

TRANSCRIPTION RE:

**CSUMB Founding Faculty
Oral History Project 1995-98
Rina Benmayor, Project Director**

**Interview with Paoze Thao
Professor of Linguistics and Education,
Department of Liberal Studies
College of Education**

**Interviewer, Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita,
Master of Arts in Teacher Education
College of Teacher Education**

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Narrator: Paoze Thao
Interviewer: Christine Sleeter

1 **Sleeter:** *This is Christine Slater interviewing Professor Paoze Thao on Monday, August 31st in*
2 *Paoze's office. Paoze, could you lean so you are a little bit closer into the mike and state your name.*

3 **Thao:** Okay. Paoze, last name Thao, T H A O.

4 **Sleeter:** *And do we have permission to record you?*

5 **Thao:** Yes. You do.

6 **Sleeter:** *Okay, thank you. Paoze, could you tell me why you decided to come to CSUMB, what you*
7 *were doing before, and why you decided to move?*

8 **Thao:** Yeah. I was working as a teacher trainer, pretty much like a research specialist, at the
9 University of Wisconsin in Madison during that time. Before that, I saw the Vision Statement. That was
10 back in 1994.

11 **Sleeter:** *Where did you see it?*

12 **Thao:** I saw it on the web. Because I was looking for work as well during that time, I saw the
13 Vision Statement. When I read it, the Vision Statement of CSUMB, I was attracted to it. I said, "This is
14 me." I wanted to go there. I submitted my application for the first flow. I believe that was the time when
15 the founding faculty were recruited. They were very nationally known at that time. I wasn't one of them.
16 [Laughs] So I don't think they even looked at my application at that time. Then after that year, we had a
17 minority lecture series that is normally set up by the University of Wisconsin, Madison, College of
18 Education. So we happened to have – guess what? Dr. María de la Luz Reyes, one of the founding faculty
19 members, came in and spoke to us about the University. That's where I told her that, ueah, I applied for a
20 position there. I didn't know what happened but apparently I wanted to work for CSUMB because "that's
21 me." You know? I wanted to start the university. I wanted to work at a brand new university just like

22 CSUMB. But I was so attracted to the Vision Statement that I talked to her. So I got to know her a little bit.
23 Then I submitted the application. She said, “Go ahead, submit the application,” and see what happened!
24 [Chuckles]

25 **Sleeter:** *So what was it in the Vision Statement that really pulled you here?*

26 **Thao:** The Vision Statement talked about creating leaders, okay, building leaders, a community of
27 multicultural, a community where we can each learn how to live together. California is actually. . . the
28 demographic is very diverse so I was thinking about “Yeah, this is me.” I wanted to do something. I want to
29 go there and make as many contributions as I could because throughout my professional life I worked with
30 people, and from different cultures and particularly from the refugee resettlement experience. I worked
31 with **Travelers ??? Aid** in the Chicago area.

32 **[3:46] Sleeter:** *Now in Wisconsin there was a Hmong community around.*

33 **Thao:** Yes.

34 **Sleeter:** *Coming here you kind of have to go over to Merced to get to a Hmong community. Did
35 absence of a local Hmong community, like how did you think about that?*

36 **Thao:** It doesn’t bother me because I embrace the community around here as part of my
37 community. And once in a while I got pulled to the different community in Fresno, Merced, Sacramento,
38 all of that, because I think I was pretty known among the community leaders in those areas. And so it
39 doesn’t matter. You know, I have to build up a community here and I think that I just extend my
40 community further to the state. And even to Southern California, like Ventura County and San Diego to a
41 certain extent.

42 **[4:46] Sleeter:** *Yeah. What about uprooting your family? How did – how did you think about that they
43 were in Wisconsin and would have to move 2000 miles away?*

44 **Thao:** Yeah. My immediate family, I have several, three brothers, two brothers living in Merced.
45 My parents also moved from Ottawa, Illinois and resettled in Merced, California after he retired. So that's
46 not that far. In a way my family is kind of moving westward to California.

47 **Sleeter:** *Oh, I didn't realize.*

48 **Thao:** Yeah. But the majority of my relatives still remain in the Wisconsin area, like Wasau-
49 Milwaukee area. And Minneapolis. The majority of them are still there even today.

50 **Sleeter:** *Oh. Just sort of as you think back, was it worth it to you to come here?*

51 **Thao:** Initially, I was looking for work. Okay. I just wanted to go where the job is. But one of the
52 things that pulled me altogether and moved my family down here is the Vision Statement of the University.
53 Because I wanted to do something, you know? A freshly graduate from college, from the university,
54 getting a new Ph.D., you wanted to do something. [Laughs] That you have some fingerprints on it as well. I
55 was a junior faculty at that time. You know. I wasn't sure to what extent I could do. But I was, you know,
56 ready to roll my sleeves and start working as hard as I can. And thanks to all of you, you know, actually,
57 founding faculty members who brought in tremendous experience and who mentor us who were junior
58 faculty to accomplish as much as we could until today. I think thanks to all of you, I got here. I got to get
59 to know you and I have known you [Christie] before that. You were very well known in the field, in the
60 multicultural education field and I always wanted to meet you in person. And here you are! And you were!
61 And then here you are! [Chuckles] That was tremendous. It has been an honor to work with you as a
62 colleague and to work for you.

