



Dear VMDT,

Many thanks to those send in new information for us all to enjoy – and I apologize for being so slow in getting it out.

Happy reading!

*Nancy*

**Included:**

- The Story of Poa Returns to MN
- Viet World Newsletter: Kitchen Bites
- Article: Old animosities persist in Vietnam
- Article: Korean Men Use Brokers to Find Brides in Vietnam

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**The Story of Poa Returns to MN**

Submitted by Caroline Ticarro-Parker

For immediate release:  
Feb. 22, 2007  
Contact: Vince Muzik, Jim Brunzell, Al Milgrom

Hmong Feature Film Returns!

International Award-Winning Vietnamese Film Comes Back to the Oak Street Cinema

The Story of Pao  
Starts Fri., March 9

Minneapolis, Minn.: After a smashing two-day run last November, the Oak Street Cinema will again host another run of the first international feature film drawn from the lives of the Hmong people, The Story of Pao. The film will screen at 7:15 p.m. nightly with a Sat. and Sun. matinee at 5:15.

Both a love story and the adventure of a young woman in search of her biological mother, this beautifully shot feature was made on location among the picturesque "needle-like" mountains of northern Vietnam and Laos. Directed by Ngo Quang Hai and starring his wife, actress Do Thi Hai Yen, The Story of Pao was filmed in the remote mountains among the ethnic Hmong. The husband and wife team lived there for a year while making the film. Filled with magnificent scenery and colorful costumes, the film won four Golden Kite awards in 2006 from the Vietnam Cinematography Association and won first place in the First World Films Competition at the Montreal World Film Festival.

The Oak Street Cinema is located 309 Oak St. S.E., Minneapolis, off the corners of Oak St. SE & Washington Ave SE. Plenty of street/meter parking - which expires after 8 p.m. - is available. Also, the Oak Street parking ramp is available, located a half block south from the theater. Admission is as follows: General \$8, Seniors \$6, Minnesota Film Arts Members and students \$5, children ages 5-12, \$4.

In the Hmong language with English subtitles. Color, 98 minutes.

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**Viet World Newsletter: Kitchen Bites**

I signed up for this newsletter by Andrea Nguyen (Vietnamese cookbook author) and thought perhaps those of you who also like to cook Vietnamese dishes would be interested. The website is fabulous and you can sign up to receive Andrea's bites by submitting your email address on her home page (look for the green box on the right with the title Keep Up With The Kitchen! at [www.vietworldkitchen.com](http://www.vietworldkitchen.com)). My first "bite" was as follows:

Dear Friends,

With this new Year of the Pig, I'm tweaking the Viet World Kitchen newsletter so that it is a little more formal and easier for me to manage. On a fairly regular basis, I'll be sending out "Quick Bites" -- a digest of things that have been going on with the site, Viet food discoveries, information you've submitted, etc. I'm not disciplined enough to blog so this is as close as it gets. Also, you should just peel through the material, not spend hours ruminating. My job is to inspire you to cook and eat great food with family and friends, not spend your life online. The first issue of "Quick Bites" includes a funky Viet potato, spongecake recipe, tips from Southerners, and Beer 333. Check it out here:

<http://vietworldkitchen.com/newsletter/feb23-07.htm>

Happy Lunar New Year,  
Andrea

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**Article: Old animosities persist in Vietnam**

Submitted by Don Hickman

The following appeared on Boston.com:

Headline: Old animosities persist in Vietnam

Date: February 22, 2007

"HO CHI MINH CITY, Vietnam -- Northerners are rude, they talk funny, they are lousy drivers and have bad taste."

[http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2007/02/22/old\\_animosities\\_persist\\_in\\_vietnam/?p1=email\\_to\\_a\\_friend](http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2007/02/22/old_animosities_persist_in_vietnam/?p1=email_to_a_friend)

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**Article: Korean Men Use Brokers to Find Brides in Vietnam**

Submitted by Kate O'Toole

The following appeared on NYTimes.com

February 22, 2007

Korean Men Use Brokers to Find Brides in Vietnam

By NORIMITSU ONISHI

HANOI, Vietnam — It was midnight here in Hanoi, or already 2 a.m. back in Seoul, South Korea. But after a five-hour flight on a recent Sunday, Kim Wan-su was driven straight from the airport to the Lucky Star karaoke bar here, where 23 young Vietnamese women seeking Korean husbands sat waiting in two dimly lighted rooms.

