

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Thao Costis

Interviewer: Sarah Craig

Date/ Time of Interview: January 30, 2013, 2:30PM

Transcribed by: Sarah Craig

Edited by: Priscilla Li (6/10/2017)

Audio Track Time: 01:15:30:65

Background:

Thao Costis was born in 1969 in Saigon. Her family was evacuated in the American airlift three days before the fall of Saigon in 1975. This was orchestrated by her father, an employee of U.S.AID, but he stayed behind to help another family and was unable to escape the country before Saigon fell. Thao, along with her mother and extended family, came to the United States shortly afterwards. They were sponsored by a family in Florida, and subsequently moved to Houston to join an aunt who had lived in America since before 1975. Her mother found work as a manicurist. Her father joined them in Houston in 1978; tragically, her mother passed away only three years later, leaving her father to raise her.

Thao's first home in Houston was north of 59 on Greenbriar, and she attended Poe Elementary School, where she attained fluency in English by the second grade. She later attended Bellaire High School. After finishing her secondary education, she went to UT Austin to get an undergraduate degree in accounting, then returned to Houston for an MBA from U of H. She pursued a career in social work and took a job at Search Homeless in Houston, which meshed with her background in accounting. She worked her way up through the ranks at Search, becoming CEO in 2007, a position she still holds. She lives in Houston with her Greek-American husband and their two sons.

Setting:

The main focus of the interview is on Thao's life experience as a 1.5 generation Vietnamese immigrant, although issues of labor and capital are also discussed. The interview traces Thao's background and journey to the U.S. from Vietnam, her experiences as a refugee youth in the American school system, and her college education and career trajectory, as well as touching upon questions of culture and identity.

Thao's interview took place in her office at Search Homeless in downtown Houston on a weekday afternoon. Her office is spacious, with some notable decorations—a block print of a Chinese character, a wooden panel painted with a bird, and a poster-sized photo print of a small African American boy dressed as Jimi Hendrix. The interview was quite enjoyable, and Thao's life story is a rich and fascinating addition to the HAAA project. We thank her for time and her contribution.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

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SC	Sarah Craig
TC	Thao Costis
...	Speech trails off; pause
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
[]	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

SC: My name is Sarah Craig, and I'm here today on January 30th, 2013, at Search Homeless in downtown, to interview Thao Costis for the Houston Asian American Archive. Um, Thao, could you please begin by telling me a little bit about yourself?

TC: Um, sure. So, my name is Thao Costis, I—my... when you say 'tell us about yourself,' that's so broad. So, um, uh—my job here is, uh, President and CEO of Search Homeless Services. It's a nonprofit organization that helps people who are homeless—men, women and children—move from the streets into jobs and safe, stable housing. I—uh—been a resident of Houston since 1975, when I first family—when our family moved here from Vietnam, and so—grew up here in Houston, uh, went to University of Texas Austin for my accounting degree, and back to U of H, University of Houston, for my master's in business, and have been in the nonprofit social service field since I graduated from graduate school, because that was the field that I ultimately decided—not nonprofit, but I wanted to do something that would help people, and so I landed in a job that gave me exposure to something that I never expected, kinda like you, and, uh, and so I've been in this field since 1992, so this would be 21 years that I've been working on homelessness, which most people don't think about or talk about.

SC: Um, kind of starting at the beginning, um, could you tell me what you remember about your childhood in Vietnam?

TC: You know, I don't really remember that much, unfortunately, about my childhood in Vietnam, so I—was 6, turned 7 here, um, in the U.S., and my memories are most vivid of once we got here. I mean, I—I remember leaving Vietnam, um, but truly, my memories of—of being in Vietnam's—mm, kinda flashbacks of just little snippets of what, you know, our bedroom was like—of course, the emotional time of when my brothers got in trouble because they almost caught the little Christmas tree on fire, you know [laughs], so those kinda kid kind of things, but, uh—but yeah, my—my most vivid memories are from here.

SC: And so your family left in 1975?

TC: Right. So, we left in 1975, uh, right about three days or so before the fall of Saigon. My dad worked for U.S.AID as a, um, like a warehouse manager. And so he was able to get us on a plane, actually, a cargo plane, to leave, uh, and he stayed back to help somebody else, another family, and missed his opportunity to leave. So, um—so it was my mom, us three kids—I was the youngest of three, the others are each a year and a half older, you know, that was the staggering—and we had three, uh, of my cousins with me, and my—both of my

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grandmothers. So, um, that was our little entourage, and, um—so we went through Wake Island, and, uh, through Florida for a short time, that's where our sponsor family was, that was a fascinating—you know, when I look back on that whole kind of community support system as somebody who's working in it now, I find it fascinating how effective or how helpful it was, and, um—so anyways, we ended up in Houston because my mom had a sister who'd already been here, and—I'm sure probably from your conversations with people you know that, you know, it's like—if you can afford to go overseas to Europe or to America for education and whatnot, then you would go from Vietnam. So my, uh, my mom's sister, my aunt, had been here, and she had married, and—so she was the only person that we knew, and so we came to Houston. And from there, of course, other families ultimately got here as well.

SC: Um, so, your family's reasons for leaving were tied in to the fact that your father's job was with the U.S. [unintelligible]?

TC: AID, yes. Well, I mean, the reason for leaving—I'm sure everybody's, you know, reason was to get out, because it's—it's not like this is the first time that it had happened with them. Because both of my parents had been from North Vietnam before [**SC:** Oh, I see.], you know, in 1954, when the Communists took over North Vietnam, they had to move. So—so really, all of my relatives, you know, their families—my aunts and uncles, you know, they were all familiar with this—that had happened already once in their life. So here we go again. So it was something that we—you know, of course we weren't wanting to be part of that, so we left.

SC: And was your father ever able to get out and join you?

