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# The Parrot



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Your ARC newsletter by and for ESL, multicultural, international students, Californians, and, well, anybody really...



Interestingly, the university I attended in Vietnam was named Lotus University. It feels like more than just a coincidence — as if the lotus has always been a quiet companion in my life, reminding me to stay grounded, rise above challenges, and bloom with grace.

*Read more on page 6*



## ***Disclaimer:***

*The articles in this special issue are based on a combination of internet resources and the personal perspective of an individual originally from Vietnam. It reflects one person's viewpoint and experience. Please understand that cultural interpretations may vary, and this content is not intended to offend or disturb anyone. Thank you for respecting this personal expression.*

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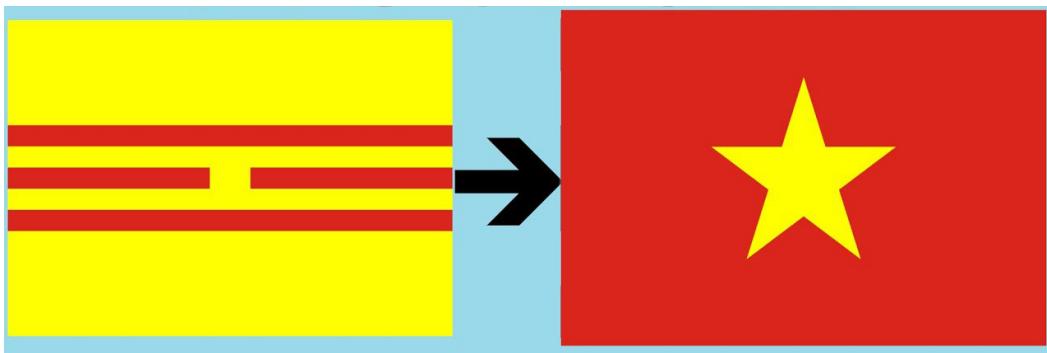
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# Geography & Vexillology



For this special issue, I want to share something close to my heart—my home country, Vietnam. As someone who grew up there, I carry many vivid memories of its landscapes, culture, and history. Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country where many cities are close to the ocean. I remember the salty breeze from the sea, the vibrant street life, and the warmth of the people.

The capital of Vietnam is Hanoi, which is located in the northern part of the country. There are many cities in Vietnam; however, major cities include Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Hue, and Can Tho. Each of these cities has its own unique charm and cultural significance, contributing to the diverse identity of the nation.

One of the most iconic symbols of Vietnam is its national flag. The current flag is red with a large yellow star in the center. I learned that the red represents revolution and sacrifice, while the five-pointed star stands for the unity of workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals, and youth under the Communist Party.

However, when I moved to the United States, I discovered something new—Vietnam used to have a different flag. It was yellow with three horizontal red stripes. This flag represented the Republic of

Vietnam, also known as South Vietnam, before the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. I heard from elders in the community that this flag symbolized a non-communist republic and was a powerful emblem for those who opposed communism.

Personally, I find this part of history very meaningful. It shows how a flag can carry deep emotional and political significance. The red flag with the yellow star represents the current government and its ideology, while the yellow flag with red stripes still holds a special place in the hearts of many Vietnamese people, especially those who left the country after the war. To me, both flags tell a story of struggle, identity, and the complex journey of a nation.



## ÁO DÀI – The Elegant Symbol of Vietnam



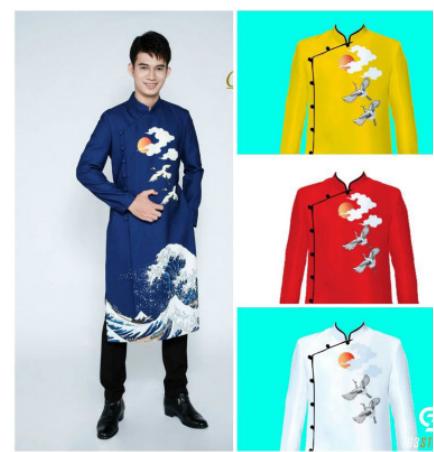
The áo dài is a traditional Vietnamese outfit that represents elegance, grace, and national pride. It is deeply rooted in Vietnamese culture and is often worn on formal occasions such as weddings, festivals, school ceremonies, and other special events.

