

Narrator: Chao Xiong

Interviewer: Sallie Anna Steiner

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STEINER: So today is August 3rd, and we're here at the Hmong Mutual Association, and I'm here with Chao Xiong, and we're going to talk a little bit about the *qeej* and about your *mej koob* work.

XIONG: Yes, I've done that for about twenty years now.

STEINER: OK, great. So just to start out, a little background about yourself. Where were you born?

XIONG: I was born in Laos, then due to the Secret War in Laos, I came to the United States as a refugee in 1985. So I've been living in Wisconsin since 1985.

STEINER: How old were you?

XIONG: I was sixteen almost seventeen, and then I graduated from high school at Memorial High School here in Eau Claire in 1989. Then I went to UW-Stout and received my Bachelor's degree in December 1993, and then went on to get my Master's degree in vocational rehab in 1996. So, from then I work as a vocational evaluator for a year in Rhinelander, and then I got a job with the State of Wisconsin as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. So I've been working as a counselor for the State since 1997, so almost twenty-one years.

STEINER: Do you work mostly with Hmong people, or with just a mix of everybody?

XIONG: No, I actually work the general public and I've had very few Hmong people for clients.

STEINER: And did your whole family come with you when you came to the U.S.?

XIONG: Yes. Actually, two of my brothers came to the United States about five years before my other brothers and my parents, so we came later.

STEINER: And they were living in this area?

XIONG: Yes, except for right now three of my brothers are living in Minnesota and one is in Arkansas.

STEINER: And what was that like for you? You were probably old enough that you remember living in Laos, and how was that transition for you?

XIONG: Well, when I grew up, again because of the war we were moving from place to place, and it was kind of hard to hear the machine guns almost all the time. And then it was nice to be here. But also, when we came in, we experienced some racism and discrimination, so that created a lot of stress as well, but since I've been here for a while, I've kind of adjusted to it.

STEINER: Have you seen that change over time, or do you still experience that?

XIONG: I think that has changed quite a bit. There's one time that my dad and I were walking down Barstow Street, and there were kids that spit on my dad's face, and that wasn't really good. You know, in our culture, we're supposed to respect the elders, but when we came here, the stuff happened to our elders, and it was hard. But I haven't seen anything like that lately.

STEINER: How about back in Laos, is there a lot of ethnic conflict between the Hmong people and Lao people, or ...

XIONG: Well you know, when I grew up, it was just kids, and basically I grew up during the war, so I didn't have a chance to go to school or anything like that, and I didn't have a chance to live with other ethnic groups. But what I've heard from my brothers and my parents, there were conflicts between the Laotian people and the Hmong people, too. So when you go to the cities, it's basically mainly the Laotian people, and there were problems, too.

STEINER: How was it when you were growing up, trying to practice your culture when you were on the run? Perhaps that was all you knew, how did your parents and family try to keep traditions alive even though you were moving from place to place?

XIONG: Well, wherever we go, there are Hmong people who practice those things, and these are things that are necessary, so they just keep doing it. Back then, there weren't many people who could do these things, so maybe a village there were just a few people who know how to do that. The learning process is difficult, and most of the people who did these things back in Laos, they did not know how to read or write, so basically you have to memorize what your instructors say, you don't have anything written.

STEINER: Oral tradition.

XIONG: Right, or don't have anything to record. So it was harder, and not too many people learn these things. But here in the U.S., it's a little bit easier because you can put it in writing or record it and listen to it, and that way it helps.

STEINER: Did you have a sense when you were growing up in Laos of your culture being something that grounded you through these experiences you're having of war, was that something about your identity that was important to you at the time?

XIONG: Oh, it has been always important to me and the Hmong people. What they do may not be a good practice in this country, but back then what the elders do is we always respect them, that's an important thing for us to learn.

STEINER: What are some of the things that you've seen change the most in coming from Laos to the U.S.?

