

Vu Khac Khoan
Narrator

Sarah Mason
Interviewer

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Bloomington, Minnesota

Sarah Mason -**SM**
Vu Khac Khoan -**VK**
Unnamed Interpreter -**Interpreter**

SM: I'm talking to Professor Vu Khac Khoan on March 27, 1979, in Bloomington, Minnesota. Professor Khoan is a writer, poet, teacher, dramatist, and historian. He was a professor at the University of Saigon before 1975 and in Minnesota he is chairman of the Buddhist Association, a leader of the Vietnamese Cultural Association, and continues to write and has had some of his plays produced in the Twin Cities.

The present interview is conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society and the interviewer is Sarah Mason. Professor Khoan, I wonder if you could start by telling us something of your recollections of childhood in North Vietnam, about your family, your education, and religious life?

VK: I'll try to remember all these things, but I must say that this will be good for me to remember all the things.

SM: I'm sure. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. I was born in Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam on February 17, no. Yes, 1917.

SM: 1917.

VK: Yes. My father is . . . how do you say? A letterer.

Interpreter: A scribe? He wrote . . .?

VK: No, he . . . you know. He learned, you know, the classical work of Confucius, and he's . . .

Interpreter: Oh, he's a scholar.

VK: A scholar, yes. He was a scholar. And my mother has a religion that is Buddhism. I come from a big family. Big in the meaning of, you know, you have many, many brothers and sisters, you know. [Chuckles] Not important. [Chuckles]

SM: How many?

VK: Mmmm, let's see. We are seven.

SM: Seven children?

VK: Yes, seven children. The first one is a boy. I say boy but, you know, now he's about seventy. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes.

VK: And then after you have another boy, and then two sisters, and after, me. [Chuckles] And my brother and after we have a sister.

SM: Are any of these in Minnesota?

VK: No.

SM: No.

VK: No, no. I am [unclear] . . . I am alone here with my family.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. My . . . all of my family, almost, are living now in the North.

SM: In North Vietnam?

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: They don't want to, you know, to leave their country, and to head to the South in 1954.

SM: I see.

VK: So I was in the South after 1954 with my brother . . . my, you know, my first brother.

SM: The oldest one?

VK: Yes. The oldest.

SM: I see. Could you talk a little bit about your childhood life, where you went to school?

VK: Yes. When I was young I must learn Chinese.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes, with my father.

SM: I see.

VK: And at this time it was usual that the father, you know, would teach about classical Chinese to his children. And after I go to learn French . . .

SM: That was at school?

VK: Yes, at school.

SM: Yes.

VK: And after I was in high school. And in 1940 I go to the university.

SM: I see. Where was that? At Hanoi?

VK: Hanoi, yes. First I learned medicine. Medical.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: Then after I . . . I didn't like it, you know, medical study.

SM: I see.

VK: And I changed. I go to the forest.

SM: Forest?

VK: Yes. And so I . . . I am, you know, like a [unclear] of forestry.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: And after that, as I learned to like, you know, to be functional, I studied laws.

SM: Hmm.

VK: After two years, I quit. [Chuckles] Because when I was in the university I . . . I had, you know, many friends who were artists.

SM: Yes.

VK: And especially actors. And about, you know, theater.

SM: Oh.

VK: And I liked it so much that I quit, you know, to begin to write, to produce, to be an actor, too, for the troupe. Theater troupe of the students at the University of Hanoi.

SM: I see.

VK: And I continued, you know, this . . . work.

SM: I see. Did you teach in Hanoi, too, or . . .?

VK: No, not yet. Not yet. In 1945, the politics . . . the political, you know, life changed.

SM: Yes.

VK: And the Japanese, you know, made a *coup d'état* [overthrow].

Interpreter: [Unclear].

SM: *Coup d'état*.

VK: Yes, against the French. Before the [unclear] you know, surrendered.

SM: Oh.

VK: Before surrendering, you know, to the Allies.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Yes. And that . . . that event gave us the occasion to do something about politics.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: And all the young are against the French. And of course, you know, I was in this movement.

SM: Were you part of a particular group, political group, or . . . ?

VK: No.

SM: No.

VK: We had a group.

SM: Yes.

VK: The student group.

SM: I see. And it was largely anti-French?

VK: Against French, against, you know, the Japanese.

SM: Ah.

VK: And for the independence that . . . you know, the true independence for Vietnam. And we tried to be, you know, to be . . . not to be, you know, influenced by the political parties.

SM: Oh. Yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: Because in that moment there is many, many, you know, political parties.

SM: Yes.

VK: And they have their political attitudes, and there have been the Communists, too. And we don't like Communists. But on . . . let's see, August 1945, the Communists take the power. And they have at that moment a government, you know, [that is] pro-Communist. In this moment there . . . there is no Japanese, no French, and we are against Communists at this moment. But in 1946 the war against the French begins. And as we are against the French, we must then take the gun and go to the background. *Arrière.*

SM: In the rear?

Interpreter: Go to the rear, yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: You were in the French . . .? No. The students were in the Vietnamese Army fighting the French?

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: But, you know, under the commandment of Communists, because the Communists in this moment . . . you know, take the power.

SM: Yes.

VK: And they rule, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: All the things.

SM: Yes.

VK: So if you want to . . . to fight against the French, you must, you know, be under their rule.

SM: Right.

VK: From 1946 to 1949, we were with them.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. But we still [unclear] it's difficult, but, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: And after that, in 1949, they begin the politics to, you know, to clear all the people who are not, you know, pro-Communist.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes.

SM: Before that there were other groups in with the Communists.

VK: Yes, before 1949.

SM: Yes.

VK: You know, the Communists are, you know, flexible. They accept . . . like companions, like, you know, fellows.

SM: Oh, yes. I see.

VK: The other groups. And our group is a student group. And when there are . . . there is war, we cannot work together.

SM: Right.

VK: Because, you know, *dispenser*. Yes.

Interpreter: Spread out all over the place.

VK: Yes. Yes. And the country is, you know, very big.

SM: Oh. The student group was dispersed.

VK: Yes. And so we cannot, you know, consult our . . . let's see . . . our, you know . . . friends.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: The leaders are *arrêté*.

Interpreter: They were arrested.