Traditionally, the áo dài consists of a long, flowing dress that fits closely to the body, highlighting gentle curves, paired with long pants underneath. This design creates a harmonious balance between modesty and beauty. The most common fabrics used for áo dài are silk and cotton, often adorned with delicate patterns or embroidery to enhance its charm.

Over time, the áo dài has evolved into modern variations known as áo dài cách tân (modernized áo dài). These versions often feature shorter lengths and are styled with skirts, layered skirts, leggings, or jeggings, making them more practical for everyday wear while maintaining their cultural essence.

Men also wear áo dài during weddings and formal events. The male áo dài is typically simpler and looser than the female version, emphasizing elegance and formality without being overly ornate. The áo dài is more than just clothing—it is a cultural icon that reflects Vietnam's history, artistry, and identity. Whether in its traditional form or modern adaptation, the

áo dài continues to symbolize beauty and pride for generations.



# Foot Badminton



**Đá cầu**, or foot badminton, is a traditional Vietnamese sport where players use their feet, head, and other parts of the body — except their hands — to keep the shuttlecock in the air. It's a popular sport in Vietnam, though I'm not exactly sure when it first began. I just remember being taught during physical education class in school. It was a required activity for both boys and girls.

The shape of the shuttlecock used in đá cầu is quite unique and eye-catching. It is typically made from a small rubber or plastic base, which provides weight and bounce, and is topped with several feathers — often from a chicken's tail — that help it stay balanced and glide smoothly through the air. This clever design allows the shuttlecock to spin and float gracefully, making it both challenging and fun to keep in the air.

To be honest, I never really enjoyed this sport. No matter how much I practiced, I couldn't manage to keep the shuttlecock in the air for more than four kicks. It



## National Sport



was frustrating, and I eventually accepted that đá cầu just wasn't for me.

However, many people — especially boys and men — really enjoy playing it. They often form small groups of two or more and stand in a circle, kicking the shuttlecock back and forth to keep it from touching the ground. If someone drops it, they lose. Another common way to play is in teams, divided by a net, similar to volleyball. Each team tries to kick the shuttlecock over the net, and if the opposing team fails to return it, they lose a point.

Even though I'm not a fan of playing it myself, I still appreciate how much others enjoy it. It's a fun, energetic sport that brings people together and reflects a unique part of Vietnamese culture.



# Water Buffalo



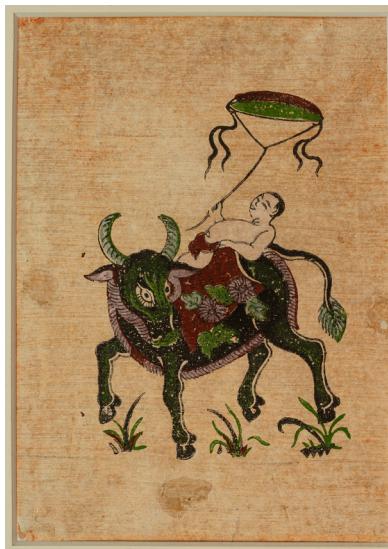
To me, the buffalo was not a common animal where I was born. I only saw a real buffalo when I returned to my hometown at the age seven, but I never got close to one. It wasn't my favorite animal, especially since I grew up in the city, not in the countryside.

As I grew older, I began to hear people—especially the elders—speak about the value of the water buffalo. There's a saying: "The water buffalo is the foundation of a family's livelihood." In the past, many Vietnamese families relied on agriculture to support themselves, and owning a buffalo was essential for farming. It was a vital tool for a family's survival.

When I was young, I didn't understand this. But now, I've started to appreciate the water buffalo as a national symbol of Vietnam. It represents the hard-working and diligent nature of the Vietnamese people, and the deep bond between farmers and their animals. The buffalo also played a role in Vietnam's history, even helping transport supplies during wartime.

