Background: Tay Tay Mynt was born in Burma in 1970 and grew up during the military dictatorship of Burma’s government. She studied International Relations in college, however, her college studies were paused due to the harsh efforts of the military dictatorship to limit politically active college students. To avoid arrest, Mynt and her husband fled Burma to a refugee camp at the Thailand-Burmese border, where she helped start the English School in the camp. In 2009, they relocated to Houston. She worked various jobs, continued her education in Medical Office Management, and finally started working at the HOPE Clinic. In this interview, Tay Tay Mynt shares her experiences and difficulties living under Burma’s military dictatorship and her life as a refugee. She explains her journey, physically from Burma to Thailand to America, and personally from Burmese citizen to refugee status to American citizen. She discusses her identification as Burmese, her experiences adjusting to life in Houston, and her responsibilities at the HOPE Clinic.

Setting: This interview was conducted on July 24th, 2018 at the HOPE Clinic.

Key:
TTM: Tay Tay Mynt
SD: Sara Davis
ZC: Zoe Clark
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
…: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?) preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

Interview Transcript:
SD: Today is July 24th, 2018, and we are here at the HOPE Clinic with Tay Tay Mynt um to interview her for the Houston Asian American Archive. My name is Sara Davis.

ZC: My name is Zoe Clark.

SD: Um, so to start, can you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

TTM: Um, I-- I was born in 1970 in Burma. It is in um upper Burma like a small... s-- not like too small town like the name is Monywa(?) and I was uh... so since um since I was born to until my high school, I live in Monywa(?) and then after I finish my high school, upon my uh college uh education, I went to Mandalay City. And so, any-- any information do you want? [laughs] I-- I'm not sure.

SD: Um, do you have any siblings growing up?

TTM: Oh, okay. I have one big sister and two younger brothers. [SD: Okay.] They are still in Monywa(?), in Burma [SD: Okay.] Yeah.
SD: And what did you parents do?

TTM: Uh uh, before when I was um childhood, we have our like a traditional medicine. We produce the traditional medicine. And then uh later on like uh Western uh Western medicine uh most popular than the traditional medicine, so business is so slow. Then later, we changed to the soy-- soy sauce, soy sauce, [SD: Oh.] and then uh chile, chile sauce like production. [SD: Okay.] We do, yes.

SD: So did you have a store that you sold at or did you just distribute it?

DDT: Distribute.

SD: Distribute. Okay.

TTM: Distribute in store, yeah.

SD: Okay. And then what did you study in college?

TTM: Uh, International Relations

SD: What made you choose that?

TTM: Uh, that time I wants to be ambassador [SD: Mm.] so I choose International Relation.

SD: Okay. [TTM: Yeah.] And then did you work while you were in school or... what was like your college experience like?

TTM: College experience. Uh its like uh our country, that time our country is under the military dictator, so we don't have big opportunity to do whatever we want because everything is controlled by military. And then like a good position like a ambassador or something like that, good position can get like people are very close with the military group. So like a our normal po-- people cannot get a like good position, good uh like uh d-- go-- uh gov-- de-- uh depart-- departmental government office, like government office we cannot get it.

SD: Oh okay. So how long was the military like there?

TTM: Uh since 1988 to uh like two years ago, so uh 2016, [SD: Okay.] yeah military government.

SD: Okay. So is that like um, what was your experience like with that growing up, like was it sort of a scary time or was it just sort of normal for you at that point?

TTM: Yeah, [clears throat] so 1988, that time, I was in first year in college, so um we have big revolution because of the socialist government. It is like a uh uh they are like they treat, they treat like uh very bad to the popula-- people in Burma, so people cannot uh like under their rule, they don't want anymore under their rule. So the student start to uh, start to break(?) out and then uh uh-- against the government, and then big revolution happen. So that time I was in first year student at the college, so that time the college uh close for like two years, [SD: Okay.] we don't have any chance to go to study, and then just stay home, [SD: Mhmm.] and um... just stay home. After that like uh the military, they
coup the the uh power, they take over the power, and then they oppress uh most of the stu-- uh like uh they oppress mostly to the student because the student are all the time start to like against so... [SD: Mhmm.] Sorry, I am emotion.