"Do I have to look at them and decide now?" Mr. Kim asked, as the marriage brokers gave a brief description of

each of the women sitting around a U-shaped sofa.

Thus, Mr. Kim, a 39-year-old auto parts worker from a suburb of Seoul, began the mildly chaotic, two-hour process of choosing a spouse. In a day or two, if his five-day marriage tour went according to plan, he would be wed and enjoying his honeymoon at the famed Perfume Pagoda on the Huong Tich Mountain southwest of here.

More and more South Korean men are finding wives outside of South Korea, where a surplus of bachelors, a lack of marriageable Korean partners and the rising social status of women have combined to shrink the domestic market for the marriage-minded male. Bachelors in China, India and other Asian nations, where the traditional preference for sons has created a disproportionate number of men now fighting over a smaller pool of women, are facing the same problem.

The rising status of women in the United States sent American men who were searching for more traditional wives to Russia in the 1990s. But the United States' more balanced population has not led to the shortage of potential brides and the thriving international marriage industry found in South Korea.

Now, that industry is seizing on an increasingly globalized marriage market and sending comparatively affluent Korean bachelors searching for brides in the poorer corners of China and Southeast and Central Asia. The marriage tours are fueling an explosive growth in marriages to foreigners in South Korea, a country whose ethnic homogeneity lies at the core of its self-identity.

In 2005, marriages to foreigners accounted for 14 percent of all marriages in South Korea, up from 4 percent in 2000.

South Korean news organizations have reported that many of the foreign brides were initially lied to by their husbands, and suffered isolation and sometimes abuse in South Korea. Partly in response, the Ministry of Health and Welfare is now moving to regulate the international marriage industry, which emerged so suddenly that the Consumer Protection Board can only estimate that there are 2,000 to 3,000 such agencies nationwide.

After an initial setback — his first three choices found various reasons to decline his offer — Mr. Kim narrowed his field to a 22-year-old college student and an 18-year-old high school graduate.

"What's your personality like?" Mr. Kim asked the college student.

"I'm an extrovert," she said.

The 18-year-old asked why he wanted to marry a Vietnamese woman.

"I have two colleagues who married Vietnamese women," he said, adding, "The women seem devoted and family-oriented."

One Korean broker said the 22-year-old, who seemed bright and assertive, would adapt well to South Korea. Another suggested flipping a coin.

"Well, since I'm quiet, I'll choose the extrovert," Mr. Kim said finally, adding quickly, "Is it O.K. if I hold her hand now?"

She went over to sit next to him, though neither dared to hold hands. She spelled out her name in her left palm: Vien. Her name was To Thi Vien.

In South Korea, billboards advertising marriages to foreigners dot the countryside, and fliers are scattered on the Seoul subway. Many rural governments, faced with declining populations, subsidize the marriage tours, which typically cost \$10,000.

The business began in the late 1990s by matching South Korean farmers or the physically disabled mostly to ethnic Koreans in China, according to brokers and the Consumer Protection Board. But by 2003, the majority of customers were urban bachelors, and the foreign brides came from a host of countries.

The widespread availability of sex-screening technology for pregnant women since the 1980s has resulted in the birth of a disproportionate number of South Korean males. What is more, South Korea's growing wealth has increased women's educational and employment opportunities, even as it has led to rising divorce rates and plummeting birthrates.

"Nowadays, Korean women have higher standards," said Lee Eun-tae, the owner of Interwedding, an agency that last year matched 400 Korean bachelors with brides from Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Mongolia, Thailand, Cambodia, Uzbekistan and Indonesia. "If a man has only a high school degree, or lives with his mother, or works only at a small- or medium-size company, or is short or older, or lives in the countryside, he'll find it very difficult to marry in Korea."

Critics say the business demeans and takes advantage of poor women. But brokers say they are merely matching the needs of Korean men and foreign women seeking better lives.