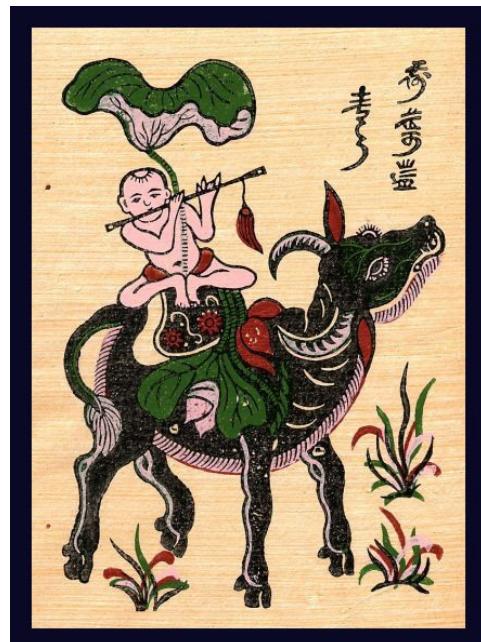


## National Animal



Today, we can still see water buffaloes in the green fields of the countryside. They are also featured in traditional Vietnamese art, such as the famous [Dong Ho paintings](#), which depict them in a unique and symbolic way.

In brief, I believe the water buffalo is a gentle yet strong animal. It is a powerful symbol of the Vietnamese spirit—resilient, hard-working, and deeply connected to the land and culture.





## National Flower



Each country has a flower to represent their people to the world. Vietnam also possesses a beautiful and meaningful flower - the lotus. It is the national flower of Vietnam. There are many sayings about its meaning; however, to me the lotus is a beautiful, useful flower and contains a wonderful meaning.

The lotus is most commonly seen in shades of pink, which happens to be my favorite color. It also comes with different colors like white, yellow, and purple. I was drawn to it at first sight. People often say that the lotus grows in muddy, smelly ponds, yet it rises above the water to bloom with a gentle fragrance. That contrast makes it even more admirable — a symbol of beauty and grace emerging from hardship. I love the delicate scent it releases, soft and mildly sweet, just like its petals.

The lotus petal feels soft to the touch and carries a mild, sweet fragrance that is both calming and refreshing. From its delicate flower to its sturdy root, every part of the lotus can be used — whether in traditional dishes, teas, or herbal medicine. It is not only admired for its beauty but also respected for its practicality. Some people even compare the unique beauty of a person to a lotus flower — growing in muddy waters, yet rising above with

# Lotus



strength and grace. Despite its surroundings, the lotus remains pure and radiant, just like individuals who strive to be different and beautiful in their own way, no matter the challenges they face.

Vietnamese people always use the symbolism of the lotus with their gods in Buddhism. The gods usually sit on the lotus flower as the lotus seems to be a spiritual creature to them. Although I am not a Buddhist, I still find this imagery deeply moving — it feels like a beautiful part of our cultural and spiritual heritage.

Interestingly, the university I attended in Vietnam was named Lotus University. It feels like more than just a coincidence — as if the lotus has always been a quiet companion in my life, reminding me to stay grounded, rise above challenges, and bloom with grace.



## 10 Trending Street Snacks in Vietnam

1. Mixed rice paper



2. Grilled rice paper



3. Boba milk tea



4. Tropical tea



5. Salted cream coffee

6. Grilled egg

7. Fried seafood ball

8. Shaken mango snack

9. Chinese sausage  
spring roll



10. Potato shake  
with cheese



## 10 Hardest Languages in the World

1. Chinese

2. Arabic

3. Japanese

4. Korean

5. Hungarian

6. Finnish

7. Polish

8. Icelandic

9. Turkish

10. Vietnamese

Source: <https://www.ecinnovations.com/blog/top-10-most-difficult-languages-in-the-world/>

## Let's learn some Vietnamese!

**Me** (ngang - flat tone): No mark; high, flat pitch.

Meaning: Mother (sometimes, but mẹ is more common); horse; you (familiar).

**Mè** (huyền - falling tone): Grave mark (`).

Meaning: To wheeze, whine, or complain.

**Mè** (sắc - rising tone): Acute mark (').

Meaning: To be obsessed, fascinated, or addicted (e.g., mê game - addicted to games).

**Mẹ** (nặng - low/heavy tone): Dot mark (.).

Meaning: Mother (very common).

**Mě** (hỏi - dipping/question tone): Question mark-like mark (?).

Meaning: A chipped piece, broken edge; also related to "to break" (e.g., cái bát mě - a chipped bowl).

