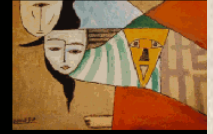




## SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

NEWSLETTER # 49

NOVEMBER 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.

# Happy Thanksgiving

## Editorial Note: The Ugly Side of the Vietnamese

**Phan Nhat Nam**

Phan Nhat Nam, a graduate of the Dalat National Military School (the Vietnamese West Point) rose to the rank of Captain in the South Vietnamese Airborne Division before becoming an Infantry war reporter. After 1975, he was imprisoned for 14 years in various communist reeducation camps before immigrating to the US where he continues to write for a living. In his essay The Ugly Side of the Vietnamese, he describes their 18 "unrefined" manners, which explain why the Vietnamese who claim to be some of the most intelligent people on earth are now a battered third world country.

Nam forewarns his Vietnamese readers not to charge him as a defeatist or a communist, but to view him as someone who by exposing their deficiencies, hopes the Vietnamese would change their behavior in order to contribute to the building of a better Vietnam. (Ed Nguyen Van Trong)

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## Another Milestone

On October 28, 2012, **Sacei07.org** welcomed its 30,000th visitor. If it took our website 30 months to reach its first 10,000th milestone and 16 months to reach the second 10,000th hit, only five months-and a half are needed to reach the third 10,000th hit.

- July 01, 2008:	Website inauguration
- January 19, 2011:	10,000th hit 30 months
- May 17, 2012 :	20,000th hit 16 months
- October 28, 2012:	30,000th hit 5.5 months

We sincerely thank our readers for their warm support over the years and will do our best to earn it.

## Paul LongMy Choate: Commander US Navy

Choate was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1967. He left the country in 1970 when he moved to Pineville, La., with his American father and Vietnamese mother. Throughout his short memoir, published by Viet Bao, [http://www.vietbao.com/D\\_1-2\\_2-122\\_4-193948\\_5-15\\_6-4\\_17-65\\_14-2\\_15-2/](http://www.vietbao.com/D_1-2_2-122_4-193948_5-15_6-4_17-65_14-2_15-2/), he explains the hardships his family and friends faced in America.

"[The story] is about my whole life from when I was born in Vietnam, coming to the United States, joining the Navy, being enlisted in the Navy, and then working my way up to becoming a commander," said Choate, who is the Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department's Maintenance Officer on board Carl Vinson. His memoir also includes "the struggles and barriers I had to overcome to still succeed."

In 1986, Choate joined the Navy as an aviation electronics technician. Ten years later he achieved his goal of becoming a commissioned officer. In September 2011, he was promoted to commander assigned to the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

[www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=69186](http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=69186)



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## Canadian Senator: Federal Judge Ngo Thanh Hai

Thanh Hai Ngo, a federal citizenship judge in Ottawa, was one of five new appointments to the Senate Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced on September 7, 2012.

He is the first Vietnamese-Canadian to take his place in the Red Chamber, having emigrated to Canada as a refugee as a result of the communist takeover of the country following the Vietnam War.

"It's an opportunity to serve, to give back what Canada has done for me since 1975, when I came here to Canada," said Ngo in an interview Friday, adding it was a "great honour" to be appointed to one of the chamber's Ontario vacancies.

There are usually 105 Senators the Senate of Canada, the upper chamber of Canada's Parliament. Canadian Senators are appointed by the Governor General of Canada on the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister. Canadian Senators must be at least 30 years old and retire by the age of 75. Senators also must live and own property in the Canadian province or territory which they represent.

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/Ottawa+citizenship+judge+honoured+named+Senate/7209389/story.html#ixzz25vzlPYE>

<http://pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?category=1&featureId=6&pageId=26&id=5010>



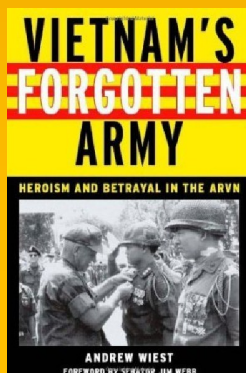
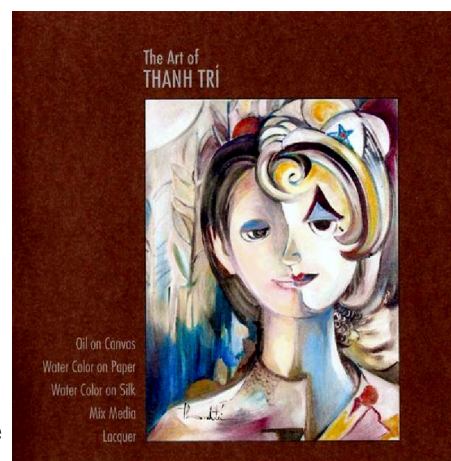
## Nguyen Thi Thanh Tri: Artist-Painter

