

## **A Visit to the Hmong of Asia: Globalization and Ethnicity at the Dawn of the 21st Century**

**By Kou Yang, Ed.D.  
California State University, Stanislaus**

**Hmong Studies Journal, Volume 9, 50 Pages**

### **Abstract**

This paper consists of observations made from my two and a half month visit to the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China.<sup>1</sup> As such, it contains two parts. The first part is my observation of the Hmong in Asia and their common issues. The second part is a photo essay of the visit to the Hmong in Asia, covering issues discussed in the paper. Although I did visit other subgroups of the Miao, such as the Hmu in Guizhou and Qo Xiong<sup>2</sup> in Hunan, this paper covers only the Hmong, whom I hope will be better presented and discussed as a result of my work. Moreover, the Hmong live in all the above mentioned countries, whereas other subgroups of the Miao live only in China. This paper highlights the socio-economic conditions and educational experiences of the Hmong in the above mentioned countries. It also covers my observations of Hmong civic engagement and other aspects of their social and political lives in the respective countries.

### **Introduction**

There were three objectives for my trip to visit the Hmong in Asia. The first objective was to learn more about Hmong women in leadership with the goal of gaining insight into Hmong women with leadership positions in Asia and the United States of America, which is the focus of another research project I am involved with. The second objective was to learn more about the Hmong in Asia and their socio-economic and educational situations. The third objective was a personal one; to better understand my own heritage and the path of the migration of my ancestors from China to Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> This paper, however, will only cover the second objective and it is based upon my personal observations and conversations with Hmong from many walks of life in Asia. This paper is not an in-depth field study<sup>4</sup> of the Hmong in Asia, but

an observation from a student of the Hmong and a person of Hmong ancestry, so the writing will be done in the first person to reflect this aspect of the paper.

### **The Hmong of Asia**

In Asia, the Hmong are found in China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). The Hmong are a people of Diaspora, with their ancestral home in central China. It is said that throughout their 5,000 year-history, the Hmong were pushed and pulled to move from north to south, east to west, and from the lowlands to the highlands of China (Yang, K.Y., 1996). This movement eventually reached Vietnam about the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Vuong Xuan Tinh, N.D.) and Laos in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Yang, D., 1992). China, the ancestral home of the Hmong, continues to have the largest Hmong population, estimated to be more than 2 million (Lemoine, 2005). They are scattered throughout the rural areas and highlands of the provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi, Sichuan and Guizhou, with Yunnan as the region that has the largest population of Hmong ancestry. Vietnam, which has about 800,000 Hmong (Phang Ching, 2008; Vuong Xuan Tinh, N.D.), is the country with the second largest Hmong population. The Hmong of Vietnam, the 8<sup>th</sup> largest Vietnamese ethnic minority group, spread to 16 Northern Vietnamese provinces, with Lao Cai and Ha Giang as the two provinces that have the largest Hmong populations, with about 100,000 each. In Laos, the Hmong population of more than 300,000 can be found in the Northern provinces of Phongsaly, Sam Neua, Xieng Khouang, Bokeo, Oudomxay, Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Borikhamxay. The Hmong in Thailand (about 150,000) basically live in the Northern and Northeastern provinces, including Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan, Loei, Phetchabun, and so on. In Myanmar, the Hmong (a

population of 10-15,000) reportedly reside in the northeastern part of the country, near the border with China. Table 1 below shows the population distribution of the Hmong in Asia.

Table 1 Hmong population distribution in Asia

Country	Hmong Population
China	2,777,039 *
Vietnam	800,000**
Laos	315,000*
Thailand	150,000*
Myanmar (Burma)	10,000-15,000

Sources: \*Lemoine (2005), \*\*Phang Ching (2008) and Vuong Xuan Tinh (N.D.)

### **The Visit to the Hmong in Asia**

The precise origins of the Hmong have not yet been established. The Hmong, like other tribal people, have no written records (Lemoine, 2005) and written records by non-Hmong have not always been accurate and reliable (Entenmann, 2005, Lemoine, 2005). The search for Hmong history has only begun recently (Lee, 2007, Lemoine, 2005, Yang, K., 2005; Yang, K., 2003), and as such, it is incomplete. This has led to the claim that the Hmong are “the undocumented people” (Moua, 2002:6) who have very few or no historical documents to reconstruct their past experience and identity.

