



A SEAA of Memories

Our Changing Southeast Asian American Communities



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Asian American Communities

An exhibit in
the UC Irvine Langson Library's
Muriel Ansley Reynolds Exhibit Gallery

June 2005 - October 2005

Curated by

Anne Frank

with the assistance of
Julia Stringfellow

The UC Irvine Libraries • Irvine, California • 2005

Foreword

Welcome to the UCI Libraries' spring 2005 exhibit, *A SEAA of Memories: Our Changing Southeast Asian American Communities*. With this exhibit we celebrate the full availability of our renowned Southeast Asian Archive as our work on a major grant awarded to the UCI Libraries by the National Endowment for the Humanities draws to a close.

NEH funds library collections of high quality and distinction that are of value for study and research on a national level. The NEH project allowed us to fully organize all of the archival collections and to digitize selected portions and make them available on our website. This benefits not only UCI's own students and faculty and the broader national research community, but also Orange County's extensive Southeast Asian American community.

The Archive exists due to the generosity of the many members of the Southeast Asian American community who have donated materials, promoted the Archive, and served as members of our Advisory Board. *A SEAA of Memories* honors them and highlights the exceptional contributions of nine collection donors.

The Libraries owe special thanks for the success of our project to Associate Professor of Asian American Studies Linda Trinh Võ, who served as faculty advisor. Professor Võ goes far beyond the call of duty in many ways in service to the Southeast Asian Archive and the Southeast Asian American community.

On behalf of both the Partners of the UCI Libraries and the entire library staff, we welcome you to this exhibit and invite you to return to view others in the future.

Gerald J. Munoff
University Librarian

A SEAA of Memories

Our Changing Southeast Asian American Communities

A SEAA of Memories: Our Changing Southeast Asian American Communities celebrates the continuing success and increasing prominence of the UCI Libraries' Southeast Asian Archive. The Archive was established in 1987 to document the experiences of refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Việt Nam who have resettled in the United States since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, including the new, and constantly evolving, Southeast Asian American communities they have founded in their adopted country.

The Archive's unique scope and scholarly significance were nationally recognized when the California State Library and the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded grants to the UCI Libraries in 2003 to extend access to these irreplaceable materials. Thanks to these prestigious grants, our unique archival collections are now fully available for research and are drawing the scholarly attention that they merit.

In addition, a new resource titled *SEAAdoc: Documenting the Southeast Asian American Experience*, scheduled to debut in July 2005, will provide both an introduction to the field of Southeast Asian American Studies and online access to selected items digitized from the collections. Global World Wide Web access to these materials will further extend the Archive's reach. It is fitting that we have achieved these milestones in 2005, the thirtieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Southeast Asian refugees in the United States.

A SEAA of Memories highlights nine of the Archive's collections and their donors. From the beginning, our donors have played a central role in the growth of the Archive through their generous gifts of materials. In fact, without the commitment and generosity of the many

organizations and individuals who have contributed, the Archive could not exist. In addition to the donors featured in *A SEAA of Memories*, hundreds of others have enriched the Archive's collections over the past eighteen years. Those who have made donations since 1999 are listed in the exhibit checklist. *A SEAA of Memories* serves as a tribute to them all.

The exhibit illustrates aspects of the refugee experience as it has been experienced, documented, and collected by our donors. Topics addressed include humanitarian efforts in Asian camps, cultural activities in the San Francisco Bay Area, household items that were abandoned on arrival in the U.S., and advocacy efforts on behalf of Southeast Asian American communities. The exhibit clearly reveals the historical value of many objects once in daily use that may seem trivial on their own, but which, taken together in the context of the Archive, provide clear evidence of an important aspect of our nation's, and our county's, multicultural evolution.

Most of the items on exhibit, and many others from the Archive, have been digitized and will be available via *SEAAdoc*, in which narrative essays intended as an introduction to the Southeast Asian American experience will be complemented by a searchable collection of digitized images and texts. The site is intended for use by K-12 and college undergraduate students and educators, scholars, and the general public for research and educational purposes.

