

## Consult the Cat

by Shannon Roy, Editor

*The Cat was talking with some friends among the Kansas Correctional Facility Librarians when the question of sources for Vietnamese language materials came up. The Correctional Facility Librarians said that this area was a real concern and not as easy to address as Spanish-language materials. The Cat commented that the same question sometimes surfaced from public librarians and that she would like to offer some help, but had no idea where to start. They recommended calling the Wichita Public Library, which has done good work in this area. The Wichita Public Library staff was very willing to help.*



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The Cat, like most cats, has a very strong sense of home place and returned to her birthplace after years in other parts of the country. She has a lively sympathy for those who have come to America from other countries and worked to make homes in various parts of the United States.

The Cat called Cynthia Berner-Harris at the Wichita Public Library, who recommended that she talk with Wichita Public's Collection Development Administrator, Mary Kay Bird-Guilliams. Mary Kay consulted with her staff and sent the following comments.

#### **Sources for Vietnamese-speaking Patrons and Their Families:**

The population from Vietnam that has immigrated to the United States has stabilized into a steadily-growing population across the United States with unique cultural attributes, but very much identifying itself primarily as American citizens. While there is still a substantial adult population of citizens whose first language is Vietnamese and who are comfortable reading in that language, the younger citizens are less fluent and few families, as yet, have reached the point where they wish to pass on or encourage their American-born children to retain or learn their language of cultural heritage. I fully expect that to come in the near future, but for now the reading population for Vietnamese is mostly adult. The second major point to keep in mind is that these citizens are in voluntary exile. While they may have ties to Vietnam, and may visit, the U.S. Vietnamese-born citizens have political differences with Vietnam that affect every type of material. Therefore, I do not recommend purchasing anything produced in Vietnam itself unless screened by a Vietnamese speaker.

There is a way to avoid this and purchase materials that are likely to please. The best option is to tap into the flourishing Vietnamese-American distributors and publishers, many of which are based in California and are available through websites. Not only books, but films and audio books are available. Some of these do a better job than others of giving we English-only speakers an idea of what we are purchasing, but the field is improving all the time.

Pan Asian is the safest choice, and is available both online and through a catalog. They also carry other languages and are reasonably reliable about their products. This may be found at:

<http://www.panap.com>

Multilingual also has some items in Vietnamese. These may be found at:

<http://www.multilingualbooks.com>

Music and film is highly popular with this population. There is a site called saigoncd.com. They aren't in Vietnam but in Texas and California. It can be found at:

<http://www.saigoncd.com>

Most traditional big vendors do not carry much in the way of materials in Vietnamese and what they do have is mostly in paperback. Libraries in parts of the country that have large populations of Vietnamese-Americans will order such materials, mostly fiction, and have them bound.

The Cat is very much obliged to Mary Kay and her staff for sharing this information. The Wichita Public staff members deserve a purr from the

Cat.