

Learning Skills to Last a Lifetime and Traditions to Last Forever

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Preface

Vietnamese Scouting is the center of Vietnamese community- within it lies a network of Scouts, parents, and Scout Leaders that have common goals: to embrace the methods and principles of both the Boy Scouts of America and the Girls Scouts of USA, teach their young Scouts skills and morals that will help them in the future, and to preserve their traditions through the youths and general public.

Continuing on even after the Communist government took over and illegalized the Vietnamese Scouting Movement, it has spread its influence all over the world, and has only grown since its start in 1957 (*VCS Thang Tien IX*). In the next ten or so pages, you shall read about how the Vietnamese Scouting Movement and Organization, also known as Huong Dao Vietnam, has influenced the Santa Clara County- not just through the Vietnamese population but the general as well. Like other Scouting organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America and Girl Scouts of USA, it emphasizes several aspects, such as the participation in community service events and projects, as well as the learning of outdoor skills and the following of good ethnic laws and promises. However, adding to its list of goals, Huong Dao Vietnam, also puts much weight on the preservation of its Vietnamese culture- its traditions, customs, folklore, etc.

If it were not for the Vietnam War, Vietnamese Scouting may not have been so widespread or effective on the Vietnamese community all over the world- and yet even today, Vietnamese Scouting is still not legal or allowed in the original country where it all started. Continue reading on and recognize how the Vietnamese Scouting Movement has influenced the Santa Clara County, an area where scouts have learned skills to last throughout their lifetime, and traditions to last forever.

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Learning Skills to Last a Lifetime and Traditions to Last Forever

On July 11, 2009, at San Lorenzo Park in San Jose, over 2,600 Vietnamese Scouts were present for the ninth International Vietnamese Scouting Jamboree, also known as Thang Tien 9. Including guests, there was probably nearly three thousand people present that week for the five day camping trip. It is a tradition that started with the first Thang Tien, which took place in France in 1985. There were only 200 Scouts then. Every three to four years, another Thang Tien Jamboree is held, in another part of the world. In the past, it has taken place in Canada, France, Australia, and the United States. Vietnamese Scouting (Huong Dao Vietnam) has been going on since 1930, although it was not until 1957 that it became a part of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. However, when the original Vietnam capital, Saigon, fell and the Communist government seized the country, the Vietnamese Scouting Movement ceased. Nevertheless, many people fled their country in search of freedom and democracy. Among these people were former Scouting leaders from Vietnam. These people, and newcomers to Scout principles, came together and began a new Scouting movement, but this time, all around the world. The first Vietnamese Scouting Unit was established in 1975 in the refugee camp in Guam, in order to help Vietnamese refugees during their passage. From this sprung other Scouting Units, and eventually the International Central Committee of Vietnamese Scouting (ICCVS), which was formed to support communication between these Scouting units worldwide. Today, the Vietnamese Committee on Scouting of Santa Clara (VCS) oversees the progress of Scouting units in the Santa Clara County (VCS *Thang Tien IX*). In total, there are currently ten troops, many of which have over a hundred Scouts registered, with children ranging from the

ages of five to twenty-one (Nguyen, Hop). Through allowing and encouraging local troops to help out in their local communities, teaching Scouts outdoor survival skills, good morals, as well as leadership skills, and preserving Vietnamese traditions throughout the younger generations and the general public, Huong Dao Vietnam has been a great influence on the Santa Clara County.

