



# SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



## To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

NEWSLETTER # 47

SEPTEMBER 2012

A COUNTRY  
STAYS ALIVE  
WHEN ITS  
CULTURE IS  
ALIVE.

- 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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## Editorial Note: The Vietnamese

To understand the Vietnam War, one has to understand the Vietnamese culture and civilization and the difference between northern and southern cultures. In his pioneering book, *Understanding Vietnam*, Neil Jamieson talks about the northern culture, which "subordinat[es] the individual to collective discipline..." while the South is "more open, less corporate, more tolerant of individual initiative and cultural orthodoxy..." (p. 5) He also writes about the North and South being "inverted images" for while in 1967 Hanoi had only ONE newspaper where news were filtered and controlled by the Communist Party, Saigon boasted 27 "different [daily] Vietnamese-language newspapers...and ten weekly magazines...where diverse views were expressed with incomparably greater freedom " (pp 284, 290-291).

Hanoi, which totally suppressed "competing ideologies" (p. 257), forced its people to march to the drumbeats of "liberating the South." This of course caused some people to react at least in the beginning: the writer Phan Khoi argued that "truth transcends all directives, all theories" and that the Party reeked of hypocrisy by compelling writers to use the same style. Le Dat, then aiming at the communist leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, wrote:

*Human lives, which can attain a hundred years,  
Are like pots of lime.  
The longer the life, the more mediocrity.  
The longer the life, the smaller one becomes.*

To which, Phan Khoi commented that communist leaders "have grown too rigid, too closed and that like lime pots, they had lost their usefulness after long use." (pp 258-261). Hanoi's reaction was swift and forceful: his magazine was closed, he was made incommunicado and died two years later in disgrace labeled as an enemy of the state.

According to Jamieson, Saigon, on the other hand, never lacked of *nhan* and *dieu*, of compassion and reasonableness as "a constant counterpoint to the drumbeats of war and dissension." (p 285) That mixture of freedom, dissension, compassion and reasonableness was not only the strength, but also the weakness that led to the unraveling of the southern society. Meanwhile, Hanoi inexorably pushed forward with its southern conquest despite leaving more than 1 million dead soldiers on the battlefields because its generals could not care more or less as long as they achieved their goals.

In 1963, Bernard Fall wrote a book titled, *The Two Vietnams* in which he stressed the difference between the country's two political and military systems. To acknowledge *two* Vietnams was to belatedly realize the gulf separating the two sides, for the two "countries" have evolved separately and differently from 1600 to 1802. In 1600, Lord Nguyen Hoang, a pretender to the northern throne, broke away and founded the southern empire--precursor of South Vietnam--and the Nguyen dynasty that lasted until 1945. Nghia Vo in *Saigon. A History* (2011) describes the evolution of that southern empire and of Saigon, its capital which anchors and personifies the southern culture--one that is different from the northern culture. Pushing his analysis further through the retelling of Vietnamese legends from 1321 until today in *Vietnamese Legends* (2012), he stresses that the difference between northern and southern legends reflects that of the two Vietnams. While North Vietnam with its ancient culture is heavily sinicized (from strict Confucian culture before 1954 to the importation/application of Mao communism, land reform and customs, the eating of dog meat for example: Chinese and North Vietnamese are fond of dog meat), South Vietnam through its *nam tien* (southern advance) has assimilated Cham and Khmer cultures and shed part of its Chinese culture to be more in synch with its Southeast Asian neighbors.

All these observations point to two different ways of being Vietnamese: the northern unyielding, oppressive-suppressive, sadistic communist approach and the open, comparatively free, compassionate, but at time dysfunctional southern way. The result of this head-to-head conflict was easily predictable.