Born in 1939 in Hue, Vietnam, she graduated at the top of her class in 1961 at the School of Arts in Hue and the National School of Arts in Gia Dinh, Saigon in 1962. She taught Arts in Nha Trang and Saigon, then immigrated to the US in 1987. She completed a degree in Design Drafting in 1993 at the Consumnes River College in Sacramento.

Thanh Tri Nguyen is an expert in many types of painting forms, including: design, aquarelle, silk painting, oil painting, and lacquer painting. It's worthy to note that of her artworks, silk paintings are the most typical ones which shape up the very foundation of her art.

Thanh Tú and Trí tuệ (Refinement and intelligence) are the two prominent constituents which define Ms Nguyễn's paintings. The combination of the two words Thanh and Trí -- that make the name of our artist -- is a conjugate union by chance, yet a happy-go-blessing of the Viet language.

[http://www.art2all.net/tranh/thanhtri/trienlam0909/trienlam\\_brochure/brochure\\_web.htm](http://www.art2all.net/tranh/thanhtri/trienlam0909/trienlam_brochure/brochure_web.htm)



## Vietnam's Forgotten Army

This sympathetic biography of Pham Van Dinh and Tran Ngoc Hue, mid-level officers in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), provides a unique perspective among American war histories. Built by American advisers in 1955 to repel a conventional invasion, the ARVN was a Western-style force that actually spent most of its 25-year life battling a lightly armed insurgency. Ironically, its destruction came at the hands of a traditional invading army from North Vietnam, but by this time U.S. forces (which it had relied on for heavy artillery and airpower) were gone. Vietnam's army suffered a chronic lack of imaginative leadership at the top, yet historian Wiest (Haig) makes a good case that it often fought well, especially at the battalion and regimental level, when led by good officers such as Dinh and Hue. Wiest describes their energetic leadership as the war intensified during the 1960s, but it is not a story that ends happily. Hue spent 13 years in a North Vietnamese prison after his capture in 1970. Dinh surrendered his regiment in 1972, finishing his career in the NVA.



Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Vietnams-Forgotten-Army-Heroism-Betrayal/dp/B0044KMVTE>



## Ride the Thunder: Richard Botkin

In *Ride the Thunder: A Vietnam War Story of Honor and Triumph*, Richard Botkin breaks new ground in telling the heroic story of a few American and Vietnamese Marines who fought brilliantly and turned the tide of the Vietnam War.



Botkin recounts the exploits of the U.S. Marines and their Vietnamese allies largely responsible for thwarting the Communist invasion of South Vietnam-known as the Easter Offensive of 1972. These are the men who "rode the thunder" and almost saved a nation. The book is brimming with new information about these old battles, including: How Colonel G.H. Turley found himself suddenly serving as chief advisor to the Third ARVN Division and how his command decisions helped defeat the Easter Offensive; how the incredible American effort to destroy the Dong Ha Bridge halted the Communist advance; how South Vietnamese Marines were winning on the battlefield and then suffered terribly after the war during the "re-education" process.



Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Ride-Thunder-Vietnam-Story-Triumph/dp/193507105X>

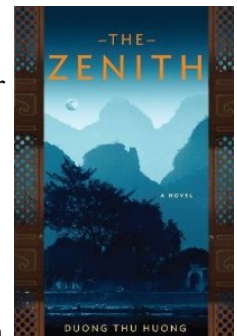
## The Zenith: Duong Thu Huong

Duong Thu Huong has won acclaim for her exceptional lyricism and psychological acumen, as well as for her unflinching portraits of modern Vietnam and its culture and people. In this monumental new novel she offers an intimate, imagined account of the final months in the life of President Ho Chi Minh at an isolated mountaintop compound where he is imprisoned both physically and emotionally, weaving his story in with those of his wife's brother-in-law, an elder in a small village town, and a close friend and political ally, to explore how we reconcile the struggles of the human heart with the external world.

