

Interviewer: Charles Numrich

Date: January 25, 1993

Place: Huang Hai's home in St. Paul, MN

1. Just for the tape, tell us your name.

My name is Huang Hai

2. Where did you come from to the United States?

I'm from Guiyang, the capitol of Guizhou Province.

3. And what country?

China.

4. Your full name is Huang Hai? Is there more to it?

That's just my Chinese name. My Hmong name is Wang Hai. In China we spell that W A N G. But here we spell V A N G.

5. In China, do most Hmong have a Chinese name and a Hmong name?

Yes.

6. Is the Chinese name used for official documents?

Yes. If you go to school, usually you have to use a Chinese name. If you use a Hmong name, it's hard to pronounce.

7. For Chinese people, it's hard to pronounce?

Yeah.

That's very much like this country; it's hard for people to pronounce Hmong names here too.

8. When did you come to the United States?

In August 1992

9. What was the reason that you came to this country?

In 1992, I was invited by Mingee International Museum of World and Folk art, and I just came to the United States to help Chinese, Hmong people's options. I'm a scholar and a lecturer of Civil art.

10. So, you brought with you the art show, or was the art show there?

I brought civil ornaments into some customs.

11. And these were all Hmong, or were these Chinese?

Hmong. Most of them were Hmong

12. When you say "civil ornaments", what would that be?

Silver jewelry.

13. So, the necklace and wasteband with coins on it? And so it was all silver artwork?

Yeah.

14. Now, that was in San Diego?

Yeah.

15. How long was that show there?

About four months. They just finished it on the eleventh of January.

16. So, then all of that artwork has gone back to China? Or is it traveling around this country?

Right now I think those items are still in the museum. Later, I will call my friend to get them back.

17. Now, where in China did these artworks come from ? What part of China?

From Guidgo Arpumis. And the Hmong Arpumis are famous for their silver ornaments.

18. And did you gather these yourself? Did you collect them or did the museum?

Some of them I bought, and some of them I just borrowed from my relatives in the countryside.

19. And what are the silver ornaments used for? What do the Hmong people use them for?

For special occasions, such as wedding ceremonies, splendid festival celebrations, Hmong people wear silver ornaments.

20. Besides wedding ceremonies, do the Hmong in China celebrate New Year with a large celebration too?

Yeah. We Hmong have our own New Year celebration, usually in the end of November. But we also celebrate Chinese New Year, a spring festival usually in February.

21. Now, you came to this country to host this art show, how did you end up in Minneapolis?

Before I came to the United States, some American Hmong had visited me in China, so before I came here I wrote to them. So, they picked me up in Chicago, then they drove me here to meet some people, so I just started to know them.

21. Was Chenia Yang one of those people you met in China?

No, Jou Hou Chong, Brova Chong, Jovi Chong, Chong Ye.

22. And they were from Minneapolis?

Chicago. And another friend is from Eau Claire, Wisconsin,

23. And then you came to Minneapolis in August...

No, to San Diego.

24. When did you come to Minneapolis?

At the beginning of September. I just spent about three days in Minneapolis, then I came back to San Diego. And at the beginning of October, then I came here again.

24. Now, at the beginning of September, did you come for the Hmong festival?

Yeah.

25. And, what was that like? How was that different or the same as maybe a Hmong festival in China?

Mostly the same. Because many people come to celebrate. You know, in China, Hmong people are very poor, they don't have cars. They don't have Cameras, video cameras. Except for that, many things are the same.

26. So at the festival in September there were a lot of Hmong people driving there, and they all brought their video cameras and their cameras to take pictures?

Yeah.

27. So, the things that were the same, the handwork, the needlework, the PaNdau, would that be much the same as you would see in China?

I think in China, Hmong people's PaNdau embroidery are more beautiful.

28. What would the difference be? Would it be the design, would it be the handwork itself?

Here, it seems that the embroidery, the PaNdau, the Hmong people here just want to sell them. But, in China they do not sell them, they're just for their own use. So, it's more artistic.

29. And what use do they put this PaNdau to? Is it for clothing, is it for decorations? What do they use Padow for in China?

Used especially for young women. The needlework is so important for them. Usually for young gentlemen, when they choose their wife they will judge whether this lady has good needlework or not.

30. And how about, I know that there was music and dancers at the Hmong festival, and I think there were storytellers, was there a big difference between the music and the dance and the stories that you saw here, was that different then what you would see in China?