SD: That's okay. That's alright.

ZC: That's okay.

TTM: So and later like uh totally military, uh military government totally rule all of our country, and uh so everything we do something related with politic, they uh they arrested, and some people got killed. [SD: Mhmm.] Like um they try to kill the opposition, opposite uh like opposition party, uh they don't allow anybody talk about related with the politics. You can do like any like drug or whatever they don't care. Just they care about only politics. [SD: Only politics.] So yeah, we are very keep quiet that time, [SD: Right] yeah until, until 2014, 15.

SD: Okay. So were you part of any of this other students who like wanted to be part of the revolution or were you just [TTM: Yeah.] trying to just keep quiet?

TTM: Uh, my parents uh they don't want me to get arrested, [SD: Right.] so they all the time control to us, [SD: Mhmm.] "Don't do-- don't get involved, don't make it friends with like the politic group, politic- - politic like interesting friends." They don't let us make friend. Um but uh as much as we can, we tried to against, um so later, uh I fell in love with a guy who is a very active politic and a student. So um he-- he got arrested, and then he get in the prison for, he was sentenced in prison for 6 years, but he released after two years. And we got married and then later they keep doing, he keep doing uh with the politic after he released, so we fled to Thailand Burma border area. We stay in the refugee camp. [SD: Okay, so what year?] in 2005.

SD: In 2005. Okay. So you were... 35 at that time?

TTM: Yes.

SD: Okay. And then did you flee just the two of you or wha-- did your family come?

TTM: Uh no, only me and my husband.

SD: Okay.

TTM: Yeah. In the refugee camp, we lived since 2005 to 2009.

SD: Okay. And what was that like, living there?

TTM: Um... excuse me?

SD: What was it like living at the camp?

TTM: Uh it is uh under the uh Thai government control. [SD: Mhmm.] It was uh like a... how many mi- - it is in the mountain and then border uh close to the Burma border, Burma border. Uh... so we-- we don't allow to go outside uh um so the-- the camp area, we just stay inside the camp area. They provide
uh uh... like uh some rice... [inaudible] water, small bottle of cooking oil, and some uh nutrition powder, and then some fish paste, they provide to us. And they don't allow to walk outside any business or any farm, so bu-- some people try to uh sneak out and then walk at the some farm area, like Thailand farm, [SD: Mhmm.] uh but uh we didn't go anywhere, we just stay inside the camp. [SD: Mhmm.] That time um um my husband is a pol-- Burma political prisoner, and then he has uh uh, he is working with uh one uh NGO like a organization in Mesa(?) like a small ci-- small, small town in Thailand, near behind the Burma bor-- border. Uh so they, he uh, he is uh like under the organization, working together, so we-- he got-- got contact from all of the cou-- all of the country uh following us, so they used to visit their showroom, and then he explain about like our uh like a um... like our country story, and then how they, the government, the military government, how they uh like torture or whatever. They explain like they have a showroom like a small museum, so he got contact many foreigners, and then we try to start a English class inside the refugee camp. Yeah. So [clears throat] my neighbor most are like a migrant worker [SD: Okay.] from Burma to Thailand, illegal migrant worker, [SD: Okay.] So they also cannot go back to Burma [SD: Mhmm.] so that's why they apply for the United Nation to resettle other country, any country, uh so most are like a very low education. Uh so I start to teach my neighbor like ABCD, and then later my husband, he get a connect with the uh teacher from England, he is from uh Cambridge or Oxford University, from the education department. So he got contact with that person, and then he visited to us, to the camp, and then he donate the money for to build a uh like a school, so we start to get a school.

SD: A school in Thailand?

TTM: Yeah, A school in Thailand, in the refugee camp.

SD: Oh that's great.

TTM: So yeah, we, we got the um permission from the camp um camp commander, commander in chief of the camp, Thailand, Thailand commander and uh chief of the camp right? [SD: Wow.] So yeah he-- he allow us to do this program. So later, we got the two volunteer from uh Minnesota state, [SD: Mhmm.] so they, they came to our-- they came to the camp, and then they stay with us together the same house. And then we start to uh we started to teach the English, basic English and uh like the based on the letter we have, so we-- we started the English class.