"But this business will get more difficult as those countries get richer," said Won Hyun-jae, the owner of i-Bombit, another agency. "Now, even a disabled Korean man can find a Vietnamese bride. But eventually Vietnamese women will ask why they have to go marry a Korean man when life in Vietnam is good."

For now, Vietnam remains a popular source of brides, second only to China. Marriages with Vietnamese women are considered so successful that the local government of at least one city, Yeongcheon, in South Korea's rural southeast, subsidizes marriage tours only to Vietnam.

At Incheon International Airport to the west of Seoul, an increasingly familiar scene unfolds in front of the arrival gates in the mornings. Korean men, holding telltale bouquets and often accompanied by relatives, greet their Vietnamese brides as they arrive on overnight flights from Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.

### On the Marriage Tour

It was also at the airport that a tense-looking Mr. Kim and another client began their marriage tours. Three brokers for Interwedding and i-Bombit arrived.

Mr. Kim, urged on by an older sister, decided to go to Vietnam after a last-ditch effort to meet a Korean woman in December failed. A high school graduate, he lives with his mother and his sister, and he works on the assembly line of a small manufacturer of car keys. Though he lives in one of the world's most wired societies, Mr. Kim does not use the Internet.

The other client was Kim Tae-goo, 51, who grows ginseng and apples on the 2.5 acres of land he owns in Yeongju, a town southeast of Seoul. Mr. Kim had recently divorced a Chinese woman he married after the death of his first wife, a Korean woman. He lives with his 16-year-old daughter and his elderly mother. His 21-year-old has left home.

Ahn Jae-won, a Korean broker who has long been based in Hanoi and is married to a Vietnamese woman, began: "The women have come out looking their best for you. But don't expect them to look as pretty as Korean women. There is a big gap in our G.D.P.'s. Don't be condescending. Don't lie. If you lie, they'll find out eventually and feel betrayed and run away.

"The parents know that their daughters will marry a Korean man. The authorities know this is happening, but there'll be trouble if we do it in front of them. So I seek your understanding. Once we land in Hanoi, even though it'll be very late, we'll go meet the women right away. It's safer to do this at night.

"One last thing. Other companies allow you to sleep with the women on the first night. We don't. Only on the

bridal night. We must, after all, keep our decorum as Korean men. Is that O.K. with you?"

The two nodded.

Introductions and a Choice

And so, at the Lucky Star karaoke bar here, the older Mr. Kim addressed the Vietnamese women, most in their early 20s.

"My 16-year-old daughter lives with me, and I'm a farmer," he said, after informing the women through the brokers that he would also send \$100 a month to their parents in Vietnam. "Is that O.K. with you?"

"I know how to farm," said Bui Thi Thuy, 22, one of the two women Mr. Kim eventually focused on.

Asked whether she had any questions, Ms. Thuy said she had none. But the other woman, an earnest 28-year-old in a light-green jacket, asked, "If I marry you, will you love me and take care of me forever?"

"Of course," Mr. Kim answered, then quickly settled on Ms. Thuy.

After a few hours' sleep, the new couples and the brokers squeezed into a small van for the four-hour ride to the women's home province, Quang Ninh, about four hours east of Hanoi. There, the couples would be interviewed by the local authorities before registering for their marriages.

The road out of Hanoi, a wide highway flanked by new factories owned by multinationals like Canon, eventually narrowed to two lanes crisscrossed frequently by cows. Farther out, farmers could be seen working the soil by hand, and signs of Vietnam's booming economy grew fewer.

Most of the Vietnamese women marrying Korean men came from the rural areas around Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Both Ms. Vien and Ms. Thuy had friends who had married Korean men and lived, happily it seemed, in South Korea. Like many Vietnamese, they were also avid fans of Korean television shows and movies, the so-called Korean Wave of pop culture that has swept all of Asia since the late 1990s.

The Korean Wave

The Korean Wave has transformed South Korea's image in the region, presenting the country as having successfully balanced tradition and modernity, a place that produces coveted Samsung cellphones and cherishes family ties.

The week the two women met their future husbands, Vietnamese television was showing in prime time a South Korean television series called "Successful Story of a Bright Girl" — the story of a simple country girl who goes to Seoul and captures the heart of a tycoon.

