice for the First Time in Decades: Industry Officials

*Exclusive - Vietnam buys Indian rice for first time in decades: industry officials (yahoo.com)*

Mon, January 4, 2021, 6:24 AM EST

By Rajendra Jadhav and Khanh Vu

MUMBAI/HANOI (Reuters) - Vietnam, the world's third biggest exporter of rice, has started buying the grain from rival India for the first time in decades after local prices jumped to their highest in nine years amid limited domestic supplies, four industry officials told Reuters.

The purchases underscore tightening supplies in Asia, which could lift rice prices in 2021 and even force traditional buyers of rice from Thailand and Vietnam to switch to India - the world's biggest exporter of the grain.

Indian traders have contracted to export 70,000 tonnes of 100% broken rice for January and February shipments at around \$310 per tonne on a free-on-board (FOB) basis, the industry officials say.

"For the first time we are exporting to Vietnam," B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the Rice Exporters Association, told Reuters on Monday. "Indian prices are very attractive. The huge price difference is making exports possible."

Vietnam's 5% broken rice is offered around \$500-\$505 per tonne, significantly higher compared to Indian prices of \$381-\$387. "Rice imported from India is mainly used for producing animal feeds and for breweries," said a rice trader based in Ho Chi Minh City.

Dwindling supplies and continued Philippine buying lifted Vietnamese rice export prices to a fresh nine-year high.

Vietnam's total paddy output in 2020 fell 1.85% to 42.69 million tonnes, equivalent to around 21.35 million tonnes of rice, preliminary data from the government's General Statistics Office showed.

The country's rice exports in 2020 were forecast to have fallen by 3.5% to 6.15 million tonnes.

Robust demand from Asian and African countries has also been lifting Indian prices but they are still very competitive due to ample stocks, said Nitin Gupta, vice president of Olam India's rice business.

Vietnam could make more purchases as long as the price difference remains, Gupta said.

In December, the world's biggest rice importer China started buying Indian rice for the first time in at least three decades due to tightening supplies from Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam and an offer of sharply discounted prices.

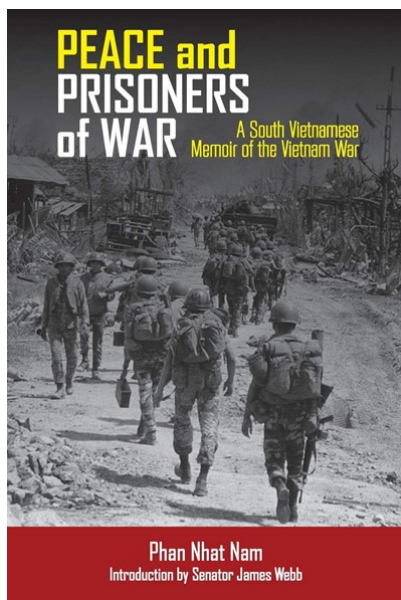
In 2020 India exported a record 14 million tonnes of rice, provisional data from the trade ministry showed.

(Reporting by Rajendra Jadhav and Khanh Vu; Editing by Euan Rocha and Emelia Sithole-Matarise)



## Peace and Prisoners of War, A South Vietnamese Memoir of the Vietnam War

Phan Nhat Nam



In *"Peace and Prisoners of War,"* Phan Nhat Nam provides a unique window into the harsh combat that followed America's withdrawal and the hopelessness of South Vietnam's attempt to stave off an eventual communist victory. Few others could have written this book. Phan saw the war for years as a combat soldier in one of South Vietnam's most respected airborne divisions, then as the country's best known war reporter, and for fourteen years after the war as a prisoner in Hanoi's infamous "re-education camps" including eight years in solitary confinement. In the war's aftermath anonymity became his fate both inside Vietnam and here in America. But now one of his important works is available, enhanced by an introduction by Senator James Webb, one of the most decorated Marines in the Vietnam War. Webb describes this revealing work as "an unvarnished observation frozen in time, devoid of spin or false retrospective wisdom." Phan's reporting made clear the sense of doom that foretold the tragic events to come, on the battlefields and in the frustration of negotiating with an implacable enemy while being abandoned by its foremost ally.

Readers will find this book both enlightening and disturbing, its observations until now overlooked in most histories of the Vietnam War.

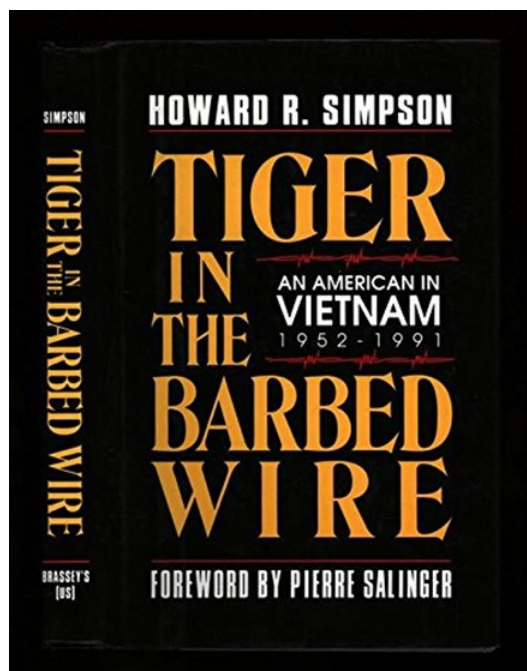
Naval Institute Press

Available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Peace-Prisoners-War-Vietnamese-Vietnam/dp/1682476146/>

## Tiger in the Barbed Wire

Howard Simpson



The author was one of the few Americans whose career in Saigon spanned the French and American eras; he served first as a press officer with the U.S. Information Agency, then as press adviser to South Vietnamese premier Ngo Dinh Diem and prime minister Nguyen Khanh. With verve, wit and an engaging readiness to admit mistakes, he evokes the exotic pre-Westmoreland years and the growing French resentment of the muscling-in Amerloques' "dangerous tendency toward criminal naivete." Simpson visited the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu before it fell to the Vietminh, toured villages with Khanh (the inhabitants, he reports, were "alternately wooed and punished" by the Saigon government and the Vietcong) and became part of the seething intrigue that characterized the difficult transition from the French to the American "military assistance command" mission.

His memoir sheds new light on the inner workings of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, which was essentially the American ministry of information and propaganda in Saigon. Simpson retired from the foreign service in 1971 to become a novelist ( *The Jumpmaster* ), returning to Vietnam in 1991 as a journalist to obtain an unusually revealing interview with the legendary North Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap, which is included here.

Publishers Weekly

Available on Amazon:

<https://www.amazon.com/Tiger-Barbed-Wire-American-1952-1991/dp/0028810082/>