

Name of Interviewer: Hung Viet Van

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Search Key Words: Immigration; Teaching, Vietnam

Name of Person Interviewed (or pseudonym): Hoang Ngo Huu

Name	Transcript
<i>00:01</i> Hung	How was the place where you grew up?
Thay	Very pretty. In the central Vietnam. I grew up very strong.
Hung	How was your life like as a child.
<i>02:07</i> Thay	Pleasant, all I knew was school. If a boy wasn't the right age for school, he had to join the army. Therefore my parents, like other parents, didn't want their child to join the army. So they made me go to school. For example, when one goes to school up to 12 th grade and graduates, they can't be over 18. If they are, they have to join the army. I have to go fight in the war and that was something nobody wanted.
Hung	How did your parents discipline you?
Thay	My father and mother were very strict though they rarely ever hit me. Although in Vietnam at the time hitting your child wasn't anything odd, my parents didn't do it. Just yelled. Yelled and lectured. Though we all have to remember that hitting your child in Vietnam is not out of the ordinary. Very normal. The higher the class in society, the less hitting your child was occurred. In Vietnam they say that "we tend to hit our kids." Though it's mostly in the lower class, even up to the middle class. However the upper class the ones with good education and high social status did not spank their children.
Hung	How was daily life in Vietnam?
Thay	Just normal. After school I'd stay after and study some more. Music...tutorial classes...play. Soccer. All the kids were the same. After I grew up I stopped liking soccer as much and became a teenager who liked music so I studied music. I played many different instruments but settled on the guitar.
Hung	Classical?
Thay	No, modern. I was in a music band in high school.

- Hung** What different jobs did you have? Were you always a teacher?
- Thay** Yea, I've taught forever. Since I was 22 years old I've been teaching.
- Hung** What can you say about the culture in Vietnam?
06:07
- Thay** It's not easy in Vietnam. It's hard to explain without paring the culture with the politics. Cultural and political. Therefore this question is really hard to answer. But if you had asked Were you involved in any cultural activities or political organizations? Then I can say yes. Vietnam has something that I think is really good. I'd have to give credit to. That is the Youth Union. Youth Union. They govern over a lot of laws in Vietnam but also many social organizations and movements too. Sports, charities...but that is that. They are all still related to politics in Vietnam. But before '75, there was a great cultural organization that was not involved with the government. For instance the Buddha Family Association. They were boy scouts. They taught life skills. For a better life. Stronger life. More meaning. All that before '75.
- Hung** Where were you during the war?
09:18
- Thay** I was in Nha Trang. That place back then during that time was occupied by many American soldiers. There was a very large American Air Force base.
- Hung** Were you involved in the war?
- Thay** No, no. I was way too young. Only those who were 18 and up had to enter the war. But those who were still in 12th grade didn't have to.
- Hung** Did you have family members in the war?
- Thay** Of course. My father and brother both were in the war. Remember people who were over 18 fought. I was 15. Everyone over 18 was more or less involved with the war. During that time my family was in the south. So we were involved with the Southern government and the U.S.'s interference.
- Hung** Do you have memories of the war?
- Thay** Oh many. I remember when I was 4 or 5 years old. It was 65 66, when U.S. just started coming over. I was still little. I used to look so cute, so chubby. The U.S. soldiers loved me very much.
- Hung** How did the war affect your family?
- Thay** Affected everything. We just have to remember there were families which suffered a lot. Families died from the war. Houses lost. Some families only a little.
- Hung** How is life now after the war?

13:10

Thay After the war? There is still suffering. Something I can say is that after a country experiences a war, suddenly everybody lives a hard life. Now when we speak of hardships, I mean extreme hardships. That's a whole other issue. According to me, after war, everyone suffers. So after the war, I still tried to study and live life. After a while it got easier.

Hung How long have you been in the United States?

Thay Just now 2 years.

Hung How were you allowed to come to the U.S.?

Thay For research, lecturing. I started out teaching at John's Hopkins.

Hung Was it hard for you to leave?

Thay It was a difficult decision. I did the full ride program. You're are still young and don't know, but they send you over here to study from all over the world. Everything is taken care of. For example they sponsored only 20 people from Vietnam for the program. Only 7 for post-doctoral candidates. Likewise, the U.S. only sent 7 over there. Scholar exchange program.

Hung Has anyone come to the U.S. with you?

Thay Yes, my wife who just had our first child. So my son was born in the United States. Maryland in the hospital. John's Hopkins hospital.

Hung Did you bring anything from Vietnam?

Thay Many things, mainly my books. My notes and my books.

Hung Have you traveled anywhere since you've arrived?

Thay many places..Washington D.C...and other places like that.

Hung What was your favorite place?

Thay Washingto D.C. because that was the place I had to get my paperwork. I've also been to UC Berkley.

Hung Did you like California?

Thay Yea. Good. California is a place I like a lot.

Hung How did you travel around?

16:42

Thay Airplane.

Hung Did you meet a lot of people? How did they treat you?