63 **Sleeter:** *Thank you.*

64 [7:21] **Thao:** You know, when I taught in the Master's programs as well. Tremendous mentoring that were
65 going on at that time. I know you have been very busy but again, you took time.

66 **Sleeter:** *Well, thank you.*

67 **Thao:** Yeah. You took time to mentor junior faculty like us who didn't know where to start. [Laughs]

68 **Sleeter:** *I appreciate it.*

69 **Thao:** I moved here in July of ...the end of July.

70 **Sleeter:** *Yeah.*

71 **Thao:** And when my family got [here], you know, we didn't have a place to stay yet. So they put
72 us in a little hotel in Marina. And the first day of class I still [chuckles] worked from that hotel, the little
73 hotel here, until the housing was actually ready for my family to move in.

74 **Sleeter:** *Okay. I want ask for, sort of probe for more details around how things were when you first
75 got here and then move forward a little bit. But first, first I'd like you to talk a little bit about the
76 organization of CSUMB has kind of shifted over time. Do you remember what Center you were hired into?
77 What your position was exactly? We had Centers, Institutes.*

78 **Thao:** I remember vividly. [Chuckles] But I believe that I was hired in Center 3, Center for
79 Collaborative and Professional Studies, I think at that time. We have fewer faculty at that time. So I
80 remember that I was pulled pretty much to every meeting in the initial days. When we had faculty
81 meetings, you know, faculty from all the Centers came together. And then made decision together. And
82 pretty much we have meeting after meeting, meetings after meetings, [chuckle] and I think that was not
83 quite what I expected when I got here. But again, faculty, administrators, they are all together into one, you
84 know, one meeting. [Chuckle]

85 **Sleeter:** *Can you think of examples of meetings that kind of stand out to give a flavor for how that
86 worked? Or didn't work?*

87 **[9:38] Thao:** I think what we had is actually why some newer people coming, they wanted to come and
88 visit the University. We all were invited to go, to attend [meetings]. One of the things that we talk about is
89 actually dealing with governance issue. We started up with programs. Several programs on campus, they
90 are started at the same time even though we had been grandfathered by the CSU Chancellor's Office. But I
91 was thinking that during initial days we were pretty much pulled to almost every meeting in the

92 administration and also dealing with issues... the Associate Vice President who dealt with transportation,
93 [those] who deal with communication, [those] who deal with IT Technology, all of that. It looks like we
94 were all in one, whatever meeting there is we have been attracted and then we have been invited to attend.

95 **Sleeter:** *So. Okay, so you would get pulled into program development meetings.*

96 **Thao:** Right.

97 **Sleeter:** *Transportation meetings?*

98 **Thao:** Right.

99 **Sleeter:** *IT meetings?*

100 **Thao:** Right. Then we set up like pretty much like we have these Senate, too.

101 **Sleeter:** *Senate meetings?*

102 **Thao:** Yes, Senate meetings. And to tell the truth, I didn't know what I was doing, but I was one of
103 the first Parliamentarian at the Senate. [Laughs]

104 **Sleeter:** *Tell me a little bit about that.*

105 **Thao:** Yeah. That was quite an experience, right? I didn't know the Roberts Rules of Order that
106 much but I had to buy some books -- I think I still have them today --, and learned my way through.
107 Because I had been also involved with the church, the National Hmong Church, and so I was able to do so.
108 Sometimes the Senate President would have to ask me, "Paoze, is this right?" I said, "Of course." [Laughs]

109 **Sleeter:** *How did you become Parliamentarian?*

110 **Thao:** Yeah. We have to contribute in a way that... there were very few of us so everybody got
111 pulled into a different direction and I wanted to contribute so much to the Academic Senate so I was pulled
112 into that. And I said, "Okay, nobody wanted to be Parliamentarian, let me volunteer to do it." But I did that
113 for one year or two years I think, at the most. You see, that was actually full load as well because I got to
114 participate in every meeting, faculty meeting, Assembly meeting as well as the Senate meeting. [Chuckles]

115 **[12:21] Sleeter:** : *Well, okay. As it relates to programs which programs during the early years did you*
116 *participate in meetings as well as teaching?*

117 **Thao:** I think mostly in the Teacher Education program. Along with Liberal Studies. Liberal
118 Studies as well as Teacher Education were part of the same, in the same Center. So every time when there
119 were meeting involving with Teacher Education, I was involved. Every time the meeting involving Liberal
120 Studies, I was involved. But I think during that time we couldn't quite separate whether it is a Liberal
121 Studies faculty meeting or Teacher Education faculty meeting? Or Graduate faculty meeting? [Chuckles]
122 But with all one of the three fit together. I participated pretty much actively with the Master's program
123 when you were the Coordinator for that as well. And so it's quite hectic.

124 **Sleeter:** *What were those early meetings like for you? For somebody who hasn't been there.*

125 **Thao:** I got to listen quite a bit. A lot. Because I didn't quite know as much as the founding faculty
126 member who headed the program. But I got to participate. Once in a while I would shed some light and
127 bring my experience, whether this should work or this should not work. But thanks to all of you, you know,
128 who really took the lead to develop programs for all of us. And one thing that I enjoyed the most is actually
129 the collaboration that took place between early faculty members who are so close just like family members.

