



Vietnamese or American

I am an American- born child whose original heritage comes from a Vietnamese background. Although the English language is what I primarily use in life, I have always had the desire to be able to speak, read, write, and comprehend the Vietnamese language as well as a native speaker. Being raised in the traditional American society has caused me to amalgamate to the American way of life. The viewpoints of my parents reflect what they learned growing up in their “Old World” and what standards a Vietnamese should live by.

Ever since I was a child, I have been brought up knowing that I am an American-born child with a Vietnamese background deep inside. I was raised to only speak to my parents in our original language knowing that I will eventually learn to speak English as soon as I attend school. However, they did not enforce the homeland’s emphasis of the role of women in the family. Though I am familiar with the cultural standards of a strict Asian society that viewed a “proper daughter”, my parents somehow understood that this is far from what “we” Americans follow. As the years progressed, the difficulty of maintaining my native culture and a sense of my heritage has been a personal challenge. As I imagine my future, I have the desire to force my children to do feel the same in pursuing this personal goal ~~as well~~. Because I feel that it is even more difficult to pass the culture and heritage down to the next generation who are born and brought up in America, I will always be afraid that my children may have little interest in things of the homeland. “They want to be a part of the modern, liberal American society in which they have been raised (Joy Luck Club, ~~Pinkmonkey.com~~).”²²

I am proud of my heritage, yet always making an effort to grasp it. My understanding of both the Vietnamese language and culture has often times been an

embarrassment. Because I personally feel this way, I attend (11 years) a private Vietnamese school every weekend to further improve and learn what I need to learn to reach my goal. I attend school with both native and inspiring Vietnamese students. I remember a particular incident regarding my “lack of language understanding.” I was asked by one of my teachers’ about understanding his lesson, which was taught in Vietnamese; a student came up to him and stated that I cannot speak Vietnamese. The comment was honestly insulting to me because I did know how to speak everyday conversational Vietnamese, but was too afraid to defend myself. Because I am an American-born child, to the natives, I appear to not know how to speak in the language. They perceive that because I was born here, I feel that I am better than them because I speak better English and they feel that they are better than me because they speak better Vietnamese; thus, I have no right to call myself a Vietnamese but an American instead. The feeling makes me feel incompetent because I do consider myself a Vietnamese even though I was not born in the homeland. I have the ability to speak, read, and write in Vietnamese, because of the school, but not as well as a native and not as well as I would like. Though it is something that I am ashamed of, I at least know that I am Vietnamese. My ability to speak and write may not be up to par with other Vietnamese children but my heart and spirit will forever be 100 percent Vietnamese (Huy).” I know my place in the Vietnamese society; therefore, at times I don’t feel that I am Vietnamese enough and in the American society, I am not American enough.

In spite of what other people think, “I stand proud. In my heart, if nowhere else, I am Vietnamese (Huy).”