XIONG: You know back in Laos, for example, if somebody dies, then you can do the funeral services right away. But now because we all work, and because of the limited space, if somebody dies we may not be able to do their funeral services right away, so we have to wait for weeks or months before we can do that. So that's a big change. Also, back in Laos, we sacrifice animals when somebody dies for that

person, but now we try to eliminate some of those, reduce the number of animals that we kill for that funeral. We changed the funeral to usually we open on Friday and bury on Monday, the next week. So we spend three good days, two good days, and two and a half days doing that.

STEINER: Do you see a lot of the younger people learning these ways, like these traditions of burying, or do you see these things falling by the wayside or changing?

XIONG: There are a number of people that change, but I think the majority still do these things that we are doing. The details may be a little bit different, or less activities, but we still do the same way, I guess, and there are still people that are interested in doing these, especially because there are technology, recording devices, we can put these things in writing. The younger generations actually learn these things quickly, and they like it because they can use it for their own funeral, or New Years events, or any events. So, they can use it as a talent, not just for the funeral services.

STEINER: So can you tell me a little about some of these rituals that you've facilitated? You said that you *mej koob*, but do you facilitate funerals as well, or?

XIONG: Well, for funerals, I learn the process we call soul guide. Have you heard about that? It's when you die, we lead the soul back to the grandparents. So I learned that in 1999. I haven't done that much, it's really my choice that I chose not to do that. It's a very long song, a long process. It's about three or four hours in length, so I just decided not to do that. I did it once, but...

STEINER: What is the goal, or what is the process of it. You guide the soul back to its original home?

XIONG: Yeah, to the ancestor. So for example, when somebody dies in Eau Claire, we would... when you lived, you use water, food in the city of Eau Claire, so when you die, you have to pay those back. So wherever you live, we have to go step by step and go all the way back until the city where you were born, and then from there we'll send your soul back to your ancestors.

STEINER: So origin is important in Hmong culture, your origin is important, where you were born and...

XIONG: Right.

STEINER: And is that something that's been, since a lot of Hmong people have moved around a lot and been displaced and stuff, has that complicated that ritual?

XIONG: Yeah, well you got to know where you moved around, so that when you die they can guide you back. So if you live in Eau Claire for ten years, and then you move to Wausau for ten years, and then come back to Eau Claire, they still guide you from Eau Claire to Wausau and then back to Eau Claire, and then wherever you lived after that.

STEINER: It seems like that ritual is really tied to place.

XIONG: Yes, places where you lived, and wherever you're born, we believe that when you need to go back and get the placenta [in Hmong]. So wherever you were born, you have to go back and get that before you can go back to your ancestors.

STEINER: So when you are born, they bury that somewhere?

XIONG: Yes, they bury it in the house. If I remember correctly, for the guide they bury the placenta in the house, so when you die you have to go back and get that before you go back to the ancestors.

STEINER: So do they mean like spiritually you have to go back and get it?

XIONG: Right, just your soul.

STEINER: If you could go back physically to the house, would they go get that?

XIONG: No.

STEINER: OK, just the spiritual idea. And you said you facilitated that once?

XIONG: Just once, yes.

STEINER: And who did you do it for?

XIONG: There was a kid that died in La Crosse and they took him over here for his funeral, so I did that back in, I believe it was 2000 or 2001.

STEINER: Interesting. And does that involve the *qeej*?

XIONG: No, it's basically the words.

STEINER: A chant.

XIONG: Yes. And this *qeej*, I just learned this recently. I just always liked that when I was young, but I haven't had the opportunity to learn it. So I believe I started learning that in 2014, and then I finished the basics in 2016.

STEINER: Who did you learn from?

XIONG: From a cousin. He's a very patient instructor, otherwise I wouldn't be able to learn. We started with close to twenty people, and only three of us finished. So the older guys like me, they all quit, and I was the only one that finished.

STEINER: Is it electric?

XIONG: Yes, this is like if you put a mic in it, and you can put speakers in it also.

STEINER: Oh, interesting. Well, I guess we can talk about that a little bit since it's here.