All items in the exhibit are from the collections of the Southeast Asian Archive, a unit of the Department of Special Collections and Archives. *A SEAA of Memories* was curated

by Southeast Asian Archive Librarian Anne Frank, assisted by NEH Project Archivist Julia Stringfellow. Associate Professor Linda Võ of UCI's Department of Asian American Studies, one of the Archive's strongest supporters and most active users in the context of her teaching at UCI, has served as faculty advisor for our NEH grant and as author of the essays that are a key part of our new *SEAAdoc* online resource.



Southeast Asian Material Culture

The Cleary and Lê Collection of Hmong and Lu Mien Refugee Artifacts

Guire John Cleary worked for voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) active in Southeast Asian refugee resettlement in San Francisco from 1979 to 1983. He was employed by Church World Service in 1979 and then served as Assistant Director of the Tolstoy Foundation from 1980-1983.

During that time, San Francisco was the entry point for the more than 50,000 refugees per year who arrived in the United States from refugee camps in Asia. The refugees would arrive at San Francisco International Airport and be met by agency workers. They would then spend the night in a motel near the airport and return to the airport the next morning to be put on flights to their final resettlement destinations.

The artifacts in this collection were left behind in San Francisco motel rooms by refugees. The items include clothing, cooking utensils and other household items, English language exercise books, and refugee identification cards. Mr. Cleary and Ms. Jade B. Ngọc Lê, the former director of the United States Catholic Conference transit center in San Francisco, kept the artifacts, carefully noting their origins. Mr. Cleary donated this collection in 1997 after reading an article about the Archive in the *Los Angeles Times*.

- 1. Identification card and photograph of an Lu Mien refugee child, ca. 1980.**
- 2. Cooking pot, possibly made from metal salvaged from an aircraft, ca. 1980.**
- 3. Black cloth hat with metal coins, beads, and feathers, ca. 1980.**



First Arrivals

Fort Chaffee Photographs

Fort Chaffee, a U.S. Army base in northwestern Arkansas, was the temporary home of more than 50,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees from May 2 to December 26, 1975. In an earlier era, Fort Chaffee had been a key military training installation during World War II.

The first wave of refugees from Southeast Asia arrived at one of four reception centers in the United States: Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Indiantown Gap in Indiana, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and Fort Chaffee in Arkansas. At these camps the refugees were processed and assigned to private voluntary agencies that then matched the newcomers with sponsors. As their first home in the United States, the camps also provided the refugees an introduction to American life.

In order to become eligible to leave the reception center, each refugee family needed a sponsor who would take responsibility for them until they were able to be self supporting. Government policy dictated that the refugees be settled throughout the U.S. so as not to form ethnic enclaves, as Cubans had done in Florida. After the initial resettlement, however, many refugees moved from isolated locations to newly-formed Southeast Asian American communities where they could be closer to friends and relatives.

The collection is comprised of photographs of the refugees' daily life at Fort Chaffee, documenting moments such as their arrival by plane and bus, a visit from President Gerald Ford, and educational and social activities.

- 4. Helping an arriving refugee woman and infant off a bus.**
Photograph. 1975.
- 5. Drivers' education class.**
Photograph. 1975.
- 6. Two Cambodian girls showing craft projects.**
Photograph. 1975.
- 7. Teaching English to children.**
Photograph. 1975.
- 8. An arriving refugee family with suitcases.**
Photograph. 1975.



International Student Advocacy at UCI

Project Ngoc

Project **Ngoc** was a non-profit humanitarian organization based at UC Irvine and comprised mainly of college students which publicized and garnered support for the plight of the Vietnamese boat people in the refugee camps in Asia. Conceived in 1987 by graduate student Tom Wilson as a class at UCI, the project was Wilson's attempt to increase students' awareness of the Vietnamese refugee crisis. He was more successful than he could have dreamed: his students decided to take his idea beyond the limitations of the classroom to undertake concrete projects intended to help alleviate the suffering of the refugees.

