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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.

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## SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



### To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

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## Editorial Note: The Quest for Freedom

In Vietnam, the quest for freedom is as old as the country itself. The Trưng sisters spearheaded the first fight for freedom in 40 AD kicking the Chinese out of the country, which was then called Giao Chỉ. After more than two years in power, they were defeated by the Chinese led by General Mã Duẩn. Then came Lady Triệu who with a group of soldiers strived to get rid of the Chinese.

### The Land Reform

When the communists took control of North Vietnam in 1945, the first thing they did was to conduct a census, not only to ascertain the size and distribution of the population, but also to force register the people and prevent them from moving around. Household heads were given a "census book" detailing the movements of each family member. A passport and permit were required for any travel more than a few miles from the household. Friends who came for an overnight visit had to report to the local public security headquarters. With this system of strict population control, every citizen was at the mercy of the government.

Next they established a system of terror using Mao's motto:

"[A] revolution is not a dinner party...To put it bluntly, it is necessary to create terror for a while in every rural area, or otherwise it would be impossible to suppress the activities of the counterrevolutionaries..." (Mao, *Selected Works*, 28)

In the countryside, the *land reform* was in full swing. Special people's tribunals were established. The "defendant" was usually prohibited from responding to the charges. He was forced to kneel before the court or to stand in a hole so he would be below the accusers in stature. Villagers, previously coached, were called to denounce the defendant's crimes, whether true or not. Failure to participate in the denunciation might be interpreted as harboring "pro-landlord" thoughts. The absence of a legitimate complaint did not deter the land reform cadres. Appropriate charges were simply manufactured and the proceedings continue.

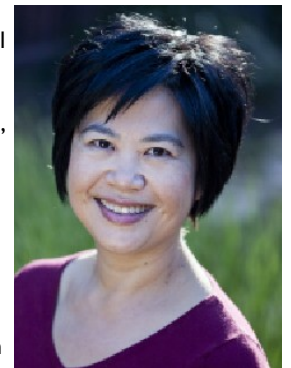
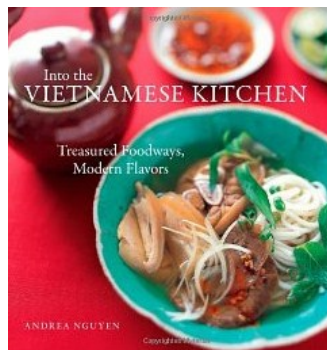
At the conclusion of the trial, the judge asked the villagers whether the defendant was guilty or not. Land reform cadres strategically placed throughout the crowd shouted, "Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!" The judge then asked for a sentence. The cadres again let the shouting, "Death! Death!" (Turner. *Vietnamese Communism*, 136-137) The defendant was led to an area close by and shot on the spot.

Aware that wives and children of the tortured men were unlikely to support the regime, the Party decided to isolate them. No one was allowed to talk them. Like leprous dogs, they were avoided and children were encouraged to throw stones at them. For more than a year...members of the landlords' families were prevented from working. As a consequence, the majority of them died of starvation, children and elderly people first, and eventually the others.

The precise human cost of the land reform campaign is unknown, it has been estimated at 50,000 people.

## Andrea Nguyen: Into the Vietnamese Kitchen

When author Andrea Nguyen's family was airlifted out of Saigon in 1975, one of the few belongings that her mother hurriedly packed for the journey was her small orange notebook of recipes. Thirty years later, Nguyen has written her own intimate collection of recipes, INTO THE VIETNAMESE KITCHEN, an ambitious debut cookbook that chronicles the food traditions of her native country. Robustly flavored yet delicate, sophisticated yet simple, the recipes include steamy pho noodle soups infused with the aromas of fresh herbs and lime; rich clay-pot preparations of catfish, chicken, and pork; classic bánh mì sandwiches; and an array of Vietnamese charcuterie. Nguyen helps readers shop for essential ingredients, master core cooking techniques, and prepare and serve satisfying meals, whether for two on a weeknight or 12 on a weekend.



whether for two on a weeknight or 12 on a weekend.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Into-Vietnamese-Kitchen-Treasured-Foodways/dp/1580086659/>

## Anh Do: Comedian

Vietnamese-Australian Anh Do's hit show from channel 7 in Australia. It aired in two parts in October 2012 and crushed rival programs such as 60 minutes - grabbing an amazing 1.678 million viewers nationally.