XIONG: So this is the *qeej*. As you probably know, we migrated from China years ago in the 1800s to Laos, and so actually if we were in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, wherever you go you see people carrying these that are Hmong people. So this is a symbolic instrument for the Hmong people. Years ago,

they use it for, or I guess these days it depends on where you live, they use it for New Year's celebration, funeral services, sometimes they use it for weddings. But here in the United States, I haven't seen anybody use it for weddings anymore, it's mainly for funeral services, and sometimes like New Year's celebrations and things like that. Again, this is one of the things that we use in funerals to send the dead person's soul back to the ancestors. It's kind of similar to what I said before, but this is *qeej*, the other one is basically I just guide it with song.

STEINER: I've heard that *qeej* is a way of playing it where you're talking through it.

XIONG: Yeah, it has meaning when you talk into it. It's the same as what I said before, but that one also takes probably four good hours to finish, too, when somebody dies.

STEINER: To finish the song?

XIONG: The song that send them back to the ancestors.

STEINER: That's a long song!

XIONG: Yes, it's a hard one.

STEINER: Have you ever tried to play something like that?

XIONG: No, not yet.

STEINER: Maybe someday.

XIONG: Yeah, I just play the short one, like maybe 45 minutes to 1 hour.

STEINER: That's still long.

XIONG: Yeah, if you carry that and blow it back and forth, it's hard. Also, it's not something that's easy to learn, too.

STEINER: Where was this one made?

XIONG: This was made in Laos. I went to visit Laos in 2014, and I bought it from there. It was \$500. So these things can cost between \$500 to \$1200, depending on the quality and the size.

STEINER: Was that your first time going back to Laos since you came?

XIONG: I have gone four times.

STEINER: Has life there changed a lot for Hmong people?

XIONG: I think there have been a lot of changes. For example, as I mentioned before, there were mainly Laotian people living in the cities, but now when I went back, there are a lot of Hmong people that live in

the cities, too. So they have changed, but they are still living in the mountains like we used to do, where there's farming, and daily living--some of it is still the same as we were before.

STEINER: Do you still have family back there?

XIONG: I got a few families and cousins over there.

STEINER: So I noticed you have some interesting stickers on your *qeej*. I wonder what those are?

XIONG: I love hunting and stuff like that, so I just decorated it, that way I know it's mine!

STEINER: That's awesome, can I take a picture? What do you hunt?

XIONG: I do squirrel hunting and deer hunting.

STEINER: Oh, OK. Did you hunt back in Laos, too?

XIONG: In Laos I was too little! [Laughter]

STEINER: Oh, OK!

XIONG: So these *qeejs* here have six of these bamboo, and each of these has a blade that make the sounds. This bigger one has three blades in it. They are made of tin.

STEINER: Oh, interesting. Would you care to play something for me, would you be able to do that?

XIONG: Oh, sure. I can do that, no problem.

STEINER: Would you mind if I filmed you playing?

XIONG: Oh sure, no problem. I'm not very good, like the masters [laughter], but I'm a rookie. Plus, you know when you learn these things, when you are old age, your fingers just don't cooperate that well anymore!

STEINER: Yes, it's interesting to see.

XIONG: [Playing *qeej* 20:58 to 24:06] So it's just a simple.

STEINER: Beautiful! Does that song have any particular meaning to it?

XIONG: It's basically like a girlfriend and boyfriend are dating from a long distance, and then the guy missed the girlfriend so much that he commits suicide. So then the guy who blow the *qeej*, come and blow that *qeej* to send that guy to heaven, I guess.

STEINER: Interesting. Is that one of those songs where you're sort of talking through the *qeej*?

XIONG: Right.

STEINER: Interesting. I noticed also when you play that you sort of pace, is that part of the piece?

XIONG: You're supposed to move around, but I'm not good at that, so I just kind of move a little bit [Laughter].

STEINER: But that's common?

XIONG: Yes, that's common. If you just stay in one spot, it doesn't look good.

STEINER: I see. Have you taught anyone else, like your kids?

XIONG: No, my kids don't like this yet. I tried to teach them, and they don't like it.

STEINER: What do you think they don't like about it?

XIONG: I don't know.

STEINER: Not appealing yet?

XIONG: No.

STEINER: Interesting. Are there any other Hmong instruments that are common?

XIONG: For things like dating, and things like that, they have *xim xaus*, *ncas* and things like that, too.