**Mẽ** (ngã - broken/stumbling tone): Tilde/squiggly mark (~).

Meaning: To smile, grin (archaic/literary); pretty, graceful (often seen in place names like Mỹ Tho).

# Cyclo



Motorbikes are the most common mode of transportation in Vietnam. If you ever visit, you'll notice them everywhere — buzzing through narrow streets, weaving through traffic, and parked in long rows along sidewalks. Following motorbikes, other common forms of transport include bicycles, cars, buses, and the traditional cyclo (a three-wheeled cycle rickshaw).

Cyclos were a popular and practical mode of transportation when I was growing up in the 1990s. They were especially useful for carrying both people and goods around the city. My father's first job was as a cyclo driver. He used to take passengers around Saigon, and sometimes he would bring my brother and me along for the ride. I still remember how wonderful it felt to sit on the cyclo's seat — it was comfortable, and I could see everything around me. One of my favorite memories is sitting beside my mother and older brother, riding together to different places.



## A Blast from the Past!



es. What I loved most about the cyclo was that it never made me feel motion sick, unlike other vehicles.

As Vietnam's economy developed, motorbikes became more popular. They were faster, more convenient, and required less physical effort compared to pedaling a cyclo. Over time, cyclos gradually disappeared from everyday life. Nowadays, you'll only see a few of them on the streets, mostly used during traditional festivals or as a unique way for tourists to explore the city center.

Even though cyclos are no longer a common vehicle, they remain a nostalgic symbol of Vietnam's past. They remind me of simpler times and the warmth of family moments. I hope that even as we move forward with modern transportation, we continue to preserve and celebrate the cultural value of the cyclo.



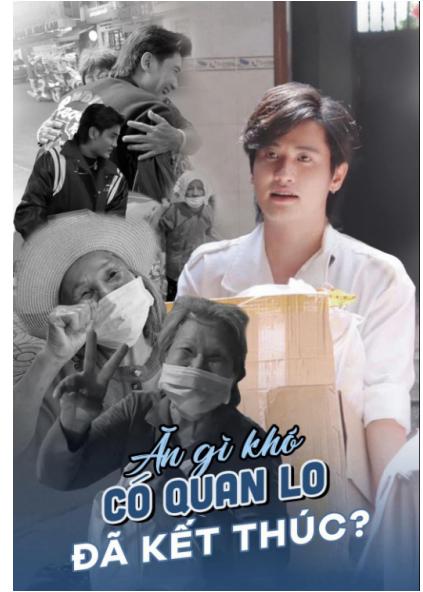
# Influencers



Vẽ Hạnh Phúc



Tina Thảo Thi



Quan Không Gờ

Vietnam is still a developing country, continuously working to improve the quality of life for its citizens. Before 2017, TikTokers and content creators were not widely known or recognized in Vietnam. However, in recent years, this field has grown rapidly and has even become a viable career path for many. Today, we can see influencers from various fields using social media to build their personal brand and share meaningful messages with the public.

Some influencers travel the world to review food and explore different cultures. Others focus on creating food blogs or lifestyle content. But what touches me the most are those who use their platforms to support local businesses and help people living in poverty. I'd like to share my thoughts about three influencers whose work brings hope and warmth to many lives — and deeply moves me every time I watch their videos.

Scrolling through Facebook is something I do almost every day. One day, I came across a video that truly touched my heart. It featured an influencer who travels from city to city, drawing handmade

banners for small businesses and elderly vendors who work late into the night to earn a living. I was deeply impressed by her kindness and talent. Her Facebook page is called "[Vẽ Hạnh Phúc](#)", which means "Draw Happiness." She doesn't charge money for her work — instead, she asks for just one thing in return: a smile from the business owner. Sometimes, she also reviews their food if they run a small food stall. Her boyfriend often joins her, helping to paint the banners. Together, they speak gently and



respectfully to the elderly, always bringing joy and dignity to those they meet.

Another inspiring content creator is [Tina Thảo Thi](#), who is known for his strong public speaking skills and infectious sense of humor. He often calls the people he meets "father" or "mother" to make them feel comfortable and respected. He trav-



els across Vietnam to review local food and support people in need. With each visit, he brings laughter, small gifts, and a message of compassion. Through his videos, he encourages his audience to support local businesses and care for those who are struggling.