Since, in China, there are three main dialects for Hmong people to speak, the Hmong here they speak Western dialect, the dialect I speak is Central dialect, and other Hmong they speak Eastern dialect, so the activities are somewhat different. For example, for Central Dilamon, they will have horse races, and dragon boat race on the river, and choggin, and blow red pipe game.

31. So in Chinese that's Choggin. So they would compete playing Gang and dancing?

Yeah.

32. Now, have you ever visited areas in China where there are the Hmongs that speak the Western dialect?

Yes.

33. Could you tell a difference between the activities of those Hmong in China and the Hmong that are here that speak that same dialect, were they pretty much the same as far as how they played their music or their Pendow designs and those kinds of things?

Yeah. The Pendow looked very much alike. Since when I went their to visit them at that time there wasn't any festival.

34. So, you didn't hear any music or you didn't have any dances?

No.

35. And now, you have decided to stay in Minneapolis for a while? For how long, do you know?

Yeah, I would like to finish my PHD education. So, maybe five years.

36. And you're attending the University of Minnesota? In anthropology?

Yeah.

37. When you're done with that, what is it that you want to do with that education?

So far, there are some foreign anthropology studying, researching Hmong peoples' culture. But, for their own people, to research, there are very few. So, I want to do this kind of work.

38. So you would go back to China to do research on your own peoples' history?

Yeah. And also to compare the culture of American Hmong and Chinese Hmong.

39. When you go back to China do you think you'll have an opportunity to do this through a university, I mean is that the way you would have to work, through a university to do this research?

Not necessarily. After I finish my education here I can become a researcher, in academical unit.

40. And so it's possible that you could simply go back and research and then write books about the history of the Hmong.

Yeah.

41. Now, when I first saw you you were acting as interpreter for Dr. Lee and his lecture about the history of the Hmong in China. Now, he is Hmong, is that right?

Yes.

42. And is he doing research at the Philagic of research on the Hmong in China?

Yeah.

43. Now, have you done much study of that yet?

Yes, and last month my article, "Hmong Peoples' Silver Ornaments" was published in Taiwan. *Chinese Folk Artist Report* magazine, a very high level academical magazine. So, actually I'm doing some research.

44. Now, you obviously know a lot about the silver work of the Hmong people, what got you interested in that particular part of Hmong culture?

So far I haven't been able to find anybody who has researched Hmong peoples' silver arts, and Hmong people are very famous for their silver ornaments, but so far there is nobody that has researched that.

45. So no one knows how long the Hmong have been working silver? Does anybody know?

How do you say it, it's a long story. So far we haven't found any silver mines in Hmong peoples' area. So, the history of Hmong peoples' silver ornaments is not long. Actually, my opinion is that the Hmong at first learned how to make silver ornaments from Han Chinese, and later the Hmong developed silver ornaments.

46. So it's maybe 500 years, maybe 1000? When was the Han?

About 400 years ago, or 300 years ago.

47. Now, when you got to this country, had you ever been here before, been to the United States before you came to San Diego?

No, that was my first time.

48. How had you learned about the United States before you came?

Ah, just that it's a rich country, very rich. And the people are very open minded. Yeah, that's true. People are very hospitable, very polite.

49. Did you study English in school in China?

Yeah.

50. For how many years?

Five years.

51. And, in learning English did you in those classes then learn about the United States too, or were you just studying the language?

If you study English it's not possible without considering its culture. You have to know its culture.

52. So, what did you expect when you first came to the country, what did you think you would see?

It's hard to say.

53. Well, was there anything that surprised you when you got to this country, that you didn't expect?

Yeah, When I first arrived in Los Angeles, it was such a big city, so many cars. And there were all kinds of people. Black, white, and yellow. So, it's just real, just another part of the world.

54. Were there any things, any places that you had heard about, that you really wanted to see in the United States?

Really, I haven't considered that.

55. As you've been living here, almost five months or six months now, what kind of things have been difficult to you, in terms of adjusting to living in the United States? What's been hard for you?

Just too busy. Everybody here is too busy. It seems that life is scheduled life. If you want to see somebody, you must call them before. I'm not used to that.

56. Where you came from in China, was it a small city, large city? How big a city would you say?

Maybe just a middle.

57. Maybe the size of St. Paul?

Our city, the capital of Guigo Pa, is about two million people.

58. So that's a good sized city.

Yeah, but compared to other cities it's not a big city.

59. Compared to what other cities?

Chong Ching, Lan Ching, Beijing, Shanghai. It's not a big city.