The students adopted three main goals: raising awareness on campus and within the community, advocating for humanitarian rights, and sending funds to camps for the development of educational programs. During its ten years of activity, Project **Ngoc** achieved these goals by providing direct relief through fundraising and sending volunteers to refugee camps in Hong Kong. Its work accomplished, the project was disbanded in 1997 after most Vietnamese refugees had been resettled or repatriated.

The collection contains a wide variety of materials documenting the activities of Project **Ngoc**, including correspondence and reports, records of meetings and activities, and photographs documenting travel to refugee camps. Materials such as correspondence and ephemera from other organizations involved with refugee issues are also present.

An evocative highlight is an extraordinary body of paintings and drawings created by refugee artists in the Hong Kong camps, three of which are on exhibit (Items 16-18). Project **Ngoc** exhibited the artwork on various occasions in the context of its fundraising efforts.



9. "Boat people: a cry for freedom."

Original poster in ink and watercolor, 1990.

**10. "Candlelight vigil for refugees, June 12-13, 1989,
Asian Gardens Mall, Westminster."**

Flyer.

11. Candlelight vigil in Westminster, California.

Photograph, 1996.

**12. "Project Ngọc Presents: Refugee Awareness Night,
University of California, Irvine, May 30, 1996."**

Program.

**13. "Project Ngọc's Volunteer Program: Volunteer's duties
and responsibilities."**

1988?

14. "Overview report on Hong Kong trip, summer 1993."

**15. *The Forgotten People: Vietnamese Refugees in Hong Kong:
A Critical Report.***

Irvine: Project Ngọc, 1988.

16. "A love between a mother and her child,"

by Nguyễn Quang Phuc. Acrylic painting, ca. 1990.

17. "Getting water,"

by Nguyễn Quang Truong. Watercolor painting, 1989.

18. "A 'red spider' in the Việt Nam,"

by Nguyễn Quang Phuc. Acrylic painting, ca. 1990.



The Fabric of Daily Life

The “Vertical File” Collection

The Southeast Asian Archive Vertical File Collection is an eclectic accumulation of thousands of miscellaneous items that document the life of Southeast Asian American communities. Here Archive users can find information on a wide range of topics such as cultural events, pertinent issues of the day, organizations and businesses, student activities, local politics, health concerns, and family relations.

The materials on the transnational connections of Southeast Asian Americans with their home countries are particularly interesting. Extensive files of newspaper clippings and ephemera cover controversial political issues, including protests over human rights offenses, detention and deportation of Southeast Asian refugees, clandestine efforts to establish democratic governments abroad, and concern over U.S. trade treaties. There is also coverage of altruistic projects, such as walkathons to aid disaster victims, medical and educational missions, and efforts to help stateless refugees remaining in Asia. More personal topics are also reflected, such as impressions of trips to the home country to visit relatives and friends.

These materials have been collected since the establishment of the Archive in 1987. They come from many sources: roughly half of the material has been donated, while the rest has been gathered by Archive personnel at community events, academic conferences, and social services meetings. Items include brochures, flyers, calendars, posters, published articles, newspaper clippings, newsletters and magazines, and unpublished student and conference papers.

The collection continues to evolve as materials are added on a regular, almost daily, basis.

19. Khmer Society of Fresno 2003 calendar.

Poster with text in Khmer and English. Donated by the Society.

20. “Cambodian Neighborhood Walking Tour, Lowell, Massachusetts.”

Brochure in English and Khmer. New England Folklife Center, 2004.

21. “Khmer (Cambodian) Deportation Facts” and “Please don’t take my Dad away.”

Flyer and postcard. Oakland: API Force, 2004.

22. *Strengthening Women and Families in Minnesota: 1999-2000 Annual Report of the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota.*

Minneapolis, 2004.



23. Hmong in the United States: APIA Health Brief.

Flyer. San Francisco: Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum, 2001.

24. “Lu Mien Community Center Grand Opening, Saturday, July 19, 2003.”

Program. Oakland: Lao Lu Mien Culture Association, Inc.

25. “Vietnam War Memorial in Westminster, Dedication, Freedom Park, Sunday, 27 April 2003.”

Program.

26. “Tony Lâm, Businessman for Westminster City Council.”