Lastly, there is [Quan Không Gờ](#), an influencer who participates in a variety of digital content projects aimed at helping the less fortunate — from elderly individuals to small business owners. He is also well-known for his honest food reviews, budget-friendly food challenges in open markets, and creative food experiments like the "glass vase food challenge." His content is both entertaining and meaningful, often highlighting the resilience and warmth of everyday Vietnamese people.

When I was still living in Vietnam before

2017, content like this wasn't common. At that time, social media was mostly used for personal updates, not for community impact. That's why I truly appreciate the pioneers who stepped forward to use their platforms for good. Their work brings many benefits — not only by helping those in need but also by preserving cultural memories. Personally, I love how they rediscover and share street foods that were once popular but have become less common in today's fast-paced generation. Many childhood dishes have disappeared over time, so seeing them featured again brings back warm memories. It's heartening to witness young people using their



voices and creativity to uplift their communities. If Vietnam continues to support and nurture influencers like these, I truly believe our society will grow into an even more compassionate and united one.



**Would you like to  
contribute to *The Parrot* ?**

If you want to share your work, art, opinion, or  
anything else with  
*The Parrot*, please email us at:

**[TheParrot@arc.losrios.edu](mailto:TheParrot@arc.losrios.edu)**

We would be happy to hear from you and will try to  
respond ASAP.

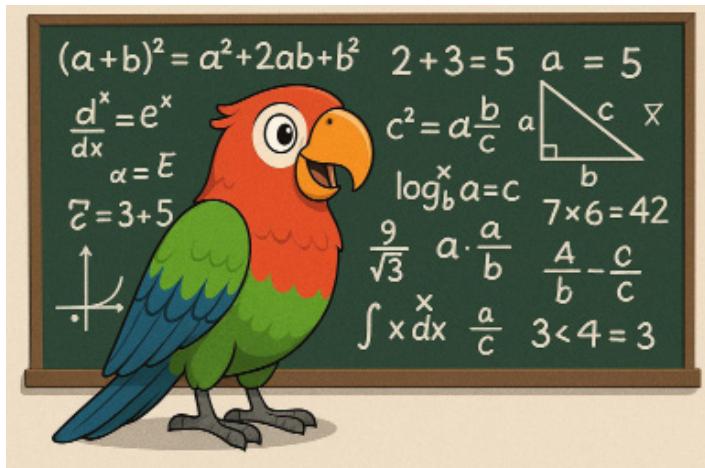
*The Parrot* welcomes all ESL student matters!

# Education

It might feel a bit uncomfortable to say, but I didn't enjoy my experience with the educational system in Vietnam. High school, in particular, left me with many difficult memories. I was required to study all the mandatory subjects, even though I had no interest in some of them. There was little room to explore my passions or choose subjects that truly inspired me. What made it worse was the corruption and discrimination I witnessed and experienced in my school. I had no one to stand up for my rights, and that left me feeling powerless and frustrated. I still remember the sense of relief and freedom I felt when I finally graduated and left that environment behind.

University brought new challenges. Tuition was expensive, and unlike in the U.S., there was no financial aid available to help students. We had to pay for everything ourselves if we wanted to earn a degree. It was a heavy burden for many families, including mine. I remembered we had to sell our city house to move to a suburban house due to my tuition debt.

When I came to the United States, I was amazed by how different the system was. I could change my major if I realized it wasn't the right fit for me — something that would have been unthinkable back home. I was also grateful for the financial aid and support systems available to students here. These resources made it possible for me to pursue my education without the overwhelming financial pressure I had experienced before. I've also had the opportunity to learn practical skills, not just theories, which has made my learning experience much more meaningful and applicable to real life.



If there's one thing I'm thankful for from my education in Vietnam, it's the strong foundation in mathematics. From a young age, we were taught advanced math, which made it easier for me to keep up with math courses in the U.S.

Looking back, I'm grateful for where I am now. I finally have the tools, freedom, and support to pursue my goals and learn in a way that truly empowers me.