All the troops in the county help out in their community one way or another. For example, every year in the April timeframe, the Children's Discovery Museum hosts a "Children of the Dragon Festival". During this festival, there are booths and events that portray parts of Vietnamese culture, including foods, music, arts and crafts, and even dances. During this two-day event, the local troops in the county volunteer to help out. At times, 150 Scouts would show up, the older Scouts helping with booths while the younger ones enjoy themselves at the museum (admission is free for Boy and Girl Scouts on these days). The troops would also contribute traditional dances as entertainment for the guests (Nguyen, Hop). This event is on a volunteer basis- it is not required for troops to volunteer their time to help out the museum, especially when choreographing dances as well as practicing them could take up quite a bit of time on the part of both Scouts and leaders. But helping out at the event allows younger Scouts to learn about their heritage, as well as expose the Vietnamese culture to other guests at the museum. In addition to volunteering at events, local troops also find their own ways to help the community. Lien Doan Phu Dong (Troop 60709 and 719) goes caroling annually at the Hank Lopez Community and Senior Center. Every Christmas, a group of about 20-30 Scouts would meet at the community center, and sing some Christmas songs. There would also be some Scouts who play songs on the piano (Lien Doan Phu Dong). The caroling makes the seniors (and

any family guests) happy and entertained, as well as allowing Scouts to have fun with their friends as well as help out in some way. In November, 2009, the troop also volunteered to march in the WWII Veteran's parade, each Scout carrying a blown-up picture of a war veteran. Later on, the troop was specially thanked at a "Spirit of '45" Conference, where they also got to meet Edith Shain, the nurse in the famous end of WWII photo where a sailor just swept her off her feet and kissed her (Lien Doan Phu Dong). Each Scout proudly represented a veteran, giving the soldiers recognition for serving the country, and emphasizing the importance of serving your country- because in a small way, that is what the troop did that day. Even though some troops may help out in the community less than other troops, Scouting always seems to incorporate some aspect of assisting the public in some way.

However, this sort of community service may not encourage Scouts to lend a hand on their own, whenever they can, with or without a large group to do it with them. They may be too shy to help, or just not care if their friends are not doing it. Some may think that the troops should encourage individual community service more. But apart from group activities with their troop, there are individual awards that can be earned for both girls and boys. These awards, (Silver and Gold Award for girls, and Eagle Scout for boys) require Scouts to do *large* community service projects that consist of the Scouts working on their own individual time, and mainly by themselves (Girl Scouts of America; Boy Scouts of America). These projects must be done on a Scout's own time, and the idea of a prestigious award gives motivation for the completion of the projects, which are strictly veered toward helping the community in some way. These awards also develop a Scout's own social, leadership, and planning skills, giving Scouts the confidence they need in doing things on their own, without needing a whole group of people

to be doing it with them as well.

Vietnamese Scouting teaches Scouts the skills they will need to be successful in the future, including survival skills for the outdoors, good morals, and leadership skills. An unwritten, but deeply implied tradition for Vietnamese Scout troops are annual camping trips, in which some of the basic routines include a “Big Game,” campfire with skits and performances from each group, and a cooking competition between the older girls and boys (Lien Doan *Flickr*; Lien Doan Phu Dong; Lien Doan Ra Khoi). These basic but key activities are fun for all Scouts to enjoy, but also teach them or improve important skills they may need in the future. Scouts learn how to cook, put up tents, be independent, lead a group of other people (both younger and older), practice and perform skits, as well as other skills. These trips also encourage Scouts to stay fit, as an aspect of the “Big Game” includes hiking for an extended time, and there are also areas to play sports during one’s free time (Lien Doan Phu Dong). Throughout the trip, Scouts also tend to bond more easily, getting to know their fellow Scouts better and also having fun with each other. Camping trips are great ways for Vietnamese troops to teach Scouts new lessons at the same time as improving ones they’ve already learned, as well as allowing friends to get to know each other better and make new friends too. Scouts also learn much discipline and order through Scouting- every week during a meeting, the typical routine starts off with a flag ceremony, which consists of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, singing the Huong Dao Theme, as well as the reciting of laws from each individual Scout group (Lien Doan Phu Dong; Lien Doan Au Lac). The ceremony is done regularly and teaches Scouts about proper order and regulation. It also teaches Scouts the importance of obeying, or at least respecting and listening to, an authority higher than their own. These guidelines, along with the skills to be taught

throughout the course of Scouting, help Scouts numerous times throughout the course of their lives, in many different situations.