VK: Arrested.

SM: Yes.

VK: But before I said to you before 1949, the Communists are, you know, a lot . . . oh, you know, flexible. And you can, you know, continue to fight the French with them. But you know, in 1945, there is the victory of the Chinese Communists.

SM: Yes.

VK: And so the Vietnamese Communists feel that they are strong enough to begin this movement of clearing, you know, their *perché*.

Interpreter: It's a perch.

VK: Yes. A perch, yes.

SM: Ah.

VK: We could not, you know, stay with them.

SM: That was in 1949.

VK: 1949, yes. Then I worked, you know, in Hanoi. Under, you know, the rule of French.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Once in Hanoi I was married. You know . . . at this moment, let's see, two years ago, yes. I was married in 1946. And once in Hanoi I must teach. I begin to teach. You know, to make money and to live. I teach Vietnamese literature. You know, after high school.

SM: Yes.

VK: In this moment. And I . . . I write, I wrote.

SM: I see.

VK: And in 1954 there is a treaty of Geneva.

SM: Yes.

VK: Dividing, you know, the Vietnam in two parts; and letting the North to the Communists, and the South to the mercenaries. So I left then of the North to then head South.

SM: I see. And the rest of your family didn't go though.

VK: No.

SM: Yes. But your wife and you . . .

VK: You know, my wife and my two children.

SM: I see.

VK: And once in the South, I was in the information ministry. I was in there, I was not the minister, you know. But in there, I was the director of information.

SM: Yes.

VK: In this moment their leader is Ngo Dinh Diem.

Interpreter: That's Diem.

SM: Diem.

VK: Yes. We pronounce it Ngo Dinh Diem. I . . . I was even, you know, like, you know, the . . . came up to the director cabinet.

Interpreter: He's cabinet level. [Unclear – speaks in French].

VK: No, no. [Unclear – speaks in French].

Interpreter: Okay, he's like undersecretary of . . . yes.

VK: Of the ministry of the president. [Unclear – speaks in French].

Interpreter: Okay, there are like a ministry of the president, and he was the undersecretary of that.

VK: Yes. And but after, you know, some months, when Ngo Dinh Diem became president . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: Of, you know, the South Vietnam.

SM: Yes.

VK: I feel that he will become dictator. And I quit to . . . you know, to teach.

SM: I see.

VK: And to write. And in this moment after 1955 I formed a group of writers. We publish a magazine of which the title is *Point of View*.

SM: Was that in French or . . . ?

VK: No, in Vietnamese.

SM: In Vietnamese.

VK: Yes. After some months, the government stopped this magazine. But the group still worked. We published books, many, many books. There . . . you know, the man who worked there were here. I mean, Nghiem Xuan Hong.

Interpreter: Yes.

VK: You know, in the meeting of that, you know.

Interpreter: Right.

SM: He's here in Minnesota?

VK: No, he's now in California.

SM: In California.

VK: He wrote about, you know . . . about thirty books.

SM: Oh, boy. That's a lot.

VK: Yes. And about on . . . on the philosophy of [unclear] communist [unclear] capitalist. Because we planned to . . . to build something like a philosophy of the middle class.

SM: Yes.

VK: When you are in the middle class you must be in [unclear].

SM: Yes. Was the group as a whole working on this? Building a philosophical position?

VK: Yes. We were, yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: And we published another magazine, too, [unclear].

Interpreter: Propaganda.

VK: Yes. This . . . you know, about this philosophy.

SM: I see.

VK: This . . . you know, political way. And so the government, you know, is against us. And the Communists, too. And, you know, the third way begins to . . . you know, to start.

SM: Did you call it the third way? Was that a name of the group?

VK: No, in this moment, you don't call . . . call it, you know . . .

SM: Just . . .

VK: This way is the third one.

SM: Yes.

VK: But after, you know, it becomes clear that . . . that it is the third way.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: And I continue, you know, this . . . this way.

SM: Yes.

VK: And in 1963 we worked with Buddhists.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. And we still work with them after . . . after 1963, until, you know, the fall of Saigon.

SM: I see.

VK: And I must say that after 1963, with the intervention of, you know, American Army. That's very difficult for us to work. So I . . . I wrote plays, I wrote, you know, novels. And tried to . . . to [unclear] you know, young people, for us.

SM: Yes.

VK: And [unclear] place where for use by students at the University of Da Lat. Da Lat U.

SM: Da Lat?

VK: Da Lat is, you know, in the highlands.

SM: Oh.

VK: We have a university there.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes. And, you know, we have a nice, nice, you know, campus. Very nice.

SM: How do you spell Da Lat?

VK: D-A, L-A-T.

SM: It is two words?

VK: You can write it in . . . you know, in one.

SM: Yes. I see.

VK: I think that was all, you know, the great big events that happened to me. And . . .

SM: Do you want to talk any about the movement prior to your leaving? Did it engage in demonstrations or more writing? Or what were the activities of this movement?

VK: Oh . . . first, in 1954.

SM: Yes.

VK: No, 1955.

SM: 1955.

VK: We have a nice demonstration at Saigon.

SM: I see.

VK: Involving, you know, all the students who come from the North and against Communists.

SM: I see.

VK: Because after that moment they sent men, a delegation, a Communist delegation from North to South and they . . . they wanted, you know, to talk about the, you know, reunification of the country.

SM: Yes.

VK: But it's pure, you know, it is pure politics. We know that they are not, you know, sincere. And we organized a demonstration. And, you know, the policemen of the Diem government shoot at them and shoot at us. I have two of my students wounded. One, you know, lost an eye. And after, all you can do is writing. Yes. And organizing, you know, meetings. But, you know, in secret. Yes. Secrecy. And after, I, more and more, you know, the . . . like the students like me very much. They don't dare, you know, to do something, arrest me, but they want to limit, you know, our activities.

SM: The government didn't dare to do too much?

VK: No.

SM: Against the students?

VK: Yes. Yes, the students can be arrested then. And, you know, after 1963 . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: The government is, you know, was a military one.

SM: Yes.

VK: And happily or unhappily [chuckles] you know, the leader of the government, he was my student.

SM: Oh.

VK: That is General Nguyen Cao Ky.

SM: Ky?

VK: Yes, he was my student.

