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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.

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SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

NEWSLETTER # 51

JANUARY 2013

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Editorial Note: The Republic of the Little Saigons

Orange County, CA in the 1970's was a white working-class town devoted to light manufacturing and family farms, especially strawberry farms and citrus groves. Its economy was in decline. When the Vietnamese arrived in Orange County in 1975, they could not even find the basic ingredients to make a bowl of "pho"--Vietnamese noodle soup. Grocers laughed at them when they asked about beef bones, cilantro, oriental herbs, fish sauce....Of course, a "banh mi" or Vietnamese sandwich was nowhere to be found. So was the tasty Vietnamese fish sauce, the smell of which could seem pungent to American noses.

Mr. Loi, an ARVN sergeant, his wife and seven children aged one to ten arrived at a picturesque Connecticut town near the ocean in August 1975. They were sponsored by the local Baptist church, which welcomed them and employed him as the church custodian. Church members unaccustomed to see such a big family let them live in a house on church ground, which was the pastor's former residence. The Loises were the only Vietnamese family in the area. Their closest neighbors were three single former ARVN soldiers some twenty miles away and a former ARVN captain some fifty miles away. The latter captain was a hard working married man with one child in tow. By November 1975, he had become the assistant manager of the local 7 Eleven store and a few months later, its manager. As to Loi, he took good care of the church grounds and got the church ready for Sunday masses. He did not have any friend in the village and could not integrate himself into the white community. He was like an island in an ocean. Home sick he bid his time and his future appeared uncertain in this nice environment. Having saved some money, he left Connecticut for Little Saigon, CA two years later.



The Vietnamese, scattered in small towns and villages around the US in 1975 soon converged toward larger Vietnamese communities that began as "communities of memory" where the refugees lost in a foreign and westernized land came together to buy/trade Vietnamese/oriental goods, sip coffee/tea, listen to Vietnamese music, trade gossips, and talk in Vietnamese. There was nothing sweeter than sitting there listening or talking back in your native language in a foreign country.

The innocent and less innocent gossips/conversations or complaints soon spearheaded ideas, deeds, and innovations. One shop opened after another to cater to the refugees' needs: a grocery store that sold Asian products and vegetables (Hoa Binh, 1977), a bookstore (Tu Quynh, 1978), a restaurant (Thanh My), a Chinese drug store (Thuc Sinh), a fabric store,... and as the community grew, it soon became a "Little Saigon," a home away from home. The "Little Saigon" appellation in Westminster was signed into law in 1986 by California Governor George Deukmejian. (Vo Nghia. *Saigon. A History*, pp. 251-252)



One successful economic story led to imitations and stimulated ideas to improve it. A newspaper came out as a weekly magazine. Although it was full of ads and gossips with occasional news for the local community, it was eagerly looked for by the refugees. Vietnamese living a hundred miles away came to Westminster, CA to shop and hunt for the free magazine. The first *banh mi* store opened a year or two later. The *banh mi* in Orange County, CA in 1976-77 cost \$2 a piece compared to a 50 cents cheeseburger. Although the minimum wage in 1976 was \$2.30 an hour, people stopped by and

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## Phan Quang Tue, JD. Immigration Judge



**Phan-Quang Tue**, son of Dr. Phan Huy Quat graduated from the Saigon University School of Law in 1965 and the Thu Duc Military College class 2/68 as a First lieutenant, Military Justice Division. He was later transferred to the civilian Justice department and immigrated to the US in 1975.

He was appointed as an immigration judge in March 1995 after receiving a Juris doctorate in 1985 from Drake University School of Law. From 1993 to 1995, he worked as an administrative law judge/board author for the California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board in San Francisco. From 1988 to 1993, Judge Tue served as a trial attorney for the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, Office of the District Counsel, in San Francisco. From 1987 to 1988, he worked as an assistant attorney general for the Office of the Attorney General in Des Moines, Iowa. From 1984 to 1987, Judge Tue served as a hearing officer in the bureau of appeals for the Iowa Department of Employment Services, also in Des Moines. He is a member of the Iowa Bar.

<http://www.justice.gov/eoir/press/08/SanFranciscoNatFeb12.pdf>



## Qui Nguyen, Playwright, Screenwriter



Qui Nguyen is an award winning playwright, screenwriter, and Co-founder and Co-Artistic Director of the OBIE award winning Vampire Cowboys Theater Company of New York City.

His scripts are published by Samuel French, Broadway Play Publishing, and Playscripts.com.