130 **Sleeter:** *Can you give an example of that collaboration? And it doesn't have to be one involving*
131 *me.*

132 **Thao:** Yeah. Our offices were housed together in Building 3, I believe. All of us were in Building
133 3. Well, the initial time my office was in Building 86. And then we got running around throughout the
134 University, but later we were together when program development became intense. We all moved into
135 Building 3 and that's where if I have some problem I couldn't really solve or something new, I would just
136 walk into your office, into Dr. María de la Luz Reyes, into Vicky Jew's office, just knock on the door and
137 say, "Hey, can I talk to you?" And I really miss the types of atmosphere here on campus today. Nothing
138 like that is taking place here on campus. We're becoming more like fragmented, too distanced to each

139 other, to one another. So that was the good years. I wish we have that like this today. When the campus has
140 grown up this big, that kind of relationship, collegiality is actually is not quite like before when we started
141 the University.

142 **[15:40] Sleeter:** *There are other people in your building.*

143 **Thao:** Oh, yes. The administrative staff as well that we have. Pretty much we worked like a family
144 anyway.

145 **Sleeter:** *I wonder what made the difference between then and now.*

146 **Thao:** Perhaps the distance ...you know, we're spread all over. For example, Teacher Ed is in a
147 different building and they spread it out into two or three facilities. Liberal Studies were not together as
148 well. The majority are here but then we have other faculty who are actually in the back in the other
149 modules. And so that, perhaps, contributes to the kind of little bit of distance that we have between
150 faculties. Also, to tell the truth, I think we also, we deal pretty much academic turfs as well. There are some
151 times that people say, "Well, you are an expert in here" and "You are the experts in that" and so on. And
152 sometimes you want to go across that line of discipline. Sometimes we get into trouble as well, right?
153 "Well, you are not really that. You can't do that." Or something like that. But those eventually, you know,
154 will work itself out as long as we know how to really deal with the problem and sit down and work together
155 as a team.

156 **[17:12] Sleeter:** *What classes did you teach when you first came?*

157 **Thao:** I taught Linguistics, "Introduction to Language" or "Language and Language Acquisition."
158 Then I moved into using my dissertation to develop a culture course, "Southeast Asian History and
159 Culture." That eventually we run into another professor's areas of Multicultural Education or pretty much a
160 culture course. And so he didn't really want me to teach my course. He just wanted to strip out the course.
161 But apparently we talked it out. And later it became two different courses. Then as time goes by, I need to
162 expand more to cover other groups as well. You know, rather than just focusing on Southeast Asian history

163 and culture. “Southeast Asian History and Culture” courses will be, you know, above and beyond what
164 that course like 391 “Cultural Diversity” is. Because students ended up having more, getting more content
165 than just a “Culture and Culture Diversity” course itself. Then when the Master’s Program, I was asked to
166 develop a research course on methods, “Research Methods for Multicultural Teaching.” I really enjoyed
167 teaching that course along with you in the Master’s Program. I never taught at the graduate level before.
168 But I think that course pushed me into another arena, into another discipline that I spent quite a bit of time
169 reading a lot of material. In fact, I still have a lot of those books up there. You know, all the books up there.

170 **Sleeter:** *Oh, yeah.*

171 **Thao:** It’s all the “Research Methods” course. [Laughter] I did quite a bit of reading on that
172 because I think my job at the UW Madison taught me that if you don’t know something just go out, do
173 research and do it. You know? And you learn it by doing it. So it also helped me with my undergraduate
174 teaching when we teach the “Senior Capstone Research Methods” course as well. The Senior Capstone
175 class. It also helped me to develop courses in Major ProSeminar, the 300 level. I was so pleased at when I
176 taught that course and applied throughout all the courses that I have been teaching on campus as well.

177 **Sleeter:** *Tell us – this is going to be listened to by people who don’t necessarily know anything*
178 *about the University. The Major Pro Seminar, Liberal Studies 300, tell me a little bit about your role in*
179 *developing that course. What it is and what you were able to contribute.*

180 **[20:16] Thao:** Yeah. The Liberal Studies 300 or Major Pro Seminar is a faculty collaborative types of
181 course. . . . It served as an introduction to the majors. So normally a university would have three different
182 courses. The first one is [Freshman] Pro Seminar [100 level], which is Introduction to the University.

183 **Sleeter:** *Did you ever teach that one?*

184 **Thao:** No. In the beginning, we were informed that MPC [Monterey Peninsula College], Cabrillo
185 [community college] and other universities, they didn’t want us to teach a lower division course [100-200
186 level]. So the course that I helped to develop is actually 300 to 400 level. So Major Pro Seminar is an

187 introduction to the Liberal Studies major. The theme that we put together at that time was led by Dr. Betty
188 McEady. We are using the theme from the Commission for Teacher Credentialing, which is: “a well
189 educated person.” And then we talk about the philosophy and go further, and it extended itself to Liberal
190 Arts rather than just Liberal Studies itself. Because Liberal Arts is actually a bigger branch and Liberal
191 Studies is part of the Liberal Arts. So we did use that particular theme and we developed quite a bit from
192 their Introduction to the Liberal Studies students so they would know what Liberal Studies entailed and
193 how we prepare a student to become a well educated person, way above and beyond after they stepped out
194 of the campus and they graduate from the University. So it helped quite a bit with students and they are still
195 coming back and with a lot of knowledge about, wow, we prepared them to become a well educated person
196 and not just in one particular discipline but across. And so on.