Campaign brochure, 1992.

27. “Laotian Handcraft Project, Inc.”

Flyer. Berkeley, California, ca. 1990.

28. Flag of South Việt Nam (paper replica).

Westminster, California: Cộng Đồng Việt Nam California kính tặng, 1999.

29. “Happy Lao New Year 1982.”

Poster with text in Lao and English. Lao Community of Stockton. Donated by Mitchell I. Bonner.

30. “Vietnamese Prom.”

Poster. Huntington Beach, 1987.

31. “Her own country,”

by Howard Henry Chen. Published in: *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), November 2, 1997. Donated by Howard Henry Chen.



Worldwide Activism

The Paul Trần Collection

Paul Trần is a Vietnamese American community activist who has worked tirelessly on behalf of Vietnamese refugees in many ways. He was born **Lộc Hoàng Trần** in **Việt Nam** and came to the United States in 1975, settling in Lexington, Kentucky. In 1977 he moved to Orange County, where he attended Santa Ana College and the University of California, Irvine, from which he graduated in 1982.

While in college Trần began working at *Việt Nam Hải Ngoại* magazine, where he adopted the pseudonym **Tường Thắng**. He later purchased the magazine, serving as editor-in-chief until 1996. In 1989 he participated in the International Conference on Indochinese Refugees, Geneva. He traveled to Hong Kong eleven times between 1989 and 1995 to work with asylum seekers. He also traveled to Eastern Europe to meet with Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia. In 1992 and 1994 he was elected vice-president of the Vietnamese Community in Southern California. Trần founded the **Tập Hợp Các Lực Lượng Dân Chủ và Nhân Quyền** political organization in 1992, as well as the Voice of Vietnamese Radio program in Orange County.

Trần's materials relating to the refugee camps in Asia poignantly convey the struggles of Vietnamese boat people against repatriation back to **Việt Nam**. Starting in 1989, the refugees had faced a controversial screening policy which determined whether they were economic or political refugees; the former were forcibly sent back to **Việt Nam**.

The collection also contains correspondence, audiovisual materials, artifacts, artwork, and other items. Materials issued by various organizations document anti-Communist activities and the resettlement of refugees throughout the United States.

32. "Freedom or death: U.B.C.C.B.H.H., Whitehead Detention Center, Hong Kong,"

Cloth and plastic sculpture representing a gas mask, ca. 1990.

33. "Screening policy,"

by Trần Ngọc Dong. Pen-and-ink drawing. Whitehead Detention Center, Hong Kong, 1989?

34. "Quê Hương" ("Homeland"), by Vũ Mạnh Tuấn.

Painting on metal. Whitehead Detention Center, 1988?



35. “Kế hoạch hành động toàn diện trung tâm giam giữ thuyền nhân VN tại HK” (“Take full action to protect the people in your camps”), by Tranh Thac Vien. “Story cloth” painting on cloth. Hong Kong, ca. 1990.

36. Classroom at Hei Ling Chau closed camp, Hong Kong.
Photograph, 1987.

37. “Two girls kidnapped by Thai’s [sic] pirates.”
Flyer and two photographs. Highland, California, 1996.

Many boat people were attacked by Thai pirates. Young women were raped, and if not killed, were kidnapped and never seen again by their families.

38. “Đêm Vượt Thoát Trại Long Khánh” (“The Night I Escaped Long Khánh Camp”), by Nguyễn Mạnh Trình.
Vietnamese poem in manuscript accompanied by summary in English, 1978.

Written by a refugee in a re-education camp.

39. “Closing remarks by Ms. Mai Công, President, Vietnamese Community of Orange County, Inc.”
Typescript. Anaheim, California, 1990.

Ms. Công spoke on the occasion of presentation of a petition signed by more than 2,000 Orange County residents protesting the forced repatriation of Vietnamese “boat people.” The petition was addressed to Alexander Casella, a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.