The Hmong are one of at least four groups lumped together under the name, Miao. The other three are A Hmao, Hmu and Qho Xiong. All the four groups under the name, Miao in China believe that they are descendants of the people of the Kingdom of Chi You in Chinese legend, and are historically and culturally linked (Yang, K., 2005). Chi You, Yen Di and Huang Di were rulers of the three Kingdoms in Chinese legend believed to have existed in Central China near the Yellow and Yangzi River basins more than 4,700 years ago (Yang, K., 2005). The Han Chinese today believe that they are descendants of the Kingdoms of Huang Di and Yen Di (Sun & Shi, 2002), leaving the Kingdom of Chi You to be claimed by the Miao. The Han Chinese<sup>5</sup>, one of the 56 Chinese nationalities, are the majority of the people of China today, representing about 92 percent of the population of China. The Miao is the fifth largest Chinese nationality, after the Han, Zhuang, Manchu and Hui. Technically, all peoples in China are Chinese. In his article, *Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity*, Lee (2007) attempted to find the origin of the Hmong through an analysis of Hmong/Miao oral folk tales, legends and available literature on their history and the results of DNA testing. He concluded that “an origin in China is the most plausible” for the Hmong. Although he did not suggest that all the four groups under the lumping term, Miao, are related in history or culture, he did indicate that “the recognition that they [Hmong] originated only in China and the search for this origin through the inclusive “Miao” designation is stronger than any other explanation (Lee, 2007:21).

Lemoine (2005:1) did not support the claim that there is a linkage of the four groups under the name, Miao, and stated that the “Hmong of China have been trapped into the Miao nationality in the wake of the Communist takeover in 1949.” He pointed out that, in early

Chinese documents, the word, Miao, was used to include many ethnic groups, not just the Hmong, A Hmao, Hmu and Qho Xiong. He encouraged the Hmong to be just Hmong. While many writers agree that the word, “Miao” is a lumping term that includes not only the Hmong, but at least three other groups (Lee, 2007, Yang, K., 2005; Lemoine, 2005), concrete evidence has yet to establish a common origin, history and culture of all four groups under the term, Miao.

Since 1986, I have travelled officially and privately inside China seven times; I have also visited the Hmong in Yunnan, Guangxi, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces; the A Hmao in Yunnan; the Hmu in Guizhou and the Qho Xiong in Hunan, the Miao in Hainan, the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, the Uyghur<sup>6</sup> in Western China. In addition to one semester spent studying Chinese language and history in 1986, I have also completed a short course on the history of the minorities in Southwest China in 2004 taught by Chinese historians. From my studies and observations, I agree with Lee (2007) that China is the most likely origin of the Hmong. The Hmong, like the Han Chinese, may have come from the basins of the Yellow and Yangzi (Chang Jiang) Rivers, the cradle of Chinese civilization. I explored the Hmong in China during a 2008 trip with an understanding that the origin of the Hmong is likely in China and that there is a need to study the Hmong utilizing the inclusiveness of the “Miao” designation. As such, my 2008 visit included the Hmong and A Hmao in Yunnan and Guizhou, Hmu in Guizhou and Qho Xiong in Hunan. To keep it more specific and focused, this paper only covered my visit to Hmong speakers in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, with a brief mention of the A Hmao in Yunnan.

In his paper, “What is the actual number of the (H)mong in the World”, Lemoine (2005:1) pointed out that Hmong ethnicity was officially acknowledged only recently: “in the early 1970s in Laos, in 1975, in Vietnam, and in the late 1970s in Thailand, following the flow of

(H)mong refugees from Laos. To this day, China has still not recognized any kind of (H)mong ethnicity nor any other ethnicity at all.” He estimated the number of worldwide Hmong to be about 4 to 5 million, including those in Australia, Argentina, Canada, the United States, France and Germany. Although he did not include Myanmar (Burma), he estimated the Hmong population in China to be roughly about 2,777,039, Vietnam, 787,000; Laos, 320,000 and Thailand, from 118,000 to 150,000. It is estimated that Myanmar (Burma) has a Hmong population of about 10,000 to 15,000.<sup>7</sup> This review indicates that Hmong speakers in Asia are found in China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). As such, during my 2008 visit to the Hmong in Asia, I chose to include the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China. Only the Myanmar Hmong were not included in my list to visit.