TC: He was. So he rejoined us, or he joined us, in 1978. So three years later, um, he managed to, um, you know, work his way through the system, and for us to request and get him here. So that was, uh, interesting, uh, reunion, you know? 'Cause here I—so just from my own recollection and my own experience, and again reflecting as an adult back to—and—and being a parent now, you know, and looking back at, um, the re-assimilation that he had—or, the assimilation that he had to have as—as a person whose family has already had a three-year start, and he was the head of household, as the husband, the father, and here my mom's been working, you know, and—and the kids have been growing up without him for three years, and so he—I'm 9 years old, or 10, when he comes back in our life, so for three years there, three very formative years, he wasn't there, and we didn't really have, you know, communication, other than a postcard, maybe, here and there, if that. And so it's like this stranger, you know, that's coming into my life, that I had to learn about again, and, um, the challenges I—that I saw that he had to identify his role again, as the caretaker, or the head of household, and the tension that it caused when—as he struggled through that, and we struggled—or, you know, my mom, and he, so, um, so yeah, so I—you know, so I—again I—I—uh, kind of tie it to some of the things that we talk about today as a society, as we talk about veterans when they go away to serve in the military, and then when they come back and the difficulties that they have, when they come back, life has continued on while they've been out fighting in the war, and—you know, so they come back, their kids are different, their family life is different, their jobs are different, and, um—and so the strain of that, and—you know, and that happened with us. So.

SC: Um, so, by the time he rejoined you, you were already in Houston?

TC: Yes. Yes, so we came to Houston very quickly. So we—we moved—we were in Florida for a little while, and my cousins actually stayed in Florida, so we had the sponsor family, who had basically, you know, kind of the family makeup that was similar to ours, with two boys and a girl that were about similar ages to us, but um, somehow I... My mom, or somehow the d-decision was made that my—that the three cousins, who were older, little older than us, um, they would stay with the sponsor family, so I thought that—you know, so that—that

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was really nice of them, to kind of take them on, and take care of them, and I don't remember how long—how many years they stayed with them, or how long that stint was, but we—my brothers and I, my mom, and my two grandmothers—moved to Houston. So, um—so yeah, so by the time my dad got here, we—we had been here in Houston, and other—of—other families of my cousins and such had also moved. We were all in the same apartment complex, um, near—at Norfolk and Greenbriar, and—the apartment complex is no longer there now, but it was one of these, you know, public housing, kind of, or—it, like, took housing vouchers that the Public Housing Authority provided, so, you know, so of course—my mom, she was a teacher in Vietnam, but here, without the ability to speak the language, she did what most women who come here with—you know, from, uh, Vietnam do—they learn how to be a manicurist. And, um, and so that was her job, and she even had a little table in the house, and she even had people that would come to the house [SC: Oh, wow.], and she would do it for—out of the house, yeah, out of the apartment. So I've—I have very vivid memories of the apartment, and where people—my cousins lived, we all lived, like, you know, next to each other, above each other, and, um—and we would play in the back driveway and parking lot, and—yeah, I mean truly, this was the urban growing up, you know, in this big city [SC: Mhm.], and, uh, our s—we went to Poe Elementary School, which is over there near Rice, and so, you know, you had—going to school there at Rice, you kind of can see the demographic, and kind of the upper end, um, echelon, and so—and we were literally, I mean, there was a railroad track that was parallel to 59 there, uh—that crossed Greenbriar, so we were literally on the other side of the freeway and r—railroad tracks. We would walk to school—and that's at least a mile and a half from where we were—and, um, uh, it was—it was a great experience, I mean, you know, I—would follow, kind of, whatever else everybody was doing, to like, [laughs] you know, to kind of learn how to assimilate, and, uh, we—I think we were one of—uh, we were the only ones that were in that school. Um, there was another family that was, uh—that I remember, uh, but there's just, you know, I don't know if my—me and my cousins, and this other family were the only Vietnamese people in this—Poe.

SC: And so, when you got to the United States, did you speak any English at all?

TC: No. No. So everything was learned here.

SC: Mhm.

TC: Yeah.

SC: Uh, did you take ESL at Poe Elementary?

TC: Yeah! Uh, so yeah, so I started at—in first grade, and my—both of my brothers were put in second grade, and, uh—but quickly, of course, you know they moved them up, they had ESL, and actually I have seen my ESL teacher, she is Rose, um, Kahle [?], who runs, um—what is that organization that she runs now? But anyways, I run into her. She's with—she works with immigrants, and, you know, refugees coming—so she was from Cambodia, so she didn't speak good Vietnamese, you know, and so, mm so, it's just, you know, she—here was this Asian woman who somewhat looked like us and who, you know, kind of pulled us out of the class so that we could have some time to work on our English.

SC: Wow.

TC: Uh huh.

SC: But she didn't speak Vietnamese so how—how was the instruction, how did that even work? [laughs]

TC: Exactly? So you know, it's—it was truly just immersion. We were like—was, was what it was, and when

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you're young—when you're at that age, you know, and you're forced to, you pick it up. [laughs]

SC: So uh, by what age do you think you were –

TC: Proficient?

SC: Yeah.

TC: Oh, I'm sure, by the end of first grade. [**SC:** Mm.] Yeah, second grade. So. [**SC:** Mhm.] Yeah. Don't think we had any problems. I know a lot of people listen to me and they—they're like 'Oh, you have no accent at all!' Well, yeah. [laughs] Yeah, you just kind of have to go with the flow. [**SC:** Mhm.] I—yeah, y—you know, the thing is, it's funny, 'cause I—I think about myself and how I am in this culture, and how I really—not that I, uh, avoid it, but I've really worked hard to assimilate into the American society and the—kind of the—the world that we're in, and so I don't—I haven't really, you know, joined any Asian-type organizations, I haven't really kind of developed that network for the sake of that network—I mean, I went to Bellaire High School, where there's, you know, of course a lot of Asian people, but it's all over the board, it's Chinese, it's—everybody. Um—and, um—but yeah, I—I thought about that too, in the last few years, and so that's when I got involved with the Asian Women's Group, which I think is wonderful. And you know, so their thing is to try to promote, uh, more Asians in—just mainstream positions, trying to pos—you know, elevate our, uh, our presence, or have more of our presence in upper management and things like that, and—which I think is all fine and good, um, I'd—but you know, so—it's really, I guess, just encouraging people to not be stereotypical Asian. [laughs]

SC: Could you tell me more about your involvement with them?