197 **Sleeter:** *And you still teach that course, yes?*

198 **Thao:** Yes. But apparently I ... [Chuckles] we have made some changes into the course and right
199 now it fulfilled the GVAR requirement.

200 **Sleeter:** *Tell people who don't know what GVAR is.*

201 **Thao:** The GVAR is a graduate ... I forgot the name ... but normally a student would need to be
202 able to pass the writing part of the undergraduate level in order to meet the requirement for graduation as a
203 ... University graduate. So it's G W A R. I think it's Graduate ...?

204 **Sleeter:** *Probably Writing something.*

205 **Thao:** Yeah. Writing Assessment. Yeah, something like that. I don't quite know.

206 **Sleeter:** *So that requirement changed the course.*

207 **Thao:** That requirement changed the course, yeah, completely. Because right now it's a writing
208 [course]. . . similar to the HCOM course that they developed. Because there have been some changes in
209 terms of the numbers of credits. We went from 4 to 3, and from 3 back to 4. And some are a combination of
210 3 [units]. We have quite a bit of changes in the program as well. So that's why when you initially asked me

211 how many credits did you teach, I said I taught 11 units, right? So Linguistics became 4. Major Pro
212 Seminar was 4. The Capstone was 2 units. Right now it's 4 credits for Major Pro Seminar, 4 credits for
213 Senior Capstone, 4 credits for Linguistics, the big one, Multicultural Literature. Some of the optional ones,
214 meaning elective ones, for example, the Issues in Comparative International Education culture course have
215 been shrunk to about 3 units. We no longer have 4 units. It's actually three. And because of the changes
216 from CTC, Commission for Teacher Credentialing as well as the program change itself.

217 **[25:09] Sleeter:** *So it sounds like there's been some clash between the Vision and requirements for*
218 *teachers?*

219 **Thao:** Yes, of course. Because what happened is actually FTE's is driving the programs right now.
220 So we have to pay particular attention to FTE's. And the workload itself was also driving the program as
221 well. The Chancellor also wanted every university within CSU to graduate student within 124 units and
222 lower than that, and so that's why we have to reconfigure the numbers of units, which one weighs more,
223 which one weighs less and all of that. So we went into some real, real ... arguments about what to maintain
224 the integrity of the course as well as... so in a sense we went through a difficult time. But we can live with
225 it, you know, for the better, we hope.

226 **Sleeter:** *Well, okay. I'm kind of going to number three about the Vision because that relates to*
227 *what you are talking about. But in what ways has the Vision guided you and the programs that you are*
228 *working with? And the clash that you are describing, I want to know what you think about how the Vision is*
229 *or isn't enacted here.*

230 **Thao:** Yes, sometimes I thought that while each one of us operate at a different level of the Vision,
231 some are just looking at the superficial level. Another one really wants to live in the Vision. Some others
232 may just want to get by. Sometimes we need to really find the middle grounds for that. Some who actually
233 doesn't care about the Vision. They just want to teach. They just want to do whatever they do, versus
234 someone who is actually committed and live the Vision Statement. So we do have people at the University

235 operating on different levels. But I think that the Vision Statement is actually the document that pulls all of
236 us together here. Nobody can argue against the Vision, in a way. The Vision serves as a document that
237 holds all of us together, which is an ideology that's saying that every time we run into some problem, take a
238 look at the Vision Statement to see how far are we from ... Are we too far, deviate too far from the Vision
239 or are we closer to the Vision, or where are we at that point? So again, I think the Vision still serves as a
240 living document that was cast by the founding faculty members.

241 **Sleeter:** *It pre-dated us.*

242 [28:07] **Thao:** Pre. You are right. Exactly. And believe it or not, we live in a state where we are
243 multicultural. We have so many diverse groups in this particular area, this region as well as the state. So
244 we are very diverse, we have diverse people and this is what we are. Nobody can change it. We are here to
245 stay and nobody can change it. [Laughs] If we change, yeah, we go along with the population, the diversity.
246 If we don't change it, the people will change us. And so that's what I believe in. I think the Vision
247 Statement will remain a living document. It will be a Vision and guide the University until the 21st, 22nd
248 century. Unless something else changes. [Laughs]

249 **Sleeter:** *Are there particular ways in which the Vision Statement has guided you?*

250 **Thao:** I think my way of looking at the Vision is actually we are building leaders for the State of
251 California, leaders who has a very broad mind. Who would embrace all the people in California. And
252 would build leaders from scratch in a way, from the community around us. From people who are actually
253 working, working people who are underrepresented. And I am one of them. As you know, I am a minority
254 within a minority group, [Chuckles] who is teaching.