It was the number 1 show 2 weeks in a row.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjVhlyhPI2g>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l35gAHVPqFo>



## Nguyen Chi Thien: Flowers from Hell

During the roughly fifteen years spent as a political prisoner in Vietnamese labor camps from 1960 to 1977, Nguyen Chi Thien composed hundreds of poems. Released following the fall of Saigon, Thien delivered a manuscript of these poems to the British Embassy in Hanoi. He was arrested at the gate and taken to Hoa Lo - the well known Hanoi Hilton Prison, where he spent six of an additional twelve years of imprisonment, often in solitary confinement. During this time, his collection of vivid poems, known as Hoa Dia-Nguc began to circulate in two Vietnamese editions, and eventually overseas. Some of the poems were set to music and popularized by Vietnamese folksinger, Pham Duy. In 1984, a bilingual edition of the poems, translated into English by Vietnamese literature scholar Huynh Sanh Thong, was published under the title Flowers from Hell by the Council on Southeast Asia Studies at Yale University. In 1985, while it was still unknown if he were alive or dead, Thien was awarded the International Poetry Prize in Rotterdam in absentia on the basis of this book. He was released from prison in 1991 and lived in Hanoi until 1995 when he emigrated to the United States. He became a U.S. citizen in 2004.

*Available on Amazon*

<http://www.amazon.com/Flowers-Dia-Nguc-Lac-Viet-English-Vietnamese/dp/0938692216/>

## Martin Scott Catino: The Aggressors: HCM, North Vietnam & the Communist Bloc

The Aggressors: Ho Chi Minh, North Vietnam, and the Communist Bloc differs notably from the many previous studies of the Vietnam War. The Aggressors delves deeply into the early world of the Communist Vietnamese and studies their activities that unfold from the 1920s through the 1960s and 1970s, developments that create "America's most difficult war," the Vietnam Conflict. Soviet affiliations, Chinese border activities, and covert Communist operations throughout Indochina, rarely mentioned by scholars--much less scrutinized-- take center stage and reveal the aggressive designs of Ho Chi Minh and his supporters.

Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) is likewise central to The Aggressors. Rather than a nationalist, patriot, and innocent victim of French colonialism, the reader finds "Uncle Ho" to be the ruthless charismatic hardliner whose Communism masterfully trumps the very best leaders of the West, from the struggles with France to the "American War" in the Nixon years.

The author is an adjunct professor at American Military University.

*Available on Amazon*

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Aggressors-North-Vietnam-Communist/dp/1608445305/>

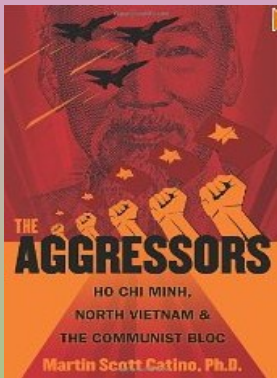
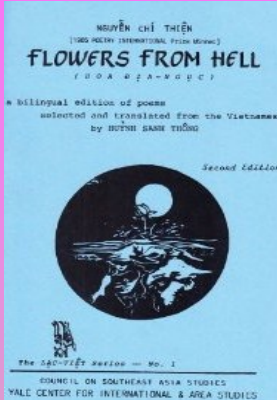
## In Memoriam: Shepard Lowman (1926-2013)

<http://aapress.com/ethnicity/vietnamese/vietnamese-americans-mourn-loss-of-shepard-lowman/>

Shepard Lowman had a long and fulfilling career as a diplomat with the U.S. State Department, a humanitarian and especially as a great friend of Vietnam and the Vietnamese community. He was 86, and is survived by his wife, Hiep Lowman, four sons (Thomas Trinh, Dinh Phuc Nguyen, John Trinh, Mark Nguyen) and four daughters (Kate, Mary, Lina and Lisa).

At Tet 1968 he was in Chau Doc where he met his future wife, Hiep Lowman.

In 1974 Shep was back in Vietnam as a political officer at the American Embassy in Saigon and helped thousands of family members of American citizens and Vietnamese "at-risk" personnel leave Vietnam. He then helped the first wave of Vietnamese resettled in the US. By 1981, he had become the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the State Department Bureau of Refugee Programs and again helped resettle Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians. Today, untold numbers of Vietnamese-, Cambodian-, and Lao-Americans owe their families' admission to the United States to Shep Lowman. Their success is his epitaph.