These narratives portray the thirst for absolute power, both political and otherwise, and the tragic consequences on family, community, and nationhood that can occur when



jealousy is coupled with greed or mixed with a lust for power. *The Zenith* illuminates and captures the moral conscience of Vietnamese leaders in the 1950s and 1960s as no other book ever has, as well as bringing out the souls of ordinary Vietnamese living through those tumultuous times.



Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Zenith-Duong-Thu-Huong/dp/0670023752>

## The Ugly Side of the Vietnamese...continued

Nothing is more bothersome than listening to people who speak the truth because truth hurts. Especially if the listeners are those who crave recognition, praise, flatteries, often unsubstantiated, about himself, his family, his community, and his people. Telling the truth to the Vietnamese is a difficult topic... The Vietnamese, although having a great deal of good qualities, also have their ugly side, which other people cannot compete with. These bad habits explain why although they claim to be the most intelligent people on earth are now one of the most wretched countries on earth.

They have many bad habits, more than normal. This author will list representative habits that have caused the decline of Vietnam and the sad division and splitting of the overseas Vietnamese communities.

The Vietnamese:

1. do not respect the truth. Vietnamese history as written by the natives contains many vague areas and does not follow the truth, especially details about the origins of the Vietnamese, about their heroines, the expansion of the country's boundaries, the reasons for forbidding Catholic evangelization, about the Tay Son and Nguyen reigns... Hearsays about the Ngo after November 1, 1963 as well as memoirs penned by former generals Do Mau, Tran Van Don, Nguyen Chanh Thi, Ton That Dinh... are representative of the lack of respect of truth among our people. As for history written by the Vietnamese communists, only one tenth of it is believable; the rest was written for propaganda purpose and the self-aggrandizement of the communist people. Most of the overseas Vietnamese curse the communists; but once they have returned to Vietnam for a visit, some of them praise the government to avoid problems for themselves and their families instead of telling the truth.

Continue on next page

## The Ugly Side of the Vietnamese...continued

2. like to brag. Years ago, when Dao Duy Anh wrote about the Vietnamese, he focused on their tendency to brag, dress up, and seek fame. So did Tran Trong Kim. Overseas, one has heard about the intelligence, drive, and talent of the Vietnamese, as suggested by the high number of high school and college students who have graduated at the top of their classes; from there, they believe they are number one in society. In reality, thousands of other Asian and European students have also graduated from top US universities without raising any ruckus but keep on working and succeeding after graduation.

3. sneer at people. According to the Vietnamese communists (and some overseas Vietnamese), they are a brave people for having defeated the Chinese, Mongols, French, Japanese, and Americans. Their leaders have the brightest minds on earth for having successfully waged two

Vietnam Wars against the imperialist French and Americans and intelligently "led" the nation on the road of socialism. Now, just look at our people who are hungry and crying day and night under the rule of the communists. Remember that sneering is the habit that Heaven hates the most and has punished many civilizations the most for it. Sodom and Gomorrah have been destroyed by fire because their citizens' pride/sneering have led them to vice and sodomy.

4. are stubborn and resentful. No one is as stubborn and resentful as the Vietnamese. They believe they are the cream of the society and the rest is only second class. Believing they are correct or right, they force people to follow their views; if they were wrong, they would argue until the end that they are right. King Tu Duc never believed Nguyen Truong To, his adviser who told him the Vietnamese were backward; he instead listened to the Chinese who called the Europeans "western savages" and continued his be quan to cang policy (cultural and trade blockade) only to lead Vietnam into the hands of French colonization. In the 1950 and 1960's, Ho Chi Minh and his Party believing only in socialism, decided to use military means to subdue the South Vietnamese and their government forcing them to abandon freedom. The Ngo government believed that the other parties, including the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang and Dai Viet, could not fight the communists as well as they did. Then the military junta after the December 1, 1963 revolt believing in its strength, did not let civilians run the government despite the latter's knowledge and skills. The Vietnamese communists believing that their gospel was the best in the world did not believe in the revisionist Russians or Chinese. After the Soviets and eastern communists collapsed in 1991, the Viet communists knowing they were wrong, did not want to accept the reality for the good of their people. A communist renegade--like Bui Tin--still believes that the leaders in Hanoi were wrong, but not the communist gospel.