255 **Sleeter:** *For people who listen who don't know, tell us what you mean by that.*

256 **Thao:** Yeah. Actually I am a minority, a member of the Hmong Tribe coming from Laos. And
257 within Laos I was already a minority. Hmong is a smaller group, a very small group. We only have a
258 population close to about 250,000 today in the U.S. And so you can consider that I am a minority within a

259 minority in a way. But that doesn't bar me from teaching the diverse population in California. I will do my
260 best. I don't claim to be their instructor but I am their facilitator. As I tell my students in the class, I have
261 been somebody who has been there and done that and I lived in three different countries. I grew up in three
262 different countries. I am a product in transition, and along the way I can also give them some guidance,
263 facilitate the learning process for them, but it's up to them. I love my students who came in with
264 tremendous experience. That's why it keeps me here at CSU Monterey Bay. Some of the things that you
265 were asking, are there times when you consider leaving? Of course. Sometimes I would consider leaving. I
266 thought that I had done my best to what I could do, but it hasn't changed anything. But in the longer term
267 when you look at it, you know, there are students out there who are waiting for you and they need your
268 guidance. It's not what your peers are thinking about you, but it's about how you can help some others,
269 facilitate the learning process for students. That keeps me here. That keeps me here. My passion is in the
270 classroom. My passion is my students and what I can do best for them. If I don't know what to do I will
271 find a way, and do research, I'll find a way to do a better job and learn the steps on what to introduce first,
272 what to introduce last, and what are in between. So if you introduce the step wrong, you know, students
273 will get very confused. You learn from mistakes, and next time don't do it. Become somebody who
274 actually can help and facilitate the learning process for students step by step. I don't know if this helped
275 you.

276 **[32:24] Sleeter:** *Yeah, it does. Times when you felt like leaving, what have been major...like what's an*
277 *example of something where you...?*

278 **Thao:** When I wanted to teach a course and my colleague said, "No, you are not qualified to teach
279 it," even though this is my passion. For example, the Culture course. One of my colleagues said, "All right,
280 Paoze, you are not supposed to teach that course. I am the expert," for example. That is the time when I was
281 thinking about, "Wait a minute. We got here. We got recruited here to CSU Monterey Bay. It's for us to go

282 across the different disciplines and then start to work on that. I may not be an expert in that but I can learn
283 about it, right, I can learn about it and teach it because that's my passion."

284 **Sleeter:** *Well, I am wondering what gave this other faculty member the authority to say that he*
285 *was the expert and you are not.*

286 **Thao:** I don't know. I don't know. I think I don't want to put words in ... I presume that it's quite,
287 maybe egocentric. He may be egocentric and he was hired as a multicultural, let's say, educator. So he
288 could be the only one to say, "All right, yes you can," and yet, "No, you cannot." But in a sense my line of
289 work, I am actually multidisciplinary in a way, and I have backgrounds in Linguistics, I have background
290 in Second Language Acquisition, Comparative Education, History of Education, Policy Studies. All of
291 these are part of my background. So culture, you know, I live in culture through different countries. I
292 published several articles and a book chapter in cultures, and here some of my colleague said, "No, Paoze,
293 you are not qualified. I am." Those are the kind of trouble we ran into. So that's why I was thinking, "Wait
294 a minute. Why do I bring this problem home? It's actually I'm here for the student and not for the
295 colleagues of mine."

296 **[34:42] Sleeter:** *There wasn't somebody with a clearer head who could mediate this? This sounds like*
297 *bullying.*

298 **Thao:** Yeah, it's actually... well, we have a very strong personality.

299 **Sleeter:** *Not sexually but bullying.*

300 **Thao:** Yeah, it's actually a strong personality. Apparently he just tried to get his way. But
301 apparently that is something that, I just work it out. I think it's a matter of whether I can live with it or not.
302 That is when I considered that maybe it's not worth it to just stay on. But the thing is, actually when I
303 started to think about it [I said], "Wait a minute. This is only one faculty member who actually has a
304 different opinion and if he is or she is egocentric, I can work with that. I lived through a harder time than
305 this. [Chuckles] I've lived through wars! [Laughs] It doesn't matter to me. I just learned how to shield

306 myself and do the best I can for the students, because I am here for the student. But I will work with my
307 colleagues as well. There are some colleagues that I can work with and some that I cannot work with, right?
308 I think you have to draw the line right there and say, “Wait a minute, I just don’t have to mess around with
309 him. I don’t need his permission or her permission to do it.” But I am here and I do the best I can and
310 contribute to the teaching and learning of so many students who need my help anyway.

311 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. On number four now, Campus culture and Work in the Early Years. And you’ve*
312 *talked a lot about things that are already here.*

313 **Thao:** Something else about scholarship that I wanted to talk about is, I came in here due to my
314 professional experience working with the University of Wisconsin in Madison. The University gave me
315 two years credit toward tenure. So normally a cycle would be six years but I was under a lot of pressure
316 trying to produce, to publish. I worked pretty much days and night, days and night, days and night to make
317 sure that I had enough publications so at the end of four years I have a job after that. [Chuckles] I get my
318 tenure. So that’s one of the things that I constantly was working hard. I almost lost my family during that
319 time because, you know, I worked throughout. We have a very slow computer. If you remember, we had a
320 very, very slow computer. It’s actually an Apple but the Apple laptop pretty much did not work at all. It did
321 not have any strength just to project things onto the board itself. Right? [Chuckles] And so it was very
322 hard. So pretty much I stayed on campus a lot of the time and I’d go home late at night. I worked five days
323 a week. Initially, I had close to 300 advisees at that time. You know, we had 800 or 900 students. There
324 were only three main Liberal Studies faculty. So advising, we did not have a separate advisor like what we
325 have today. So we had to do advising, develop coursework [plans] for student, what courses they need to
326 take in order to graduate. And so these did take a lot of my time. On top of that, Saturday and Sunday
327 community called you to do presentations as well. And so we are pulled from different directions.
328 Community, University pulls us, students pull us, our time, families as well. So I almost lost my family at

329 that time. And sometimes my wife would just say, “Paoze, I just want you to find some kind...a new job
330 and just work from 9 to 5.”