## Healthcare System

Basic health insurance in Vietnam is relatively affordable — it costs only around \$30 to \$40 per year. With this insurance, patients typically pay 20% of the cost for most hospital services and medications. However, there are many expenses that the insurance doesn't cover. For those who want access to better healthcare services, paying out of pocket or purchasing premium insurance is often necessary. Unfortunately, many people can't even afford the basic insurance, and as a result, they rarely — if ever — see a doctor.

In Vietnam, regular health check-ups every six months are not common practice. The healthcare system lacks reminders, and many patients either don't have the knowledge or access to take care of their health proactively.

I've had personal experience with the healthcare system in Vietnam. In 2014, I needed a kidney transplant. The process was long and complicated.

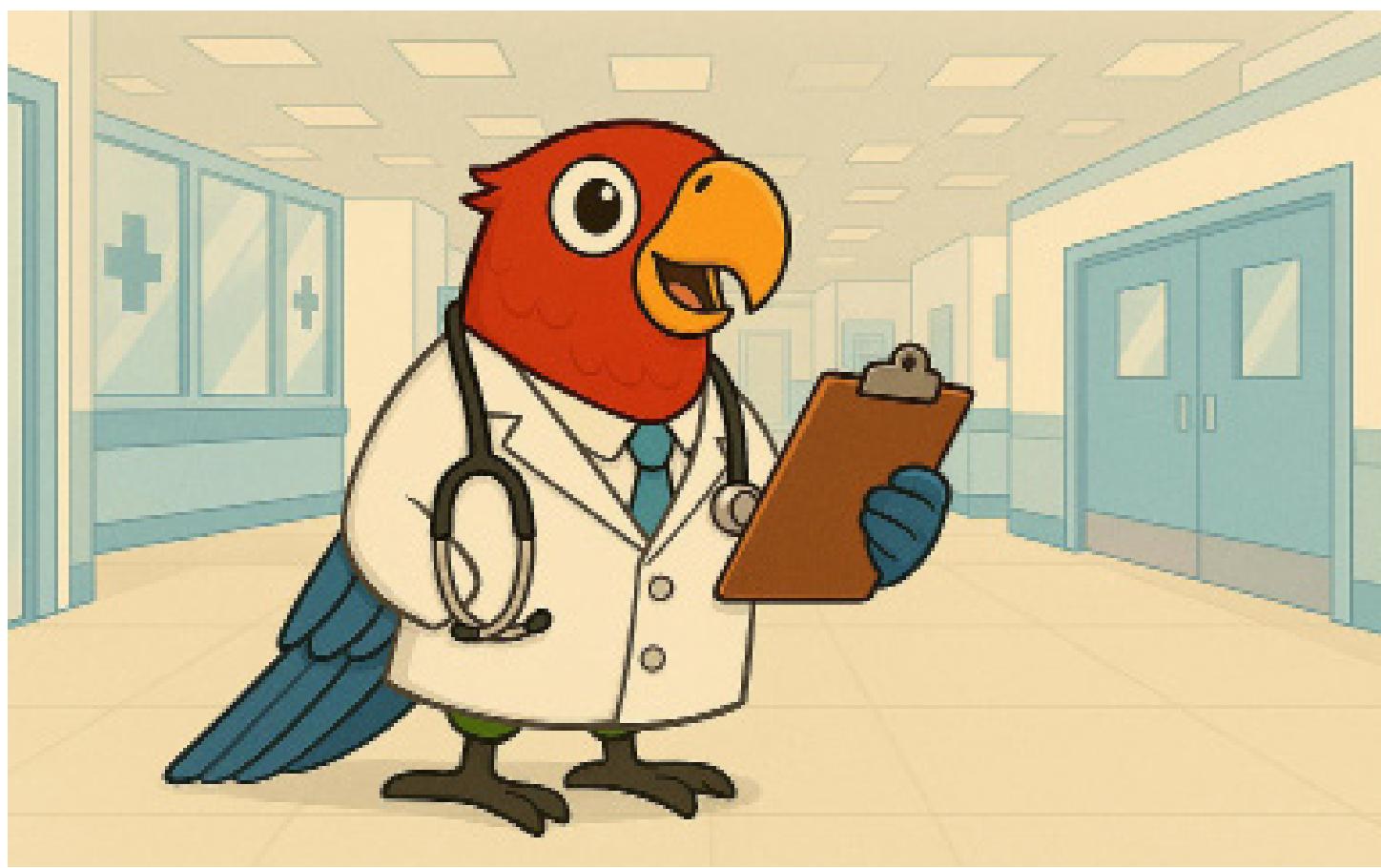
The only way to move things forward was by giving money or gifts to the perioperative nurse in the department. I remember one painful moment when my father was publicly scolded by a nurse because we hadn't given her a bribe. It was humiliating and heartbreakin