SD: So you were only at the refugee camp for four years, [TTM: Yeah.] but in that time you started a whole school?

TTM: Yes

SD: Wow, that's so amazing.

TTM: You can search and google uh E-S-C, E-S-C in um Mesa(?), like a Nubu(?), Nubu(?) Refugee Camp. Yeah.

ZC: So how many people were in the refugee camp with you?

TTM: Uh like uh some are political-- Burma political prisoner, some are illegal mi-- uh immigrant worker so some are like a people... uh like-- ethnicity, they live in the border area and military... military like they ban their house, like they kill whatever they think. So like a ethnicity group, and then uh
political prisoner group, and illegal immigrant worker group. So we have three group in the camp, so most are, the one part is ethnicity group, our part is uh immi-- uh illegal immi-- migrant immigrant worker group, and then like a Burma political prisoner group. So mostly, I think over... uh nearly 10000 of nine camps, nine refugee camps in Thailand Burma border area. There are nine refugee camps.

**ZC:** In your camp alone there is 10000 people?

**TTM:** Our camp alone is uh, yeah.

**ZC:** Okay. Could you like tell us about like the setting? What did the camp kind of look like?

**TTM:** The camp, the camp the um, we live in a small tent uh tent or how is that, hut, hut, right. Um the hu-- uh the roof make with the leaf, big leaf, and the wall are make with the bamboo, and then floor are also make with the bamboo, uh no door, like a no partition, like so we register uh at the United Nation of uh High Commission for Refugee. We register our name, and then our bio, the history. So later, uh all the people apply for the refugee status has to stay in the refugee camp, they don't allow to stay in the city. So they move all the uh applica-- application uh uh so we-- they-- they-- they sent us all the people to stay in the refugee camp. Uh so that time when we get in there, it is a rainy season, all are muddy, and then the the the hut are like broken, so we fix ourself everything, like make a door, partition something like that. And-- and they provide us like uh some rice for one month, for two people enough, and uh one bottle of the cooking oil, and then some fish sauce, and then some like a nutrition powder. But there are not enough for us, we cannot eat like this only, right? So some-- I have a my safe, some safe money, I brought together with me, and then um we change the Thai, Thai currency, and then we buy ourself more meat, more other vegetable. And then later, some of the camp like resident, they have their own vegetable farm, we grow the plant, we grow the vegetable, and then sell each other like. And also like some city nearby the camp, they came to the camp, and they sell the meat and other food, yeah we bought from them.

**ZC:** I guess I want to ask like what made you and your husband decide to like become refugees?

**TTM:** Uh because we cannot stay inside the Burma. Uh he keep trying to protest against the military government, so the um military intelligence people all-- all the ways-- all the time follow to them, like who are-- what are they doing, you know, so always follow to them. So they cannot, he cannot sleep well at night, sometime like he had some like a the-- the past, past behind, he thinks some people coming to arrest him, so like not safe, stay not safe all the time, scary, and then uh not secure. So that's why we decide, decide to fled to Thailand like uh from border.

**SD:** Would you say most of the people in the refugee camp were from Burma?

**TTM:** Yes. Yeah, all the nine camps are from Burma.

**SD:** Okay. And were most of them trying to go to the U.S. or other places?

**TTM:** Uh so the country, we cannot choose. Which country we want to go, we cannot choose. [**SD:** Right.] So the UN, depends on the year and time frame, this time to this time uh UN decided to go to United States, so this time and this time frame, we apply, they decided to send to Australia, New Zealand, uh Finland, and uh uh United Kingdom, like that. [**SD:** Okay.] Yeah, so we don't know where we have to go. Even uh we don't know to get to resettle in Houston. Just we know two days ahead of our
departure, we know we have to go to Houston, [SD: Two days.] two days ahead of departure.

SD: Wow. And while you were in the camp was-- were you able to communicate with your family or your siblings?

