



# Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam

*Andrew X. Pham*

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## **Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam**

Andrew X. Pham

A Vietnamese Bicycle Days by a stunning new voice in American letters.

Andrew X. Pham dreamed of becoming a writer. Born in Vietnam and raised in California, he held technical jobs at United Airlines-and always carried a letter of resignation in his briefcase. His father had been a POW of the Vietcong; his family came to America as "boat people." His sister committed suicide, prompting Andrew to quit his job. He sold all of his possessions and embarked on a year-long bicycle journey that took him through the Mexican desert, where he was treated as a *bueno hermano*, a "good brother"; around a thousand-mile loop from Narita to Kyoto in Japan; and, after five months and 2,357 miles, to Saigon, where he finds "nothing familiar in the bombed-out darkness." In Mexico he's treated kindly as a *Vietnamito*, though he shouts, "I'm American, Vietnamese American!" In Vietnam, he's taken for Japanese or Korean by his countrymen, except, of course, by his relatives, who doubt that as a Vietnamese he has the stamina to complete his journey ("Only Westerners can do it"); and in the United States he's considered anything but American. A vibrant, picaresque memoir written with narrative flair and a wonderful, eye-opening sense of adventure, *Catfish and Mandala* is an unforgettable search for cultural identity.

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