STEINER: OK, and those are used for dating?

XIONG: They are used for dating. They are not as big as this one, and I don't know how to play those.

STEINER: OK, are those wind instruments?

XIONG: Yeah, kind of similar.

STEINER: It seems like a lot of the music is centered around dating and courtship, like you said that song was about a guy who was in love. Is that common, like music is a thing to use in a courtship rituals in Hmong culture?

XIONG: Yes, the other ones are for dating, but these [gestures to *qeej*] are basically for funerals. Because the person dies, and they do the celebration and they use the *qeej*. It's dating, but the end result is death, so [Laughter]...

STEINER: Send the bereaved soul of the lover back to heaven.

XIONG: Yes.

STEINER: Speaking of dating, can you tell me about your work as a *mej koob*? Can you tell me how you got started and involved with that?

XIONG: How did I get involved to become a *mej koob*? Well, you cannot really complete a marriage, a wedding without the *mej koob*. The *mej koob* are the negotiators. We need negotiators for the girl's parents' side, and then, too, for the boy's parents' side. Those are more like negotiators, or messengers, or mediators. So those people really communicate back and forth between those two clans.

STEINER: So you have one *mej koob* represent...

XIONG: Two for the woman's side, and two for the guy's.

STEINER: And are they negotiating dowry?

XIONG: Dowry, or any past issues with previous marriage. They tend to bring up, say for example, if you're married to somebody in the Vang family, and we got divorced for any reason, if my children or my cousins go marry the same clan from that first marriage, they are going to say, "Your guy married one of our daughters and they didn't last, so how do you assure them that's not going to happen again?" So those kinds of things they bring up in marriages. So as the *mej koob*, you have to exchange information between those two clans.

STEINER: It seems like the extended family is very involved in the wedding and the marriage.

XIONG: Right, not just family but extended families, they come and those are the kinds of issues they have to resolve or assure that they will try to prevent those things from happening again. See, in our culture, marriage is supposed to last a lifetime, so if you marry for a few years and get divorced, and then your children or your cousin go marry the same clan, from the same family again, then they are going to say those things to you.

STEINER: How do Hmong people look at divorce? Is there a traditional way to get divorced in Hmong culture, or is that something that's been more from living in the West...

XIONG: In the United States, we follow the same divorce process. If they are legally married, then we follow the same process, but there are steps before you actually get to the final divorce. If a married couple have conflicts, and they are not getting along, then usually there's a clan leader that will get involved and try to resolve those issues. If after that they still cannot live together, then they will file for divorce.

STEINER: Is that something that's considered shameful in Hmong culture, or how do people react to when marriages don't work out?

XIONG: Yeah, we try to avoid that, because when a married couple get divorced, the community sees that as there's something wrong with the people, either the woman or the man. Your reputation is just not as great as it was.

STEINER: Tarnished reputation?

XIONG: Yes. So that's why people try to stay away from getting divorced unless it's necessary.

STEINER: And hopefully the *mej koob* helps that to not happen.

XIONG: Well, the *mej koob* do the weddings, but after that they don't deal with that. Usually, there's a clan leader that will be responsible for making sure that they work together and try to stay married. If after that clan leader talked to them and they're still not happy, then they can go to the girl's parents' clan leader to see if they can do anything, too. But if after that it still can't work out, then there's not much you can do, and you can get divorced.

STEINER: With the *mej koob* ritual, you said there are two *mej koob*. How are they chosen?

XIONG: Well, if you know how to do it, and you do it well, and you are available, so that's how you get chosen.

STEINER: OK, so they don't have to draw from a specific clan?

XIONG: No, but say if my son marries somebody in the Vang family, then the *mej koob* from my side could not be the same last name as us, but any other last name can do the *mej koob*.

STEINER: And what is your relationship to the other *mej koob* that you're working with, is it usually someone you know well?

XIONG: No, usually you don't know, but when you get to their house, that is when they will introduce those two people. You go ask them "Who are those people? Do they have a *mej koob* already?" and then they would introduce you to the *mej koob*, and then you can start that process with them.

STEINER: What is your interaction with the other *mej koob*, what kind of things do you have to talk about with them, or what rituals do you have to do with them?