"To be honest, I don't know much about Korea except what I've seen on television," Ms. Vien said. "But the Korean landscape is beautiful. Korean men look sophisticated and affectionate. They seem responsible, and they live in harmony with their family members and their colleagues."

A soccer fan able to rattle off the jersey numbers of David Beckham and Zinedine Zidane, she had registered two years earlier with a broker for marriages with Koreans. Her father, a construction worker for a local firm, was able to send his two children — Ms. Vien and her older brother — to college.

By contrast, Ms. Thuy was one of five children of rice farmers. She had registered with the agency soon after graduating from high school.

“A friend of mine married a Korean man and now lives in Seoul,” Ms. Thuy said. “We talk on the phone sometimes. She’s very happy. She says there are so many people and tall buildings in Seoul.”

At age 22, she said, half of her peers had already married. As she waited to marry, she helped with household chores, forbidden by her parents to engage in the farm work that might blemish her looks.

The couples registered for their marriages and underwent medical checkups, running into other Vietnamese-Korean couples along the way.

The younger Mr. Kim wrote a letter in Korean to his bride — trying to allay the anxieties he saw on her face, promising to protect her and surmount the inevitable problems — but found no way to relay its meaning. The couples bought Korean and Vietnamese dictionaries, pointing to words or using broken English.

### The In-Laws

About 40 hours after landing here in Hanoi, the Korean men married their Vietnamese brides in a double ceremony. The brides’ relatives waited at a large restaurant here with expectant looks.

“Today is the union not only of two people, but of two countries,” said Ms. Vien’s father, To Minh Seu, 55. “Vietnam and Korea share many similarities. We are both Confucian societies.”

Standing next to her daughter and her new son-in-law, Ms. Thuy’s mother, Nguyen Thi Nguyet, 56, said: “This is a poor country, but conditions are much better in Korea. I hope my daughter will have a better life there.”

But Ms. Thuy’s father, Bui Van Vui, 52, was displeased that his daughter was marrying a man just one year younger than he was. The night before, he had telephoned Mr. Ahn to complain about the age gap between his daughter and Mr. Kim.

“I’m still very worried because of the age gap,” he said as his son-in-law listened to Mr. Ahn’s interpretation. “I’m slightly relieved now that I see my son-in-law for the first time. But I can’t stop worrying.”

“Don’t worry, don’t worry about a thing,” Mr. Kim said.

Still, the father looked grim throughout the ceremony.

“Let’s tell him about the compensation,” Mr. Kim told Mr. Ahn, referring to the \$100 he would send every month.

“Later, later,” Mr. Ahn said.

As he left the restaurant after the ceremony, the father turned around at the entrance to take a final look at his daughter. He pressed two fingers against his lips and kissed her goodbye.

Later, Ms. Thuy said: “I was my father’s favorite. He really adores me and is worried.”

She, too, was worried. “I know Korea only from television, but it must be very, very different from reality. I don’t know whether my new family will like me, and I don’t know how I’ll adapt. I’m overwhelmed with worries.”

### A New Chapter Begins

Two days later, it was time for the Korean men to return home, with their wives staying behind to complete the paperwork to join them.

At the airport here, Ms. Thuy announced that she had something to tell her husband and asked Mr. Ahn to interpret.

“Please extend my greetings to your mother and children,” she said.

Mr. Kim reached out for a handshake, but the brokers pressed him to give his wife a hug.

“Don’t worry about me,” she said. “I’ll study Korean very hard, and by the time you see me I’ll be good at it. We had only a short time together. But I felt affection between us and started to feel love for you. When you’re in Korea, please call me.”

“I’ll call you in two days,” he said.

The two women would leave Hanoi in three months, the same way half a dozen other Vietnamese brides, visas in hand, did on a recent night. The extended families of these brides had come from the countryside to bid them farewell, some still wearing car sickness patches behind their ears for the long drive here.

Many, it seemed, were visiting the airport for the first time. Some kept riding an escalator up and down, their faces showing the thrill of a new experience.

Then, with the boarding time approaching, they clustered in front of a window looking into the immigration office. Noses pressed against the glass, and waved at the brides as they were stamped out of Vietnam and went off to catch the red-eye to South Korea.

Su-hyun Lee contributed reporting.