

**Name of Interviewer:** Charlie Lee  
**Method of Recording Interview:** Digital audio  
**Language of Interview:** English  
**Location of the Interview:** [Interviewee's House] Austin, Texas  
**Date:** October 03, 2008  
**Themes:** Immigration; Education; Employment; Vietnamese Bilingual Program  
**Name of Person Interviewed** (or pseudonym): Dr. Chat Thiet  
**Contact Information of Person Interviewed:** [6003 Rain Creek Parkway, Austin, Texas, 78759; (512) 342-7153; masauchat@yahoo.com]

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
0:07 Charlie	When did you leave Vietnam?
Chat	I left Vietnam in 1964 with my three girls. The oldest one was 11 years old and the second one is 7 years old and the youngest one was 4. And I left to join, I left Vietnam to join my husband who study already at the University of Texas. He left Vietnam in 1963 as a student. And I became a student at UT also in 1964.
Charlie	When you came over, what did you decide to bring with you?
Chat	I really didn't bring anything because I...By that time I thought that after 4 years of studying, when I got my degree and my husband got his degree. We will go home. So I didn't really take anything with me. Only some clothes just you know the usual things that you need like some clothes that's all that I brought.
Charlie	What happened during your journey over to the U.S.? How was your experiences?
Chat	[small laugh] Talking about my journey from Vietnam was very bad. It was a very funny thing. By that time in 1964, I did not speak English. So with my 3 children on the airplane, we really did not get anything to eat or drink besides whatever the hostess gave us. And then again when we arrived in Los Angelos. The airplane, my airplane was delayed for 12 hours. And we were there at the airport without English, we don't know how to use our money. And I called my husband who was waiting for us in San Antonio. And he say "use your coins and get something to eat from the machine." I said what kind of coin and how do you operate the machine. For 12 hours we just drank the water and we did not know how to use how to operate the water fountain and the only water that we could find was in the bathroom, from the fountain, you know from the faucet in the bathroom. And we just drank that water for 12 hours. [laughter] And when we arrived in San Antonio, my husband was there but we were exhausted. Really it was a very bad experience. It was a bad trip for us.

Charlie Wow, I can only imagine. How do you feel about your decision to move to the U.S.?

Chat Well at first, I love to come to the U.S. because I want to further my education. And I thought that after I got my degree I would come home and I would make something new to my school because I had my own school in Vietnam before I left. And I had 500 children there with 12 teachers with/working for me. So I thought that you know it was a new opportunity for me to further my education. And then go home and improve my school in Vietnam.

5:11

Charlie What was the hardest thing about starting a new life here?

Chat Well for me, I don't see any difficulty. But I hope to little by little to make myself feel that I belong to this land. Because when I left Vietnam, I was a student and I thought that after my degree I would go back. So I have never put in mind that I would stay in America. So it is very hard for me to get use to the idea to live here.

Charlie How did you find a job here?

Chat It is not very hard because with the university degree from the University of Texas, UT, and my husband had an engineering degree and master degree in Chemistry. We find our jobs...we did not find a hard time to find a job.

Charlie By that time your English was proficient enough?

Chat Yes..Yea

Charlie What kind of occupation have you held in the United States?

Chat Let me see. I start by being a translator with Betol Engineering Company in San Francisco and Houston and I used my French. I was a translator from French-English or English-French. And then later in 1983, Austin ISD needs a bilingual teacher. Then I applied for the job, I got the job. But, then I had to go back to the university for...to get a teaching certification because they said my PHD was not enough to teach elementary school. So I had to go back for my certification.

Charlie You had experience in Vietnam teaching too.

Chat Yea. Uh huh.

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

Chat Well as I told you, the old community is the old community in Vietnam use to be an extended family and close friends. Because Vietnam is not that big. Because family and friends live very close to one another and we spend a lot of time together. But here, I find like sometime we found loneliness because you know like my own family like my children, one live in California, I have sisters and brothers in California, in Florida, in Washington D.C., in Virginia. And my oldest daughter is a plastic surgeon now, she is in the closest one is in San Antonio. So it is a kind of far away, people just...the kind of hard really hard to get together. Like in Vietnam, family get together like almost everyday. Friends get together everyday after work, and here you don't have that. You don't. Number one, you don't have enough time to do that. Number two, we just live too far from one another and that is what I feel is the difference between the old community in Vietnam and the new community here in the United States. I feel a kind of some loneliness in my life.

10:20

Charlie Did you experience any culture shock coming to America?

Chat To tell you the truth, I don't experience any culture shock because I have been raised and I have lived with...in two culture with two cultures since my young age. My family, all the members of my family, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, everybody speaks French. And study in French and attended French school. So we live in a particular two cultures since we were young. So when we come to the United States, we don't have any problem to getting along with another culture.