331 **Sleeter:** *Yeah, I didn't know that.*

332 **Thao:** From 9 to 5. But apparently I said, “No.” I have no other jobs. I came here to work and I am
333 going to try to achieve that. So that's why I was able to achieve what I could initially and get my tenure in
334 four years.

335 **[39:12] Sleeter:** *Then were you able to cut back?*

336 **Thao:** Then I started cutting back. But again, because we only have three full time faculty at that
337 time and a whole bunch, 14 or 15 part-time faculty members, so that was very difficult until pretty much
338 like 2000, when we have bring in more faculty. So we had like five. Now we have six. And this year we
339 added two more so we have total eight, eight faculty members in the department now. But before that? No.
340 The faculty at the department was actually responsible to do everything including advising, mentorship,
341 you name it. You know, we are there. So every time a student runs into some problem they just shoot us an
342 email and say, “I want to see you. I want to meet with you.” And that's why we got to be there. So I have
343 been in my office pretty much like five days a week. And I went home late at night until in Building 3 the
344 Dean said, “Paoze, you have to go home now.” [Chuckles] It is ten, eleven o'clock at night. Because Dean
345 Lloyd, Dorothy Lloyd was working real late, too. You know, she had no family so she worked real, real
346 late. And she had to come by and say, “Paoze, you go home now.” [Chuckles] During the early days I had
347 to teach, took in overload as well. Sometimes I taught 15, 16 units per semester. Above and beyond. And so
348 that's why the Dean had to say, “Paoze, you cannot do that anymore. You violate the contract between
349 CSU and CFA now.” [Chuckles] Yeah, until the Dean told me to cut back. But otherwise I did go full
350 swing.

351 **Sleeter:** *Why?*

352 **Thao:** I was too busy and so I didn't really have time to read the contract. You know. [Laughs]

353 **Sleeter:** *So people would ask you to do something and you would just ... "Okay"?*

354 **Thao:** Right. I would just say "yes" because there are only so many people, so few people on
355 campus, Christie.

356 **Sleeter:** *I do remember that. I do remember that.*

357 **Thao:** Yeah. Right. And so, okay, if they ask you, very few times you would be able to say no
358 because who else is out there?

359 **Sleeter:** *I got to more and more saying "No."*

360 **Thao:** Yeah, I think you did because you know your limit. But I was a junior faculty. I thought that
361 I could volunteer for everything, right? So people ask you, "Yeah, do you want to sit on this committee?" I
362 said "Yes." Right. Do you want to sit on that committee? "Yes." [Laughs]

363 **Sleeter:** *What about search committees, were you on a lot of those?*

364 **Thao:** Yeah. I was on search committees as well. Every committee that I could be, meaning that
365 when people asked me I would serve them. For World Language and Culture. Social and Behavioral
366 Science. You name it. World Language and Culture. Liberal Studies. Teacher Ed. [Chuckles]

367 **Sleeter:** [Sighs]

368 **Thao:** There were very few people, Christie, and if you said no, where would they find the new
369 people to fill those, right?

370 **[42:22] Sleeter:** *Okay, I don't want to get into that. I'm here. I dealt with that a little bit differently.*
371 *Sometimes I was just like, "Well, you're going to have to hire somebody else, even as a part timer."*

372 **Thao:** Yeah. We were told that there's no money for part-timers. Right. No money. And so....

373 **Sleeter:** *Yeah, how did you survive all of that?*

374 **Thao:** Well, I just had to do what I could and tried the best I could so that I wouldn't be crazy.
375 [Chuckles] You know, I have to balance between families and the work. But at the same time work was

376 first and family was second. And that's why my wife and I, we did not have a vacation until the 2000's,
377 because I had to keep on working.

378 **Sleeter:** *I remember when you finally went on vacation.*

379 **Thao:** Right, right. [Chuckles] I remember that I almost went back to Wisconsin as well as
380 Minnesota because I got a job offer. And my salary was ... I was hired as a junior faculty. I received the
381 lowest salary of all the faculty from what I could remember. Then, two years later, I got two job offers, in
382 Wisconsin and one in Minnesota working for the Office of the President at Concordia University. Another
383 one was actually UW Oshkosh. With more money. And so for some reason I think you were the one who
384 initiated, you said, "We don't want to lose Paoze!" And so you wrote up some letter of support. And then
385 got everybody to sign that letter, and then bring it to the Dean Dorothy Lloyd. So I managed to get some
386 money on that, right. Still not to the level of what they offered in Wisconsin and Minnesota. But I was
387 thinking about why would a \$2,000 difference, why would I move the family back over there when I was
388 already here. You know. So it wasn't quite worth it, it wasn't quite worth it to move my whole family just
389 for the \$2,000 difference. So I chose to remain here and I have remained here ever since and continue what
390 work that I have done until today.