60. So living in Minneapolis and St. Paul isn't very small to you, there's only about a million people in the whole area.

No, I cannot feel it's a small city.

61. Why is that?

The architecture, the buildings, very very tall. And the stores. And just many things are modernized.

62. What would be different besides the pace, the scheduling of life here? What would be different from your life in Gingo? What's different here from there, besides the pace?

If you take the bus, usually the bus will give you a schedule. For example, for 9:15, the bus will come. In China, we don't have that system. You have time just to go around before the bus comes. You don't know exactly what time the bus will come.

63. And, do most people travel by bus or by foot in China, or in your city?

We use bicycle. Bicycle is popular.

64. So, at the university, not this time of year, you'll feel very comfortable then, because a lot bicycles go around the university in the springtime and summertime. So, when you went to the university in China, how far away from the university did you live?

It's not far. About two kilometers.

65. So you live much farther away, here, from this university then you did there.

Yeah.

66. How long a bus ride do you take now to get to school?

About 15 minutes.

67. So that's a long bus ride.

Yeah.

68. When you met the Hmong in the United States, did you feel close to them, or did you have to learn about them? They don't speak the same language as you, so you had to communicate with them in English. Was that difficult?

No. In China, like I said, there are three main dialects for Hmong to speak. Actually, they cannot communicate to each other, they have to use Chinese. But it doesn't matter. So far as we know, you are Hmong. So we think you are my brother.

69. So that's the same in China, then, for the Hmong, that family is part of the culture. And if you meet someone else who is Hmong, it doesn't matter if you know them, they speak the same language, they're like your friend, your brother, your family.

Yes, that's true.

70. One of the things that Hmong people coming to this country have had problems with is the legal system, the laws in this country. Do you see that as a problem for you, coming from China?

Yeah. For example, here people are not allowed to eat something or drink something in the bus. You cannot.

71. So you can get in trouble for doing that here, and in China it doesn't matter.

Yeah, doesn't matter.

72. Are there other things that you've heard about or that you've run into that you see might be problems as far as the laws or the customs of this country that are confusing or difficult to understand?

It is the same as here. Just everything has a law to come to.

73. And when you say everything, what would be something, well like the bus is one example. Are there other examples that you can think of?

Yes, for example even in the evening, when the traffic light, a red light is on, I found that people do not pass the red light. But in China, usually after this hour, people do not care about that.

74. So it's no problem if you go through, if there's no traffic it doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter, after official hour, there's no police, they don't care.

75. I take it your family is still in China?

Yeah.

76. And who is still there in your family? Who is left behind?

I have two brothers, young brothers, and parents.

77. So, compared to Hmong families from Laos, and Hmong families in this country, you have a pretty small family, only three children.

Yeah.

78. Do the Hmong in China try to stay with the small family plan of the Chinese government?

Actually, yeah. The Hmong people would like to have more children. This is our tradition. Even our government has a new law, that for one family one child. But for ethnic groups they may have two children. But for Hmong, they usually have more than two children.

79. So, have you noticed if the Hmong in this country have held that tradition, do the Hmong in this country that you've met do they still mostly have large families still?

Yeah. Usually they have six, five children.

80. And as you get to know more Hmong people in this country, what do you feel is happening to the traditions of the Hmong as they adapt to this country, as they get used to living here? What kinds of things do you think are happening? How are things changing or staying the same?

Well, in China, when guests come to visit us we usually use alcohol, rice whiskey to serve them. Here, Hmong people use beer.

81. Sometimes I know that's because of the cost, but then to some Hmong parties where they bring whiskey, but that's only those that have enough money, because whiskey is expensive. I think the beer is sometimes used because it's less expensive.

Yeah.

82. How do you feel your schooling is going to go when you get into the anthropology department at the university, what are you expecting from that? Do you think it will be difficult? How do you think you'll do?

Right now I'm just liking the systematical, anthropological training. For the past few years I have spent my summer holidays, winter holidays, and other holidays with my relatives in the countryside. So, I'm quite familiar with the lifestyle and kinship system, social life. And also I have taken a lot of photos. So, I would like to get some training about anthropology. So, when I write some of those articles I can use some anthropological explanations. That's what I want.

83. In studying the family structure of the Hmong, in the countryside, what kinds of things have you learned, what have you noticed? What are the important elements of family for the Hmong?

Father's position in the family is so important.

84. Does that seem to be changing in this country, for the Hmong?

Maybe, in the future. Because here, when a husband and a wife, they both work outside, they have income. In China, in Hmong peoples' area, the wives they do housework.