Honors include 2012 & 2009 GLAAD Media Award nominations (*She Kills Monsters* and *Soul Samurai*); 2008 & 2006 NY Innovative Theatre Award noms for Best Production (*Fight Girl Battle World* and *Living Dead in Denmark*); 2012 ITBA Patrick Lee Award for Outstanding Off-Off Broadway Show & 2010 nom in the same category (*She Kills Monsters* and *Alice In Slasherland*); named a 2012 TCG Young Leader of Color; 2007 Comiccritique.com citation for Best Adaptation of Comics into other Media (*Men of Steel*); 2004 NYTheatre.com's People of the Year; and cited as a "Downtown Playwright to Watch" by TIME OUT NEW YORK.

He is a proud resident artist at New Dramatists, a core member of The Playwrights' Center, an alumnus of Youngblood, and a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre and The Ma-Yi Writers Lab.

His company, Vampire Cowboys, is the only theatre organization to be officially sponsored by NY Comic Con. He is represented by Morgan Jenness and Abrams Artists Agency.

## Tri Ta: Westminster Mayor Elect



Westminster, CA This city – home to the nation's largest Little Saigon – elected its first Vietnamese American mayor in December 2012.

Councilman Tri Ta said he also is the first elected – as opposed to appointed – Vietnamese American mayor in the country.

Ta celebrated at an El Torito earlier in the evening with supporters and Mayor Margie Rice, the city's long-time mayor who endorsed him as her replacement.

"Her endorsement helped me a lot. I really want to thank her for her support," Ta said.

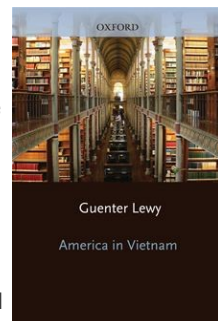
Ta won with 42.5 percent of the votes. His closest opponent was Penny Loomer, who netted 30 percent. (Orange County Register 2012)

## America in Vietnam: Guenter Lewy



His study of NVA/VC shows that terrorism was methodical, highly organized and an integral part of Communist strategy. They "rallied" the "support" of the population through a major program of murder. In the land reform, 37,000 people were killed. Individuals were tortured and disemboweled in the town square as their family and friends were forced to watch. Such acts had the desired effect of terrorizing the peasants into passive support. While holding Hue for 26 days in 1968, the NVA murdered and kidnapped some 5,800 civilians (many of whom were buried alive). A favorite NVA tactic was to shell civilian areas of major cities and massive throngs of civilian refugees fleeing South.

The important distinction Lewy makes is that while American atrocities were perpetrated at the small-unit level by a few individuals who then tried to cover-up their crimes, Communist atrocities were official strategy, committed on a wide-scale. Those who committed them did not cover their tracks because they were in no danger of being penalized.

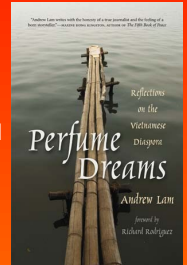


## Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora. Andrew Lam



In his long-overdue first collection of essays, noted journalist and NPR commentator Andrew Lam explores his lifelong struggle for identity as a Viet Kieu, or a Vietnamese national living abroad. At age eleven, Lam, the son of a South Vietnamese general, came to California on the eve of the fall of Saigon to communist forces. He traded his Vietnamese name for a more American one and immersed himself in the allure of the American dream: something not clearly defined for him or his family.

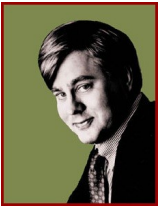
Reflecting on the meanings of the Vietnam War to the Vietnamese people themselves--particularly to those in exile--Lam picks with searing honesty at the roots of his doubleness and his parents' longing for a homeland that no longer exists.



Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Perfume-Dreams-Reflections-Vietnamese-Diaspora/dp/1597140201/>

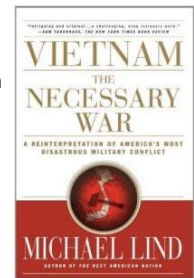
## Vietnam, The Necessary War. Michael Lind



In this ground breaking reinterpretation of America's most disastrous and controversial war, Michael Lind demolishes enduring myths and put the Vietnam War in its proper context -- as part of the global conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. Lind reveals the deep cultural divisions within the United States that made the Cold War consensus so fragile and explains how and why American public support for the war in Indochina declined. Even more stunning is his provocative argument that the United States failed in Vietnam because the military establishment did not adapt to the demands of what before 1968 had been largely a guerrilla war.