TC: Um, so I—you know, I don't even—I can't even remember how I got invited to even the first meeting, and I think it was a friend of ours, a friend of mine, somehow, um—that was even linked to Search—anyway, so she invited me to this thing, and—and so, you know, so I thought okay, I'll make a concerted effort to do something Asian. [laughs] I mean truly, I was thinking that, because I was like I do—I really don't have very many friends or—you know, it's just my cousins really, and, uh—or—or network, you know, within this—in—in homeless services there's no—not very many Asian people, and, um—so, anyway, so—so I went, and it was still somewhat of a forming group, and so I said okay, well, I'll help, I'll be part of the group to help plan these meetings and, you know, make it interesting, and so it was nice in that I was able to bond with a—with a group of ladies that I really enjoy, um, getting to know, and—and we're, you know, good friends, and—and so we had a concerted effort, for a year, year and a half, and then I got busy with work again and so it was just harder to keep it up. But, uh, but it—you know, it—me, I guess reconnected me, and reminded me of, uh, how many different levels and kind of peoples—um, communication abilities, and—and just their presence, and that was part of the work of the group, was to help them, uh, build a presence and—and—for themselves, and build confidence, and how do they not just feed into that stereotype. Mhm.

SC: Um, so you said—were—were there a lot of other Vietnamese in that group, or was it just all over the board?

TC: It was—it was—it was—so, sometimes people don't like the term Oriental, I don't—I don't know why, but I mean, so it's most—it was Asian women, and they was from[?] mostly Chinese and, you know, s—a couple of Japanese, and not that many Vietnamese, a co—yeah, a couple Vietnamese. But it wasn't—you know, yeah, it wasn't any one particular, uh, group.

SC: Mhm. Um, do you have a network of Vietnamese friends in Houston?

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TC: No, I really don't. Mm-mm. That's—that's—that's part of, I mean, that it's truly—it's just kind of part of the way that I've lived. Yeah. And uh—and maybe that was part of my rebellion, [laughs] –

SC: How—how do you mean?

TC: I mean, just—just to not be perceived at—I think I've always been very conscious of my, um, Asian... presence. Okay, so, I can't do anything about that. But, uh—and not that I deny it or am—am ashamed of it, it's just I think I always work to fit in. I think because of where we lived and because of the people that I was with, I worked hard to fit in with the people around me. And—and so, I think, you know, as a young person, I—and—and then in Bellaire, you know, there was the—the nerds, the Asians, the—you know, and the jocks, and the smokers. [laughs] You know? So, um, so I didn't ever want to be considered a nerd just because I'm Asian, you know? So even though I hung out with Asian people, I wanted them to be cool [laughs], or, you know, somewhat mainstream, right? So it's always about trying to be mainstream. And, uh—so even when I was look, thinking about work—you know, of course I went to school and did the kind of jobs that—that my parents wanted me to, because that's the practical thing to do, right, to get an accounting degree, and—I'm sure you've been hearing that too, and, um—and I quickly realized I didn't want to be an accountant. And I didn't know what I wanted to do. But, um, I wanted to do something that would help people, because of the experiences that I have had and the—and—you know, the people that can make a difference in somebody's life, even though they're not your relative and not even necessarily your friend, but they sought you out, and—uh, and so, you know, it's kind of a sense of giving back and g—fulfillment about that. So that's why I sought this field out, and so—you know, so there's not a whole—ih—that wasn't necessarily an accepted norm either, you know, within the Asian culture it's like you go to work, you get a good paying job, and human services—ehh, that's kind of—kind of like out there with acting and singing. [laughs] No, but uh—and I mean, there's more people now that are doing it, but—but yeah, it was just different from all my—what my cousins were doing—engineers, finance people, computer science.

SC: So, you're—you're the CEO of—of Search Homeless, how—how did that come about, could you tell me kind of the—the narrative of that?

TC: Sure. Well, so, I've been in this role almost six years now, and I've been with this organization almost 18 years now, and, um—and so, when I came into the organization, uh—course, you know, I never did the h—the actual client service side, I was always on the business side of it. Um, fundraiser, that was my main job, and then, you know, I asked to be exposed to other things, or to be responsible for other things, and so—I think, you know, it's my personality and the way that I've been raised, you always try to do your best, and—you know, so I was still applying, of course, all of my typical left brain kind of [laughs] skills and talents to a field that I think, um, can be somewhat loose and maybe, if you're grass roots, you know, not very professional. So—or you—you don't h—put the structure in place that a lot of businesses have. And so, I was able to apply those skills and my, mm, type A personality to it, um, and so I—I grew in this, uh, field, and also because I think of, um, my loyalty, to my employer, you know, um, and maybe it's just my dad, or I don't know if it's, you know, cultural at all, but I really have a sense of responsibility to the people that I work for, right? And, um, and so I took care of my boss, who was the executive director, who had been executive director for many many years, and so she took care of me. You know, so it was kind of this—we—we built each other up, um, and supported each other, and, um—and so, when the time—when she finished, um, didn't really—it wasn't a right fit for her anymore, you know, she wanted me to take the job, and we were—actually, Search was really suffering financially, we had really started way—doing way more than we needed to be doing, and—as an organization. And so it had kind of gotten a little lost in our—our management, and—and decision-making about that, and mission creep, and all the things that non-profits kind of go through as they evolve, but we did it to the extreme. So anyways,

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so when it got to that point, the board asked the management team, it's like 'Okay, you know what do—what is the answer here, how can we get taken back to a management level.' And so I took the lead in that process, and got our team together and said, 'Okay, you know, it's—it's up to us, the board's not going to be able to do it, they don't know enough, they're looking to us. So what are we going to do?' So when the decision, you know, the—the control was put back in our laps, then we were able to very quickly [snaps] get to 'This is what we need to do, this is what we need to let go of, there it is.' So the board chair, who was relatively new at the time, who was kind of stepping in to help clean this up—he saw, he's like 'Okay, you know what you're doing.' So this person that they had put—hired and thought could be the rainmaker, you know, to bring in the money to supposedly fix the problem—which is never enough—um, they said 'He needs to go, you need to step in, you need to do this job, take this job.' And I hadn't wanted the job because I didn't think the board was really ready for some—you know, for what really needed to happen, and—and I—and that—some of that maybe was also me—whether it's culturally or—or it's just me, uh, being self-deprecating, you know, where I said 'You know what? If they don't recognize that I can do this, or they're not asking me to do it, I'm not going to just kind of stick my head in there.' [laughs] At that moment. And, um, and so, um—so yeah, so we filed [unintelligible] for a little while, until they said 'Okay, it's up to you.' And so I stepped in. And that was 2007. So we've been in the black ever since, and—and you know, so it went from this reactive, um, really difficult time for us, to—now we're ready for growth in a very strategic way, and—and we've rebuilt the—the reputation of the organization, um, so that people will recognize that we're a player and that we need to be at the table when it comes to big stuff related to homelessness.