In his article, “The Shaping of Traditions: Agriculture and Hmong Society”, Lee (2005) reviewed the available literature on the history of Hmong agricultural practices, and observed that the Hmong have a long history of involvement with agriculture. As such, their traditions and society are strongly shaped by their agriculture and related way of life. Other accounts have indicated that some Hmong in Thailand have begun to receive formal Thai educations either from the Thai Buddhist temple or from regular Thai mountain schools, which is “part of the effort to control Hmong integration into Thai national life” (Johnson-Messenger, 2003:4). In Laos, a small number of Hmong have, since 1975, continued to send their children to school, and some of these students have even earned college and graduate degrees from abroad; many of them have returned to serve in the current government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Yang, K., 2003). On the negative end of the spectrum, a large segment of Laos’ population of Hmong ancestry had never been to school as of 1995; this population numbered more than twice

the national average, which was 37.6 percent (Lee, 2008). In Vietnam, Vuong Xuan Tinh (N.D.) studied the Hmong in Vietnam's food security and found that the destruction of their forests, limited cultivable land, isolation, and low level of education are major factors contributing to their poverty and their low and unsustainable food security. He also found that cultivation and livestock breeding are the two key economic activities of the Hmong in Vietnam, who are mostly concentrated in the mountainous northern provinces of Vietnam. From this review of the literature, it appears that the Hmong in Asia continue to rely heavily on agriculture, with some improvement in education and government participation. Building on these previous studies, this paper includes a discussion of issues related to the Hmong in Asia's economic and educational situations and level of government participation.

My trip to visit the Hmong in Asia began in Late December 2007 and ended in early March 2008, with the purpose of visiting the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China.<sup>8</sup> The first stop of the trip was in Bangkok, Thailand, where I spent one night and a day with several Hmong professionals in that city. The first two persons I met were Prayath Nanthasin (Kub) and his college educated wife, Taub. He is a university lecturer, the only person of Hmong ancestry who teaches in a higher learning institution in Bangkok. The other two persons were a network technician and his wife. I did not have the opportunity to meet other Hmong professionals, such as Dr. Songwit Chuamsakul (Ntxoov Fooj Haam), who is a Hmong researcher for the Office of Ethnic Affairs in the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. He is the second Hmong in Thailand to earn a doctoral degree from the West. He completed his Ph.D. in Native Studies from Kent University, Ontario, Canada. Additionally,

I did not have a chance to meet with Hmong who came to Bangkok to sell their goods to tourists or those who came to work for Bangkok manufacturers.

After my stay in Bangkok, I went to Laos and spent more than three weeks there. My visit to Laos can be divided into two parts. The first part consisted of my visit to the Hmong in Vientiane, who live in the city and many of whom are government officials, civil servants, and entrepreneurs. The second part centered upon my visit to six of the eight Northern provinces of Laos, where I saw Hmong from many walks of life, mostly in their own social environment.

In Vientiane, I met with many Hmong leaders, professionals and individuals as well as officials of the Ministry of Education. First, I attended a Hmong New Year's party in Vientiane hosted by one of the newly rich Hmong entrepreneurs in Vientiane. Second, I attended a wedding in which the bride was a Hmong and the groom was a Lao. The whole wedding ceremony was performed according to the Lao wedding tradition. The two families are members of the elites in Vientiane. Third, I spent a portion of my time in Vientiane at the home of my distant relatives who are entrepreneurs and have two servants working in their home. Before I departed from Vientiane to Hanoi, I spent two nights at the Mekong Breeze Hotel, which is owned and managed by a Hmong American and his Lao wife. Fourth, I saw the interaction of Laotian-Hmong and Hmong Americans, especially spouses of Hmong Americans at many places, including the many events I attended, the US Embassy in Vientiane, and the Wattay International Airport, where relatives of Hmong Americans were there to welcome or to send their relatives off. Lastly, I visited several Hmong ghettos to learn more about the daily life of the Hmong in Vientiane.