San Francisco Bay Area Cultural Life

The Mitchell Bonner Collection

Mitchell Bonner has been active in the San Francisco Bay Area's Southeast Asian American communities since 1975. Over the years he has photographed both daily life and numerous community events, documenting activities ranging from a 1975 Christmas party for Vietnamese refugees at San Francisco's International Student Center to a 2000 Laotian New Year's celebration in Richmond, California.

Bonner has traveled to Laos four times and has helped to organize Laotian festivals and social events in the Bay Area. He was a volunteer with the International Student Center in San Francisco until it closed at the end of 1976. It was there that Bonner met a Lao-Vietnamese man who introduced him to the arriving Lao and Hmong refugees being settled to San Francisco.

Bonner's photographs vividly depict Lao, Hmong, Lu Mien, Khmu, Cambodian and Vietnamese community social and cultural events throughout Northern California, but primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area, with an emphasis on Laotian American communities. The collection comprises 3,000 photographs and slides taken between 1975 and 2003, complemented by printed ephemera that Bonner has also collected.

40. Invitation to opening of the first Lao Lu Mien Cultural Center, July 11, 2003.

Oakland, California: Lao Lu Mien Cultural Association (LIMCA).

41. Former Laotian Air Force pilots at a reunion party in Pinole, California,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, ca. 1995.

42. Mitchell Bonner and Laotian friends.

Photograph, 1980s.

43. Lu Mien ceremony on anniversary of a death,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?



**44. Lao singer and khaen player at picnic in Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco,**

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?

45. Making food offerings at Lao temple in West Oakland,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?

46. "Lao New Year Festival, Year of the Horse, April 13, 2002."

Program and raffle tickets. San Pablo, California.

**47. Lao girls performing at street fair in San Francisco's
Tenderloin district,**

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?

The khaen player is a former Peace Corps volunteer who learned to play while in Thailand.

48. Arrival of Khmu leader Khong Le in Fresno,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1992.

49. Two women at baci ceremony,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?

50. Rock band at Lao Seri Association party,

by Mitchell Bonner. Photograph, 1980s?

51. "Introducing Thunder, latest group from Sacramento."

Flyer, 1990s.



National Leadership for Refugees

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

Established in 1979 as the Indochina Refugee Action Center (IRAC) in the midst of the boat people exodus and the “killing fields” crisis in Cambodia, SEARAC has repeatedly redefined its mission and programs to meet the changing needs of Southeast Asians in the United States. In 1983 the organization’s name was changed to the Indochina Resource Action Center, reflecting its increasing advocacy role. IRAC then became SEARAC in 1992. It has evolved from an organization responding to a critical refugee situation to become a national voice for Southeast Asian American communities in public policy, research, and leadership development.

The collection presents a detailed picture of SEARAC’s activities and advocacy on behalf of Southeast Asian communities nationwide. It comprises the organization’s extensive working files, including correspondence (both between refugee organizations and with individual refugees), minutes of meetings, memoranda, reports, newspaper clippings, conference materials, and materials from related organizations. Recent records are added on a periodic basis.

52. SEARAC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

Brochure in Vietnamese. 1995?

53. *The Cambodian Repatriation: A Special Trip Report with Recommendations, January 12-20, 1992,*

by Walter Grazer and Shep Lowman. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Migration and Refugee Services, 1992.

54. *“Who Are the Khmer Kampuchea Krom People?”*

by Thach Tom. Report no. 101/NAKKK USA/91. Tacoma, Washington: The National Association of Khmer Kampuchea Krom U.S.A., 1991.

55. *“Invitation to a Palm Sunday vigil at the White House on behalf of the Vietnamese boat refugees.”*

Flyer, 1988.

56. *Letter to Senator Alan Simpson from Lo Vang, Senate intern, regarding Hmong refugees.*

Typescript, 1987.

57. *Toward Humane and Durable Solutions to the Indochinese Refugee Problem, by Lê Xuân Khoa.*

Washington, D.C.: Indochinese Resource Action Center, 1989?