SC: Um... let's see... so, what—what sparked your interest in this field?

TC: Um—you know, homelessness was not something I sought out. It was, um, as I, uh, alluded to earlier—it was my experience, having been here... as an immigrant, as somebody who had nothing, you know, I—um—I mentioned my vivid memories of once I came to the U.S., and it, uh, has a lot of different people—you know, people who were teachers, um, uh—the experience of being a Girl Scout and not having my own uniforms, and you know, and—and this one teacher who—she wasn't even a regular teacher, she was like a substitute teacher, and somehow we connected and she kind of adopted me. She was this beautiful Black lady who, uh—she and her husband didn't have kids, and, um—and she took me to Sears, down here on Main, to buy me my Brownie uniform so that I could fit in. And they took me to Astroworld. You know, so I still remember that day, it was starting to rain, and I was starting to kind of panic about it, and it's like—but it was a wonderful time. And so it's like these people who didn't have to, who, um, wanted to take care, wanted to give me an experience that I would have never been able to have, I mean my mom was, you know, making the wages of a manicurist, we wouldn't—you know, we couldn't afford any of this stuff. And, um, I remember the food stamps, you know, when it was literally pieces of coupons that you would have to hand to the—the—at the checkout line, and me being embarrassed about that. Or the Girl Scouts that—as a fun surprise, they went, uh, to the girls' houses early in the morning, and wake them up out of bed and go to breakfast together, and me being livid because I did not want them seeing where I lived. You know, so kind of this—this idea of growing up poor and yet trying to fit in, and—and the people that made it work, and—and so I think about, you know, other people that—that need this help, who are living here, struggling every day, and—and how I can do the same for them. So. So that—so I didn't have a clarity on what that was that I wanted to do, and I just happened to, you know—I—I would—I picked up the phone and I would call different organizations, hospitals, and the Houston Area b-Urban League and Career Recovery, I mean I remember meeting with everybody, and getting—actually, the call, the lead for my job came from Search, it was, uh, the employment counselor, the head of the employment services here at Search that said, 'Yeah, I know that the Coalition for the Homeless is looking for somebody.' And so I called over there, and—and one thing led to another, and I got that job. So, um—so within

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homelessness, I—you learn is that there are so many factors that contribute to it, and because, to me, education was always something that I could relate to, you know, so I could go into an organization and help promote education and whatnot, um, and—and so—so education is one big piece of how people got here, the lack of education, and the power of education to get them out of here. You know, and so—and then there's mental health and healthcare, and all the things that, um, I can relate to personally as somebody who grew up poor, who had to get food assistance, who—you know, we had housing assistance until I was in high school. I mean, we lived in apartments all of my growing years [SC: Mhm.], and hated it. You know? And it's—again, it's that embarrassment of here's all my friends who live in—near Rice University, and here I am in this teeny tiny little apartment, or—we would move to Gulfton [SC: Mhm.], you know, when I was in high school, um, junior high too actually. No, no—junior high I was over at West Belfort and Fondren area. So—you know, so it's—it's all these kind of places that you—you don't really choose, if you can afford—if you can afford it, you wouldn't want to necessarily. Um, but, you know, those were our choices, and so we had to live with it, and—and—and so I can—I can f-have empathy.

SC: Mhm. Um, after your father rejoined you, uh, did he find a job? What—what work was he doing when he came to the U.S.?

TC: He did all sorts of things. I remember he pumped gas, he, um—I don't know what other odd jobs that he had, but ultimately he ended up as a clerk at—uh, Social Security, at the Department of, uh, Health and Human Services. So he—his office is at Louisiana, down here near Travis, I think. Um—or Wheeler. Um—so yeah, so he ended up there, um, you know, working as a file clerk for many, many years, um, my mom ended up passing away in 1981, so—he was gone for three years, he came back for three years, and then he became a single parent. And—'cause she passed away from cancer, breast cancer. So that was the other th—you know, the vivid memory for me, was being in and out of visiting both of them at various points, um, for their illnesses, my mom for cancer and my dad had a lot of kidney stone problems. So always getting—you know, trying to get rid of that, and—so I just, yeah, remember saying 'I don't wanna get old.' You know, getting old is just... lot of health problems, and sicknesses. And I always felt like my parents were older than everybody else. I don't know that they were that much older than everybody else, but I—that—that was my perception too. Because—partly because of their illnesses. But um—yeah, so he worked as—as a, uh, a file clerk. Mhm.

SC: And then, how did you pay for, uh, college?

TC: Um, Pell Grants, and whatever scholarships—I did end up having a small loan, and, um, paying that for a few years after I got out of school. You know, school was more affordable then. [SC: Mhm.] Uh, so yeah, I went to UT. Both of my brothers went to Rice, actually. Uh huh. They both went to Rice for engineering.

SC: And did your father help pay the way for any of you?

TC: No. No, our parents never paid for anything. I mean—and we never asked for anything. You know, I mean—and that's funny because I—we were with my, uh, cousins, we had a yogh[?]
—I don't know you've heard that term, but in the Vietnamese culture, uh, you know, when somebody passes away, you remember them at the anniversary of their death. And so you get together, and—and, you know, you have an altar, and eat food, and so everybody gathers together to basically remember that person. So anyway, so twice a year, you know, it's big family gathering, and we were reflecting on how old our parents were, how old we are now. You know, it's like—wow, our kids are graduating from high school and college, and some of them are starting to get married, and our parents were just in their thirties when, um, we came to the U.S., and us thinking how old they seemed, you know, back then. But, um—anyways, uh, so as far as affordability of school and things like

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that—no. You know, so what we were joking about was, our kids, you know, getting married, it's like—they can't expect that we're gonna pay for their weddings or anything like that [laughs], you know, it's like—so in our culture, you get—you give money, right, instead of gifts, so the money helps pay for the wedding. And so we were—we were saying 'Oh yeah, make sure you don't do it in a hotel, because if you do it in a Chinese restaurant, you might actually make a little bit of money [laughs] to pay for your honeymoon. [laughs] You know. But if you do it in a hotel, you're gonna have a loss. [laughs] You're gonna have to pay for it.' But no, our parents never—never. And—and so, it's okay. You know, we—we went to work as soon as we could, and –

SC: Uh, what was your first job?