To gain insight into the experience of the Hmong in Laos, I spent the second part of my visit to Laos exploring the situation of the Hmong in Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Luang Namtha, Bokeo and Xieng Khouang. These provinces are home to the largest Hmong populations in Laos. In addition to my visits to many Hmong villages and conversations with Hmong people from all walks of life, I also attended several Hmong New Year's events in Oudomxay, Luang Namtha and Bokeo. These New Year's events provided opportunities for me to learn and observe Laotian-Hmong culture in a changing world, their New Year's activities, and the impact of globalization on their New Year and costumes. The northern trip provided me with an insight into the socio-economic, educational and other aspects of the experience of the Hmong in northern Laos, especially those in the rural areas.

I want to note here that I grew up in Sayaboury and was a student in Luang Prabang prior to my departure from Laos to Thailand in September 1975 and then to the United States in 1976. I knew these two towns better than other towns in Laos. This visit provided me an opportunity to observe and identify the development or changes during the last three decades. In Sayaboury, I met with two of my old classmates and friends; most of my classmates are either gone to other countries or have moved to other cities. The elders have mostly passed away; only two elders still recognized me. Most of the younger generation, those under the age of 40, do not have any memory of me; they grew up after I left town in 1974 to attend school in Luang Prabang. When I was a student in Sayaboury town between 1963 and 1974, I was well known among the town people, partly because I was a resident of the largest Buddhist temple in town and partly because of my academic excellence. On this part of the trip, I also visited many relatives, including my 80 year old maternal aunt, the only aunt left in Laos. She has continuously lived on the foot hill

of Pha Xang, or Elephant Mountain, the landmark of the town of Sayaboury. There, I was surprised to see children watching “The Lord of the Rings.” Roads are more accessible in rural Laos today than 33 years ago. The most important change is the accessibility to roads, electricity, and technology, including cell phones and television. Those who can afford to buy satellite TV dishes can watch programs from international broadcasting companies.

In Luang Prabang, I visited my old school, the Normal School of Luang Prabang; many buildings there remained the same with no modifications, except that the trees are now taller than they were in 1975. I also visited the Royal Palace of Luang Prabang and Mount Phousi in the heart of the city. The former Royal Palace is now a museum and is open to the public. Mount Phousi has a special place in my heart because I used to climb it with my many friends and classmates. Before leaving Luang Prabang in September 1975, a friend and I rode on his motorcycle around the foothill of Mount Phousi without my telling him that the ride was my last; he did not know that I was planning to leave the next day.

Luang Prabang is now a world heritage city, so most of its traditional home styles and other structures are preserved. As a result, many of the preserved buildings and streets reminded me of my younger years in this city. It also reminded me of my classmates and friends as well as my experience during the difficult years of 1974-75, when the government of Laos was in the transition between governments. To go to Xieng Khouang from Luang Prabang, I took Road 13 and then Road 7, passing through Kiou Kacham and Sala Phou Khoune. It was very emotional, when I looked at the many mountain peaks visible from the Kiou Ka Cham and Sala Phou Khoune areas. I was born on one of those mountains more than fifty years ago. My paternal and maternal great grandparents as well as maternal grandparents were buried there. Also, both of

my parents were born there. My family moved from that area to Sayaboury province when I was about four years old.