TTM: No, not at all. That time uh in our country, there is no like a cell phone communication thing. Very strict, very very strict. Only government, very rich people with uh like a crony, who are the business with the military government, they can get the cell phone. Very very expensive, like equal to 5000 dollar for one cell phone. Nobody cannot buy. So this cell phone, our country start to use two years ago. Just we can use the cell phone two years ago. [SD: Oh, after the end--] No communication, yeah, we cannot call, like we cannot contact, yeah. When I just arrive to United States 2009, I tried to call my family, let them know I am here, you know, [SD: Right.] I need to let them know, so that time I buy, I bought the uh like a phone card for ten dollar, I can talk only two minutes, two minute. It is like a landline, not a cell phone. So near my friend house, some people house we call, and then they call my parents, and my parents come to their home and then we can talk.

SD: So the first-- so you didn't talk to your parents the whole time you were in the camp [TTM: No.] and then 2009 [TTM: Not at all, not at all, not at all.] was the first time you spoke to them?

TTM: Yeah.

SD: Wow, that must have been very amazing to hear their voices.

TTM: Yeah.

ZC: Did they know that you were going to a refugee camp?

TTM: Yeah, they know like some information, some people like trick... Uh in nearby in the refugee camp, there is a small city, some like migrant worker working from Burma, they have some document, they can go back, they are not related with the politic, they don't arrest them. So we get some information to them, and then each other like.

SD: Why did your family choose to stay in Burma?

TTM: They don't want to take a risk, [SD: Okay.] you know. Just keep staying their normal life. [SD: Mhmm. I see.] We don't know our future, even we move in the refugee camp, we are not sure we can go or not. We are not sure, yeah.

SD: I see, okay. [TTM: Yes.] So then what was it like when you first arrived in Houston? What do you remember?

TTM: Uh 2009 January, I get in Houston. Uh actually my-- our departure is in December 2008. That time in Thailand, they have a big revolution, red group and then yellow group, big revolution, and all the airports shut down, so they postpone to the departure to January. So we get in January 2009 Houston, uh I we are uh like sponsored by Interfaith Ministry [SD: Mhmm.] Agency. So the agency volunteer, they pick me up at the airport, and then they brought to us, and then they the drop off the rental stuff(?), uh Semblasa(?) Mounting Apartment, the rent the room, they arrange for the food, uh clothing, everything, they prepare for us. So and uh next day is a Saturday or Sunday. I think we arrive in Friday, so monday
uh the case worker came to our apartment, and he brought to us to apply the job, to find a job. [SD: Right.] Yeah. And then later they brought to us many different places like in hotel for housekeeping, uh and then like a-- I get a job at the Menswear Wearhouse Distribution Center, yeah.

SD: Okay. So what did you do there?

TTM: Uh it is uh... like they rent that tuxedo, [SD: Mhmm.] so after return, they use and they return back to the distribution center. We break down all the clothing, and then scan, and then the label like a you see like stock everything, yeah.

SD: And how long did you work there?

TTM: Uh it is 2009 um March to 2010 January or February, until I was uh I finish my my school, I went to-- I went to school. So it is my my-- I work a second shift, 2 pm to... I'm sorry, 4 pm to next day 2 am. [SD: Wow.] Yeah. Next day 2 am, because I choose that-- that schedule because I want to go to school, [SD: Mhmm.] so I, I look for, for the school where I can go, So one of my neighbor, he came from Bhutan, he is also uh refugee. So I have no idea and then no friend uh like can... can like navigate me to where I should go. And also agency also didn't help me for this case, so they just asked to-- forced to work, just work work work. They don't think about the school. So uh the Bhutanese guy, also the same agency, we went together for finding a job, the same group. So he told us and then he find a school, we don't need to pay too much, and then we can get a loan. So he brought us to the Texas School of Business. [SD: Okay.] so we went there, and then we apply and then we take the test for the entrance, and then we pass, and I study for Medical Office Management. And then one of my friend, she study for Medical Assistant, and then he study for IT, but he didn't finish, because he has big family, he is uh uh the leader of the family so he cannot go school. [SD: Right.] Yeah.

SD: So is that for a Master of Business?

TTM: Uh, no, it is uh Texas School of Business.

SD: Okay.

TTM: Yeah, they have uh like a some program, like vocational school or something. [SD: Oh okay.] I don't know how to call.

SD: Okay. So you had [TTM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.] already finished your college degree back in Burma?

TTM: Mhmm. Yeah.

SD: Okay. Um, what would you say was the hardest part of adjusting to life here?