TC: Uh, I worked at a bakery that was owned by these Vietnamese people that my brother had worked in before, because I was underage. [**SC:** Mhm.] So they would, you know, they would ac—hire me and—and pay me, and so as soon as I turned 16, I went to Sears [laughs] and worked retail. But I remember my brothers working McDonald's and Loman's, which was a clothing store, and—but yeah, so we did a lot of retail until we got into college, yeah.

SC: Were those all minimum-wage jobs?

TC: Mhm. Yep. Yep, but, you know, it was money in our pocket, enough to drive the car around, yeah. And so—yeah, so when I got to driving age, my brothers got me a car. You know, we never—yeah, we—we would always kind of figure it out, never would ask our parents.

SC: Mhm.

TC: Yeah.

SC: Um, shifting back towards the... um, the kind of Vietnamese community and Vietnam, uh, do you consider yourself as a member of the, uh, what could be called a Houston Vietnamese Community? Do you perceive that as—as kind of a—a thing of which you are part? Or not?

TC: Well, I think, um... not so much, per se, I mean I—I do, of course, uh—consider myself part of the Vietnamese community just because I am Vietnamese, and because Houston has a big, big Vietnamese population, um, but—could I be labeled as, or a part of any particular group within that? No. I don't—no.

SC: Mhm. And uh, what is your attitude toward Vietnam?

TC: I... um, I don't have any anger or anything like that, cause I, you know, I was so young, I didn't really have any kind of political understanding of what was going on, and so my view of it is—it's uh, you know—it's another society just like China or any—any other society like America, that's trying to figure out the political versus the economic drivers that make your country function. And, um, and so—you know, for me it's more of an intellectual kind of perspective, rather than a personal tie. I mean, I appreciate how nice it is, how pretty it is, how wonderful the culture can be, um... you know, it's—it's worrisome that it's—some of it is getting lost because of the economies that, you know, kind of drive it, 'cause the last—so, the only time that I went back since we left was in 2003, um, when we were living in Hong Kong, and so we were close enough that we were able to, you know, take a trip. I didn't go to Saigon. I went to Hanoi, and I went to Danang, which is in the middle of the city—uh, country—and, um, and was just, you know, really amazed at in—when you're in the city, the hustle and bustle and, you know, of course the sheer number of people. And everybody's on motorcycles, whereas back in the day everybody was on bicycles, and then soon I'm sure it'll be everybody's in cars, and trying to jam through the city, you know, that doesn't have the infrastructure for it. And once you

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leave the big city it's like flash back in time, you've still got the water buffalos and the women irrigating the rice fields without heavy machinery, and—and just very, very interesting contrast.

SC: So—going back, did it provoke any—any nostalgia [**TC:** No.], did you feel any nostalgic attachments to [**TC:** No.] Vietnam [mumbling]?

TC: No, I—I th—you know, I think it's actually even a little uncomfortable for me, in the sense of—the expectation that I should be able to communicate, or should be able to kind of fit in, and yet I have—I'm very far removed from it, you know, because I—I—I identify myself almost like—because I'm so Americanized, yeah, that it's hard. So I'm a tourist in my own country.

SC: Um, do you feel a sense of South Vietnamese [**TC:** Or Vietnam?] nationalist identity?

TC: Mm... uh, no. I mean, I have—it—it's very sad to me that, you know, it has to be this Communist way, but, um, I'm not... you know, any strong advocate one way or the other. I think Vietnam has gone through a lot of struggles over the centuries, over the, you know, the decades, and so it's—uh, it's kind of... natural, that it—that the people have taken back over, you know, their own country, versus the U.S. was in there, the French was in there, the Chinese was in there, and, you know, it's like all these influences, and so it'll—it'll work its way through, and at least we're not, you know, fundamental crazy kind of [both laugh] basic thinking, um it's more about the people. You know, so in a sense, it's rational to think that they wanted to reclaim it for the good of the people, but I think the ec-economic drivers will make it this hybrid that will work out.

SC: Um, so the one time that you went back, I know you—you were able to because you were living in Hong Kong, uh, but why did you want to? What was the—the driving force behind that decision?

TC: Well, yes, I—I—definitely curiosity, of what it's like, what it looks like, what it feels like, what it's like today, uh, not that I really could remember and compare it to anything except, um, yeah, to understand it and appreciate it.

SC: And, um, switching gears a little bit, could you tell me more about your spouse?

TC: So I married an Anglo guy, um, he is half Greek, he is, um, 14 years older than me, uh, we've been married for 16 years, soon it'll be 17, and, um—yeah, I didn't really—I don't—I think I've only dated one Vietnamese guy. And—so, you know, I—I didn't... I didn't seek out Vietnamese people as potential mates, necessarily, or husband candidates. Again—

SC: And why do you think that is?

TC: I think, you know—uh, I mean, there were some guys that I liked, but—I don't know. I think again it's part of me just, um, not feeling like I needed to, uh, restrict myself, although my dad would have wanted me to. He kind of gave up, after a while. [laughs] Um, and I think partly because he wasn't so rigid about it, he wasn't—'cause I know some parents and families that, you know, 'No, you can't.' And, um, so he gave me that luxury to—to be more mainstream. I mean, and—and I—it's—it's kind of good and bad, I guess, and as an adult again looking back, you know, and as a parent, the—the language culture part is, you know he didn't really pressure us to speak Vietnamese, uh, at home all the time, or, you know, to continue to kind of build on that, because my language—my Vietnamese language skills is pretty limited. You know, I was young when we got here, and—and I quickly went into English mode, and so I can carry on a basic conversation, but of course, you know, I'm throwing in English left and right nowadays, and so when I had kids, I tried to, you know, speak to them in

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Vietnamese, but it-it's hard when you're trying to explain things and you don't have the depth of the vocabulary, or the breadth of the vocabulary, that you need to kind of build on it. So...

SC: Did you send them to Vietnamese classes or anything?

TC: We did that too, and, um, and—the Vietnamese classes—you know, it's kind of too basic, or, ended up just not feeling—not being—it's not as regimented as some of those Ch—Mandarin classes, the Chinese classes, so it's not worked out very well for us. And I think partly because we don't speak it, you know, at home, so it doesn't get reinforced. So.

SC: Does—does your husband speak Vietnamese at all?

TC: He tried. [laughs] He tried.

SC: [laughs] How hard did he try?

