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# ASIAN PREMIER

MAGAZINE

YEAR OF THE  
TIGER

NEW BEGINNINGS

THE MOST  
INFLUENTIAL  
ASIAN AMERICANS  
OF 2022

TRAVEL & DINING  
IN STYLE

ASIAN PREMIER MAGAZINE'S

# Most Influential

As we look forward to a new year and new beginnings, let's take a moment to recognize Asian Americans who have distinguished themselves through their extraordinary talents in the arts, philanthropy, and business.

First on the list is **Viet Thanh Nguyen**, the affable Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Sympathizer*. Nguyen's book sold over a million copies worldwide, and his literary influence shows no sign of declining. Since winning the Pulitzer Prize in 2016, he has become a regular op-ed writer and charismatic TV guest. Now, he can add screenwriter and producer to his illustrious résumé. In July 2021, *Variety* reported Nguyen's best-selling book will be made into an HBO limited TV series, with Robert Downey Jr. as a producer and a co-star.

Another name to watch for is author **Ly Ky Tran**. Her searingly honest and moving coming-of-age memoir, *House of Stix*, has earned glowing reviews from top critics. Tran spoke about her ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese parents' struggles in Vietnam, her family's hardships in New York City, how she overcame depression, and her journey to self-discovery and finding her voice through writing.

Asians also continued to make waves in film. Award-winning playwright and TV/film writer **Qui Nguyen** co-wrote Disney's animated film "Raya and the Last Dragon." He succeeded with scripts because of his ability to tell stories that are close to his heart:



his parents' journey to America, a story marked by grit, courage, and uproarious humor.

In TV, **Jackson Nguyen**, the seven-time Emmy award-winning TV sports producer, is known for his well-crafted documentaries on boxing legends such as Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao and other sports figures from gymnastics to horse racing. Nguyen fortuitously began his career during the 2008 Beijing Olympics working for NBC. He later helped launch the popular HBO reality sports program "24/7."

Director/producer **Bao Tran** has also carved his own path. He turned to Kickstarter crowdfunding to produce his movie "The Paper Tigers" after multiple Hollywood studios wanted to use "marketable" Caucasian faces instead of Asian actors.

Giving back matters now more than ever. Two leaders shared their stories with us: **Duy-Loan Le**, chairwoman of the Mona Foundation that empowers children and girls with education programs in 23 countries; and **Caroline Nguyen Ticcaro**, founder of the Catalyst Foundation, a non-profit helping to build stronger communities in rural areas of Vietnam by providing education, clean water, and resources to help fight sex trafficking of our most vulnerable victims: children.

Other individuals have quietly made a difference through their work. For instance, **Uyen Nguyen**, a Seattle entrepreneur whose family's heartbreaking journey to find freedom in America has fueled her passion for immigrant advocacy. Last year, she co-founded Viets4Afghans, a volunteer coalition that helps Afghan refugees resettle in the United



# Asian Americans

of 2022

States. Her friend and cofounder, **Thanh Tan**, is a veteran journalist and exceptional storyteller whose words have compelled others to take action to support Afghan refugees.

In Southern California's business world, **Dr. Truc "Chuck" Le** and his wife, **Dr. Thanh-Huyen "Christine" Chung**, have given back to their local communities. The esteemed doctors we profiled—including cardiologist **Dr. Paul Truong**, ophthalmologist **Dr. Triet Nguyen**, pharmacist **Dr. Tina Quach**, and dentist **Dr. Thinh "Thomas" Nguyen**—all share a spirit of philanthropy and have provided pro bono services for those in need throughout Orange County.

We are inspired by the personal stories of **Thieu Hua**, of Oklahoma, whose company is the distinguished industry leader in the designing and

manufacturing of custom trailers for clients worldwide. In California, the teamwork of **Darren and Tiffany Nguyen** resulted in their successful real-estate companies. **Victoria Hà Vy Le**, led the way in finance; and **Mindy Luong** manages more than 150 real-estate agents and staff.

And where would we be without our beloved "Tiger Mamas"? They rule the Asian households with a strong, quiet authority. We talked to one of the most hard-working and elegant Tiger Mamas, **Lucy Le**. She came to the U.S. in 1975 not speaking any English, penniless with three young children—all three later became prominent doctors. The Tiger Mamas' sacrifices are limitless, and so is their love.

We are proud to feature these extraordinary women and men

who have made an impact in their respective fields or a difference in the world. Unfortunately, it's impossible to include everyone who has inspired us with their positive work and contributions to making society a better place. Nonetheless, we want to highlight and celebrate as many remarkable, influential Asians as possible on the following pages in the premier issue. We salute all of you.