In Sala Phou Khoune, I saw a disabled old jeep used by the Pathet Lao during the 1974-75 period. It reminded me of the battle between the forces of the Second Military Region (MR II) commanded by former Major General Vang Pao, and the Pathet Lao in April 1975; this battle was the last battle. After this battle Vang Pao resigned from his commission as the Commander of the MR II, and he eventually left the country in the middle of May 1975. At Sala Phoukhoune, I took road 7 to Xieng Khouang, passing through many historical and cultural sites, such as Muong Suey and Khang Khay. Muong Suey and Khang Khai were the strong holds of Kong Le<sup>9</sup> in early 1961. I passed through the village of Phakhae, which was the former territory of the Lyfoungs, and the official birth place of Touby Lyfoung (Lyfoung, 1996). I toured the Plain of Jars and other historical sites, including the graves of Lo Bliayao, Nhiavue Lobliayao, Faydang Lobliayao and those of Ya Thotou and Paset Fong Ya. In 1961, only two Hmong, Vang Pao and Ya Thotou, reached the military rank of Colonel. Ya Thotou, who died in 1961 from a traffic accident, was a Colonel and Commander of the Pa Chay battalion, one of the most decorated battalions of the Lao People's Army (LPA). Paset Fong Ya, who was deployed to take charge of Long Cheng after Vang Pao left, was Ya Thotou's successor and died in 1975 from an assassination. I also visited Nong Het, the district that most Hmong leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from. These leaders include Lo Bliayao, Ly Foung, Touby Lyfoung, Tougeu Lyfoung, Vang Pao, and those on the Pathet Lao side, such as Ya Thotou, Paset Fong Ya and Pani Yathotou. Moreover, Nong Het was the site of the execution of many Hmong rebel leaders, who supported Pa Chay during the war against the French colonialists from 1919 to 1921. It is

said that “[f]ollowing his [Pa Chay’s] death, many Hmong rebel leaders who surrendered were decapitated at Nong Het by the French in front of Hmong spectators who were forced to assemble there” (Lee, 2008). Nong Het District borders with Vietnam and as a result, the people there can easily travel to Vietnam; most of the officials in Nong Het speak Vietnamese.

In Phonsavanh, the capital of Xieng Khouang Province, I met with many Hmong individuals and visited some of their homes. I also saw Hmong Americans in the streets of Phonsavanh and I was told that the number of Hmong Americans visiting Xieng Khouang during the 2007-08 Hmong New Year decreased due to the news that three Hmong Americans had disappeared in Xieng Khouang. After visiting Xieng Khouang, I returned to Vientiane for my flight to Hanoi, Vietnam. In Hanoi, I met with Professor Vuong Duc Quang (Vaj Kab), who is the only Hmong at the Vietnamese Institute of Social Sciences. I also met with two Hmong students from Sayaboury, Laos. I learned that there are nearly 20 Hmong students from Laos studying in Hanoi, but no one knows of the number of Hmong Vietnamese students in Hanoi. There is a possibility that there are no Hmong Vietnamese students studying in higher learning institutions in Hanoi. Professor Vuong related that, in general, there are less Hmong Vietnamese students in higher learning institutions now than there were his generation.

After several days in Hanoi, I went to Lao Cai province to visit the Hmong in Sapa, Lao Ca City, Bac Ha and other towns in Lao Cai province. I went directly to Sapa, which is described on the website of Sapa City as “an incredibly picturesque village that lies on the Hoang Lien Son mountain range near the Chinese border in [Northwest] Vietnam. It is called ‘the Tonkin Alps.’ You can see many hill tribe people, their villages, rice terraces, lush vegetation, and Fansipan, highest peak in Vietnam.” (Sapa City Website, N.D.) In Sapa, I visited the famous

Hmong terrace rice paddy fields, which draw thousands of foreign tourists to Sapa each year.

Many Hmong also invited me to visit their homes and villages. Many of the Hmong girls in Sapa speak English; they learned English from the tourists. Some of them have gone on to become tour guides for Vietnamese tour agencies. Six of them have already married foreigners; two to Americans, one each to a Canadian, French, Japanese, Korean and a Norwegian.

Although tourists who come to Sapa are there to see the Hmong, their villages and their terrace rice paddy fields, money from tourists rarely makes it way to the Hmong, but to hotels, restaurants and gift shops. I found a restaurant in Sapa that carries the name, “Hmong Restaurant.” I approached an employee of the restaurant and she said the owner is a Vietnamese and they do not have Hmong food. The Vietnamese people in Sapa have learned to capitalize on the Hmong; they hire Hmong tour guides, and name their shops and restaurants after minorities including the Hmong.