TTM: The hardest is um... security. Whenever we go, we don't feel secure, you know. Like these days, mostly these days, I feel not secure, whenever I park my car at the grocery store or like uh parking, I need to watch out all the neighbor or the area. It can be safe or not. So it is a scary, scary as in not--feeling not secure. I get robbed or something, I am so scared, because most of our friend get robbed. [SD: Oh, really?] Yeah, mostly this area not secure, [SD: Okay.] yeah.

SD: Um, did you and your husband do anything to sort of keep your Burmese tradition or culture when
you were here?

TTM: Yeah, uh when we just arrived um... so we have a many Burmese community in the apartment area. [SD: Hmm.] Uh we have a every year, new year festival in April, April 13th. [SD: Hmm.] So we used to celebrate at the temple, the Burmese monastery, so I teach them like a Burmese traditional dance, the girl, and then we celebrate the new year, uh but we have only once a year party, we don't have like too much, because most are Buddhist. [SD: Oh, okay.] So, yeah.

SD: So are you religious? Are you Buddhist?

TTM: Yeah, Buddhist. Hmm.

SD: Okay. Um, so you mentioned feeling like insecure and scared. Have you ever faced any discrimination since you've been here like trying to find a job or?

TTM: No. I never face any discrimination or any, yeah.

ZC: So like uh how did you kind of-- how did you begin to assimilate into like American culture or American society?

TTM: How do I...?

ZC: Like uh, you know, become like used to--

TTM: To be a Americanized--

ZC: Yeah, like how did-- [TTM: Like the, how the--] like uh culture.

TTM: Culture.

SD: American culture.

TTM: Until now, I am not really melt into the American culture. Even the full McDonalds like the first food, I've been trying like totally until now nine years, maybe two or three four times, not more than five times. Uh I just try to cook myself, like I like our traditional food, our country like traditional things, I like to eat. Um and also because of the religion, I thin-- I didn't go to the any church like, so I am not familiar with the American culture until now. I think.

ZC: So I guess like what is the Burmese community of Houston like? Like Burmese people in Houston. How do you guys keep connected?

TTM: Mostly we live the same area together, like all around the Ranchester(?) all are Burmese, like the other in Fondren(?), all other same area, we live the same place, mostly the same place. So we help each other, sometime when I was in the Ranchester(?) even at midnight, 2 am, or 12 like midnight, they knock our door whatever medically needed, or emergency, whatever they need, they knock the door, they call us, we used to help each other. [SD: That's good.] Yeah.

SD: So after you worked at Men's Wearhouse, is that when you started working here?
TTM: Mhmm.

SD: Okay. And then [TTM: Yeah.] can you tell us a little bit about what you do here and what the HOPE Clinic is?

TTM: Um okay, I worked at Men's Warehouse until um... like almost one year yeah, almost one year. After that, I finished my school, and at that time, this HOPE Clinic is a very small clinic like uh we have uh the first time I walk here, it is only nineteen employee, one nine. [SD: Wow.] So I... we like um we are like some of um... in-- in our Burmese community, me and my husband are used to... like lead like navigate and uh find out what are they happening, what do they have, uh how can-- can they find the job something like we are. So my... uh we used to do the volunteer at the Asian uh... there is a... before... Asian um American, Asian American Family Service. There is a organization over there, so... and uh my husband, he work at the YMCA like a caseworker, [SD: Oh, okay.] so he got contacts some of the information some other organization, so we know with Shane from here, you know, she's a C-- COO. So uh one event, she invited us. It is in the Rice University 5K Walk, so we went there and then we know more than-- more people. So that time Shane, she said they needed Burmese interpreter to this clinic, because that time like Burmese refugee has started to live in Houston. So they have a Burmese patient, they needed Burmese interpreter, so she asked me, so I came here for volunteer for three months. And then uh when I finished my school, I apply the job in here, so they hire me, I said Medical Billing. I began to work as a Medical Billing and Coding. So...

ZC: When you went to the, I guess, Texas School of Business, why did you decide on the um, the medical degree?

TTM: Uh, that time I did just whatever I can learn study. I can get the school very easy, so I joined the school. I don't have any [laughs] idea. I-- I don't have chance, you know, to find out more, so whatever I get the chance, I join it. Yeah.