The mission of the National Vietnamese Scouting Committee is “to prepare young people to make ethical choices over their lifetimes by instilling them the values of the Scout Oath and Law, focusing on the expanding programs and initiatives directed at the Vietnamese who live in the United States” (*Huong Dao Viet Scouting*). Coming from this goal, and also from the Boy Scout principles, are the Scout Laws that every Scout should recite and abide to, which includes lines that state certain principles, such as “A Scout is trustworthy... loyal... helpful... courteous... kind...” These laws are recited in Vietnamese as well as in English (*ICCVS HDVietnam*), and are expected to be followed by Scouts of all ages. The Huong Dao Vietnam Organization also has a motto, which is “Sap San.” The phrase translates to “Be Prepared” in English, paralleling it to the Boy Scout motto (*Huong Dao Viet Scouting*). It encourages all Scouts to be prepared for all sorts of situations, and also for Scout Leaders and volunteers to prepare their own younger scouts for the real world. These laws and principles are the basis for what Scouting aims to teach in each Scout, shaping him or her into having good morals as well as strong leadership skills. Such principles show that Scouting not only concentrates on physical and survival skills, but that there is also much emphasis on the shaping of a Scout’s character and personality.

On the other hand, one must also need communication and social skills to succeed in life, not just good morals and outdoor survival skills. Besides, it may be believed that the outdoor skills the Scouts learn may not even be used in their lives. It will seem that unless one plans on engaging in a career relating with the outdoors, the skills taught and practiced may

turn out to be quite useless throughout one's life. Yet, such survival skills may be needed when one least expects it. Not only are they often fun to learn and use, but it will keep a person ready for almost any situation- whether it is to help someone, or help one's self. Furthermore, communications skills are still very much addressed while one is a Scout- it is just found in different areas of Scouting. These communication skills lie in the projects one will work on to earn the awards possible for a Girl and Boy Scout, as well as in fundraising activities the troop will have, such as Girl Scout cookies and Boy Scout popcorn (*Girl Scouts of America; Boy Scouts of America*). While selling products, one will learn how to speak to different people, most of which are strangers one has probably never seen nor met. Scouts also learn how to react to different situations. They have to answer customer questions, be courteous even if the customer decides not to order anything, and also figure out and learn different ways to convince customers to buy the products. Vietnamese Scouting is able to teach a whole range of skills that will help Scouts be prepared for the real world later on, and become successful in their lives.

Huong Dao Vietnam works to preserve Vietnamese traditions and heritage by reaching out to the younger generation. The ICCVS is an organization that works to establish communication between Scouting units all around the world, as well as seeking "to preserve Vietnamese traditions and culture while adapting to the current needs in the Vietnamese Scouting community" (*ICCVS International Central*). Huong Dao Vietnam's goal is evident in their attempts to join Vietnamese families and communities together under one organization that strives to work together. Even in the Santa Clara County, there is an annual event in which all local troops come together and just participate in joint activities for a full day, as well as

enjoy performances performed by all the troops. Many of these activities and performances are based on Vietnamese tradition and culture, including the clothing worn during performances, and even just by parents sometimes. This day is called “Ngày Huong Dao Vietnam,” translating into Vietnamese Scouting Day. (Lien Doan Phu Dong *Website*). Through Huong Dao Vietnam, Scouts can learn, through both their fellow Scouts and leaders, about Vietnamese history, myths, and traditions, incorporating them into fun activities at the same time. This eventually makes the Scouts learn to love and truly think and reflect on their Vietnamese heritage, rather than taking it for granted. Outside of the large events, many troops incorporate traditions into their own annual, monthly, or even weekly activities, such as Lien Doan Rang Dong, whose program “provides the ideals and values of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) in conjunction with the Vietnamese tradition and culture” (*Dac San Thang Thien IX*). Scouts would have fun participating in these activities, and grow proud to be a part of Vietnamese Scouting, and in turn, make them proud to be Vietnamese. Some troops even have additional classes outside of the usual meeting time to teach Scouts how to read and write the Vietnamese language, spreading the knowledge to more of the younger generation (Lien Doan Huong Viet). Each troop offers different opportunities for the youthful Scouts to learn about their Vietnamese culture, and everything they do just adds another step to the ladder to ensure that their customs and ways of life will be preserved and carried on by the next generations, rather than disappearing with the older generation.