XIONG: Well first we have to talk to them and say that we are just doing the weddings for those families, and we have nothing against each other, so we should call each other friends, and then get to know them, know their last name, basic information. And then usually the *mej koob* drink a lot of alcohol.

STEINER: What kind of alcohol?

XIONG: Beer. So anytime you say something, you have to drink a little bit before you start saying what you are going to say. So it's a long process, and the other thing that they are looking for in a *mej koob* is that you have to be available, you have to be able to drink, don't talk more than you have to, that you can still do your job when you're drinking. So it's not easy to do [Laughter]. A lot of people can learn it, but because they have a little bit of drink, they cannot concentrate or stay focused. Those people do not get used very much.

STEINER: I see. Is the beer they use just normal beer, or is it special, do they brew beer for the event?

XIONG: No, it's just normal beer. Bud Light.

STEINER: [Laughter] Very Wisconsin! The drinking, do the bride and groom and the whole wedding party participate in that?

XIONG: The bride and groom do not drink with the *mej koob*. The *mej koob* is in the negotiating process, and once they're done with that they will have a meal that everybody will participate in. Usually the girl does not come and sit at that table, because I don't know why. Even though it's for her, the wedding, she won't be in there.

STEINER: Oh, OK. The table where the *mej koob* are sitting?

XIONG: Yes, the *mej koob* and all the relatives, she will not be sitting in there.

STEINER: I see. But at the table, are her family and the groom's family with the *mej koob*?

XIONG: No, not even that. See, it's a tradition that I think we need to change some of that, too. When you're eating and drinking, it's usually the men.

STEINER: So it's a very male dominated ceremony.

XIONG: Yes. The women can have separate tables, but they don't drink.

STEINER: OK, I see, so the drinking at the wedding is for the men.

XIONG: Mostly, but these days the younger girls do drink, too, but they will not come and sit at the tables. They just drink around.

STEINER: So some of those gender roles are changing a little bit.

XIONG: Yeah, I see that the younger girls start drinking to, so hopefully someday they can join is at the big table.

STEINER: Do you think that for you is that fine or good that it's sort of a male space, or do you think that this should change, or is it not matter so much to you?

XIONG: [Sigh] You know for me, I'm pretty open for both genders to be there, but it's a tradition that has been practiced for a long, long time, and even though we ask the woman to sit, they would not. So it's not that we don't want them there, they know that they shouldn't be, so they don't.

STEINER: They also have a sense of wanting to maintain their reputation maybe in the culture?

XIONG: Yeah, they just know that it's not their role to be at the table.

STEINER: So drinking, if women drink is that kind of frowned upon in Hmong culture?

XIONG: Well again, society has changed, so not very much anymore.

STEINER: Why did you decide to become a *mej koob*?

XIONG: Well, first they are people that are necessary to complete the wedding, and the older generations are retiring and not too many people are available to do that, so I just decided to do that.

STEINER: And what was the process of learning to do that, who did you learn from?

XIONG: Actually, the first time I went I didn't know anything so I just went with the other *mej koob* and gained some basic experience. From there, there was a class that was offered at the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association in Menomonie, so attended one class there and then from there, there was another class offered here in this building the same year, so I attended both classes back in 2000. So I've been doing that since.

STEINER: And what was that training like, they just walked you through what to say?

XIONG: What to say and some hands-on practice, too.

STEINER: Hands-on in what way?

XIONG: Like just pretending.

STEINER: Oh, I see. Is that something your family wanted you to do, or is that something you decided yourself?

XIONG: Yes, just what I wanted to do.

STEINER: How old were you when you started doing that?

XIONG: Well, I'm forty-nine now, so I've been doing it for eighteen years, so I was about thirty-one.

STEINER: Were you already married at that point?

XIONG: Oh, yeah.

STEINER: Is that kind of required of the *mej koob*, that they should be married?

XIONG: Nope, you start as young as you can, if you want to. But the thing is, when you are *mej koob*, you have to be able to drink.

STEINER: So a little life experience is good.