85. Do you have any feelings about how that will change the culture, what effect that will have on the children or what effect that will have in the future as far as Hmong culture goes in this country?

Sorry, your question was kind of big.

86. Yeah, the fact that the men and women, the roles in Hmong society for men and women are changing. Women are now more working for themselves, or working on their own. Men are working too. That means how they act toward their children is different. The mother is not home all the time to be with the child, or maybe the father is home more during the daytime and the mother is home at night or something like that. Do you think that that will change the Hmong culture in the future here, to make it different than it has been in the past?

Yeah. Since both the husband and the wife are working outside. So comparatively independent. So, here I found that the Hmong people, the divorce rate is much higher than the Hmong in China. The divorce is not our culture in China.

87. So you're saying in China very seldom do Hmong people divorce.

Yeah.

88. What would be a reason for a Hmong couple to divorce in China? What would cause that to happen?

If a wife cannot be pregnant is the main reason.

89. So the husband would divorce her.

Yeah.

90. Are there ever times when the wife would divorce the husband?

Very seldom.

91. So it has been historically pretty much a male dominate society.

Yes.

92. Although the women do hold on to some property, that they bring with them into the marriage.

Yeah, especially in Gingo. We have an oudecine, that after parents pass away the daughters can share silver ornaments. Sons can share the house or other properties.

93. So the daughters are taken care of then, with silver, which is very valuable.

Yeah.

94. Do you see in this country the Hmong being Americanized? And how does that compare with the Hmong in China and how much they are like Chinese people? Is it different?

It's hard to say. So far, if they know you are Hmong, they treat you very well, the same as in China.

95. Have you had enough experience with the younger generation of Hmong, the Hmong who were born in this country, to know if it seems like they are going to

carry on the traditions of their people, does that seem to be something that's happening?

It's hard to say. I think most of them can still keep the Hmong culture.

96. Is there, in this country, I know that there is a tension between trying to be Hmong and trying to adapt to being American, that people struggle with that a lot. Is that a struggle that Hmong people in China live with, or because Hmong have been there for so long has it not been much of a problem?

I don't think it's contradiction really. You can be a good citizen here and also keep your own culture as well. No contradiction.

97. Well, there are sometimes. Especially in legal aspects. Sometimes I've heard stories about disciplining children that for some Hmong traditionally disciplining a child would sometimes mean physically hitting them, and you can legally get into a lot of trouble in this country for hitting your child. Or that having more than one wife was traditional. A man would sometimes marry a younger woman when he got older in Laos.

Yeah, that's true. In Laos, the Hmong may have two wives, three wives. But in China it's very seldom. Take our promise for example, there's very few. Even in the older society, before 1949. Even before that time it was very seldom to have two wives.

98. You mentioned the fact that the Hmong are one of the nationalities in China. Is it then not really a contradiction in China to be Hmong and to be a good citizen of China? Are there any contradictions there?

No, no contradictions.

99. As you think about going back to China, which is your goal, what besides your work, doing anthropology studies, what do you see as your life there? What will happen when you go back? Will you get married, will you have a family? What kinds of things do you expect when you go back to China?

Yeah. So far I'm the first one from China to study in the United States, so I think that after I finish my education and come back to China our government and our people will lay good hope upon me. So, I think I can take a good role in our society. So I can help the Chinese people, I mean the Hmong people a lot I think.

100. Do you wish to have a family, get married and have children? Is that one thing that you want to do?

Of course. But it's just that my situation here is difficult. Right now I just don't have time to think about that thing.

101. I know that for the Hmong in this country and in Laos very often the marriages would be arranged by families. The elders from two families would get together and decide that this boy and this girl should get married. Is that a tradition for the Chinese Hmong too?

No, it's not our tradition. And according to some research, the Hmong who live close to Han Chinese the marriages is often arranged by the parents. But, in Hmong's community, Hmong peoples' areas, it's free. Free marriage, you can decide your own marriage.

102. And I also know that for the Hmong here and the Hmong in Laos much of the courting of the boys and girls happened at the New Year's celebration. They would get together and get to know each other. Does that happen at the Hmong New Year in China too?

Yeah. Usually the festivals they serve as a function for the young men and the young ladies to court.

103. And, do the Hmong in China get married quite young, or not so young?

Quite young.

104. So like what age?

About 16, 17, 18.

105. So, when you get back to China, and begin your work, when you start thinking about a wife for yourself, what will you look for in a woman to be a good wife?