*Pictured Above, L to R: Caroline Nguyen Ticcaro, Jackson Nguyen, Ly Ky Tran, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Uyen Nguyen, Thanh Tan, Bao Nguyen, Duy-Loan Le and Qui Nguyen.*

# Uyen Nguyen

Co-Founder  
Viets4Afghans

Story by Dô Quyên

At age 10, Uyen Nguyen lost her mother, her baby sister and younger brother at sea when the family tried to escape from Vietnam by boat, according to CNN. Fortunately, Nguyen and an older brother, 15, survived the boat tragedy. They eventually made it to the U.S., where she lived with her uncle in La Quinta, Calif. In the years following, Nguyen earned a bachelor's degree in pharmacology from UC Santa Barbara, and a master's degree in biomedical sciences from UC San Diego. Still ambitiously pursuing her education, Nguyen in 2006, earned an MBA, focusing on entrepreneurship and venture capital from UC Berkeley. After graduation, Nguyen worked as an investment officer at CalPERS, which oversees one of the largest pension funds in the world. Later, her career took her back to Vietnam, where she worked for a private equity firm.

After returning to the States, Nguyen took a position at Amazon, where she met her husband, Chris Cvetkovich. In

2015, the couple opened Nue, an award-winning restaurant in Seattle, Wash. Their culinary inspirations come from their travels and the food they loved from around the world. Nguyen not only manages the hectic pace of running a restaurant, but she also finds time to advocate for refugees as well as others in Seattle experiencing homelessness and economic deprivation. She says it's part of her mission to give back to the world and to a country that have given her opportunities to succeed and blossom.

Her avocation took a new direction on Aug. 16, 2021, when Nguyen texted a group of friends consisting of children of Vietnamese refugees. She compelled them to help Afghans fleeing the Taliban in their country. Her text was the catalyst that galvanized a group of friends in Seattle to start Viets4Afghans, a humanitarian organization devoted to helping Afghans resettle in America.

I spoke with Nguyen about how Viets4Afghans is meeting the Afghan

refugee crisis, and how the non-profit organization is growing to meet increasing demands.

**When and how did the idea to form Viets4Afghans come about? How has the project evolved from when you first started?**

**UN:** The idea for Viets for Afghans was formed on August 16, 2021. As I was watching the evacuation from Afghanistan unfolding, I was compelled to do something to help Afghan refugees. So I texted four other Vietnamese American friends in Seattle who might want to do something with me. We all agreed to move forward. We also decided to pay homage to the year 1975 when the Vietnamese had to go through our own similar evacuations. So our first project was called '75 Vietnamese Families for 75 Afghan Refugee Families.'

We've now added two more projects. Our Humanitarian Parole project is

"As refugees or children of refugees, we don't see an alternative to not do something to support the Afghan community. They are going through the same hardship we went through several decades ago, and we want to use our experiences to be good allies and a support group to the Afghan community."



L to R: Nathan Duong, Mina Le, Thanh Tan (sitting), Jefferey Vu (standing), Kimberly Pham, Ali Rahimi, Uyen Nguyen, and Dede Tran.



to help Afghans who are still residing in Afghanistan and who have urgent humanitarian reasons to leave the country. Our upcoming Sponsor Circle project is to mobilize Vietnamese Americans to create small groups to sponsor Afghan refugees. These are refugees who have not been moved out of US military bases, and we want to create an option for them to be resettled into permanent homes as quickly as possible.

Currently, we have about 20 active volunteers and a part-time paid staff working on our projects. Most of our volunteers are in the Seattle area, but we also have some residing in other states. Please email us if you'd like to join our team!

**Why is it important to step up and help the Afghan refugees?**

**UN:** First, the United States promised safety to our Afghan allies, and as of today there are still many Afghan allies

who were not evacuated, and are left in Afghanistan to deal with a humanitarian crisis.

Second, even those who have been evacuated are still in military bases and detention centers. So we want to help them move into permanent housing as soon as possible.

Third, as refugees or children of refugees, we don't see an alternative to not do something to support the Afghan community. They are going through several decades ago, and we want to use our experiences to be good allies and a support group to the Afghan community.

**Where does most of the Viets4Afghans funding come from? How are the funds disbursed?**

**UN:** Most of our funding comes from private individuals. We are hoping to garner more grants and also corporate donations. At first, we directed most of our donors and donations to programs

that directly help resettlement agencies. Now our funds go to help Afghans pay for humanitarian parole application fees.

**Have you worked directly with the Afghan families? If so, what are some things you've learned about Afghan culture?**

**UN:** I have passed my background check and am still waiting for the resettlement agencies to match me with an Afghan family to host in my house.

In regard to the Afghan culture, while we should remember that there are different ways of doing things and different cultures around the world, each of these cultures are also bounded together by our humanity and shared common threads, such as a desire for a bright future for our family, good education for our children, a chance at happiness and the desire to live in peace. When trying to support the Afghan community, I try to keep myself rooted in this shared humanity versus our different cultures.

Telling the stories of Vietnamese refugees has been one of the passions of Thanh Tan. She was the creator/host of the podcast “Second Wave,” which revealed both the suffering and the triumphs of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees and was broadcast on National Public Radio member station KUOW and on PRX (the Public Radio Exchange). Tan has also reported many of these stories in print and in broadcast journalism. Additionally, she worked as a storyteller for Microsoft Public Affairs, as well as for Starbucks Stories. Tan recently turned her attention to philanthropy. She helped start Viets4Afghans, a grassroots, volunteer organization of Vietnamese Americans who are helping Afghan refugees resettle in the United States (VietsForAfghans.org). I spoke with her about what it means to be a Vietnamese American journalist and we also discussed some of the people, who are no longer with us, that she wishes she could interview.