1. South Vietnam was swallowed whole and eviscerated by a belligerent Hanoi which reneged on the 1954 and 1975 Paris Accords despite claims to the contrary. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

2. After the war of destruction (Hanoi was the instigator of the 20-year fratricidal Vietnam war) that killed

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## VISIT US AT THE 2012 SACEI ANNUAL CONFERENCE

August 25, 2012 at Courtyard Marriott, Tysons Corners, VA

For the Program, see: <http://www.sacei07.org/Newsletter46.pdf>



### Jacqueline Nguyen: Federal Judge

Born in 1965 in Dalat, South Vietnam as Hong Ngoc Thi Nguyen, she immigrated to the US in 1975 at the age of ten. Her father was then an ARVN colonel. She got a BA from Occidental College and a JD degree from UCLA Law school in 1991.

She then worked in private law practice before becoming an Assistant US Attorney in the central district of California from 1995 to 2002. Governor Davis then appointed her as Judge at the Superior Court of Los Angeles County thus becoming the first Vietnamese American appointed to the LA Superior Court.

In 2009, President Obama appointed her to the US District Court for the Central District of California. She was confirmed by the US Senate in 2009 by a vote of 97-0. In September 2011, Obama again appointed her to the Ninth District US Court of Appeals. The US Senate confirmed her by 91-3 in May 2012 making her the first Asian American female to serve as a federal appellate judge.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/may/07/nation/la-na-nguyen-20120508>

### Lee's Sandwiches Founders: Chieu & Henry Le



Chieu Le, a third year law student escaped from Vietnam in 1979 and moved with his wife Yen to New Mexico where he worked as a butcher in 1980 for \$8 an hour. Moving to San Jose, CA, he bought a catering truck to sell sandwiches to students in the school yard. He then sold lunches to workers in the companies' parking lots during lunch breaks for ten to fifteen minutes before moving to the next one. Soon his daily round included 10 companies three times a day. In 1982, he and his brother Henry founded the Lee Bros. Food Services that branched into standard sandwich shops as well as catering trucks serving North and South California, Chandler, AZ, and Houston, TX all headed by Le's siblings. Today, Lee's Sandwich Shops have become one of the fastest-growing restaurant chains in the West. They offer traditional American sandwiches served on baguettes or croissants, as well as Vietnamese iced coffee, espresso, Thai tea drinks, and a large selection of smoothies. At many of its newer locations, much like Starbucks, customers could come as early as 4:30 a.m. and stay as late as midnight.

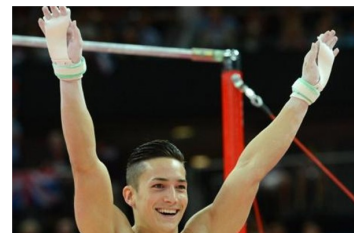
[http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=e36fe113217f73394a803877f2eaa996](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=e36fe113217f73394a803877f2eaa996)

### Marcel Nguyen: 2012 Olympic Silver Medalist



The Vietnamese-German Marcel (Van Minh Long) Nguyen was a twice silver Medalist in Gymnastics (Individual all around and Men's Parallel Bars) at the London Olympics in July-August 2012. He was fourth at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Peking, China. His father is a Vietnamese and his mother, the German Heidi. According to the Berliner Zeitung, the Nguyen name is the second most recognizable Vietnamese name after that of Prime Minister Philip Roesler, another Vietnamese German.

[http://youtu.be/Pj\\_qdhiSXBc](http://youtu.be/Pj_qdhiSXBc)  
<http://youtu.be/N-C0dQCKEHg>  
<http://youtu.be/SqT6UqLUoBY>

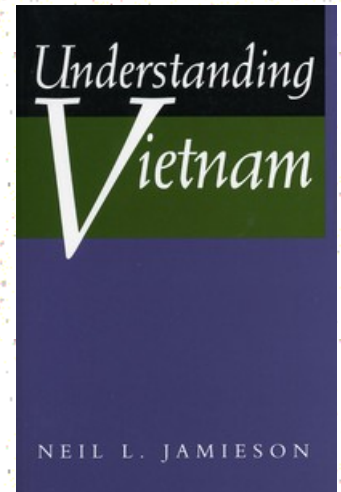


## Neil Jamieson: Understanding Vietnam

Jamieson paints a portrait of twentieth-century Vietnam. Against the background of traditional Vietnamese culture, he takes us through the saga of modern Vietnamese history and Western involvement in the country, from the coming of the French in 1858 through the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Throughout his analysis, he allows the Vietnamese--both our friends and foes, and those who wished to be neither--to speak for themselves through poetry, fiction, essays, newspaper editorials and reports of interviews and personal experiences. By putting our old and partial perceptions into this new and broader context, Jamieson provides positive insights that may perhaps ease the lingering pain and doubt resulting from our involvement in Vietnam. As the United States and Vietnam appear poised to embark on a new phase in their relationship, Jamieson's book is particularly timely.