SD: And when did you learn English, did you learn it in school, in Burma, or...?

TTM: English?

SD: Yes.

TTM: Um yeah, our high-- uh university education, all the subjects are in English, in English [SD: Oh, okay.] and also refugee camp um we have a English class. We-- English class, so the teachers are from United States. They came to the refugee camp, and they taught to us.

SD: Oh okay. So have you ever been back to Burma to visit your family or have they ever come here to visit you?

TTM: Um 2015, I became a citizen, as soon as I became a citizen, I aligned a passport, and I visited to my country, [SD: Mhmm.] I met with my daddy. Uh my mom pass away as soon as I arrive in United State, I didn't know, 6 months later, I know my mom already pass away, because that time we cannot get contact each other. So I met with my daddy and my sister and my brothers. Uh they don't want to come here and that they cannot come here. [SD: Mhmm.] Yeah, so I just visit to them in 2015, and also this year 2018 January, I visited to them again [SD: Oh, okay.] because my daddy is too old like uh not
healthy very well. That's why I need to see him very often. Yeah.

**SD:** Have you seen any changes in your hometown since you been gone?

**TTM:** Yeah, now we have uh democracy government, so we keep fighting, everybody keep fighting, keep fighting and also get involved in the national uh attention. So government changed, change a little bit, little bit, and then later, 2016, we have uh election so NLD... like a democracy group, they won, they won the-- the uh the uh like they-- they got the... not power like uh... 50 50, **SD:** Hmm not 100 percent, you know, 50 is still another go--military, 50 is uh like a NLD party, so not totally change. So that time like people keep trying to get the... right, so later uh they allow to the outside uh country company investment, they allow, so that-- that time we can get the like um IT, like the telecom, everything. Then, we got the cell phone. So and also... um lot of big building. Before it's like a small houses and then wood houses, right now brick, uh like make with brick, and then taller, the-- the building and also like more crowded than before. Yeah.

**ZC:** What was it like watching the changes in Burma when you were like uh I guess, when you were in the United States? That you were so far away?

**TTM:** Change between **ZC:** Like. Burma and here?

**ZC:** Well um changes, **TTM:** Different. like changes in the government. Like watching the government change while you were like in the US like as a... I guess I'm trying to ask is um how was it not being in Burma when all these changes were happening? Like did you still feel connect-- I guess, did you still feel connected to like the Burmese-- the changes going on in Burma?

**TTM:** Yeah, **ZC:** Yeah. now keep changing. **ZC:** Mhmm. So now um because of the international attention, and then human rights, something like that, so... um military government. Only right now 25 percent, they get involved, like for military-- uh Ministry of Home Affair, and then uh yeah, only yeah Mini-- Ministry of Home Affair is uh they don't allow to the opposition party, they only still hold their power. Um... change a lot but not 100 percent change. Before like um we cannot like-- we cannot serve the visitor to my house to stay-- tonight uh like-- like a overnight stay, but right now anybody can visit anybody house, we don't need to report to the uh authori-- authority. Before, I want to visit your house, you need to report your your city authority. My friend come and uh sleep at uh overnight at my house, you need to report. So right now, we don't need to report, freely go to everywhere. Yeah.

**SD:** Now that you've been living in the US for a while, would you say that you identify as Burmese-American, or would you still consider yourself as Burmese or would you consider yourself American what-- how do you feel?

**TTM:** I feel like Burmese, I'm [**SD:** Burmese?] not [laughs] American.

**SD:** Okay, even though your American citizen now, still Burmese?

**TTM:** Still Burmese, yeah.

**SD:** So at home, do you and your husband speak Burmese to each other?

**TTM:** Yes. Yeah.
SD: Okay, and then what do you do for fun when you're not working?

TTM: Um, I like to dance mostly our traditional dance and also... singing and then cook. My favorite is cooking.

SD: Cooking?

TTM: Yeah, my favorite hobby is cooking. I cook. That's why I don't like to eat the American food, [SD: Mhmm.] so I cook by myself everything.

SD: That's good. Are there any good Burmese restaurants in Houston?

TTM: No.