391 **[44:38] Sleeter:** *As you look back what would you say are the main contributions that you've made?*

392 **Thao:** I think the main contribution is in the areas of teaching and learning and also secondly in
393 building out the infrastructure of the University, where we put together the policy for Faculty Affairs and I
394 served as one of the members there until recently. So I think that is something that I was very proud of it.

395 **Sleeter:** *Say more about that.*

396 **Thao:** I was part of the ASEC [Academic Senate] Executive Committee where we helped to
397 build the Senate. We put the Bylaws together. We put the Constitution, all of that together. I did not have a
398 lot of contribution in that part in terms of writing it, but at least I had participated actively and see that it
399 was actually in place. So two things that I made a lot of contribution is in the areas of building out the

400 Academic Senate during the early years as well as the policy for the Faculty Affairs that we are still using
401 that today, in terms of, assessing the tenure, the level where they are. It was the beginning but it was
402 working. And right now we just have to refine it to be a better policy.

403 **Sleeter:** *That's the RTP policy?* [Retention, Tenure and Promotion]

404 **Thao:** Yeah, that's the RTP policy. That's right.

405 **Sleeter:** *Cool.*

406 **Thao:** Those are the two things that I think stand out. Otherwise I think something else is
407 actually I did quite a bit of community service by using my scholarship and disseminated throughout the
408 field. So right after the book that I published, ...the United Nations wanted me to present the model. . .

409 **Sleeter:** *Wow.*

410 **Thao:** . . . of the book to settle a group that ...is not quite literate. They wanted to use it as a model
411 for the European countries to settle some refugees that only have oral tradition.

412 **Sleeter:** *Interesting.*

413 **Thao:** So I was invited to go to the United Nations conference that was held in Sweden. So that
414 was some of the things that I think it was an accomplishment that I did professionally. That is at an
415 international level. The other one is actually, I was known throughout, not just in California, but
416 throughout. Due to my background and professional development with the University of Wisconsin
417 Madison, I was invited everywhere to do presentations throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa,
418 Kansas. You name it, I've been there. So those are the kinds of things where I have been able to inform the
419 community about CSUMB and the model that we have here on campus. And recently, last year they
420 invited you to go to Thailand. Do you remember that? Do you remember you sent me some material on. . . .

421 **Sleeter:** *I don't think I got invited.*

422 **[48:55] Thao:** Yeah, you were invited because you were the one who sent me some. . .

423 **Sleeter:** *Okay, then I couldn't...yeah, it was at a time I could not go.*

424 **Thao:** You could not go. I think you were in Australia or New Zealand at that time.

425 **Sleeter:** *I was somewhere at that time, yeah, yeah.*

426 **Thao:** So you forwarded the announcement to me and I put it [a presentation] together. And that
427 was the 40 years of commemoration of the University of Chiang Mai, Thailand. And they wanted to
428 establish... they wanted to run a Multicultural Education program at the University of Chiang Mai for the
429 minorities. So I printed the application in there. And I sent the information to Dr. Yo Tao.

430 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. Yeah, yeah.*

431 **Thao:** And both of our proposals were accepted for presentation so we did that in 2000.

432 **Sleeter:** *Oh, I don't think I quite knew that.*

433 **Thao:** Yeah. So that's why I just wanted to let you know. And the topic that I presented is
434 Teaching Multicultural Education at the CSU System.

435 **Sleeter:** *Perfect.* [Laughs]

436 **Thao:** [Laughs] You were in a slide, where you were talking a little bit. I have a small presentation,
437 a clipping of that to say, "I saw you there! This is the expert in Multicultural Ed., Education." [Laughs]

438 **Sleeter:** *Wow. That's so cool.*

439 **Thao:** Yeah. So Dr. Linda Bynoe ... we wrote a paper together.

440 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. I remember that, yeah.*

441 **Thao:** She was not able to go. I went over there and I presented the paper. It's also published, from
442 what I learned, but I haven't seen it yet. [Laughs]

443 **Sleeter:** *That's so wonderful.*

444 **Thao:** Yeah. But due to you. Thanks to you.

445 **Sleeter:** *As you think over the goal of preparing leaders, and through your teaching preparing*
446 *leaders how well do you feel like that goal is achieved?*

447 **Thao:** During my tenure here at CSUMB for the last 20 years every time when I go to Greenfield,
448 and go to the areas surrounding, the Tri-County area, I saw my students out there waving to me, saying,
449 “Hey, Paoze.” [Laughs] And so in a sense what I did and along with my colleagues like you and everybody
450 did, is that we have produced, we have made a tremendous contribution to the community even though we
451 do not see it in terms of quantitatively. But in the sense that we see that qualitatively, both in the way what
452 we produced leaders who are there actually teaching in the community, who are now teachers. Some of
453 them have been in the school district for 15 years, let’s say. Some of them have become principals as well
454 as vice-principals. So I think these are the kind of work that we put in, these are kind of fruit, I would say,
455 of the of work. It came into fruition pretty much like right there. They are the real people that we helped to
456 become who they are today. They make a contribution. So I am real happy when I go out there to the
457 school district. Sometimes [I hear], “Paoze, is that you?” I say, “Yes.” Every time when you go
458 somewhere, into the grocery stores or somewhere and people say, “Are you Professor Thao?” “Yes,” right?
459 I say, “You remember me?” And they say, “Yes, I had you for Linguistics” or “I had you for Research or
460 for Capstone,” for example. And they are still out there. So I think these are, even though we can’t really
461 measure in terms of statistically, but I think our students are out there serving the community and that is the
462 kind of work that I think CSUMB has put together. Thanks to all of you who put the Vision Statement
463 together. You wrote it so well that I would say oh, my goodness. Every time. . . .