SM: Oh.

VK: And he cannot, you know, do anything against me.

SM: Oh. Well, that was lucky. [Chuckles]

VK: Oh, you know, Vietnam is a practical, you know, our country.

SM: Yes.

VK: You arrested me, but you are my . . . my teacher.

SM: Yes.

VK: I still respect you.

SM: Yes.

VK: And I don't do anything against you, but, you know, I try to limit your activity.

SM: I see. So that must be a very strong cultural value then between student and teacher.

VK: Yes. Yes. We are, you know, according to the Confucius . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: That we have three duties, big duties.

SM: Yes.

VK: I call that, I name that, you know, strong relationship.

SM: Yes.

VK: Between, you know, the son and father. Between school and then teacher. Between the subject and the king. And happily, you know, the father of Ky is also a teacher.

SM: Oh.

VK: And he's . . . despite of, you know, his faults and all the things they talk about Ky, that he's still never a good student.

SM: Yes.

VK: And the only thing about it, you know, he liked were the teachers.

SM: I see.

VK: There were his . . . his teachers. Not . . . [Chuckles]

SM: Not other teachers.

VK: Not every . . . all the teachers, you know.

[Laughter]

SM: Yes.

VK: And you know, they are not good enough, you know, for the . . . you know, the brains. I mean, they are not very intelligent.

SM: Yes.

VK: And they don't care about culture.

SM: Yes.

VK: And so, they don't care about our [chuckles] you know, activity. For them, there is only guns, bombs, and, you know, airplane bombing. That's all.

SM: And Ky especially wanted escalation of the war, didn't he? Or that's what I heard.

VK: There . . . there you have Ky and after Ky you have [Nguyen Van] Thieu. Thieu is, you know . . . [unclear] really *ambitieux*. Ambitious.

SM: Ambitious.

VK: And more . . . you know, more intelligent, you know.

Interpreter: But ambitious in the way he used it means *ruthless*. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes.

Interpreter: *Ambitieux, ambitieux en Francais est différent.*

VK: *Oui, oui, c'est* [unclear]. And *rusé*.

Interpreter: [Chuckles] Wily and sneaky. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. And more intelligent than Ky.

SM: But more intelligent. [Chuckles]

VK: More. But intelligent for *him*, not for, you know, the country!

[Laughter]

SM: It's unfortunate he wasn't more.

VK: But he was not my student. [Laughter]

SM: Oh, too bad. [Chuckles]

VK: I don't mean that a . . . a good one, but, you know . . . [Laughter]

SM: I see. So did he move against you then, too?

VK: Thieu, he's, you know, more against me than . . . than Ky. But I don't . . . I don't care, you know.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Because I was, at this moment, director of the section of the theater at the Conservatory of Saigon, and a professor, you know, at about four or five universities.

SM: Oh, in Saigon?

VK: In Saigon, in Da Lat, you know.

SM: Professor of drama, is that right?

VK: Of drama, of Vietnamese literature.

SM: So that, your prestige, did that protect you any from government persecution?

VK: Oh . . . I don't [unclear] it, but, you know, generally, the government, you know, want the intelligent to be quiet.

SM: Yes.

VK: [Chuckles] And, you know, and so they . . . they let them to live. They don't, you know, *dérange*.

Interpreter: They don't move anything around or bug us.

VK: [Unclear]. Yes.

SM: I see. And they think that will keep them quiet.

VK: Yes. And I said to you that, you know, they don't realize the importance of culture. And so when I write and I produce plays, they don't care. The [unclear] don't care. But you know Diem . . .

SM: [Unclear].

VK: Under Diem, they . . . they realized more, you know, the importance of culture.

SM: Oh.

VK: Because of my play *Genghis Khan*, it was, you know [unclear].

Interpreter: He was banned. *Genghis Khan* was banned.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

Interpreter: That was the one we did [unclear].

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes, at this moment, yes. After 1962, they let me publish the work. But [unclear] be too curious.

SM: Oh. Because more people would be influenced.

VK: Yes, I think so. And more direct. Direct.

SM: Oh, yes. I think it might have been around 1963 when Americans first saw the Buddhist monk [unclear] on the TV.

VK: Yes. Yes.

SM: And I don't know if you want to speak any about that movement. Was that part of the Buddhist movement that you were working with or . . . ?

VK: Really I cannot get information about the first step.

SM: Yes.

VK: That was under, you know, the anniversary of the birthday of Buddha [unclear].

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: What is the date of that?

VK: Oh, let's see. We go to celebrate it here.

SM: Oh.

VK: Ah, let's see. I must . . . you know, look at my . . .

SM: Oh, okay....

[Recording interruption]

SM: Maybe you can talk a little about Diem.

VK: Yes. I must say that Diem is honest.

SM: Oh.

VK: He's . . . I . . . you know, several times talked to him directly.

SM: [Unclear] yes.

VK: And I wrote, you know, many times, speeches for him, in French, in . . .

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes, in Vietnamese. But at first [unclear] you know, about two or three months. I said to you that two or three months after Diem, working with Diem, I quit, you know.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Because he became a dictator. I don't like it.

SM: Yes.

VK: Okay, but his brothers are very ambitious.

SM: I see.

VK: You have in many ways of ambition; the oldest is a Catholic priest. He's [unclear].

Interpreter: A bishop.

VK: Yes, bishop.

SM: Oh.

VK: He's now in Rome.

SM: Oh, he is?

VK: Yes.

SM: Hmm.

VK: And he wanted to, you know, to be . . . how do you say, a [unclear].

SM: Canonized?

Interpreter: A cardinal.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

VK: He wanted to be a cardinal, yes.

Interpreter: His brother wanted to be the cardinal.

VK: No, *he* wanted to be.

Interpreter: Oh. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes, he wanted to be. And all the politics of Vietnam in this way, you know, in this part is, for this [unclear] to make his brother cardinal.

SM: I see.

VK: And I talked to Catholics, and they . . . they told me that in order to be cardinal, the country must have, you know, a certain number of Catholics.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: And so there is movement under Diem, to make everybody Catholic.

SM: Wow.

VK: If you want, you know. There is at this moment a criterion, you know. Criteria for being minister and, you know, very close fellows to Diem.

SM: Yes.