5. are cruel and petty. The way the North Vietnamese treated US POWs [and the South Vietnamese] was cruel and barbaric, not unlike the imperialist Japanese during WWII. Although the US did not pay much attention to honor but just looked at their own personal needs, they could be generous toward those in need. For example, once they become wealthy, they use their wealth to do charitable work. And rarely did they try to knock off those who lost, even if they were Japanese or Germans. The Vietnamese are different: those who won would massacre their enemies. In history, Tran Thu Do killed the Ly clansmen right and left, King Gia Long ordered his men to unearth the King Quan Trung's remains and to urinate on them; he condemned General Bui Thi Xuan of the Tay Son to a brutal death; there are stories of the Le posterior and Nguyen who killed the court members...

6. are partisan. No country is more partisan than ours. Being partisan means that besides us, we just care about our family and friends; as for our country, it can turn into whatever it can. This fact rings true for the nationalists as well as the communists, which explains why our country has degenerated as fast as it has. John Paul Vann, Chief adviser of the II Corps in the 1970's has said that "the Vietnamese are the greatest lovers on earth," meaning that they just love and care for their families and friends, irrespective of the fate of the country. Even during a retreat the size of Dunkirk, officers and soldiers hung on to their wives and children slowing and impeding the withdrawal and leading to death. Everyone has criticized President Diem of being nepotistic, but if power comes to another family, he would have done the same thing; the difference is in the degree of dictatorship and corruption between the various families/clans. When the military junta took power, only military personnel could run the country. Under the communists, only Party members could stand first, get rich and send their children to the imperialist USA to complete their studies.

7. are nearsighted. For being nearsighted, the Vietnamese lost the chance to westernize their country (under the Nguyen), to reconcile the people and rebuild the country after the war (under the communists) and to reclaim the Paracel Islands, which rightly belong to the Vietnamese. One just has to look at the tiny architectural work left by the various Vietnamese kings to realize it. It is not because our kings were poor or did not want to oppress their people to serve their personal needs like the Chinese, Thai, Laotian, Khmer kings, but because our vision was so limited it did not cross over the bamboo hedge around our villages. This in turn affects our architecture, which lacks grandeur, size and magnificence. Because of their nearsightedness, the South Vietnamese demonstrated repeatedly [in the 1960's] to ask for peace at any price, for the US to withdraw, although the Viet Cong attacked them at close range. As for the generals, they just liked to bring down President Diem so they could replace him. And because of the same nearsightedness, the overseas Vietnamese did not invest in long-range projects, like in politics (call to vote to create a political force, run for elected positions...) or culture (scholarship for Vietnamese children, nonprofit organization) but only on short term gains.

8. like to be a king or a prince. This phenomenon has been known since the colonial days when the French studied the characteristics of the Vietnamese. A Frenchman, probably governor Pierre Pasquier, stated in fact that "inside each Vietnamese is a prince." Although a little bit too strict, it expresses the fact that everyone wants to stand above the others. Therefore one can see that among all the overseas Pacific islanders, the Vietnamese are often the only ones who fought and sued each other for leadership positions from literary centers to community associations.

9. do not respect laws. It is because Americans respect laws that America, although less than two centuries old, has become the richest and most powerful superpower in the world. Few Vietnamese, however, worry about respecting laws. This is the consequence of a country that has gone through a thousand years of warfare, from insiders to outsiders leaving it with not enough peacetime to strengthen its



## The Ugly Side of the Vietnamese...continued

judicial system. Although Vietnam is said to have a centralized system from the Ly onward (11-13th centuries), in reality the king's court only had the right to levy taxes and conscript soldiers through a strong village system. The phrase "The will of the king yields to the village's customs" speaks about the autonomy of the villages in Vietnam because the court was always too busy fighting outsiders as well as insiders instead of strengthening the country's laws. It was not until the 19th century that the Gia Long judiciary system has been applied although laws have been enacted since the 15th century under Le Thanh Ton. In general, the Vietnamese have a low respect of laws. Partly because of poor communication system due to general poverty, partly due to factionalism and regionalism, and also because life is so simple that it does not have the complex needs of an advanced civilization. When the communists began controlling north and south, they reverted to the old factionalism--each province has its own laws, at times provincial laws are even placed above state laws--with the goal of letting provincial cadres benefit from bribes without having to answer to higher authorities. The lawless state therefore is just the consequence of widespread corruption and abuse of power.