SD: No? [laughs]

TTM: Uh last year, there is a restaurant in Ranchester, [SD: Mhmm.] later they did not succeed and... they cannot do like um good management, something, so they sold out their business. [SD: Okay.] Yeah, there is no Burmese uh restaurant, but grocery store we have.

SD: Okay, [TTM: Yeah.] maybe you could open up a restaurant [TTM: Yeah.] [laughs] Um... so you said that you spoke Burmese and English. But then on your resume you also spoke Chinese [TTM: Chinese.] I saw. When did you learn Chinese?

TTM: Uh so 19-- uh 1988 to 19... 95, ‘95 yeah, I um I went to the University, ‘95, after I finish my university education, then I moved to the city of our country, Yangon. So I walk at the Un-- uh Uni uh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Then um... because I learned Chinese uh in my hometown, my neighbor, they are Chinese family. So 1988, there is a... uh big uh thing happen in my country, so their family moved to Taiwan [SD: Hmm.], so they said uh don't stay in the Burma, you know, you can uh get any, uh get improve-- improvement, so follow to them in Taiwan. They asked me to learn Chinese, so during the school, um close the time, the-- the time, two years library close, that time, I went to the Chinese um like a private teacher, and I learn Chinese, then I get to the city, I joined to the University of Foreign Language to study more Chinese. So yeah I-- I went to the University of Foreign Language, and I studied Chinese [SD: Okay, do you get to use--] for four years. Yeah.

SD: Did you get use your Chinese working here at the HOPE Clinic. Do you speak Chinese to the people here.

TTM: Yes.

SD: Okay.


SD: Um, could you describe like a typical day working here for us? Like what do you normal-- like what is your normal day look like when you work here?
TTM: Uh, I used to work Monday to Friday, [SD: Mhmm.] uh 8 to 5, 8 to 5, and um... so at the beginning I work at the Medical Record, so just scan the record and call the hospital to send the record. Then later, uh... uh sorry, the first time I work at the Medical Billing and then later they are-- they are, clinic is bigger and bigger so they sent to the company to make a billing process. So I moved to Medical Record, then after Medical Record late-- uh there is a uh... call like a navigation because most of the Burmese, they don't know English at all, they need to find a specialist to see. So they need a care coordinator like so I switched to the Care Coordinator Department, and then I find for the specialist. So everyday we call many places like do they accept this insurance [SD: Mhmm.] or like do they provide the interpreter, something like we look for the specialist uh they are very uh matched for this patient. They can really help for this patient.

ZC: How has HOPE Clinic changed since you started working here?

TTM: Yeah, at the beginning when I start to work, there are only nineteen employee, and then later we have a more refugee coming in Houston, many different country, not only Burma, like in Africa, like Swahili, Ethiopia, and also Middle East, uh Iran, Iraq, like-- because this is um... community uh clinic right. They-- they founded uh by the Chinese Community Center at the beginning, and then later, like I think they uh... they got the grant, they got the grant and other program. So then more and more refugee people coming in, so there is a refugee clinic uh health clinic in Harris County, they got connect to here each other. And all the refugee after screening, they need to get more treatment, so they send to us, so we have more and more patient, and then we need more employees, so they have more grant. So that's why this one is bigger and bigger.

SD: How many patients would you say you see a day?

TTM: Uh... seven to fifteen sometime I uh... [SD: Do you have any other questions--] not only the patient, just uh some of the document to apply for benefit, like Medicaid like uh other free medication for diabetes for uh for like uh Hepatitis uh like other special medication cancer treatment medication, so they are low, mostly low-- low income, so we are applying for that. Yeah. People work, a lot of people work everyday.

SD: People work? Okay. Um, do you have any children?

TTM: No.

SD: No children.

TTM: No.

SD: Um, what would you say is your greatest accomplishment so far?

TTM: Greatest accomplishment. [laughs] Um I'm trying as much as I can to be more and more, you know, uh more and more uh skill [SD: Mhmm.] um... so during nine years uh... I learn more... uh knowledge and then like uh society and [inaudible] like to be a... like community leader like yeah. All the-- most of the Burmese patient, they trust me and they rely on me, a lot of people, so I can navigate to them, I can guide them. [SD: Mhmm.] Like that.
SD: Are you involved with any other Houston community organizations or just HOPE Clinic?