Our Orange County Communities

The Gayle Morrison Collection

Gayle Morrison first began working with Southeast Asian refugees as a counselor to Vietnamese high school students in Costa Mesa. She continued her counseling work at Santa Ana College and then became a teacher of English to Vietnamese adults in the Rancho Santiago Community College District. Morrison notes that she “crossed the border” when she later accepted a job with the Lao Family Community, Inc. working with Hmong refugees from Laos, rising to become the organization’s Executive Director. After the organization’s closure in 1991, she became personnel administrator for the Lao Hmong Security Agency in Orange County.

In her role as an independent scholar, Morrison has published *Sky is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA’s Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 1999). In 2003 she received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to complete her oral history research on what happened to the U.S.-allied Hmong who remained in Laos between 1975 and 1990.

The collection contains materials documenting Ms. Morrison’s work as a community college counselor, her service with the Lao Family Community, her activities in the Refugee Forum of Orange County, and her membership on the Governor’s Task Force Citizen Advisory Committee. It includes correspondence, memoranda, minutes, ephemera, newsletters, publications, and other materials relating to refugee resettlement and acculturation.

58. Letter to community business managers from Vietnamese Friends Club. Santa Ana College, concerning upcoming Tết Festival. January 12, 1978.

59. “Qualities of Vietnamese teenagers,” by Sơn Nguyễn.
Typescript, English 101 writing assignment. Santa Ana College. February 24, 1978.

60. “Tears for my country.”
Handwritten essay. Santa Ana, California, January 29, 1979.

61. “Tết Lunar New Year Celebration Program.”
New Horizons Counseling Center & Vietnamese Friends Club of Santa Ana College. February 7, 1978.

62. “MAA meeting 5/1/89.”
Minutes of a meeting to plan the program for Refugee Mutual Assistance Association Recognition Week, probably held in Santa Ana, 1989.

63. Letter to the City of Santa Ana from the Lao Family Community, Inc., concerning an application for Title VI CETA positions. Santa Ana, ca. 1980.

64. Letter to General Vang Pao from Michael Huỳnh, Refugee Resources Center, concerning participation in a conference, September 25, 1985. San Francisco.



From Thailand to the San Joaquin Valley

The Brigitte Marshall Collection

Brigitte Marshall worked as a volunteer in the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Processing Center in Thailand during 1989 and 1990. After returning from Thailand she became a Program Specialist for the Fresno County Office of Education and a Refugee Youth Coordinator at Fresno City College. She then joined the California State Refugee Programs Bureau as a Community Specialist in 1996. Marshall has been active in many refugee assistance organizations and was the Chair of the California Refugee English Language Training Task Force.

While teaching English in refugee camps in Thailand, Marshall documented camp life by photographing Hmong and Mien refugees as they struggled to maintain their families and culture in a difficult environment. She used these photos to familiarize service providers in the United States with the realities of refugee camp life.

The collection consists of printed materials, audio and videocassettes, and photographs taken by Marshall. A significant portion of the materials relate to Southeast Asian refugees, principally Hmong and Mien, living in camps in Thailand, and later adjusting to life in the United States, particularly the Fresno area. Materials include Hmong and Lao language lessons, memos, reports, newsletters, newspaper and magazine articles, refugee orientation materials, and unpublished papers.

- 65. "The Southeast Asian Refugee Camp Experience: A Photograph Collection Compiled by Brigitte Marshall, 1990-1992."** Report, 1997.

- 66. Mien baby and big sister, Chiang Kham, Thailand,**
by Brigitte Marshall. Photograph, 1990.
- 67. Hmong children lining up for school operated and funded by French Voluntary Agency, Ban Vinai, Thailand,**
by Brigitte Marshall. Photograph, 1990.
- 68. Mien girl's vantage point to watch wedding ceremony, Chiang Kham, Thailand,**
by Brigitte Marshall. Photograph, 1990.
- 69. Letter to Brigitte Marshall from "Jon" at Ban Vinai Information Project, Chiang Khan, Thailand,**
May 19, 1991.
- 70. Field report: The Hmong in Fresno and Merced, July-November 1990,**
by Brigitte Marshall. Typescript.
- 71. Letter and article relating to Pen Pal from America program. 1991.**

Donors to the Southeast Asian Archive, 1999-2005

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