10. steal the work of others. Without a personal system of thoughts or ideology, the Vietnamese easily assimilate foreign schools of thought. They have adopted Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, western ideologies, Marxist-Leninist materialism as well as other cultural thoughts old and new. They have used Chinese and Indian thoughts to concoct their own school of thought: Viet Nho or Viet Hoc. Vietnamese architecture and music are just replicas with some modifications of the Chinese and Cham (Hindu) music or architecture. The French have also noted that the Vietnamese are great imitators, although imitation is not invention but appropriation of other people's work. One classic example is the communists' bragging claim they had started the "revolution" by fighting against the French and Japanese. In reality, the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, Dai Viet, or other sects like the Cao Dai or Hao Hao also had contributed to the fight against the French and Japanese. The problem was they could not take over the government to brag about their deeds as the communists did.

11. like to be praised and flattered. Because of their haughtiness and princely behavior, they like to be praised. Straight words like those of Nguyen Truong To and Phan Chau Trinh can easily upset our princelings. Since King Khai Dinh liked to see his ministers kowtow before him, he had a courthouse set up right in Marseilles during his visit to the Oriental Fair in France in 1925. President Diem liked to be praised as Ngo Tong Thong. But Ho and the communists beat them all. Writers headed by To Huu and his associates Xuan Dieu, Nguyen Dinh Thi,...constantly wrote letters, poems, musicals praising the Uncle and the Party. Even though the latter drove the country into the precipice, they never cease to praise them.

12. like bribes. This is the common disease of government officials and those who believe they are princelings. In South Vietnam, after taking down the Diem government, the rebels only found a wooden bed and a rack of books in his bedroom. When President Thieu left office, he did not bring gold with him but had some wealth accumulated in Swiss banks after a ten year rule. His generals from Tran Thien Khiem to Cao Van Vien and Dang Van Quang are known to be the most corrupt people of the regime. They consider corruption as a natural right of the leadership, especially in times of war when life and death are common. For example Do Cao Tri, a not so clean but talented general (similar to Patton) once told the foreign press that he made war and money (through corruption and smuggling) at the same time. However, these incidents are nothing compared to those of the communists who control 75 [now 90] million people (and a small number of Viet Kieu). Corruption is so bad today that it has undermined the northern communist regime, once constrained by the rigid rules of a dictatorial party-led regime in a poor country. The South Vietnamese mention that the generals once took bribes from US monies, therefore left the people fairly undisturbed. But under the communist regime, if high officials took large bribes smaller ones took lesser bribes leaving the country poor and destitute.

13. are greedy. Although greediness is natural for human beings, the Vietnamese are greedier than others because they have suffered more and lack of everything. The communists, although claiming to fight for the poor, have exploited them the most and pushed them toward the worst state of greediness. A Viet Kieu only needs to return to Vietnam to realize it. He would be cursed if he only gives a small amount of money to his relative in Vietnam; tolls have to be paid to cross any bridge; local hotel rooms that are barely in shape are more expensive than in the US; a Viet Kieu will be doubly overcharged everywhere he goes.

14. do not respect time and principles. Although Vietnamese like protocols and rites, they do not respect any definite principle as the norm. From ancestor worship to marriage celebrations, each region has its own rites, but no one is the same as the other. According to General Ngo Quang Truong in March of 1975, Corps I defending units withdrew from Hue by order of the commander in chief, President Thieu, but the latter did not follow the order he had given: holding Hue in the morning, abandoning it at night, causing people to lose faith, which eventually led to the loss of the I Corps and the country. The communists are the same: besides central directives, provincial deputies could add new ones or disregard former ones, especially when dealing with the taxing of foreign ventures that come and invest in the country. As for respecting the time, the Vietnamese have no notion of time, which for them is elastic. One has to attend a community meeting or a wedding to understand it. The paper may say 9 am or 5 pm, but it would be 11 am or 7 pm before things start moving. And then after some delaying, the meeting really convened at 9 pm. What is strange is that the same people would arrive strictly on time when they go to work at US firms.

[http://www.sacei07.org/VA94\\_TheUglySideOfVietnamese-PhanNhutNam.jsp](http://www.sacei07.org/VA94_TheUglySideOfVietnamese-PhanNhutNam.jsp)