

The Empathizer

a documentary about vietnam.

directed by
FRED LE

shot and co-directed by
BRET HAMILTON

produced and edited by
HAK LONH



Overseas-born Vietnamese are returning in waves to the country their families fled decades ago.

Why?

THE FILM

Fred Le, a stand-up comedian, explores the narratives of young Vietnamese immigrants who, like himself, returned to the homeland their parents departed after the Vietnam War. A journey of self-reflection through snippets of candid conversations with friends old and new. Fred embodies the complex sentiments of someone who benefited from their parents' sacrifices yet opted to return to a land once lost to them, unpacking his mother's statement:

"That's not my Vietnam anymore."

WHY THIS FILM?

The Empathizer offers a fresh cinematic approach to modern Vietnamese history, exploring not just the "what" and "why" but the intricate ways these legacies shape successive generations. With a blend of humor, irreverence, and surreal moments, the film defies conventions to deliver a poignant portrayal of Fred, a Việt kiều grappling with the complexities of identity and belonging in a Vietnam transformed by time and memory.

This film transcends its own perceived genre of "cultural documentary." *The Empathizer* is a rarity in that it can appeal to a wide, mainstream audience who will be attracted by its accessible humor and eye-catching visual language, but the nuanced conversations and frequent introspective moments are what makes the film inherently rewatchable and worth sharing.

“My mom, was like, ‘Why would you wanna go back to the country I left to give you a better life?’”

—Khoa Tran | Kent, WA

JOIN US

This is a time when Asian stories are needed now more than ever. We have a strategic finishing and distribution plan in place in order to reach broad audiences domestically and internationally:

- Red carpet film festival screenings to build awareness and earn press coverage
- Partnerships with influencers in the areas of Vietnamese diaspora, Asian, and immigrant studies
- Screenings & discussions at top universities and libraries
- Grassroots outreach to dignitaries, politicians, and businesspeople in major Vietnamese communities
- Educational & discussion materials to facilitate important conversations
- National television broadcast (PBS, CNN, IFC)
- Distribution on a major streaming platform



THE FILMMAKERS

FRED LE was born in San Jose, California six years after his mother fled Saigon on a boat. A deeply proud Việt kiều, he focuses his creative output on exploring the second-generation Asian immigrant experience through standup comedy, his variety show *Embarrassed by Night*, and now with his first film. As a comic, he's earned invites to showcase at prestigious festivals such as San Francisco Sketchfest, Boom Chicago! in Amsterdam, and Treefort Music Fest. He is a graduate of the UC Santa Cruz Film & Digital Media program.

BRET HAMILTON is a documentary director of photography based in Los Angeles. Bret also lived in Vietnam during the same period as Fred, where he developed a deep affection for the culture and community in Vietnam while working as a documentarian for a variety of media outlets including one of the top online food and travel channels: *Best Ever Food Review Show*. More recently, Bret has partnered with brands like *Rolling Stone* magazine, Showtime and Salesforce to capture engaging stories for their global audiences.

HAK LONH is an Academy of Art University graduate, launched his career as a freelance editor with esteemed ad agencies like Chiat Day, Wieden Kennedy, and 180 LA. His editing prowess shaped groundbreaking campaigns for Apple, Playstation, Nike, and Nutella, alongside music videos for artists like Adele, Snoop Dogg, and Ryan Adams. Noteworthy collaborations include serving as an additional editor on *I'm Still Here* featuring Oscar-nominated actor Joaquin Phoenix, under the direction of Casey Affleck. Beyond editing, Hak demonstrates his versatility as a director and producer, with a diverse portfolio spanning commercial projects to feature films.