I would like a wife like, how do you say? If I write some articles, she can make copies for me.

106. And other things that you would look for, for your family, for your household, that your wife can help you with?

Just thinking. I wish I had a wife whose English is excellent. It's much better than mine. Yes, my ideal wife. So I can write my research in English, so more people know our culture.

107. Now, since there are so many more Hmong in China than anywhere else in the world, would most of your articles and research be for the Chinese Hmong, or would you look at sending this information out more to the Hmong in Thailand, the Hmong in Laos, the Hmong in this country? Do you see that as a possible bridge, a link between all of those groups?

Yeah.

108. And what do you see as the greatest value of building those bridges between all the different Hmong groups all over the world? What's important about that?

It's so important of course. Since Hmong, we have been separated for many, many generations. Even the Hmong in Laos, they cannot see us in China. We can't see them in Laos. But we come to the United States to see them. So, just to do something, to let us know each other, I think it's so important.

109. When you think about your own culture, about the Hmong culture, what do you think are the most important values? When you think about the children, whether it's here or in China, what are the most important values for the Hmong children to learn, about being Hmong, or about being people?

In Hmong, we need family. Just the social pressure, the economical pressure, the political pressure just some kind of heavy. So we need each other. We need to help each other. Also the tradition, the Hmong, not like other nationalities, the family is not as important as the Hmong think about that.

110. And, in the family structure, as you see it right now, do the Hmong in China still use that as a way to pass on the arts and culture and the stories of the people, is

that mostly still done in China orally, from parent to children, or are there books written that pass this on? How is the culture transmitted to the next generation?

Right now, we use Chinese, because, how do you say, traditionally we haven't had a writing system. After liberation, after 1950's the government created our own writing system. But it's not so popular, we still have to use Chinese.

111. So, there is a written Hmong system, a Hmong writing system that uses Chinese characters?

No, the alphabet.

112. Uses the Roman alphabet that we use here.

Yeah.

113. And that was created by the Hmong government or by the Chinese government?

The Chinese government. Of course it's the Hmong people's government.

114. Yeah, I didn't know if it was the cultural leaders of the Hmong or if it was the actual government. Is that written language anything like the written Hmong that the Hmong here use.

It's different.

115. And so there aren't any Hmong anywhere in the world who created their own written language?

No, it's very difficult work because we speak different dialects. If you use the Roman alphabet letter. So that's a kind of language, just to record the sound of the language. So, it's hard, it's hard for all dialects of Hmong to speak. Not like Chinese. You can write this way, you can pronounce that way. But the meanings are the same. For Hmong, if you pronounce differently, it's a different meaning.

116. Since you've been in this country, have you had any experience with discrimination, as an Asian person or as a Hmong person?

No, well, yeah. Once I met a lady in Chicago. She's from Asia. And she was not friendly to me. So, I feel so strange about that. Just that we are from Asia.

117. Are there any other things, those are most of the questions I wanted to ask, are there any other things that you would like to say about life in this country, that has been important to you, or that you have noticed particularly?

Yeah, I do believe in American education. Here, teachers are very responsible. They usually assign you a lot of homework. I think that's a good way. I think I really learned something.

Here, many young Hmong people, they don't know their history. They don't know where they are from. Many, many years ago what their ancestors did in China, they don't know that. And many Hmong people, they still think that they are Mongolian, because the Mongolian song is like the Hmong, so they think they are Mongolian. It's quite wrong. So I think it's so important for the Hmong community leaders here to educate the young generations with the Hmong history.

118. That raises another question for me. I had heard that point that the Hmong may have come from Mongolia at some point. But the Hmong have been in China for how long?

5000 years ago, according to Chinese ancient document. It mentioned that 5000 years ago Hmong lived in the basin of Yellow River.

119. And is there any way that anybody has found out where the Hmong might have come from before that?

No, no evidence. It's hard.

120. Well it's a long time ago and the Hmong never wrote anything down, so nobody would know. I have read some attempts by Western historians to trace them back across the Eurasian continent back to near maybe even the Euro mountains in Russia, maybe even Iran and Iraq and that area, everything. Is one of your hopes as an anthropologist to go beyond the Chinese history of the Hmong, or are you most interested in the Chinese history of the Hmong? Would you like to go back farther than that if there was any way you'd be able to?

It's hard to get the evidence.

121. Another thing I just thought of too, as I've collected Hmong folk tales I feel sometimes like a story I'm being told is a very very ancient story, that it's coming a long way. Are there any particular stories from your culture, any folk tales, that have meant a lot to you, your favorites, or any sorts of stories you've been reading?