XIONG: Yeah. But the reason I started really late is I came to the United States when I was sixteen, almost seventeen, and I went to school. So learning the English language was pretty hard for me because I came here when I was almost seventeen and they put me right into high school. So learning was pretty hard for me, so I didn't have time to do all the things. I pretty much spent all my time on school.

STEINER: And in Laos you didn't have any schooling really?

XIONG: I grew up during the war, so basically living from village to village or in the jungles throughout my life, so no chance to go to school there.

STEINER: So could you read and write when you came here?

XIONG: When we came to Thailand, in a refugee camp in Thailand, I did learn English for almost two years. So I did have some very basic English, but it's still hard when they put you in high school when I came here.

STEINER: Was that kind of a shock all of a sudden to be in this school system, coming from refugee camps and then into a school system, what was that like for you? Were there a lot of other Hmong people your age there as well?

XIONG: Yes. I actually came to Rice Lake in '85, so I went to school there until '87. There were, I think, four or five Hmong people attending that high school. But when I came here and attended Memorial High School, there were more Hmong people my age there.

STEINER: So you were all in it together. Did you learn to read and write Hmong language ever?

XIONG: In Thailand. So when I came to Thailand, I didn't know anything about reading and writing. So I learned English, and then two different types of Hmong writing, then Thai and Lao. So you have those four or five languages to learn at the same time. It was pretty hard.

STEINER: Did you grow up speaking both Hmong and Lao?

XIONG: No, just Hmong. Lao and Hmong are two very different languages.

STEINER: So do you speak Thai or Lao at all now?

XIONG: Now, yes, I did study for two and a half years in Thailand, so I can speak the basic, I can get by.

STEINER: Coming to the U.S., has education been important for Hmong families to try to, because obviously you've gone from not being able to read and write to having a Master's degree in a pretty short amount of time.

XIONG: Education is always important and promoted by Hmong parents. But the reason many people could not read and write in Laos is because the lack of schools. I would say that there were some discriminations, again against women, in Laos. Because when you were a woman, they didn't really let you go to school very much, but the boys got to go to school more. But now it's changed. Both genders can go to school there, and that's one of the things that I've seen change in Laos, too.

STEINER: Is being educated in traditions important for Hmong people, too, like to educate their children in Hmong traditions?

XIONG: Yes, they always see education as an important thing to learn, and that's one of the ways to get good jobs, so they always promote that.

STEINER: What is this basket that you have here?

XIONG: So in Laos, we use this to carry crops from the farm. This basket is called *kawm*. So you use it to carry crops from the field. But the reason I brought this today is that when you do weddings, this is what you use to carry stuff to go from your son's parent's house to the other family. So when you *mej koob*, you bring like a bottle of water, a container of salt, a little bit of rice, maybe eight or ten spoons. You bring cooked chicken and rice for lunch during your trip from the guy's home to the girl's home. So in Laos you'd need to carry this, otherwise it could take a day long, if you don't have this to carry those, you have nothing to eat. So that is one of the reasons we still use it today. We don't really need to do that, but it's a tradition, so we just do that. We don't really have to anymore because these days it doesn't matter where the person lives, we just drive there.

STEINER: Does it have a name, the basket?

XIONG: *Kawm*.

STEINER: Can you write that down for me?

XIONG: In Hmong? K-A-W-M. And I also brought this. This is called the umbrella, it's used to protect the bride's and groom's souls when you do weddings. Traditionally, they believe that when they are newly married, everybody likes them, so they will come and try to disrupt you or take away your soul, and that's why we have this umbrella.

STEINER: So you hold that over the couple?

XIONG: You don't really do that, the *mej koob* just have to carry that.

STEINER: OK, so it's sort of a spiritual armor?

XIONG: Yes.

STEINER: I see. Does this mean anything?

XIONG: I'm not sure what the meaning is, but it's just one cloth that you wrap around it.

STEINER: Did you put that on there?

XIONG: Yes, I put it on it.

STEINER: But that's something that all these umbrellas have?

XIONG: They the *mej koob* have to do it.

STEINER: What's that called?

XIONG: *Siv ceeb*.

STEINER: And that protects the couple from...

