Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: TRI C. TRAN

Interviewer: Jimmy Huynh

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Location: Irvine, California

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FIELD NOTES

The interview was conducted in Krieger Hall, Room 550, the office of Tri C. Tran at the University of California, Irvine. Present during the interview were the Narrator, Tri C. Tran, and the interviewer, Jimmy Huynh. We split the interview into two separate sessions due to time restrictions.

When I arrived to his office for the first interview session, I was initially surprised to see another student in his room who was scribbling lots of words on what I believed to be an assignment or test. It seemed like the student needed assistance, and Professor Tran was offering him help until I arrived, which was when switched his attention towards me for the rest of the session. The student, meanwhile, was still in the background silently doing his assignment as I interviewed the narrator.

I studied the room as I entered. The room itself was smaller than I expected for offices and looked a little old. There was a second desk with a computer that the aforementioned student was working on, but it doesn’t seem like that particular desk had its own owner. There weren’t many decorations around the room aside from books, a few plants, and things you would see in a typical office environment like computer electronics and a myriad of pens and pencils, yet one of the few hints of knowing that I was definitely in an Asian environment was a framed, red poster with golden Vietnamese text written on it. At the time I thought not much of it, and I started to study the narrator instead.

Professor Tran was dressed in a casually professional manner. He wore a white-collared shirt with a black top-coat on top, but also wore jeans. As I interviewed Professor Tran, we were both mutually nervous in the beginning. Professor Tran occasionally stuttered and sometimes took a while to fully recollect his memories, but I noticed that he appeared to be very emotional when talking about his mother. He would slow down; the tone of voice became slightly softer, and he seemed to be very sad while thinking about his mother. Conversely, Professor Tran expressed lots of pride and enthusiasm when talking about subjects that really appealed to him, like his experiences as a teacher and his immense passion for studying linguistics.
Throughout both interviewing sessions, Professor Tran was attentive to my questions most of the time. However, he often did things on the side while answering my questions, like print out papers or read things from his computer monitor. It felt almost as if he was being distracted by these things, but nevertheless he managed to answer my questions in a timely and respectable fashion. As the interview went on, he showed signs of slight exhaustion by drinking his water more copiously and by rubbing his head occasionally. He may have been trying to conjure up more memories, or he may have been genuinely exhausted by the questions.

After the first interviewing session, I thanked him for this time and quickly took pictures of him and his office. When I came to interview him again for the second session, things went a lot smoother. By now we were already much more comfortable with the interviewing process and his responses were much faster and consistent overall. He was also dressed virtually in the same way as he had the first time I interviewed him, albeit this time in beige/brown colors. It was during this session that I asked more questions that asked him to elaborate more on his personal philosophies on life, which he answered with great pride and detail. After I asked him about what he thought was the most important thing that future Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past, we had a brief off-the-record conversation about why Vietnamese-American youth would not use Vietnamese in a public setting. The conversation went by extremely smoothly and fluidly, as if it were a real, unscripted conversation between two friends. This conversation also caused us to really run out of time; at the end of this session, I quickly asked him the meaning behind the red poster, and he told me that it meant “Congratulations to the new graduate!”; a gift that he received after graduating from UCLA. I quickly thanked him once again for his contributions to the project, and I quickly walked with him to the elevator, where he hastily walked off to teach his next class.