VK: Three points. You must be in the same town, born in the same town, you know, as Diem. Or in the [unclear]. In the [unclear] because [unclear] you know, has three parts.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes. The [unclear]. Okay. The second one is Catholic. No, the first one is in a [unclear].

SM: [Unclear].

VK: You must be born, you know, in a [unclear].

SM: Yes.

VK: The second one is, you know, Catholic.

SM: I see.

VK: And the third one is the same town.

SM: Oh.

VK: If you're not, don't have the three points, you can be sure that you will be Communist.
[Chuckles]

[Laughter]

VK: He doesn't care about your [unclear] your . . . you know, your specialty. No. The three points.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: And all the governors of the provinces must do, you know, their best to get, you know, more conversions for the Catholicism.

SM: I see.

VK: And I think that is the main reason, you know, for the Buddhists to be organized then.

SM: I see.

VK: They talk about, you know, an intervention.

SM: An intervention?

VK: Yes. American intervention after [unclear] at this moment to make something, you know, to [unclear].

SM: To . . . to . . .?

VK: I mean that Americans see that Buddhists are against, you know, the government. And at this moment there is something like pressure.

SM: Yes.

VK: You know, American pressure, you know, on the government of Diem. And Diem is, you know, a very independent man.

SM: Yes.

VK: Very. He doesn't like it. And his second brother, oh, he's terrible. He's like Machiavelli.

SM: Oh.

VK: And he planned to . . . to make a treaty of the North.

SM: Oh.

VK: If the pressure of American pressure is strong.

SM: Oh, I see. The second brother planned this [unclear].

VK: Yes, the second. Yes.

SM: Yes. Okay.

VK: But yes, the . . . I think that the fourth.

SM: Fourth?

VK: Yes. The oldest is a Catholic priest.

SM: Oh.

VK: The second is Diem.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: The third one is . . . no, he is the third one. The fourth, he is the governor, you know, like governor, he's behind, but he's very, very powerful. That way he has no . . . you know, no official function.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: But if you want to do something [unclear] you must go to his house and to, you know, to present your project.

SM: I see.

VK: You know. Very feudal. Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: And they have a youngest brother.

SM: Yes.

VK: But this man . . . I think that this man is actually in France.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes. The third one was, you know, in France, too. He studied in France. He's very intelligent, very intelligent. Archaeologist.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: And in fact, there is, you know, their shooting, you know, and [unclear] had this, you know, demonstration. Not demonstration, but, you know, the ceremony of the birthday of Buddha.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Because they forbid [unclear]. [Unclear –asks interpreter a question.]

Interpreter: Yes.

VK: They forbid the Buddhists to show their [unclear].

SM: The government?

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: It's forbidden. Based on this, you know, this point that the country must have one [unclear] national one. And so....

[Recording interruption]

SM: That's all right.

VK: Okay.

SM: [Laughter]

VK: Yes, [unclear] juice, [unclear] juice, beer, and I think . . . and you.

Interpreter: Do you have some juice?

VK: Yes, I'll have juice.

Interpreter: Do you want some?

VK: Yes.

Interpreter: What do you want?

VK: Oh, I don't know. But you [unclear].

Interpreter: [Chuckles] I'll get it right now.

VK: Okay.

[Unclear]

VK: Okay, okay.

[Recording interruption]

SM: This is 1963?

VK: 1963, yes.

Interpreter: Do you want coffee? There's coffee set up there.

SM: Okay. That would be good idea.

Interpreter: [Unclear].

VK: Mmmm . . . at this moment, I was at Da Lat.

SM: I see.

VK: I must say that I make the trip from Saigon to Da Lat to teach, and at this moment I was at Da Lat when I hear, you know, the [unclear] by radio.

SM: Yes.

VK: By, you know, by press.

SM: Yes.

VK: But in the official . . . that means governmental version.

SM: Yes.

VK: And after that, you get information, true information, from where there are . . . there are dead and wounded men in this demonstration. And after that, the movement [unclear] all the country.

SM: Ah ha.

VK: Eventually. From June to November, they arrested many, many people. For example, in my family, I have a brother [unclear] who was a professor at the University of [unclear], and who is arrested.

SM: Oh.

VK: I have another brother-in-law arrested, a pharmacist. And my niece, who is now at Boston, my niece worked at the pharmacy.

SM: Oh.

VK: This pharmacist who is arrested. In my family we have three arrested. And what about me? They . . . at this moment they . . . I think that they don't want to arrest me, you know. They want to follow me and to get on all the persons, on the people who contact me. Yes.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: And so I have about ten friends who are arrested.

SM: Oh.

VK: And for me they adopt another politic. They give me a grant for three months to go to France.

SM: The government gave it to you?

VK: Yes, to go to France.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: To . . . you know, to . . . the trip is officially for the observing, you know, conservatories of Paris and of the, you know, the principle towns of France. They gave me, you know, money enough, you know, to . . . to spend, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: At France. But I refused.

SM: Oh. This is still 1963?

VK: 1963, yes.

SM: Kind of was a wise choice, I would say. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. [Chuckles] And happily, all this, you know, ended at the . . . at November 11th. No, the 1st. The 1st. Thank you.

SM: November 1st?

VK: November, yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: November 1, 1963, and Diem. [Ngo Dinh Diem's government was overthrown on that date. Diem was captured and executed the following day.]

[Sounds of coffee cups clinking]

SM: Oh, yes. Thank you very much.

VK: And he was overthrown. His [unclear], you know.

SM: Right. Just [unclear].

VK: His [unclear] brother. His third brother. He's, you know, the highest . . . they name him as, you know, the counselor, the highest counselor of the country.

SM: Yes.

VK: The two are killed.

SM: Right.

VK: And the brother at [unclear] he's, you know, [unclear- speaks French word].

SM: Tried?

Interpreter: Tried.

VK: Yes, at the court.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes. And after, they killed him, too. There are two, only two who escape. Not escape, but at this moment, you know, the Catholic man, the priest was in Rome.

SM: Oh.

VK: And the other, I mean the youngest, was in France. And now the . . . you know, the woman, the wife of the third brother is now in Rome.

SM: Oh.

VK: She is very intelligent. Very intelligent. But she is very ambitious. Very.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: But terrible. Yes. Terrible.