Thay Very friendly. Something very special about is that people are really friendly. Very friendly, helpful and individualism. They don't bother other people. But other countries in Asia, people do things they shouldn't do in the street. Molesting other people. In the U.S. I don't see that.

Hung How do you feel about your decision to move to the U.S.?

Thay great..

(Phone rings)

19:18

Hung What are some differences and similarities between your old community and your new one?

Thay Very different. As a human, there are a lot of similarities. Love, hunger etc. Those are all similar. Such as when I teach in the U.S., when I criticize someone they feel bad just like in Vietnam. But the way they show it is very different. Life in the U.S. people get upset about more things. That will develop into something. But other countries, Asia and mainly Vietnam is very different. The awareness is different. In Vietnam people don't care if people litter. People argue and yell at each other. Traffic jams. It's not a big deal. The lifestyle is different. The thinking is different. That's something that unique to my homeland. Something I remember very much. Though there are things, bad things I don't care to remember as easily. For example, ideally one would always like to strive for a better life. Realistically, some of the poor families have no way of living better. So then how is life? It's very hard to explain. In life you should approach better things.

Hung Do you speak with your family in Vietnam?

Thay Frequently, once a week.

Hung Have you been to Vietnam recently?

Thay Just 2 months ago.

Hung Do you go to visit or what?

Thay yea, because of my visa status.

Hung How are your visits? Does everything change?

24:48

Thay Change. Change a lot. Vietnam is special in that change happens in not a year but a month. From month to month. Very fast. The change is scary. The life is constantly changing. For example you see oil refineries and buildings. It just means more work and a changing life.

Hung Does your family pray to ancestors?

Thay Yea, my grandparents, my great grandparents. Those are the days that the offspring must concentrate.

Hung According to you, how is the Vietnamese culture in the U.S.?
27:44

Thay What do I think? One thing I have a feeling of, referring to the Vietnamese culture in the U.S., I feel today that maybe people in Vietnam and Vietnamese people in the U.S.A have lots of varieties of Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture. You know varieties? For example I saw Vietnamese language in the U.S. hasn't been developing. It has stopped since 19'75, where as Vietnamese language in Vietnam has been developing very much since 19'75. I mean more than 30 years a language in the country where the native speakers use has much developed where as in the U.S. it hasn't been developing very much. Similarly, culture is the same. In some way, Vietnamese cultures in the U.S. is suddenly affected by U.S. culture.

Hung Would you say Vietnamese culture is the U.S. hasn't stopped, but it's changing?

Thay It changes but in a different way, and that way has something about it. It's affected by U.S. culture more. It's not completely genuine, not completely original. Albeit culture in Vietnam changes a lot. when you are going along the same straight, sometimes you can keep right, sometimes you can keep left, sometimes straight sometimes stop but also on the same street. that is the culture in Vietnam. It is still the same. But the culture in Vietnam, you might turn onto a different street. Those streets are influenced by American culture, Mexican culture, everybody. So should know that a country with diversity multicultural diversity. It's different. For example, you. Can you tell me what culture you belong to?

Hung No...I can not.

Thay See You can't answer whether which culture you belong to. But a student in Vietnam can instantly reply. See. That is different. Right now you can say I belong to U.S. culture..not sure? But you can say I belong to Vietnamese culture likewise not sure. That is a huge interference that Vietnamese society in America has to deal with.

Hung Is it important to keep cultural identity?
31:35

Thay Sure, sure. You have to keep it. Why, because I usually tell my students in Vietnam. We usually forget our culture when we are in another country. In college usually encourage people to maintain and develop their culture but when we don't keep up with it, it's absurd. Why? It's unreasonable. Therefore we must keep it. I am really sad when you guys speak weak Vietnamese or when you are unaware of Vietnamese culture. But with me, all I can ask for effort. Sometimes I think that an effort may be better than competence. Effort is very important.

Hung Is there anything else you want to add?

Thay No, that's it. Those were pretty much all my memories of mine.

Hung I have one more question for you. When you teach here, how is it different than in Vietnam?

34:20

Thay Very different. Similar and different. Same in the macro. Students everywhere are grade conscious so they try hard. Likewise, students everywhere also like playing and become lazy. The differences are the way they learn. The method of learning. The way the school is different. U.S. students are very lucky. Lucky that they can have so much interaction with the teachers. In Vietnam, students are great in the way that they overcome hardships. Just imagine, they are not like you. They are broke. Their families have to sell rice so that they can send money so they can go to school. Those who smoke cigarettes can not eat for day for their habit.

Hung So then would you say that students in Vietnam value their education more?

Thay They desire. Students in Vietnam study abroad. Think about it. Many students in the U.S. don't study abroad because they think they are okay. You go to school here in Texas, there are so many colleges here, no reason to travel to Europe. No use. What for? For nothing. But in Vietnam leaving is better. Any place but here. Even Singapore would be great. Philippines is good. Don't need to go to America. But unfortunately, all Vietnamese students know is studying. They don't know how to live life. They won't even evaluate their teachers. That's bad because teachers don't check themselves. No competition. No effort. The teachers begin to slack. The difference is the method in teaching and students. But it's all culture.