Available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Vietnam-Necessary-Reinterpretation-Americas-Disastrous/dp/0684870274/>



## Editorial...continued

bought the expensive *banh mi* just for the pleasure of indulging themselves in an ethnic delicacy. Due to competition in 2012, the same *banh mi* costs \$2.50 compared to a \$3 cheeseburger. One restaurant opened after another; it often changed ownership because working conditions in the restaurant industry are tough. Restaurants in the beginning had on their menu *pho* as a side dish as no one dared to offer *pho* alone to the community. It was only a decade later that a *pho* restaurant selling only noodle soup opened in Westminster. Today there are about 40 *pho* restaurants alone in Little Saigon, Orange county. *Pho* restaurants are a common sight and can be seen in many US cities and countries worldwide. They are frequented not only by Vietnamese, but also by Americans, Chinese, Koreans, Latinos...

Over time, "instead of fading away as the generations pass, memories have become a more prominent feature of Vietnamese-American community building and place-making. (Aguilar-San Juan. *Little Saigons* p 68)

Little Saigon in Orange County, CA has spread to nearby communities and encompasses parts of the cities of Westminster, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, Anaheim, and Fountain Valley. It is home to 234,000 Vietnamese (2000 census) and in 2004 has sent a prominent Orange County lawyer, Van Tran to the California State Assembly. Tran became the first Vietnamese American to a state legislature.

There are about 2,000 Vietnamese businesses in Westminster, including restaurants, grocery stores, nail and beauty salons, professional offices and social services. Little Saigon is anchored by the Asian Garden Mall/Phuoc Loc Tho, a two-story complex with its hundreds of stores. It soon became the heart and center of the Vietnamese community and the unofficial expatriate capital of the Viet Kieu. The place has become a target for politician hoping to collect Vietnamese-American votes. In 2003, Presidential candidate George W. Bush talked to a crowd of 2,000 supporters in the mall's parking lot. Nearby is a \$3 million Catholic Center as well as dozens of Buddhist and other temples.

Local leaders have managed to transform a collection of storefronts into a cultural and political zone spanning the Vietnamese community, city, county, state, nation, and globe. (Aguilar-San Juan. *Little Saigons* p 8) They also helped to regulate the boundaries of place through commerce and ideology, namely anti-communism. When a local merchant decided to exhibit in 1986 an image of Ho Chi Minh in the front of his store, thousands of people demonstrated until he took the image down. From that time onward, shopkeepers have displayed a yellow flag with three red stripes--South Vietnamese flag--in front of their stores to mark the "yellowing" of the area in opposition to Hanoi's red communist flag. It was a way of framing the South Vietnamese's sense of self and community in the face of the loss of homeland.

On May 11, 2004 Garden Grove city council passed a measure requiring the US State Department to let it know two weeks in advance should any Vietnamese communist official decide to visit the community. Westminster soon passed a similar measure. The cities

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## Editorial...continued

also declared Little Saigon a "communist free" zone by banning communists by declaration.

The Vietnamese have also managed to erect the Westminster Vietnam Memorial in 2003, which is dubbed the "West Coast Statue of Liberty." Flanked by US and South Vietnamese flags, it includes an eternal flame, a fountain, and a three-ton fifteen-foot bronze statue depicting two soldiers, American and South Vietnamese posing as war heroes. The Monument which occupies a park next to Westminster City Hall, might not be there without the political and economic clout of the Vietnamese in Little Saigon. (Aguilar-San Juan, 78)

There are many Little Saigons in the US, besides the one in Westminster, CA: Houston and Dallas in Texas, San Francisco and San Jose in California, Chicago in Illinois, Washington State to name a few. Not every community wants to be called Little Saigon: the one in Virginia is named Eden Center and the one in Boston Fields Corner. Other centers are smaller and carry no name. There are other Little Saigons in other countries because after 1975, the South Vietnamese have become a population in exile that does not care about Hanoi, the red flag and the communist ideology. Communism is a foreign ideology that is not native to the Vietnamese culture and that sadly corrupts its leaders.

However, all these Little Saigons or whatever their names share the same ideology: capitalism against socialism, democracy against communism, freedom against enslavement and repression. They are linked together in ONE Republic of the Little Saigons, one that stands against communist Hanoi.

A large gulf separates the Vietnamese communists and the Viet Kieu. This is not something new but simply reflects the two different ideologies of the two groups of people. Most of the Viet Kieu interviewed by Aguilar-San Juan mention they would rather die than helping Hanoi. (Aguilar-San Juan, 158)

The Viet Kieu stand for freedom and independence and Hanoi for enslavement and control.

The Viet Kieu stand for transparency, Hanoi for coziness, mafia type obstructionism.

The Viet Kieu stand for respect of rules, Hanoi for corruption.

The Viet Kieu stand for justice, Hanoi for injustice.

As long as there are injustice, corruption, a one-party state, and communism in Vietnam, there will always be TWO VIETNAMS. (Vo Nghia. *Legends of Vietnam*, pp. 16-22)