Despite these challenges, there were some positives. The transplant doctors were professional and genuinely caring. They even gave their personal phone numbers to patients in case of emergencies. They acted like primary care doctors, but with specialized knowledge in transplant medicine. After the surgery, they required us to come in for check-ups every two months. Each doctor would see over 40 patients a day — a testament to both their dedication and the overwhelming demand.

My mother's experience, however, was much more difficult. She hadn't seen a doctor for regular check-ups in Vietnam because she couldn't find a provider within her insurance network who could treat her properly. When she came to the U.S., she was diagnosed with cancer. I asked her why she nev

er went for check-ups back home, and she told me it was too expensive and that the doctors didn't seem to care about her condition. She also mentioned that many healthcare workers were rude to patients. In Vietnam, if you pay out of pocket, you're more likely to receive better care — a reality that creates inequality in access to quality treatment.

In contrast, the U.S. healthcare system has its own challenges. It's extremely expensive, especially for low-income families. It can also take a long time to get an appointment — sometimes months. But one of the biggest advantages is the support system. There are financial aid options, and patients are encouraged to get regular check-ups. The system is far from perfect, but it provides more structure, education, and access to care than what I experienced in Vietnam.



## About the Writer



I was born and raised in Vietnam, where I lived until July 5, 2017. On that day, I came to the United States with a K-1 fiancée visa to marry my husband and begin a new chapter of my life. In Vietnam, I studied banking and finance at Lotus University, a private school. Although I did not gain deep financial knowledge, the experience gave me a basic foundation and helped me become more confident academically. It also allowed me to learn and practice English, which later made my studies at American River College (ARC) easier.

Studying English at ARC has been one of the most meaningful experiences in my life. The ESL classes helped me grow stronger in writing and speaking, and they gave me confidence I didn't have before. After completing ESL, I had the chance to explore many other subjects beyond economics and finance—subjects I never had the opportunity to study in Vietnam.

In 2022, I officially became a U.S. citizen, which was a significant milestone for me. Two years later, in 2024, my parents immigrated to the United States. Their first year here was challenging, but they adapted quickly. My father now works as a house attendant at a hotel and is also an ESL student at ARC. He enjoys learning English and meeting different professors in the ESL lab. My mother works as a manicurist in a nail salon and loves her job, especially because she was a housewife in Vietnam and now has more independence.

### My husband and friends

often joke that I am "Americanized" because I adapted to American life so quickly. I truly love American culture and traditions, but I also hold on to the beauty of Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese food will always be my favorite because it reminds me of home. One of the things I treasure most about Vietnam is the Lunar New Year—the decorations, the family gatherings, and the festive atmosphere. In a similar way, I enjoy Christmas in the United States. The lights, decorations, and joyful spirit make it my favorite time of the year.

I also hope that my older brother and his children will be able to join us in the United States in the future. It would mean a lot to reunite our whole family and begin building our lives together here.

Parrot Staff Writer: Tuyet Le



## Nón Lá



The nón lá is a traditional Vietnamese conical hat that has become an iconic symbol of Vietnamese culture. Made primarily from palm leaves, bamboo, and sometimes rattan, it is lightweight yet durable. The hat's wide brim provides excellent protection from both sun and rain, making it practical for farmers, vendors, and travelers alike.

## Pho – a flavorful noodle soup with beef or chicken



## Bánh mì – a Vietnamese baguette sandwich with various fillings



## Terrific or “Weird” Food - Balut



Some unique dishes include balut (fertilized duck egg), fermented shrimp paste, and silkworms. These are considered delicacies by many locals. Disregard their “weird” look, they are delicious.



Special Issue Staff Writer: **Tuyet Le**

Faculty Advisors: **Patrick Hoggan and David Evans**

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