TC: Yeah, he did, actually—it's funny because we—when we—uh in the first year or two of our marriage, he actually was commuting back and forth and—from New Jersey and New York, and Houston. [**SC:** Oh wow.] So because he was there during the week, he would, you know, spend time listening to tapes, Vietnamese tapes, and those—like, the Foreign Service Institute kind of things, and—and so he thought he would surprise me when I came and visited, [laughs] and so he would say something, and I'm like, 'What?' [both laugh] And so, he said 'I know I'm saying it right,' you know, and so he would pop in the tape, and it turns out that the—the voice, the accent, on that Foreign Service language tape was very heavily southern. [**SC:** Huh.] And I—my family is from the north [**SC:** Mhm.], and so—so it's—it's really kinda hard to hear some of that stuff, and so then I was like, 'Oh. Yeah. This is why I didn't know what you were saying, is because I can hardly understand what he's saying.' You know, it's—it's just that different. And he's like, 'Darn!' [laughs] You know. So—so he's trying some other things, I think we had Pimsleur and he was doing it with the kids, and—about a summer or two ago, and so that kind of—it maxed out at the—kind of the basic first conversation level, which was at—really good, actually, I thought, it was a great, uh, CD pack, but unfortunately it kinda stopped.

SC: So what—how well do your husband and children speak Vietnamese now?

TC: Not good. Not good. [laughs]

SC: [unintelligible] Just very very basic stuff?

TC: Very very.

SC: Okay. Um... what have you told your children about Vietnam?

TC: What have I told them about it? Um, not much, other than that, you know, here's this culture, and I try to expose them to the foods, and—everything's done through foods, mostly, I guess, these days, but—you know—and they're not even used to that so much. So it's, uh, it's been limited. So they know, you know, that this is part of their heritage, but it's, uh, been limited.

SC: Um, has there been any efforts to make them more aware of their Greek heritage as well, or is it mostly just the Vietnamese side?

TC: A little bit, yeah, so it—you know—so my second son, he's funny [laughs]. He identifies himself as

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Brazilian, because he [laughs]—because he was born in Brazil. So we lived in Brazil for about a year, and it just happened that he was born there. And so I asked him one day, when he was—I don't—how old was he, he was probably about 7, 8. And I was like, 'So you guys, so how do you identify yourself when somebody asks you, you know, are you Anglo, are you Asian, or...' And the older one says, 'Well, you know, just depends on who's asking [SC: [chuckles]] and what's the situation.' [laughs] And the second one says, 'I tell 'em I'm Brazilian.' I'm like, okay. [laughs] You know, that's a good one.

SC: [laughs] Have you ever gotten a sense of—of how the older one i-identifies, did—did you ever get an answer to that question?

TC: I think he identifies himself more, uh, Anglo. Yeah. Yeah, so he—he's more—he's closer to my husband, you know, they—they're tight, they do things together, you know, sports, dah dah dah, um, so I think he just—is more natural to him. Although, you know, he has many Asian friends, cause we—we've had this kids at T. H. Rogers, which is this school where, you know, it's HISD, it's a vanguard, you go from kindergarten to eighth and—um, and the majority of the kids there are Asians. Um, there's a handful of Anglo, more so than African American and Hispanics. And so—you know, so he gets—he really gets along with everybody, um, but I think he does see himself kinda little bit different.

SC: Um... let's see. So when you went back to Vietnam, were your children with you?

TC: With us? Yes. Yes, but they were still pretty young at the time—very young, yeah, so the smaller one was only 3, the other one was 5. So, yeah, they don't remember much at all.

SC: So you—you don't think they really got anything out of it?

TC: Mm-mm, no.

SC: Um, do you want to take them back when they're older?

TC: I would. Yeah, yeah, I'd like to, uh, show them what—you know, just the Asian culture, even just—the contrast, even, you know, across different countries that are even very close together, between Thailand and Vietnam and Cambodia and, you know, China.

SC: Um... so why were you living in Hong Kong and—and Brazil, if I may ask?

TC: My husband's job, um, took him over there. So he worked for BFI for many years, the, uh, waste—trash company, uh, before they got bought over by Republic, and, um, and so he was part of their international IT team. So he would go to these different countries and set up their financial systems [SC: Mm.], and stuff like that. So. So we didn't get married until he was 43, um, so he had traveled a lot in his years when he was single and doing that kind of work, so—in the early 90s, uh, or so—yeah, uh—the trash business was, you know, they were kind of struggling a little bit, so they sold off—BFI and Waste Management both—sold off all of their international operations, and just focused on domestic. And so he basically didn't have a role anymore, and so he started working for this, uh, other company, but he had a chance to go work for the French company that had bought BFI's international operations, and so—so he went over there with them to kind of do some business development, and that was the Hong Kong one, and then when we were in Brazil it was with Waste Management, and um—and they were trying to do something with a potential partner down there, so those were our two stints. Yeah.

SC: And how did that affect your professional life?

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TC: Um, it put—it slowed it down just a little, but it was a break that I needed both times, um, especially ‘cause I had little kids and, you know, was just starting to have another one, um, so it was perfect timing, uh—they didn’t—again, part of my—you know ‘cause of—I’d contributed, and I’d been loyal, she didn’t want to stop my employment even though I was moving overseas. So, she was like ‘Okay, let’s set up the cameras, let’s work, you know, by—electronically,’ and this was before wi-fi, and before DSL and all this stuff, and it was like dial-up, so naturally the—the camera thing didn’t work, [laughs] [**SC:** Mhm.] you couldn’t hardly get a picture, you know, and whatnot, and, uh, and so it was—it was different. Um... my, just a few years home, you know, what a difference it makes. But anyway, so I still did writing, uh, grant writing and, uh, whatever I could from home and overseas. I would send it back and forth and, um, they kept me on the payroll. Mhm. Yeah, it was nice.

SC: Both times?

TC: Yeah.

SC: Wow.

TC: It was nice [**SC:** [breathy laugh]], yeah. And—and—in between, I came back to work part time, I didn’t even, you know, come back full time. So, you know, I kept my finger on the pulse and contributed, but was able to kind of go home and be Mom when I needed to. [**SC:** Mhm.] So it was ideal, yeah.

SC: So when—when did you come back to working full-time as opposed to part-time? How old were your kids?

TC: So that was in 2000—late 2003, when I came back, started working full time. So they were still small. My dad was, um, still around, and, um—so they stayed with him, or they were in preschool when they were old enough. So Reese was in preschool, and then my dad took care of the little one until he was 3. Yeah.

SC: Mhm. Um, and you mentioned that you have limited proficiency in—in Vietnamese, um... With whom do you speak Vietnamese?