**Please tell us about your journalism background. What are some projects you’re working on in 2022?**

**TT:** I spent 12 years working full time in journalism across all platforms - television, radio, online, newspaper, podcasting, and film. In 2016, I started telling stories for Microsoft and traveled extensively across six continents, documenting the impact of technology on society. During the 2020 election cycle, I became gravely concerned about the rise of misinformation in the Vietnamese community and put my journalism skills to use to launch Viet Fact Check, a bilingual website.

In the middle of the pandemic, I went on a sabbatical for a few months before starting my own communications consulting practice while developing documentary film ideas. Recently, I joined Starbucks as a senior writer/storyteller because I love the company’s mission to nourish every soul on the planet and to connect people to one another. I’m working on several projects that are under wraps, but you’ll find out soon enough! Hint: I will always have a passion for telling stories about the Vietnamese diaspora.

**Why did you choose to become a journalist? Who are your favorite journalists?**

**TT:** I grew up in a Vietnamese household where my parents subscribed to the daily



newspaper and tuned in to the news every evening. They learned English and became active citizens in their community thanks to access to true stories. I still remember when all of our Vietnamese friends gathered in the late 1980 or early 1990s to watch a newsmagazine show following a Vietnamese woman back to Vietnam.

At that time, the country was still closed to the world, and I saw the impact that the visual medium had on their hearts and minds. I felt that journalism would allow me the opportunity to exercise my curiosity, see the world and help solve real world problems. I love talking to people and sharing learnings. My favorite journalists are the late Ed Bradley and

Ted Koppel. Both are serious, inquisitive, and cool under pressure.

**You are a co-founder of Viets4Afghans. Your team has received national media attention very quickly. What was your role in helping to launch Viets4Afghans?**

**TT:** Viets for Afghans came together so quickly. I was shocked by the images I was seeing that Sunday morning as Kabul fell. It was triggering for a lot of Vietnamese people, so I already felt compelled to act when my friend Uyen Nguyen initiated a text conversation encouraging a group of us to do something. At that point, I guess I felt that we had a story to tell and a responsibility to speak



Thanh Tan with Lynn Novick and Ken Burns.

out as so many Afghans are struggling right now just to survive.

We know the importance of having others advocate for us over many years, so it’s natural for us to pay it forward. My background in journalism, film, social media, and communications consulting came in handy because we needed to understand our own narrative and to communicate that story quickly and succinctly to journalists with different needs and deadlines.

I’m proud to be a co-lead on the project because we’re doing something new, leveraging our knowledge and experiences, building relationships with the Afghan community, and paving the way

to hopefully motivate more Vietnamese people to step up and take action.

**I listened to your “Second Wave” podcasts on KUOW-NPR that ran in the fall 2017. Your stories were terrific! It was the first podcast in the Northwest focused on Vietnamese American lives after the Vietnam war. Tell us more about this program that you created.**

**TT:** Thanks for listening. I applied for PRX’s Project Catapult competition in 2017 with KUOW, the NPR station here in Seattle. Our proposal was selected, and I went to Boston monthly for several months to research and develop the show. We launched nine months later. It was an emotionally grueling experience

because I had to dig into some painful history. Prior to this, I’d been an avid public radio listener and was fortunate enough to contribute to “This American Life” a few times. Audio - the act of talking into someone’s ear - is an incredibly intimate way to exchange information and spark change.

**Is the “Second Wave” coming back? If not, are you interested in doing other podcasts?**

**TT:** I don’t know. Never say never. The podcast was supposed to run for three seasons. For personal reasons, I decided to not continue after the first season. I will never stop exploring what it means to be Vietnamese, though. I love our complex history, our food, our music, our resilience. There’s a lot to unpack!

**If you could interview three people, past or present, who would they be and why?**

**TT:** My late uncle, Tan Thuc Hung. He was an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) officer who died young during the war. He left behind a watch for my father that would later be one of the keys to our family’s harrowing but successful escape from Vietnam. I’ve heard stories of how debonair and fun loving he was. He represents lost potential. I often imagine he’s watching over us. I’m living out a life he didn’t get to.

My grandfather, Tan Huu. He passed away when my father was a little boy. He packed a lot into his 60 years, including a long journey from China to Singapore to Vietnam, where he became a very successful businessman. I’ll never fully understand my origin story, but I do know that our family’s trajectory has changed drastically over the last century - and my resilience comes from those who came before me.

Hung Cuong, the late South Vietnamese singer who sang every genre of music expertly and acted in pre-1975 films while also constantly traveling to the battlefield to raise the morale of soldiers. Women loved him. Men wanted to be his friend. After many attempts, he fled Vietnam and made a living singing overseas. He came to Olympia to perform for charity when I was about nine. He regaled the adults of our community with stories from a different era. I was too young to appreciate him at the time, but there’s a photo that I’ll treasure.