Yeah, Chio. Chio is an ancestor, and is good at writing. So, he's regarded as a fighting god in China. The story of Chio is my favorite story.

122. Can you tell a little bit of it, a little bit about Chio and what he did?

He has two homes. At the beginning, the Yellow emperor's tribe could not defeat him. But later, Yellow emperor, he united the emperor. They are supposed to be the ancestors of Han Chinese. So they finally defeated. Chio tribe, the Hmong tribe.

123. So are there a lot of stories about Chio, as a hero, things that he did?

Yeah.

124. What kinds of things did he do, was it mostly stories of war? Did he do any other things?

War. It's just a legendary story. So it's not the real history. But, anyhow, we think he's our ancestor.

125. And, for example, what kinds of weapons did he use?

According to Chinese documents, he used iron to make weapons. But at that time the Yellow emperor's tribe, it used stone. So the Hmong were more advanced at that time than the Yellow emperor tribe.

126. That would seem to indicate, that the Hmong, then, are a more ancient culture than the Chinese. And I know, just in my collecting of folk tales, I've read stories of how the story of Cinderella was traced back to China. People thought that the original Cinderella story came from China. And yet in my collecting of Hmong folk tales I found a Cinderella story and thought well I wonder if this is older than the Chinese story, that maybe the Chinese story actually came from the Hmong, maybe.

Yeah, that's true. The Han Chinese, this concept came into being in Han dynasty.

127. Which concept?

Yeah, Han Chinese. The Chinese right now, before Han dynasty we do not have Han, this concept. So, the Han Chinese are the combination of many nationalities.

128. But the Hmong never were taken into that?

5000 years ago we had the tribe of war, we lose all, we lose the war. So some Hmong became Han Chinese. Some moved to the South.

129. So the ones who moved to the South, to what part of China did they move?

I'd have to say, 5000 years ago they were defeated by the Yellow emperor, so they moved to Yan Suriva. About 4000 years ago the Hmong were defeated by Han Chinese again, so some Hmong moved to Western China and Mongolia.

130. Oh, so they did go there afterwards.

Yeah, 4000 years ago. And some Hmong still move to south Hmong. And later most Hmong move to western China and Mongolia. They moved to south.

131. Did the Hmong and the Chinese continue to fight through that history, or did they stay away from each other? How did the relationship go after that defeat?

It's hard to say. Just in the war Han Chinese and Hmong. Let me just say the Hmong during the war, the ruling class, in Hmong. For example, in Chin dynasty, at that time Mon nationality, the ruling class of China.

132. Which, the Hmong nationality?

The Mon nationality was the ruling class. Other times, Han Chinese, other nationalities also suffered a lot.

133. Also, the history of the Hmong, that I know about, portrays them as very proud people who really refuse to be taken in by anyone around them. I read somewhere that wherever Hmong have lived, people around them have referred to them as the Barbarians, and have kept them away and long have stayed away because they wanted to keep their own culture. That ability to keep the culture strong, do you feel like that will carry through in this country, too, that that's part of the makeup of the people, that they will hold on to their culture?

I don't know your question.

134. In this country, do you think the Hmong ability to keep their culture to themselves and to keep it strong, do you think that Hmong will be able to do it in this country too, with all the pressure of our culture?

Yeah, I think so.

135. The other thing that it seems to me that the Hmong are about is about being able to adapt. To make changes that are needed, to survive, but to hold on to the culture as they need to. In your understanding of the history of the Hmong in China, has adapting been an important part of what the Hmong have done to survive in China?

Yeah, in the past some Hmong they were even afraid to declare they were Hmong. Yeah, since Camnise came to power, the situation for Hmong has improved a lot. And, right now some Hmong, in the past they declared themselves Han Chinese, but now they required just to uncover their own nationality.

136. I also read or heard somewhere that the Hmong were very helpful to Matzadom on his long march. They were part of that process.

Yeah.

137. Is that one of the things that helped them after Mow came to power, they assisted him? So he changed things for the Hmong people then after that?

Yeah, and also I could do some research. Matzadom's mother is Hmong.

138. Oh, that's interesting. I had also heard that there was some research that said that some of the early emperors might have also been Hmong.

In the Chu kingdom, the emperors of the Chu kingdom, they are Hmong.

139. And that would be how many years ago?

2000 years. More than 2000 years ago.

Hmong Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society