XIONG: Protect their souls from, I guess, getting away from devils or evil spirits.

STEINER: I see. Do Hmong believe in a lot of different kinds of spirits?

XIONG: I guess so [laughter]!

STEINER: Do you believe in different kinds of spirits?

XIONG: Well, to me, I don't really believe that much because the tradition and the culture, they just do that, so I just do it. So I really don't believe even God or, I just do what they say, I don't really believe that there is something there.

STEINER: It's meaningful for you as a tradition rather than as a...

XIONG: Yeah, rather than is someone going to protect me.

STEINER: Why do you think that still is meaningful for you, is that identity that's meaningful for you even though you don't literally believe in it?

XIONG: It's belonging to the group or it's a sense of belonging. You just have to do something. You can't just stay by yourself and not do anything.

STEINER: That's true. Are there a lot of Hmong that do literally believe?

XIONG: I think there are a lot, yeah.

STEINER: Vincent invited me to attend a shaman ritual on Sunday, so do you practice shamanism at all?

XIONG: Oh! That's something that you cannot learn. It's somebody that make you do those, you cannot just learn to do it.

STEINER: You have to have the spirit inside of you?

XIONG: Right.

STEINER: So the shaman is somebody that's sort of born with that power rather than learning about it?

XIONG: Right, right.

STEINER: I covered pretty much everything that I wanted to cover, with the music, and the weddings, and rituals and stuff. I was going to ask, where was that made, did you get that from Laos?

XIONG: These were made in Laos, too.

STEINER: OK, are there people here that still do basket weaving?

XIONG: Well, they don't have the materials. These are made from rattan. I'm sure you've heard of that.

STEINER: Yes, I have heard of that. So you have to import these?

XIONG: Yes, these are imported.

STEINER: And you brought these with you or you got it here?

XIONG: No, I just bought it from Minnesota, because they imported a lot of these to Minnesota.

STEINER: OK. Is there anything that I didn't ask you, that you think I should ask you?

XIONG: I don't know. I know a lot of things, so if you have questions about specific things, you can call me, and if I don't know I can find that out from somebody else.

STEINER: Alright, well thank you so much.

XIONG: Yes, so there are many people that know more than me, and they have more knowledge than me.

STEINER: Oh, this is good to try to get a survey of people's practices and traditions, so this is good.

XIONG: So Vincent was talking to me about how we can decorate our Hmong Mutual Assistance Association facilities to kind of represent our people, and I say one of these [*qeej*] should hang on the wall, because like I said before, it's a symbolic instrument of the Hmong people. So you need to have at least one of these someplace.

STEINER: Maybe the museum could look into acquiring some of these objects for the display.

XIONG: And this *paj ntaub*, they basically make Hmong people do different things to represent our culture.

STEINER: Yes, those are beautiful. I saw you have one more sticker on there that's a deer, I thought that was kind of cool. On your *qeej*.

XIONG: Oh, yeah, I just love to decorate my things.

STEINER: That's nice. You got into hunting here in the U.S.?

XIONG: Yes.

STEINER: Are there a lot of Hmong people who hunt?

XIONG: I think so.

STEINER: I've heard fishing is popular.

XIONG: Fishing and hunting, both.

STEINER: So there are a lot of white people in Wisconsin who like to hunt, so is that like a way to connect to other people from Wisconsin?

XIONG: Well, there were a lot of different groups of people that hunt, and we do meet once in a while, but usually when you go hunting you're on your own.

STEINER: Very interesting. Well, thank you so much for talking with me today.

XIONG: Yeah, I hoped you learn something and you can get some useful information from it.

STEINER: I did, and I hope we can make some kind of exhibit.

[Break]

XIONG: ... You sing a bunch of good things to them after they got married, that they have good children, they have good business, and everything like that. [Sings in Hmong 00:14 to 03:51]

So, after you open this [umbrella], the married couple, I give it to you, and then you hold it, and then you both take that to your bed, and leave it in your bedroom for three days before you put it away.

STEINER: I see. And then do they give it back to you?

XIONG: No, they keep that.

STEINER: Well, thank you so much, that was fascinating.

[End]