Charlie Are you a U.S. citizen?

Chat Citizen? Yes. I become an American citizen after 75'. Yea.

Charlie Was the citizenship test difficult to pass?

Chat Not for us because we have study like government, history, American government, U.S. history at the university when we attended university so it is not very hard.

Charlie So do you think yourself as an American or Texan? Why or why not?

Chat A kind of yes and no. Yes, because we are here and I feel like this country is my country now, but you know in my heart I still pretty much feel like I still I'm still very much Vietnamese.

Charlie Are you involved?

Chat No [giggles] I just vote. I do exercise my rights as U.S. citizen. I vote and every time that I have to but I'm not very much involved.

Charlie Do you still keep in touch with family and relatives in Vietnam?

Chat Yes but all my brothers and sisters are here with their families. I have very a kind of remote cousin.

Charlie So all of your immediate family members are all here.

Chat Yes, and my parents passed away in the early 70s.

Charlie So have you gone back to visit Vietnam?

Chat Yes, I did. I went back two times. One time when a kind of 15 years ago when my last brother was still in Vietnam, but he now sponsor by his own children and so we don't have anymore family over there. But we did return to Vietnam last February just for a quick visit.

Charlie How was the experience over in Vietnam?

Chat I love Vietnam because it is my country. But I don't feel as comfortable as I should because I did not find anything that...not like the Vietnam that I use to. It has so changed so much now that I don't find the way to my own house.

15:15

Charlie Does your family celebrate important holidays like Tet?

Chat Yes. But not in the United States. But when we were in Vietnam, yes, Tet is the big holiday. We celebrate Tet a month before the first day of the year and then a week after that, very big holiday in Vietnam. Everybody get new things, get to clean the house, decorate the house, buy new clothes, and just decorate the house like you know because they believe that if we get new clothes and get new things in the house that you get luckier for the year...the coming year.

Charlie So the Tet in the U.S. is a lot different than Tet in Vietnam?

Chat Yes. Because Tet in the U.S. fall in during the weekday and everybody is working and also family can not get together because we live far from each other.

Charlie I have some questions about the after school, Vietnamese After-School Program. Can you tell me some more details about it?

Chat Yes. Lets see, I started the Vietnamese After-School at Walnut Creek in 1983 and it's a program. It's called a bilingual program but is not a bilingual as like the Hispanic bilingual program. This is a very different from the any other bilingual program. It is a put out program. The Vietnamese children enroll in Walnut Creek would come to us each class come to us an hour and half a day. The children in the regular classroom with the regular American teacher, they just only come to us an hour and half a day for us to teach them English with the support of the Vietnamese language if needed. And then in the afternoon at 2:45 at the end of the school day, the children would stay with us again until around 4:30 or 5:00 and we call that after school program. So that in that after school program we have a lot of UT student volunteer as like you Charlie. We try to help them with their homework and after their homework, they have two times a week dragon dance and martial arts as their extracurricular activity. That help the children to be follow up with the school activities, school homework and also keep the children go on with the culture, tradition of Vietnamese that the parents did not have the time to really give to them. Because some of the parents have to either work two or three jobs. And some of the parents are not fluent in English. So the children would need us to support them in homework and other activities too.

20:36  
Charlie .....

Chat And we need a lot of volunteers like you.

Charlie Has there been any difficulties running the program? Like funding and support?

Chat Yes. We have lots of trouble from the school district. Number one is the children, the Vietnamese students work very hard and we support them in all of their classwork, homework so they generally do very well. Every year the third, fourth, and fifth grade have their TAKS test. Without...if they don't pass the TAKS test, they won't be promoted to the next class. Our children pass the test from 95-100% every year.

Charlie Impressive

Chat They apply the rule of the other bilingual program which is when you pass the test, it proves that your English is good or you are fluent in English so you don't need the program anymore. So they tried to exit those students, but they do not know why do they work so well and why do they have good result like that is because we support them from A to Z. The parents

can not do that at home since because they are not good in English to support them at home. And we support them, but then the school district says they are good and have to exit the program. So it's a kind of parents say that they did not agree with that decision because they are afraid that once their children exit the program, they would not do well as well as when they are in the program. And then where do they get the support. But then the school district did not pay attention whatever the job or the work that we are doing, but only the result of the test. Then the children feel that when they do well, instead of rewarding them with extra time and extra support. They punish them as exiting from the program where they can have the only place where they can have extra support. That is dilemma that we have to work with right now. And we are debating with the school district right now for the rights of the children.

Charlie            Interesting. I have been volunteering for 3 years and was told the summer program would be discontinued because of funding.