SM: Hmmm. She's still there?

VK: Hmmm?

SM: Is she still there?

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: And she lives in a villa, you know, in Rome. Oh, she's, you know, rich enough for, you know . . . [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] Her money is from the family money or . . . ?

VK: I don't think so. You know, I don't think so. Diem is very honest, I must say that.

SM: Oh.

VK: They . . . but, you know, the brothers like, you know, to isolate him.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: Even . . . he doesn't know the price of foods.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: Yes, he doesn't know. Once, I go there. You know, there are children of the third brother who came to see, you know, their uncle. Okay. And their uncle—I mean Diem, you know—said

to their nephew and niece, okay, I will give to you enough for going to a movie and get some ice cream. And he gave to them about one peso. One peso, that means then going to a movie here and to get ice cream, and you give, you know the person to go to a movie you speak to, about ten cents.

Interpreter: [Laughter]

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Because, you know [chuckles] there is confusion about price for this man, who is not, you know, a realistic. Oh, they . . . you know . . .

SM: Oh, that's terrible for president. [Chuckles]

VK: You know, they tell, you know, so many stories about this.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Yes, about this. For example. Okay. When Diem has hosted somebody of . . . I think an American man who came. Very important gentleman. Okay. He wanted to invite him to dinner. And Diem said, you know, to . . . there is a chef of, you know, the kitchen. But Diem, he says that that's not good. Okay. Now I want to serve all in the Vietnamese manner, you know, food and liquor, all the things. The chef is very confused.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Because, you know, that's very difficult to serve, you know, a dinner in the Vietnamese manner without, you know, Chinese cooking [unclear]. Okay. And then, you know, there is always a minister's wife who presents herself and who says that, okay, Mr. President I will do this for you. Because I am, you know, I know about cooking, Vietnamese cooking . . .

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: [Chuckles] Okay. You know, to gain his favor for her husband. Okay.

Interpreter: [Laughter]

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: She prepares a festival, you know, of . . . of feasting.

SM: A feast?

Interpreter: A feast.

VK: Yes. Oh, a very big feast.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: There is, of course, you know . . . [chuckles] some, you know, Chinese meat and so on. Okay. And after Diem, you know, congratulates the woman. Then asks about the price.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Oh, the woman said, oh, it's nothing. It's not expensive, Mr. President. How much? She spent about, you know, for this feast about, for example, twenty thousand [unclear]. She doesn't dare, you know, to say the truth.

SM: [Chuckles]

Interpreter: [Chuckles]

VK: And she said that, no, nothing about, you know . . . two . . . two hundred. Two hundred [unclear] Mr. President. And, you know, the reaction, the reaction of Mr. President?

SM: [Chuckles] Too expensive?

VK: Too expensive!

Interpreter: [Laughter]

SM: [Laughter]

VK: For the price of all . . . [Chuckles] When I was little . . . [chuckles] if you know a peso, I can get everything for, you know . . . one peso.

SM: Oh.

VK: And now a feast like a feast, you know, it's two hundred pesos. You must do something about this profit [unclear]. [Chuckles]

SM: So he had no idea of the prices.

VK: Yes. Yes, no. And he's not, you know, he's not ended.

SM: [Chuckles]

Interpreter: [Chuckles]

VK: Because, you know, there will be another American or another Chinese man, ambassador who comes. And was invited, you know, to dinner. [Chuckles] And naturally, Diem, you know, thought, you know, it appealed to this woman to do the same thing.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: And like this [unclear]. The woman must have spent, you know, twenty thousand pesos for this. That is terrible.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: [Chuckles] Oh, yes.

SM: Well, that's the kind of thing we never know about Diem. [Chuckles]

VK: [Chuckles]

SM: Different [unclear].

VK: Oh, he's . . . you know. *Oh*, he was terrible. His idea . . . and he's very, very, you know, strong nationalist. There is two [unclear].

Interpreter: Mistakes.

VK: Yes, mistakes for him. The first one is he's not married.

SM: Oh.

VK: And when you are not married, you, you know, you don't know about price, about, you know . . .

SM: I see.

VK: The domestic [unclear]. Domestic life.

SM: Yes.

VK: And he considered all his [unclear] like him.

SM: Yes.

VK: He has nothing to [unclear]. Nothing. Always, you know, to the palace alone. And the second one, you know, is that he's . . . he's too Catholic, too.

SM: Oh.

VK: I mean, like this. Like . . .

SM: Like blinders.

VK: Yes. [Unclear], you know, I must say that he's very honest.

SM: Yes.

VK: Very honest.

SM: But he is . . . clouded.

VK: [Chuckles] Yes.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: And very, you know, very strong.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes, very strong.

SM: Have the Buddhists in Vietnam always had a political role? It doesn't seem to have been true in Chinese history, for instance.

VK: I don't know. You know, if in China the Buddhists have political, you know, role or not.

SM: Yes.

VK: But in Vietnam, the . . . when we got independence at the tenth century, the role of the Buddhist monks are very, very important.

SM: Yes.

VK: Very important. Because they are the early, you know, [unclear]. You know, I know who know Chinese.

SM: I see.

VK: How to write, how to speak. And then when you have ambassador, Chinese ambassador who visits in Vietnam. The monks must, you know, receive them.

SM: I see.

VK: And talk to them, talk in, you know, manner of speaking, because he talks in writing. We have a term for this. Writing-speaking.

SM: Hmmm.

VK: I write to you and you write to me, you know, like this.

SM: That was the way they communicated with the ambassador?

VK: Yes. Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. From . . . let's see. From the tenth to the thirteenth, you know, the role of the Buddhists, the monks . . .

SM: I see.

VK: Are very important. I think that is like the old country.

Interpreter: And the priests in Europe were the same.

VK: Yes. Yes. The same.

SM: That's right.

VK: But, you know . . .

Interpreter: Cardinal Richelieu, you know. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. In my country, they . . . they have a function in the *cour*. In the *cour*.

Interpreter: The court.

VK: Court, yes.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: He has . . . they are, you know, the [unclear] comes [unclear] for the king.

SM: I see.

VK: And they are like the minister of education.

SM: Oh.

VK: And at the same time like [unclear] the . . . you know, the . . .