## Editorial...continued

Adding indirect casualties: landlords who committed suicides to avoid execution and torture, members of families of convicted landlords forced to die of starvation by the isolation policy, the total could amount to three hundred thousand people. (Turner. *Vietnamese Communism* 142-143)

### The Hundred Flowers Movement

The intellectuals denounced the excess of the land reform, "...illegal arrests, imprisonment, investigations (with barbarous tortures), executions, requisitions of property, and the quarantining of landowners' houses which left children to die of starvation...are also due to lack of a complete legal code."

The Party reacted by censoring freedom of expression by ordering the press, 1. not to carry propaganda against the government; 2. not to oppose government's laws and political line; 3. not to publish articles aimed at opposing the government.

The Party then instituted a program of "reeducation" for intellectuals. This began with the usual methods of criticism and self-criticism and expanded to include "reform by manual labor." Dissidents were sent into the highlands to work under the supervision of the highlanders. Exposed to disease and privation, many intellectuals committed suicides.

Phan Khôi led the *Nhân Văn Giải Phẫu* (Hundred Flowers) Movement in 1956 demanding freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and democracy. The intellectuals accused the Communist Party (CPV) of violating the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In December 1956, the CPV closed the journals. In 1958, many intellectuals were tried and imprisoned. Phan Khôi was kept prisoner at home and died in January 1959 before being put on trial His son soon died under unexplained circumstances.

Nguyễn Mạnh Tường, after obtaining two degrees of law and literature in 1932 at the age of 23 from the University of Montpellier, France, returned to Vietnam in 1936. He taught at the Lycée du Protectorat (the Hanoians called it the Bưởi School) and opened a law office in Hanoi. When the communists stole the power in 1945 and believing in the fight for freedom, Tường offered his two houses to the revolution and followed uncle Ho in his campaign against the French.

He returned to Hanoi in 1954 after having witnessed the revolution with his own eyes. In 1956 he joined the *Nhân Văn Giải Phẫu* and spoke against the government. Facing criticism, the Party retaliated by excommunicating and isolating him: his food coupons were cut off. Excommunication meant removal from arenas in which people could put up a fight or challenge to the Party.

"Breakfast was the first meal to go; meat and vegetables became an infrequent part of their diet. As lunch and supper declined to a bowl of watery rice gruel, the family desperately tried to find ways to earn money. But Tường's classes were broken up by police, the family didn't have the cash to buy cigarettes for resale on the street..." (Templer. *Shadows and Wind*, 109) However, he was lucky to own a hen that laid an egg a day to be distributed to family members on a rotational basis. But that hen had to be fed and every day, the professor with a French double degree had to go to the market after closure time to pick up discarded vegetables for his precious hen.

### A change of heart

Nguyễn Trung Thanh, head of the Security from 1951 to 1988, caught by remorse, wrote to the Politburo in 1995 that the accusations back in the 1960's had been based on forced confessions and distorted reports causing a number of innocent people to suffer the insufferable. People died as a result of hunger, poor health, and mental problems. Their families had to suffer an immense burden. By revealing the mendacity of the Party, he turned a powerful light on a system that rested on fear. He was called to meet with Đỗ Mười who told him, "What if the United Nations obtained this letter and used it to accuse us of violating human rights. It would cause a lot of damage." Đỗ Mười thus recognized that Vietnam has a case to answer on human rights. Later Thanh was expelled from the Party. (Templer, 109-112)

By the late 1980's, the country was in a state economic crisis. The Party's legitimacy was eroded by corruption and disastrous policy decisions. A group of Việt Cộng veterans banded together to form the Club of Former Resistance Fighters in 1987 with Nguyễn Hồ as its leader. The Club demanded changes in the political system and urged elderly and incompetent cadres to resign. After logging these criticisms, Nguyễn Hồ went from being a Party elder statesman to become an outcast. After the Club was closed in 1989, Hồ left the Party and began a self imposed exile. He was arrested, excommunicated, and subjected to harassment. He was released on house arrest and was denied access to proper medical care for a serious heart condition. (Templer, 110-119)

### The bloggers

The Vietnamese for a long time have spoken against the violations of human rights by the communist government of Hanoi. The jails of Hanoi and Saigon are filled with people fighting for human rights in Vietnam and bloggers. Many have been spending years in these dark jails without ever seeing daylight. The latest blogger sentenced to jail was Tạ Phong Tần.