TC: Vietnamese? My cousins, maybe, when we’re together, you know, as a group. Although we mostly speak English to each other. But you know, periodically we’ll do that, especially the older ones, um, and my aunts and uncles. Mhm.

SC: Um, with your aunts and uncles do you speak primarily Vietnamese?

TC: Mhm.

SC: And—do you try to avoid mixing English, or is it ...

TC: I try to avoid it, but it’s hard not to. Yeah.

SC: And when your parents were alive, did you speak to them primarily in Vietnamese?

TC: Um—primarily, yes. Yes, mhm. But I would still throw that in.

SC: Was that important, or –

TC: Yeah, it—it was—it was, I think, you know, just part of, um, respect, uh, to them, and to my dad, but, um, like I said, he really did not, you know, push for us to have to. Um, so—we would mix it in and he would be

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okay with it. Yeah. He was a pretty contemporary guy, for—yeah.

SC: Um... and—and you said he was pretty okay with you marrying an Anglo guy [**TC:** Yeah.], even though he might have preferred [**TC:** I know yes] a Vietnamese?

TC:—it's so funny cause you know, my aunts—because my mom passed away pretty, uh—when I was only 12, and so my aunts, I think sometimes they felt like, you know, they—they, um, could help me. So [laughs], so they would try to set me up, I'm like 'Nooo. No thank you.' [breathy laugh] And like—so my dad—I think—I'm trying to think if there was a time when he just, you know, showed his discontent about who I was seeing, um, I think it was probably when I was younger, um, in college, perhaps, but—so—you know, so after I started working and stuff, and he's like, 'You know, you're a grown person, whatever makes you happy.' And I think—and if it's a—it's a—you know, a good decent person, that's really what counted for him, he didn't—he didn't mind that it's not a Vietnamese.

SC: Um... how important to you is it that you maintain fluency in Vietnamese? Or—or any proficiency?

TC: Well, apparently it's not been, 'cause I haven't worked on it. [laughs] Um... yeah, it's—you know, it—it is kind of sad, when you think about, you know, the next generation, and—I—yeah, when I look at my kids, and I'm like, 'Kids, you don't even like the food! [laughs] You need to at least try it, and learn about it, and be—get used to it, even, you know?' So, um—so yeah, so I think, you know, with the language, it's almost like—you have to want to learn it, and you have to want to do it, but—I haven't made the time. And I—and we've tried to force it on the kids, and it hasn't worked. [laughs]

SC: Uh, so, do you ever watch or listen to Vietnamese-language media? News, or –

TC: No. No, no, I couldn't keep up.

SC: Uh, how often do you eat Vietnamese food?

TC: Um, maybe... once every couple weeks. It's not even—and it's mostly when I—you know, from work, I go seek it out. Like today, you know, with my coworkers or friends. [**SC:** Mhm.] Um, but I eat—I cook it not that often at home, um, I do things that are quick and easy, and so—that kind of stuff. Sometimes it's quick and easy, but a lot of times it's a lot of prep work. Work that I just haven't done. Or they complain about it, and so I'm like 'I don't wanna hear complaints,' but [laughs]—yeah. So I don't do it that much.

SC: So your kids really don't like Vietnamese food?

TC: Yeah. Or they just don't like the combination of things [**SC:** Mm.], you know, it's like they like things kind of in their own little categories. [laughs]

SC: I know people who feel that way about food. [laughs]

TC: Yeah. Yeah, I'm hoping they'll grow out of it [**SC:** Yeah.], but yes, I'm just gonna keep—'Okay, here's an opportunity, let's try it!' [laughs]

SC: Uh, do you participate in Vietnamese cultural events in Houston, like big celebrations for new year or anything?

TC: Uh, periodically, yes, a little. We'll go to the Chinese New Year kind of things, um, but not that often, no.

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Really, you know, it's—it's mostly just the time, the opportunities I have with my cousins and their kids, so—that's how I want our kids to be able to kind of stay connected with that, is through our m—our family.

SC: Um, so how does your family celebrate Lunar New Year?

TC: Um, we'll go visit our aunts and uncles, you know, try to carry that tradition on, and, um, you know, bringing gifts, and just taking the time to—to have one-on-ones. 'Cause when we do these big family gatherings it's kind of this rush mob, and—you know, you're gone again, and—so you, you have your little sub-groups that kind of stick together. But I mean, really, I mean, that in itself is also kind of this cultural thing that, you know, we want to continue, because it does bring us together, because even nowadays, you know, it's like—we used to be so close together, everybody lived relatively close together, or—you know, we were able—we grew up together, and, um—and now, you know, it's like we're all moved further and further apart, our kids are going to school further and further away, out of state, we—everybody ended up at UT or U of H, you know? So, um—so it's hard, as society is kind of—as everybody's becoming more mainstream, and, um, and how it just kind of, you know, kind of pulls us apart.

SC: Um, and you mentioned your involvement in Asian Women Empowered, are you involved in any specifically Vietnamese cultural organizations?

TC: Mm-mm. No, no I'm not.

SC: Okay.

TC: Yeah, it's like my life is work, work, and then family, a little bit. You know, it's like—yeah, all my days are here, you know, like seven to seven, and then a little bit of family time.

SC: Like seven to seven, wow.

TC: Well, yeah, I mean—you know, by the time I leave the house it's seven in the morning or before. I get home about seven or after. So, yeah. It's consuming.

SC: Yeah.

TC: Mhm.

SC: Thank you for giving me so much of your time for this interview, I appreciate it.