464 **Sleeter:** *I didn’t write it. [Laughter]*

465 **Thao:** No, I mean the founding -

466 **Sleeter:** *Oh, the people who did? Yeah.*

467 **[53:27] Thao:** Yeah. It was well put together. Even today ... the problem that we have pretty much from
468 the beginning as well as now, is that people in the faculty as well as staff operate at different levels which is
469 not quite up to the levels of the Vision that was proposed. But in a sense that we’re trying to reach it, that

470 particular goal. In a way I feel that we are still...we have work to do in order to bring everybody up to par
471 on the same level. I think that takes quite a bit of work.

472 **Sleeter:** *Is the institution still honoring the Vision the way it did at the beginning? At an*
473 *institutional level.*

474 **Thao:** I think it changes. It changes over time. But I think that there may be a few versions of the
475 document now. I think. I don't know that. I haven't really read it closely but I believe that we may have a
476 few versions of the Vision Statement. But I think it's still intact. I wanted to see the word Multicultural
477 Education there, that are in the College but it's ...today I think it doesn't appear in there. So one of my
478 comments actually at the College level -- you know that we have become a College of Education ourselves.
479 They separated Human Services out as well as Kinesiology. So right now we have our own Dean. And I
480 think that the word Multicultural Education slowly disappeared. It has been replaced with something maybe
481 cultural – culture rather than multicultural. But that is some of my observation. But as long as I am here I
482 think the Multicultural Education is still the foundation of my teaching and learning here on campus. It's
483 the people and not, you know, [laughs] we are the people. And as I mentioned to you before, if we don't
484 change, go according to the diverse population in California, they are going to change us. So I believe that
485 the Vision Statement of the University will remain intact for a very long time. People are here to stay. They
486 are not going to disappear.

487 **[56:12] Sleeter:** *Yeah. Just one more... I kind of skipped over number five because you already talked so*
488 *much about struggles and evolution and I just wondered if there was anything else as it related to key*
489 *moments of struggles and evolution as the campus is...that you would want to talk about that you haven't*
490 *already talked about.*

491 **Thao:** I think that for the future we have to find a way to educate the population around here.
492 Perhaps how can we develop, let's say, classrooms or resources that can accommodate more students. We
493 are growing but at the same time we don't have enough natural resources like water to sustain us to the next

494 level. Even though right now we grew up to our full capacity which is 7,000 students, I think we cannot
495 grow beyond and above that because we don't have enough water. We have to find a way to sustain the
496 University, to educate the students around here. I don't mean that we have to be completely online, that's
497 not my way of saying that, but there must be a way that we could find enough natural resources to sustain
498 the kind of effective teaching and learning, the kind of pedagogy that we initially began with OBE, we
499 wanted to do that.

500 **Sleeter:** *For readers who don't know or listeners what OBE is...?*

501 **Thao:** Yeah. OBE stands for outcome-based education. Where we designed the curriculum down
502 but we delivered it up. It's competency based, where we teach students exactly what we want them to be
503 able to do at the end of the semester.

504 **Sleeter:** *Which seems to conflict with what I am hearing you talk about right now about numbers*
505 *of credits.*

506 **Thao:** Right, yeah. The two of them don't work together well, you know. Because we want to
507 graduate students as many as possible but at the same time, as you know, the debate is always on whether
508 we need to concentrate on quality or quantity. I think for me quality would always come first. Otherwise
509 you produce quantity and people can't do the work out there. And also it destroys your integrity as a
510 university, as well. But again, I think that's a battle and I don't know where the middle ground is going to
511 be. But I think the two of them, whether we like it or not, they are together. Work load will be at issue. It's
512 constantly an issue that we have to work. Right now the University wants us to increase the workload,
513 right? So increase the size of students. Some of them they want bigger classes. But on campus we don't
514 have a classroom that can accommodate 50 or even 70 or 100 people even though the University is talking
515 about some classes that we could maximize the enrollment. But there's no such a place that can do it, so . .
516 . But at the same time, we can't do our quality work, can't do quality teaching with that kind of amount of
517 students. So I still want to maintain the number, which is 30 maximum, so we could have the kind of

518 development, we can have the kind of student-teacher rapport like before, that you get to know your
519 student, every student by their first name. When you increase that level up to 100 people you don't know
520 the students anymore. You just get up there, do a lecture and it's done. You know, I think. . . we don't want
521 to sacrifice that part.

522 **Sleeter:** *Yeah. Okay, Paoze, thank you so much.*

523 **Thao:** I hope I have enough strength to work until I am 70½, Christie! [Laughter] You should have
524 stayed here because we really do miss you and a lot of founding faculty members!

525 **Sleeter:** *It was the work environment. Well, I can turn this off now.*

526 (END OF RECORDING)

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528