Interpreter: Secretary of state.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes. The three [unclear]. But after this . . .

SM: There were three function? Secretary of state . . .

VK: Yes, for the foreign affairs.

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: And they receive, you know, the ambassador, you know.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. Counselor of the king, the [unclear] kind of thing, you want to do something, you must ask, you know, [unclear].

SM: Yes.

VK: And you know the minister of education.

SM: Mmmm.

VK: Because of, you know, the pagoda is like a school.

SM: I see.

VK: You must go to the pagoda to learn how to write in Chinese.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. And you know it's a way to propagandize, you know, the Buddhism. But, you know, more and more, when you get in the pagoda to learn how to write, how to read . . . there are [unclear] who leave, you know, the pagoda. Because besides the Buddhist books, there are also, you know, other books. And there can be other books. Confucius books. And they are, you know, this . . . they feel that these books are more [unclear] for them.

SM: The Confucius books?

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: And more and more, you know, we have a class in Vietnam, the intelligent class, who tend to, you know, to . . . to replace the monks.

SM: I see. When did that begin to change?

VK: About the thirteenth. The thirteenth century.

SM: I see.

VK: At the thirteenth . . . no. Let's see. It's not sure. No. About . . . hmmm....

[Recording interruption]

VK: Three, eight.

SM: Yes, three, eight.

VK: Two.

SM: Yes.

VK: Let's see. That's the tenth century.

SM: To . . . yes. That's the tenth century.

VK: Yes. To the . . . I think that's to the eleventh.

SM: To the eleventh?

VK: Yes. The position of the Buddhist monks are very strong in the country.

SM: Those were the years they were in power? The Buddhists?

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: The monks.

SM: The monks.

VK: The monks, yes. They have, you know, three functions, like I said to you. Okay. At the almost, you know, beginning of the eleventh century . . .

SM: Beginning of the eleventh century?

VK: Yes.

SM: It began to change?

VK: Yes. There is [unclear] that begin to . . . to change.

SM: I see.

VK: The birth of, you know, a new class.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes, and in the eleventh century the government organized an examination. That's the first, you know.

SM: Oh, that's when it began.

VK: Yes. And so then if you are, you know, a [unclear] for the Asian nation . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: You became, you know, a *fonctionnaire*.

SM: I see.

VK: And so, you know, these *fonctionnaires* became a class.

SM: I see.

Interpreter: Bureaucrats.

VK: Yes.

SM: Right.

VK: Yes. The [unclear].

Interpreter: [Chuckles]

VK: And this is, you know, the Confucianist influence.

SM: Yes.

VK: It's heavy on this class. Very heavy.

SM: Yes.

VK: [Unclear] you know, for the king [unclear].

SM: Yes.

VK: And the position of the Buddhists, you know, becomes lower.

SM: I see.

VK: But when it becomes lower, it . . . you know, it develops in [unclear] for the people. You understand?

SM: Oh.

VK: So it developed, you know.

SM: It became a popular . . .

VK: Yes. Yes, popular. More popular.

SM: Yes. I see.

VK: The monks live with the people.

SM: I see. So in modern times then, would you say that the Buddhist is a very important moral force in Vietnam? Moral and political?

VK: Now when, you know, they ran the people . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: They don't . . . for the most of the monks, don't do politics.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. Yes.

SM: I guess I was thinking mainly in terms of the Vietnam War, which is the very modern times.

VK: Yes.

SM: They did seem to be an important factor.

VK: Yes. For the recent war?

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes. You know, it begins, in my opinion, at the French domination.

SM: Oh. Okay.

VK: The monks, you know, are against the French.

SM: Yes.

VK: And they organize.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. And they want to go with the people and to, you know, go into popular people. And to talk to them and . . . we have many . . . enough of the monks who are revolutionary.

SM: Oh.

VK: They're killed by the French.

SM: I see. They were fighting as soldiers?

VK: Not fighting, really.

SM: No, but stirring it up.

VK: Yes. Yes. In the . . . just in the party.

SM: The party.

VK: Yes, party . . . political party . . . you were just talking about for . . .

SM: Oh, the Vietnam [unclear].

VK: Closed them down, yes.

SM: Oh, there were monks in that party?

VK: Yes. They . . . one monk.

SM: One monk.

VK: In the state . . . you know, [unclear] in the [unclear].

SM: Oh, in the stop . . . of the peace movement. Or do you mean the nationalist group?

VK: Nationalist, yes.

SM: Yes. Okay.

VK: Whose name is Su Trach, Su that means monk.

SM: Oh.

VK: S-U.

SM: S-U.

VK: Yes. T as in [unclear]. T-R-A-C-H.

SM: Su Trach?

VK: Su Trach, yes.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: The monk Trach.

SM: Ah. And he was . . . was he a leader in that group?

VK: Oh, yes. One of the leaders.

SM: One of the leaders.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

VK: He was killed, you know.

SM: I see.

VK: Like, you know, the leader.

SM: I see. Well, that's very interesting.

VK: And, you know, this movement continues. It continues.

SM: Oh, it continues?

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

VK: Continues, you know, and not, you know, not apparently, but, you know, in secret.

SM: Underground.

VK: Yes, underground. Yes. And after that, you know, it still has the political life.

SM: Yes.

VK: And this is why, you know, when the politics of Diem is too Catholic, it doesn't surprise me that the monks are against, and they have people who follow them.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes. So it's a political and religious movement, in a sense.

VK: Underground.

SM: Underground.

VK: I mean . . . yes.

SM: Yes.

Interpreter: [Unclear – speaks in French] Communism [unclear – speaks in French].

VK: No, the problem is not the Communism politics and religion.

SM: Oh.

VK: But, you know . . .

SM: But some monks took [unclear]?

VK: Yes. But they were resisting. The Buddhism . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: . . . has some principles.

SM: Yes.

VK: And when the government is against these principles . . .

SM: I see.

VK: The monks, you know, have only to say that we must go against them. If not, they destroy us.

SM: Yes. So they're a dissenting voice.

VK: They are rather, you know, defensive.

SM: Defensive?

VK: Defensive.

SM: Yes.

VK: Of course, there is . . . there are some monks who are, you know, activists. But, you know, for the most of the monks who are very pacifist . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: Because they bomb themselves, that's all.