TTM: Just HOPE Clinic.

SD: Just HOPE Clinic. Okay.

TTM: Before Asian American Family Service, [SD: Mhmm.] we uh used to do like uh mentor mentee program for Burmese student. Yeah but right now they don't have anymore this organization so I don't get involve anywhere, any other.

SD: Okay.

ZC: How... uh how did your husband uh I guess did he follow-- I'm trying to ask like what did your husband do after you... you guys, you both arrived to Houston?

TTM: Yeah my husband, he got a job... at the beginning he got a job at the Houstonia Hotel uh for storage manage-- storage assistant manager. Like he buy the uh supply for the hotel, for food, you know, the-- the kitchen everything, so they buying the supply. Then later, YMCA Refugee Agency, they needed case worker for Burmese, so he apply there and he got a job at YMCA for like a refugee uh case worker. And then later he work at the Alief um... Middle School for like assistant teacher or substitute teacher and then most, most of the Burmese refugee children uh went to-- go to the Alief District School right, so they need to communicate with the parents and their kids, so they need a like a interpreter, also teacher right, so that's why they hire him. So he is a... uh he's a assistant-- sometime assistant teacher, sometime substitute teacher, sometime interpreter, like that, he work over there.

SD: So you and your husband like living in Houston, you don't want to move?

TTM: No.

SD: No, you like it. [TTM: Yeah.] That's good. [laughs]

TTM: Since we arrive here, we didn't move anywhere.

SD: Do you have any more questions?

ZC: I think that's good. Um, let's see... I guess maybe uh what was life like when you were in Burma be- - I guess under the military rule, like what was life like?

TTM: Life?

ZC: Life like. Like daily life in Burma?

TTM: Oh okay. Um so we cannot talk any related with the politic right [ZC: Right], not only this like we cannot go from one place to another place freely, we need to show our ID everywhere, they check the ID, like a surprise check anywhere on the way, like this they stop the bus and they let us show the ID. So that time mostly they are attention to the student, the student are the first uh [laughs] the first uh uh... how to say? So like uh regular people, they are not against the government, mostly just they want to do their own business, they don't want to get trouble right. But student, they don't care, so very active, so
they pay attention all the student, like the age between uh 17 to... under 30, they are-- pay uh very uh like pay attention, they check, they are more concerned for this age, they scare about to get against to against to against to them. Uh like that and also... like uh there is no communication, not like IT and goes uh tele-- telecom-- communication, we don't have it, we don't have it. So if we want to contact each other, like uh some people go to from city to other city, we we give them message or we can send the written letter from the mail. Even the mail, they check, they open the uh-- if they uh like uh they some-- some area uh uh the most activists, the letter from that area came from, they open that letter and then they read it, like that, not secure everything. Yeah.

SD: Do you send any sort of like money or anything back to your family in Burma?

TTM: Yeah um when I just arrive 2009, uh... we sent through over like uh how to say... MoneyGram, MoneyGram right. [SD: Mhmm.] We send uh... that time we can send to Thailand, from Thailand, some friend bring to my parents, so right now we can send through from Western Union. [SD: Okay.] Yeah. I support to my daddy. [SD: Mhmm.] because I cannot take care uh like in person, nearby him, so I just uh send him money to them, to take care of my dad.

ZC: So what do your siblings currently do in Burma?

TTM: Okay uh I--we our family still have the soy sauce and chili sauce distribution, so my sister she-- she is managing everything, and then my two sibling also they are in charge for the making, the process, you know. So yeah, they are doing their own business.

SD: I think I'm good. Are you?

ZC: Yeah, I think we covered a lot of stuff.

TTM: If you need some other information in like a specific or something, let me know. I also-- I don't know what should I tell. [laughs]

ZC: Yeah, I feel like yeah if we have to do another interview, [SD: Yeah.] somebody else will definitely.

SD: Is there anything final you want to add or...?

TTM: Uh. No. [laughs]

SD: Okay so we can finish it. Thank you so much for your time.

ZC: Thank you.

SD: It was very interesting.

TTM: Thank you. Thank you for coming to me and uh for the interview.