TC: No, no, I appreciate—no, it's—it's fine, it's good. Um, so you know, I think—part of it is—is the drive to do a good job, part of it is I love what I do, you know, and so I feel very fortunate to not have had to do something just because somebody told me I had to do it. You know? Or just to go into accounting because that's the right thing to do. You know, I still—I—I look at, uh, my staff, who—these young girls who are Indian, and—you know, so they're—they're born here, but, you know, the—the culture—the family's influence is so—still so heavy on them, in a res—very restrictive way. So it's kind of these extremes, I mean, it's like, I know that we've kind of gotten a little too liberal maybe, and I have personally, and yet here's this young lady who just graduated, and I think she's going for a Master's degree just to kind of stall so she doesn't have to get married just yet, because when she gets married, she's like 'I can't work anymore. I'm not allowed to work.' And that's [SC: Mhm.]—yeah! And so it's so sad, and—and she—she worked here for quite a while, and then she said, 'Okay, so I'm getting this job,' she only stayed at that job and now she's wanting to come back, um, for a few months, and it's a great job, it's—it's like got these travel to France and New York, but that's taboo. She's not

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really allowed, she shouldn't be traveling on her own, you know, that kind of thing. So it's like wow, you know, I'm glad our culture isn't quite that extreme. But, um—you know, so—so it's kind of this balance, right, how do you kind of retain your culture and—and appreciate the good parts of it [laughs], and, and still be able to live in this contemporary society, and, um, and be happy. [SC: Mhm.] You know? And so I'm very happy that I'm able to give back, I'm able to do a good job, I'm able to apply my accounting and business skills to a field that, you know, needs it. And, um, so—yeah. It's—it's all good. [laughs]

SC: Um... just a couple of wrapping-up questions, uh—how do you self-identify, like as Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American, American, or something else?

TC: Vietnamese.

SC: Vietnamese?

TC: Mhm.

SC: And what does that identity mean to you?

TC: Mean? Um, it means that I, um, I was born there, both of my parents, you know, have long histories, and, um, I do identify myself as being part of that culture, and—and part of that, um... driving kind of, you know, work ethic, and those kind of things that—maybe are the positives of the stereotypical Asian description. Um... so yeah, so I—I—I do identify myself as that, and, um, so it's a very interesting, you call this one and a half, or 1.5, and, so—help me understand the origin of that.

SC: Um, it's just—it's a sociological term, uh, uh Ruben, uh, Rumbaut, uh coined it to describe—I think he was—he was specifically dealing with—with the—the Vietnamese, I believe, he's the author of a lot of scholarship on—on Vietnamese immigration to the United States post-1975, um, and uh he—he recognized that there was this unique cohort of people who were, you know, technically first generation in that they were born not in the United States, but they had these different experiences because they were coming over so young.

TC: Right. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's so—so yeah, I think that's a very good description, of kind of like, you're—you're in and out, you're kind of, uh—so I do have a strong, uh, identity, and pride, in the fact that I am Vietnamese, but then there's also this uh drive to be able to achieve and fit in with anybody else in America, you know. Um, mhm. And—and it does mm... I guess make me, uh... kind of feel challenged on people who are really shy and really quiet, and it's like, 'Okay, you know, how can we help you kind of get past that, I mean, it's like, you gotta work on it,' just like I've had to work on it, you know, and—and—and I think, uh... I think about my role here, being second in command, or, you know, not being the one in charge, I was very comfortable with that. And I think that's a very—maybe I shouldn't say that it's an Asian thing, but it was—it was like this place where it's like I feel like I can contribute, and I can do a lot of good stuff, and—but I don't want—I don't have to be the front. Right? You're—you're—it's like I was being modest, to always be in the background, and I will give you everything you need to be able to kind of do the job. Um, and so it took me really, uh, some time to kind of get comfortable being the one in front, being the one that's ultimately going to be responsible for everything, and, um, and feeling okay about it. Um—so I don't know if that was just my own personal confidence thing, but—or my shyness, my introverted aspect—character—um—but you know, they did one of those, uh, Briars May—Brig—uh—Myers-Briggs, you know [SC: Mhm.], so, I'm, you know, the introverted, uh, sensory, thinking, judging, eyes teaching[?], and—but when they did the more kind of in-depth look at it, I'm only introverted by a small amount now. You know, I—I have a lot of E in me, a lot of extroversion. And so it's—it's part of this—you know, as you evolve, in your role in life or your job or

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whatever, you kind of—you gotta push yourself to—[laughs] to make it work. So—so yeah, so, I think—you know, when I think of—when I see some of the—kind of the—the stereotypical Asian characters in people, then it makes me a little irritated, and I'm like, 'Okay, come on, guys. [laughs] You can do this!' [laughs]

SC: So, um, you say that you've—you've spent your entire life trying to fit in to the mainstream, uh—how do you feel that has impacted your—your *Vietnameseness*, and how do you feel you've—you've negotiated that—that duality?

TC: Well, I think it's—um, it's definitely made my Vietnamese—you know, side—suffer—um, because I don't know the language very well, because I couldn't, you know, I wouldn't be able to teach my kids and—and kind of reinforce that a little bit more, um—so it's more of on a personal level than on a broader community level, I mean—I—I really, um—I don't worry so much about what others—you know—so it's really more about just—yeah, I think that it's definitely caused separation of that identity for my kids, and, you know, and the kids that will come after them. Mhm.

SC: And, uh, finally, how do you see yourself with respect to other Asians in general and other Asian groups, like, do you feel any more affinity with someone walking down the street who happens to be Asian, than with someone walking down the street who happens not to be?

TC: Um, I don't... so if I were to walk into a room, and there was an Asian person mixed, you know, would I gravitate towards one than another?

SC: Mhm.

TC: Um, I think that I would, um... I would probably be more willing to go to the Asian person and—and at least, you know, initiate the conversation, or a conversation, mhm. Yeah. Cause you know, I mean, just by the sheer demographics, you know, today, there would be a small number of Asian in a larger, whatever, room of other people, and so—yeah, I would probably seek them out, at least to say hello and to—yeah, kind of make a connection.

SC: I noticed that some of the decorations in your office are—are Chinese.

TC: Yes... yeah. Let's see. So, um, this is something my dad had in our house, and so—so that, to me, is kind of more of a personal connection to Dad. That—my husband had actually bought that, uh, when he was traveling, and I—I identify with the message. [laughs] You know? It's like the people [SC: Mhm.] against the waves, more so. Um, yeah. I—I do, I do like Asian art, but I don't really—yeah, I think it's just—I don't have it at home, I don't think. We have [inaudible], we have all sorts of mixed things. Somebody gave me that. So yeah, it's just—mm.

SC: So—so—so you really identify really solidly as Vietnamese, as opposed to Asians, it's [TC: Yeah, yeah.] it's a very national identity then? Okay.

TC: Yeah, I think—oh yeah, I suspect, you know, if you were talking to a Japanese, and—yeah, it's very interesting, as I said, you know, it's like there's such a—even though we're all very close together, everybody's very distinct in how they identify themselves. Mhm.

SC: Well, that wraps up the interview—once again, thank you so much [TC: Thank you.] for making the time to talk to me.

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TC: Thank you; glad you're doing this.

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]