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Vietnam-Neil-L-Jamieson/dp/0520201574>

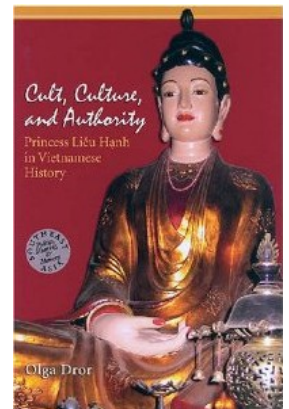


## Princess Lieu Hanh in Vietnamese History: Olga Dror

A Princess Lieu Hanh, often called the Mother of the Vietnamese people by her followers, is one of the most prominent goddesses in Vietnamese popular religion. First emerging some four centuries ago as a local sect appealing to women, the princess' cult has since transcended its geographical and gender boundaries and remains vibrant today. Who was this revered deity? Was she a virtuous woman or a prostitute? Why did people begin worshiping her and why have they continued? *Cult, Culture, and Authority* traces Lieu Hahn's cult from its ostensible appearance in the sixteenth century to its present-day prominence in North Vietnam and considers it from a broad range of perspectives, as religion and literature and in the context of politics and society.

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Cult-Culture-Authority-Vietnamese-Southeast/dp/0824829727>



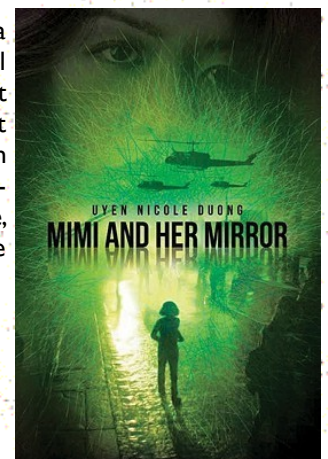
## Mimi and Her Mirror: Uyen Nicole Duong

Vietnamese American attorney Mimi Sean Young turns forty and has it all: a partnership in a leading Houston law firm, a sexy younger boyfriend, Brad, also a successful attorney, and all the trappings of a woman who has made it big. When her firm becomes embroiled in what could be an international scandal around a key client and Brad begins asking questions about her past, an overwhelmed Mimi begins to sink into emotional chaos. One glance at herself in an old mirror leads her to dig into her past and courageously relive the traumas of her childhood. Thus begins the heart of Uyen Nicole Duong's *Mimi and Her Mirror*, a poetic, passionate, and sometimes chilling novel about Vietnam and a girl known as Mimi Suong Giang, whose youth was destroyed by a brutal assault as she attempted to escape during the fall of Saigon.

(Provided by Dat Tran)

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Mimi-Mirror-Uyen-Nicole-Duong/dp/1935597302>



# Editorial Note: The Vietnamese....continued

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5 million people, came the period of domination: 1 million men were sent to reeducation camps and all southern (private and state) properties were confiscated and later divided between Party members. I just talked to a man whose family owned a fish sauce factory in Phan Thiet, central Vietnam. When the communists came in 1975, they hauled away all his 40 especially made 6ft tall by 6 ft wide urns used to make fish sauce leaving behind only the woody frame of the factory. Its savings and wealth invested in these urns once lost, the family became bankrupt from that time onward. Facing this brutal culture, three million people decided to escape from the communist hell by boat or land scattering hundreds of thousands of dead relatives along their escape route. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