SM: Right. But that could be seen as an aggressive act, too. [Chuckles]

VK: [Chuckles] Yes. Yes. But, you know, they don't take guns.

SM: No.

VK: No.

SM: Right. I see. Yes.

VK: They have, you know, a term for this like, you know. *Passive*. You know, *passive* defense.

SM: Pacifist.

VK: Yes, pacifist defense.

SM: Yes. And that means peaceful though rather than passive, right.

VK: Yes. Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes. Well, when the Buddhist monk burns himself . . .

VK: Yes.

SM: Doesn't he see that as both a political and religious act?

VK: And religious? Oh, you know . . .

SM: Is the religious principles are also involved, aren't they?

VK: You know, that's very difficult to explain.

SM: They [unclear].

VK: Yes. Very difficult. But you know, when a monk feels that, you know, his hour in this life is the last, they can, you know, burn himself. They can burn himself. Because they can, you know, wait for the death, but they . . . they prefer to do this.

SM: I see.

VK: You know, to show to people that their meaning in this act and when the principles of the Buddhism are you know, in the fear of, you know, being . . . to be destroyed.

SM: Yes.

VK: The monk must do something. He must do something because when Buddha, you know, is illuminated . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: He can go to Nirvana. But why he stays on this earth?

SM: Yes.

VK: He says that . . . he said and that you know, that says in the books, I cannot because there is too suffering, you know, on this earth. I must stay. Until that day is no no suffering, even for, you know, insects. Even for [unclear]. I must not save myself but, you know, the other people, too. And he continued, you know, his teaching around the country, I mean India.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes. And I think that the monk who burned himself, you know, seeing that act a lesson.

SM: Yes. A lesson to the other people.

VK: Yes. Yes. A lesson from, you know, the life of Buddha.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: Well, when he . . . when the monk burns himself . . .

VK: Yes.

SM: Then does he consider that he stays on the earth [unclear]?

VK: Not stay on the earth, you know.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: In Buddhism you have several, you know, lives.

SM: Yes.

VK: There is no death. There's no death.

SM: I mean, he doesn't see that as a way to go to Nirvana?

VK: Ah . . . no.

SM: No.

VK: He's not, you know, because this . . . and I consider this life, all I do and you, all I do, you do, is something like a germ for another life.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes.

SM: So he would be progressing to another life.

VK: Yes.

SM: But an earthly one.

VK: Yes. And then more and more he approaches the Nirvana.

SM: I see.

VK: Yes. Because, you know, you have a [unclear]. [Unclear].

Interpreter: A prayer.

VK: You know, that I like very much. I see it, you know, in . . . in the language of India [unclear]. That means [unclear]. P-S-A-N. [Unclear – speaks foreign language]. That means transcend. Transcend.

SM: Yes.

VK: Transcend. And transcend . . . still transcend the . . . the truth is there, you know, at another, you know . . .

Interpreter: [Unclear]?

VK: [Unclear – speaks French].

Interpreter: Oh, another . . .

VK: You know . . . the river is here.

SM: Yes.

VK: Another. Another . . .

Interpreter: Level?

VK: Not level.

SM: Another tributary?

VK: Yes.

Interpreter: Another stream?

VK: No, not stream. For example, you have river here.

SM: Yes.

VK: We have two.

SM: Yes.

VK: To what?

Interpreter: Banks. Banks.

SM: Where they come . . . ?

VK: Banks.

Interpreter: Bank.

VK: Banks, yes.

Interpreter: *La rive.*

VK: *La rive.*

SM: Oh. Oh, yes. I see.

Interpreter: [Chuckles]

VK: [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, yes. Yes.

VK: So much so, you know, you must, you know . . . to make a force for this to transcend, to transcend.

SM: I see. So the burning of the monk would be an effort to transcend . . .

VK: Yes. Yes. And when, you know, the principles of the Buddhism are attacked . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: You know, they consider that is a duty to do that.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes. After this, you know, this [unclear] there are many monks and nuns who imitate, you know, this monk.

SM: Yes.

VK: And still now, now I mean now . . . but after . . . after the fall of Saigon.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes. And to show, you know, their attitude. There's something like thirteen monks.

SM: Oh.

VK: Who burned themselves, you know.

SM: Hmm. I didn't read anything about that in our press, did you?

Interpreter: There were . . . there were a few.

SM: Oh.

Interpreter: I remember.

VK: Yes.

SM: I see.

Interpreter: It was reported . . . one or two were reported, but not that many.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh. I guess I just missed it.

VK: They talk about thirteen. Yes.

SM: Yes.

VK: And I have names, too, of them.

SM: Oh.

VK: For them.

SM: What is the name of that first one?

VK: I don't remember. Excuse me.

SM: Yes. But you have the names of those [unclear]?

VK: Of the first one?

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes, the first one, his name is [unclear] is, you know, the name of all the monks.

SM: Oh.

VK: [Unclear].

SM: T-H-E-N?

VK: T-S-I-C-H.

SM: I-C-H.

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh. Okay.

VK: And the second word is Q-U-A-N-G.

SM: Yes.

VK: And the third one is D and U and C.

SM: D-U-C.

VK: Yes, Tsich Quang Duc.

SM: Oh.

VK: Yes.

SM: He was the one who did it in 1963?

VK: 1963, yes. Before the [unclear]. And, you know, because of this event, you know, all the Buddhists are against Diem.

SM: Are against him?

VK: Diem.

Interpreter: Diem.

SM: Oh, against Diem.

VK: Diem, yes. Yes.

SM: I see. So that that is a very important act then.

VK: Yes.

SM: Hmm. Well, I shouldn't take too much of your time. Maybe I could come and talk to you again sometimes.

VK: Well . . .

SM: But I did want to hear more things.

VK: [Chuckles] I think so.

SM: I'm afraid I'm taking too much of his time, too.

VK: Okay . . .

SM: But . . .

VK: You can organize a second meeting.

SM: Would that be better maybe than going too long . . .?

VK: Yes.

SM: I would like to ask just one more thing today.

VK: [Chuckles] Okay [unclear].