Tạ Phong Tần is a Vietnamese blogger born in 1968 in Bạc Liêu, Vietnam. A former policewoman and a member of the Communist Party of Vietnam, she was arrested in September 2011 on anti-state propaganda charges for her blog posts alleging government corruption. On 30 July, Tạ Phong Tần's mother Đặng Thị Kim Liêng immolated herself in front of the government offices in Bạc Liêu Province in protest of the charges against her daughter. On 4 October 2012, Tạ Phong Tần was sentenced to ten years in prison.

In a July 2012 visit to Hanoi, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed concern for the detention of the three members of the Free

*Continue on next page*

## Editorial...continued

Vietnamese Journalists' Club.

In March 2013 Tạ Phong Tần was named a winner of the International Women of Courage Award and the US State Department.

Last year facing a weakened leadership besieged by factional infighting, corruption, abuse of powers, incompetence, and conservatism, Hanoi decided to ask for feedbacks regarding a change in the constitution. This was not the first time Hanoi has done such a thing although it has always returned to its former conservatism and clamped down on dissidents. But this time, a number of Vietnamese from all backgrounds took on the airwave, got on the internet and made speeches to let their demands known.

A group of intellectuals with long ties to the Party and the State released a "Petition 72," named for the number of early signatories, which "called for the elimination of Article Four of the Constitution, which establishes the supreme leadership of the Party, and directly rejected the principle of one-party rule and the subservience of the military to any one political party. Among other notable points, the petition also called for clearer property rights, the rule of law, and the scrapping the Constitution's preamble, which celebrates the Party's presumptive indispensability." ([Jonathan London, March 18, 2013](#)) Hundreds of Vietnamese inside and outside Vietnamese rushed to sign on the Petition.

When the Party's General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng responded that calling for the removal of article 4 was a retrograde idea, a journalist Nguyễn Đắc Kiên of the State Family and Society newspaper, wrote "you are the general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam. If you want to use the word deterioration, you can only use it in relation to Communist Party members. You can't say that about Vietnamese people." He said there was nothing wrong with wanting political pluralism, and that "embezzlement and corruption" by party members was a bigger problem. The next day, Kiên was fired from his job. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-vietnam-journalist-hits-limits-of-governments-willingness-to-debate-new-constitution/2013/02/27/784b1de6-80ab-11e2-a671-0307392de8de\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-vietnam-journalist-hits-limits-of-governments-willingness-to-debate-new-constitution/2013/02/27/784b1de6-80ab-11e2-a671-0307392de8de_story.html).

A persecution of some form is almost a certainty. But he is also a hero.

In a posting on his Facebook page after his firing, Kiên said "whatever happens, I just want you to understand that I don't want to be a hero, I don't want to be an idol. I just think that once our country has freedom and democracy, you will find out that my articles are very normal, really normal, and nothing big."

The quest for freedom is not new for the Vietnamese; they had been looking for it for the last two millennia. Jonathan London, on March 18, 2013 wrote,

"Vietnamese are a patriotic people. They are anxious to explore how more effective and responsive government can be achieved at a time when self-serving and shortsighted leadership have made them increasingly impatient with the status quo."

Facing the scandal of the century, we strongly urge the United Nations to investigate the human rights violations committed by the communist government of Hanoi:

- a. during the land reform and the Hundred Flowers Movement,
- b. during the war: Hanoi has instigated the Vietnam War and invaded South Vietnam from 1959 to 1972 in violation of the Geneva Agreements and from 1973 to 1975 in violation of the Paris Agreements,
- c. during the 1968 Tết Offensive especially in Huế where thousands of people were murdered,
- d. after the war when hundreds of thousands of southern soldiers were sent to reeducation camps and millions of boat people had to leave Vietnam because of persecution; and actions against the Club of Former Resistance Fighters had to be investigated,
- e. in the jailing of bloggers and human rights fighters.

As to the communist government of Hanoi, the CPV has over the decades through its actions destroyed and ruined the State of Vietnam and in response to the call of the CPV asking for suggestions about changing the Constitution, we agree with the Vietnamese that:

- a. no party can be above the State, including the CPV,
- b. Vietnam should be a free democratic, multi-party state that values and respects human rights.
- c. the rule of law should be established and respected,
- d. the will of the people should be respected and the sooner, the better.

It is only after through the observation/respect of Human Rights that the country's deep wounds can be healed.