3. Under four decades of communist control, communist Vietnam is a sick lady whose 90 M disenfranchised children live in poverty (annual GDP of \$1,300) without rights and basic freedoms, except for Party leaders and their families who own everything from lands to factories. Corruption is rampant from top to bottom. Remember that if they once lived in the jungles or the poor North, how did they get all that money in the span of four decades? You got it: through confiscations, bribes and extortions. Politically, the communist party supercedes the state and rules over the country as a lawless and corrupt government. The so called "revolution" was just a brutal conquest of the South, worse than the French conquest. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

4. Worse, having mortgaged the country's future to buy all the war materiel from their masters: China and Russia, Hanoi and the Party became beholden, the real "puppets," to their Chinese masters. Because of that huge war debt, they had to cede part of Vietnam's northern territory to China, to sell lands cheaply to China for mining purposes, to let the Chinese settle and exploit the Vietnamese market. Hanoi did not lift any finger when the Chinese claimed the Paracel Islands for themselves. Of course, the communist Pham Van Dong had signed these islands, which once belonged to South Vietnam, away to the Chinese back in 1954. The communists turn out to be the real traitors of the nation. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

5. The three million overseas Vietnamese became the embryo of a new generation of South Vietnamese. After suffering from years of incarceration in reeducation camps, from deprivation of food and freedom under the Stalinist society, from braving high seas and storms during their escape, and unwelcoming lands, they resettled abroad and rebuilt their lives. In the free western lands after four decades of hard work and resilience, they are now economically and educationally well off and send back to Vietnam more than \$10 billion (with a big B) yearly to Vietnam to rebuild the country. The bios of some of the most successful overseas Vietnamese are listed in the monthly SACEI newsletter. One of them, Marcel Nguyen, a Vietnamese-German, earned two silver medals in gymnastics (individual all-around and Men's parallel bars) at the 2012 London Olympic while Vietnam with its 90 M people did not medal at all. What did they do with the brains and muscles of their 90 M people?

Besides, smelling the money, Hanoi now tries to woo back overseas Vietnamese calling them the "the mile-long dear gut" of Vietnam. Remember the time when Hanoi put them in jails, confiscated all their properties and belongings, and called them all sorts of names like, "puppets, renegades, losers....?" That was not long ago. Although some did come back, the majority would not until rights and freedom are firmly recognized and respected in the country. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

6. Among those who came back was Mrs. Luong Thi Ho Quy, a Vietnamese-French who returned to Vietnam every two years under the umbrella of her organization "Avenir" (Future) to help build schools and assist the young poor and disinherited achieve some type of schooling. She has been harassed by the Cong An (Secret police), prevented from doing her work, hauled to police stations for questioning, and kicked out of Vietnam recently: [http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in\\_depth/police-threatened-vns-french-07302012155616.html](http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/police-threatened-vns-french-07302012155616.html) despite not having done any political proselytizing in Vietnam. Her problem stems from the fact that her husband in France is the head of a "Multi-party organization" that does not even work in Vietnam. And she is not even a member of that organization. Hanoi does not care about human rights, it harasses whomever it wants. Hanoi is NEVER to be trusted.

In sum, with only 3 million overseas Vietnamese, this new "southern" society is much stronger intellectually, economically, socially than that of the 90 million Vietnamese living under the communist regime. This discrepancy stems from the difference between the northern and southern cultures. The northern communist culture only tries to exploit its people to the last drop of blood, to teach them amoral ways, to diminish them by taking away their rights and freedoms to the point they are no longer innovative, productive, and in essence beholden to foreigners. The southern culture on the other hand offers freedom, achievements, riches, self worth and pride. It accentuates the positive characteristics of the Vietnamese. As such, southerners turn out to be the true/future builders of the Vietnamese nation.

The communist system has driven the country to insolvency and bankruptcy through nepotism, corruption, lack of morals, and one party-rule. It introduces communism, which is a foreign, rotten and amoral ideology into Vietnam and an anathema to the traditional, law abiding Vietnamese culture of our forefathers.

For the Vietnamese to move forward, they have to shed the communist culture and return to a new political system where freedom, human rights, and rules of law are respected. Or Vietnam will remain a third-world country forever.