Huong Dao Vietnam not only tries to conserve culture through the younger generations of the Vietnamese community, but also the general public. At large Scouting events, such as Ngày Huong Dao Vietnam, or Thang Tien Jamborees, the council members for the Boy Scout

and Girl Scout office are normally present (VCS. *Thanh Tien IX*). The council members represent those who are not familiar with the Vietnamese customs and traditions, but who are witnessing them in the form of Scouting. Just by attending such events, they are already being exposed to the culture that holds the Vietnamese Scouting Organization together. Another example is at the “Children of the Dragon Festival” at the Children’s Discovery Museum, where any guests who come to the museum during that weekend will be able to watch the Vietnamese cultural performances performed on the stage outside of the museum. Along with the museum are booths, where guests can sample Vietnamese food, view the traditional clothing worn, types of boats used, arts and crafts, and more (Nguyen, Hop). Visitors would be able to see all kinds of different aspects of Vietnamese culture, and watch performances presented by the Scouts in any troops that choose to volunteer some kind of dance or piece. Huong Dao Vietnam plays a large role in the disclosure of Vietnamese ways of life to the public, making certain that such ways will continue on in others as well as the Vietnamese.

Sometimes it may seem too “one-sided” to teach Scouts only about Vietnamese traditions and not other cultures. Many may think that it would be better to have them learn about other cultures around the world and to stop keeping them isolated from other American Scouts that the Scouts should also be interacting with Scouts of other ethnicities. This is where involvement in American Girl Scouts comes in. Through participating in the Girl Scouts of America’s events, Scouts can learn all sorts of other things- not just about Vietnam- especially during the annual World Thinking Day. This event normally takes place in late February or early March, and is when all Girl Scout troops in an area come together, with each troop representing one country. Each troop must have representations of that country in some way, with a display

board, a dish from that country, and preferably a performance as well (*Girl Scouts of America*). This event is where everyone gets a chance to learn quick facts and get an idea of the cultures of different countries, as well as learn about the country one's troop picks. Other Girl and Boy Scout events around the country and world allow for other methods and opportunities to learn of other cultures, not to mention the American culture, as diverse as it already is. There are Boy and Girl Scout camping trips available for sign-ups, as well as programs a Scout can sign up for. Camp High Sierra is a camping trip held every summer around the July timeframe in which Boy Scouts ages eleven or older go on a camping trip with boys from other troops (*Boy Scouts of America Santa Clara Council*). On the trip, Boy Scouts from troops all over the county can meet each other and participate in activities together during the camping trip. They can learn to interact with other Boy Scouts, learn new things, and even make new friends. But in the end, it is always crucial for one to know one's own culture and heritage, and preserve its traditions. For once lost, it may be impossible to gain them back again.

Vietnamese Scouting has made a large impact on the Santa Clara County. Along with helping out in different community service projects and events, and teaching young Vietnamese skills in both survival and ethics, the Vietnamese troops have also brought together numerous Vietnamese families and ensured that their Vietnamese traditions will be preserved, by exposing them to the younger Vietnamese generation as well as the public. Huong Dao Vietnam has the ability to help shape the lives of the younger generation- encouraging them to help others, and giving them the skills they may need in the future, whether they are for surviving outdoors, or for just succeeding in life. It also teaches Scouts their heritage so that through the younger generation, as well as others whom the culture is exposed to, Vietnamese traditions

and culture will be remembered and continued on for as long as possible. Huong Dao Vietnam has been able to offer the Vietnamese population a way to guide their children in all sorts of ways that will help shape their character for the better, and help them to *be prepared* for the future- who wouldn't want their child to experience such an opportunity?



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