25:19

Chat                Yes. Actually, they took away the funding for summer school for Vietnamese saying the Vietnamese are doing too well and don't need summer school. They took away the funding for after school program saying the children are doing so well they do not need the after school program. With all of the teachers there, they say with or without funding, we are still working and still running the after school program.

Charlie            I have volunteered for the Spanish Bilingual Program at UT. It is totally different from the Vietnamese program. There is a lot more dedication helping the children versus the Spanish Program. The Spanish Bilingual Program is not as widely supported from the faculty.

Chat                Thank you very much Charlie for noticing that and we are very proud of our teachers and our program and our children. They are doing very well because of the dedication of the teachers and the volunteers. I have to thank the volunteers like you.

Charlie            Do you think there is more potential now that the program has moved to another school because it is under populated?

Chat                Yes. The principal of the new school is very understanding and she has been doing all she can to support us up to now. It is now up to what we can get from the school district.

Charlie            What do you think will become of the Vietnamese culture in the U.S.? Do you think it will be as strong?

Chat                We love to kind of maintain the Vietnamese culture as much as we can. Because we think that we are here and we want to get anything good from

both sides, American culture and Vietnamese culture. And we would love to benefit for the children for both sides. And thanks to the Vietnamese community in town, to the Vietnamese families are pretty much in touch with one another.

Charlie I notice the Vietnamese culture tend to stick together.

Chat Yes.

Charlie I think that is all that I have to ask you. Thank you for your time.

Chat Thank you Charlie. It was my pleasure.

### Excerpts

Name	Transcript
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Subject: Leaving Vietnam  
00:10

Chat I left Vietnam in 1964 with my three girls. The oldest one was 11 years old and the second one is 7 years old and the youngest one was 4. And I left to join, I left Vietnam to join my husband who study already at the University of Texas. He left Vietnam in 1963 as a student. And I became a student at UT also in 1964.

Subject: Journey from Vietnam  
01:58

Chat [small laugh] Talking about my journey from Vietnam was very bad. It was a very funny thing. By that time in 1964, I did not speak English. So with my 3 children on the airplane, we really did not get anything to eat or drink besides whatever the hostess gave us. And then again when we arrived in Los Angelos. The airplane, my airplane was delayed for 12 hours. And we were there at the airport without English, we don't know how to use our money. And I called my husband who was waiting for us in San Antonio. And he say "use your coins and get something to eat from the machine." I said what kind of coin and how do you operate the machine. For 12 hours we just drank the water and we did not know how to use how to operate the water fountain and the only water that we could find was in the bathroom, from the fountain, you know from the faucet in the bathroom. And we just drank that water for 12 hours. [laughter] And when we arrived in San Antonio, my husband was there but we were exhausted. Really it was a very bad experience. It was a bad trip for us.

Subject: Starting New Life  
05:17

Chat Well for me, I don't see any difficulty. But I hope to little by little to

make myself feel that I belong to this land. Because when I left Vietnam, I was a student and I thought that after my degree I would go back. So I have never put in mind that I would stay in America. So it is very hard for me to get use to the idea to live here.

Subject: New Community vs. Old Community

08:16

Chat

Well as I told you, the old community is the old community in Vietnam use to be an extended family and close friends. Because Vietnam is not that big. Because family and friends live very close to one another and we spend a lot of time together. But here, I find like sometime we found loneliness because you know like my own family like my children, one live in California, I have sisters and brothers in California, in Florida, in Washington D.C., in Virginia. And my oldest daughter is a plastic surgeon now, she is in the closest one is in San Antonio. So it is a kind of far away, people just...the kind of hard really hard to get together. Like in Vietnam, family get together like almost everyday. Friends get together everyday after work, and here you don't have that. You don't. Number one, you don't have enough time to do that. Number two, we just live too far from one another and that is what I feel is the difference between the old community in Vietnam and the new community here in the United States. I feel a kind of some loneliness in my life.

Subject: Culture Shock

10:25

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“I left Vietnam in 1964 with my three girls. The oldest one was eleven years old and the second one is seven years old and the youngest one was four. I left Vietnam to join my husband who study already at the University of Texas. He left Vietnam in 1963 as a student, and I became a student at UT also in 1964. But I hope little by little to make myself feel that I belong to this land [America]. Because when I left Vietnam, I was a student and I thought that after my degree I would go back. So I have never put in mind that I would stay in America. So it is very hard for me to get use to the idea to live [here].”

I have chosen to correct very little grammar to maintain the emotions of the interview. The interview was conducted in the home of the interviewee. The atmosphere was very welcoming and relaxed. I did not feel like a stranger, but more as a close friend. I was able to meet Dr. Chat's husband and youngest daughter at her home.