SM: That is, you know, whether you as a writer and intellectual and so on here in Minnesota, do you see this as a sojourn, or is this a place you'll continue to live and work, or you don't know? [Chuckles] How do you look at your stay here in Minnesota?

VK: I like it, you know, really.

SM: Yes.

VK: I don't talk about the cold. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] To keep warm.

VK: Keep warm, keep warm here. The people are nice, are nicer.

Interpreter: [Unclear – speaks in French].

VK: I . . . I don't know, really.

SM: You don't know yet.

VK: Yes. It depends on my children.

SM: Your . . . ?

VK: My children.

SM: Oh, I see. Sure.

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes. What about in the United States? Do you . . . would you think that maybe sometime you might return to Vietnam or does that seem not likely or . . . ?

VK: You know, every . . . you know, Vietnamese people here want to return there, you know.

SM: Want to return.

VK: Because they are homesick, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: Motherland.

SM: Right.

VK: But in my opinion it's very difficult to return there.

SM: Yes.

VK: Unless, you know, if it's changed politically—really changed.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes.

SM: In relation to that, in your writing, have you already or maybe thinking about writing about the American experience of the Vietnamese? Or are you writing more about Vietnamese culture and . . . ?

VK: I like to write about, you know, the relationship between American and Vietnamese.

SM: Oh.

VK: All the misunderstanding, all . . . you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: But I . . . I'm still thinking about [unclear] you know, beginning to . . . to work. But now I have a project with [unclear] to work about a play.

SM: Yes. I see.

VK: And to say something about, you know, the war.

SM: Oh, I see.

VK: Yes.

SM: Yes. Well, of course, that would be a really good project. But do you think that after Vietnamese have been here five, ten years, there will be something unique about their life in this state, for instance, that would be something you might write about? Or . . . or what they might contribute to Minnesota culture? [Chuckles]

VK: Ah, yes. I have an idea about this. Once I took, you know, to a meeting . . . and in this meeting there are some American people and I told them that there is no American like concept.

SM: Like . . . ?

VK: Concept.

SM: Concept?

VK: Yes.

SM: Oh.

VK: Because you come from every, you know, country.

SM: Yes.

VK: Yes. And you become American.

SM: Yes.

VK: You become American. And I think Vietnamese people who want to live here become American.

SM: Sure.

VK: Yes. You, for example, you come from . . . you know, I mean your ancestors from here.

SM: Yes.

VK: About your roots, you know.

SM: [Unclear].

VK: You come from what country?

SM: Ah, France and Germany.

VK: You know . . . yes. But you . . . you become American.

SM: Yes.

VK: Because in the, you know, in the [unclear].

Interpreter: In the country? In the . . . ?

VK: No. The [unclear – speaks French] I mean the [unclear – speaks French].

SM: Domain?

VK: [Unclear – speaks French].

Interpreter: Domain.

SM: Domain.

VK: Yes. In the domain of [unclear].

SM: Oh, yes.

VK: Yes. Okay. You take, you know, like lunch . . . yes, that's lunch. You can take, you know, a hamburger.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Me too. But, you know, in the evening for dinner and at weekends . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: You . . . I am sure that you are thinking of [unclear]. For example, of choucrout, you know.

Interpreter: [Laughter]

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. You still, you know, conserve something that is intimate to you.

SM: Yes. Yes, right.

VK: But we have to, you know, to adapt . . .

SM: Yes.

VK: To the society of, you know, American here.

SM: Yes.

VK: And I think in the domain of cooking, it's like this.

SM: At lunchtime you can be American. [Chuckles]

VK: Yes. Yes, yes.

Interpreter: At lunchtime. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] Yes. Right. Well, it would be interesting to see what kind of impact on Minnesota the Vietnamese will make, I think.

VK: Yes.

SM: Because they're a sizeable number and their culture is very different from the mainstream.

VK: [Chuckles] Yes. You mean the . . . the impact on us?

Interpreter: No, the other way.

SM: On the Americans.

VK: On the Americans?

SM: Yes.

VK: We . . . make an impact on you?

SM: I think the Vietnamese will make an impact in Minnesota.

VK: Yes, the [unclear]. That is the weather, you know.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: And I guess on language. That's, you know, for me, for example. For my wife.

SM: Yes.

VK: That's, you know, very, very difficult, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: To communicate. I . . . when I teach at the U, I . . . I get the bus in. Once by day. And I explain, you know, something I like one hour to get from here to downtown and to change to the U. Okay. I, you know, I stay like this. And I hear something, you know, like, you know . . .

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: To the sound of the bus. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] Yes.

VK: And sometimes I . . . I [unclear] you know.

Interpreter: Get surprised.

SM: Oh.

VK: I'm here. America.

SM: I suppose so. [Chuckles] Yes.

VK: Oh, that's [unclear].

SM: It's a big shock. [Chuckles] Of a culture shock.

VK: Yes. Now, that's only, you know, a question of complication.

SM: Yes.

VK: I think that once this question is solved, I think that is . . . will be better though for us here.

SM: Oh, yes. Yes. That's right.

VK: You can communicate. And any complication, you know, you can . . . become more curious.

SM: Yes. Right.

VK: Yes, and that will [unclear].

SM: Sure. That makes a big difference.

VK: Yes.

SM: I think one thing that will become more apparent to Americans here, eventually, I think that there is some assumption that most of the Vietnamese who came here were pro-government. But it's not true.

VK: Oh, no.

SM: I mean, it's not true with you.

VK: No. For pro- . . .

SM: It's not true with the . . .

VK: No for government you mean what government?

SM: Pro-Diem and [unclear].

VK: Oh, no.

SM: And the American support of that, you know.

VK: Yes. Yes. No, you know, they are . . . I think that there are many who . . .

SM: Right, who seem . . .

VK: Who were, you know, pro-

SM: Oh, of course. Yes.

VK: But now they want to become American, you know.

SM: Yes.

VK: They forget about this.

SM: [Chuckles]

VK: But most of the scholars, of the most intelligent, I think that, like in every country, you know, it usually to be against the government.

SM: [Unclear]. Yes.

VK: But for us, it's not a luxury to be against, you know. [Chuckles]

SM: To be . . . pardon?

VK: To be against the government.

SM: Oh.

VK: And against Communists, because you can get, you know, killed by this.

SM: Right.