Bac Ha in Lao Cai is the second town that I have visited. In their tourist brochure, it said there is a Hmong king’s Palace in Bac Ha. It sounds as if there was a Hmong king in Bac Ha during the French colonial time, but this is incorrect as the so-called King was a Dai assigned by the French to rule the Hmong and collect taxes for the French. The official house and office of this administrator was in Bac Ha, so they called it the Hmong king’s palace. There was no Hmong king as there was no Hmong Kingdom in the history of Vietnam. During my two days in Bac Ha, I went to two different open markets. The first one was held every Saturday at a rural village in Can Cau. The Hmong there called this site, Xeeb Puas Kiab and they call their open market, “Kav Kiab.” The second site of an open market that I visited was in downtown Bac Ha which is open every Sunday. While the women come to sell goods and buy needed materials for

the family, their husbands tend to come for socialization; many eat and drink with friends until they drop on their knees.

In Lao Cai town, which is the capital of Lao Cao province, I met with Phang Ching (Faaj Wam Txoov). He is a retired official of the Lao Cai Provincial Office of Minority Affairs and former Mayor of Muong Khuong District. He has spent much of his retirement working to preserve and promote the preservation of Hmong culture. From him, I learned that the Hmong in Vietnam number about 800,000 and they live in 16 northern Vietnamese provinces, such as Lao Cai, Ha Giang, Son La, Lai Chau and so on. Lao Cai and Ha Giang each have about 100,000 Hmong and they are the two provinces which have the largest Hmong populations. After the 1979 Chinese invasion of Vietnam, some Hmong were moved to the south of Hanoi; there are reportedly two villages of these Hmong in Central Vietnam. According to Phang Ching, there are five subgroups of Hmong in Vietnam: Hmoob Shib, Hmoob Leeg, Hmoob Dawb, Hmoob Dub, Hmoob Ntsuab, and Hmoob Shua. I did not meet any Hmong Ntsuab, whose language, I was told, was very different from mine. Those I met spoke only the Hmong Leeg and Hmong Dawb languages to me.

After two weeks in North Vietnam, I entered China at the international border crossing at Lao Cai and He Kou. This is also one of the major sites of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979. Lao Cai is a town on the Vietnamese side and He Kou, a town on the Chinese side, separated by the Clear and Red Rivers, which meet each other and become one large river, known from here down to the Gulf of Tonkin as the Red River. In China, the Red River is known as Hong He, which also means Red River. Many Hmong related that during their long journey from China to Vietnam and Laos, they crossed the Red River. It is very likely that this is

the Red River in their story. One Hmong elder in Fresno, California came from the Lao Cai area. He left his home in Lao Cai during the Vietnamese Independence War in the 1940s and eventually reached Laos. He became a Hmong of Laos, married to a Laotian-Hmong woman and lived there until 1975, when the government of Laos changed hands.

In He Kou, on the side of China, I met with two local Hmong officials, Mr. Her and Mr. Zhang. Mr. Her is a retired official of the He Kou Office of Minority Affairs, and Mr. Zhang is the Secretary of the Office of Minority Affairs. In the evening, I attended the New Year banquet of the Office of Minority Affairs, in which the town Mayor was the guest of Honor. The Mayor is a Mien and has in the past visited the Mien in the United States, so he was very friendly to me. He Kou County is officially called the He Kou Yao Autonomous County to reflect its Mien population as the largest ethnic minority population in this county. In He Kou, I was preparing to go to Shiping, an area near the border of Vietnam that is populated with large population of Hmong. I was told in He Kou that, if I could make it to Shiping, I would find many Hmong there who spoke the White Hmong language. Because of heavy rain and bad weather, I was not able to travel to Shiping as planned. I then took the highway from He Kou to Kai Yuan, passing through Pingpian Miao Autonomous County. In Kai Yuan, I was a guest of Wang Chaoxing, a Hmong and an official of the Kai Yuan Office of Minority Affairs. He took me to several Hmong and non-Hmong New Year's feasting events and to four Hmong villages in Kai Yuan. Through him, I also met with Mr. Xiong and Mr. Yang; both are Hmong and officials of the Kai Yuan Government. It is worthy to note that all of the three, Mr. Wang, Mr. Xiong, and Mr. Yang are married to non-Hmong.

After Kai Yuan, I went to Mengzi to spend a few days with the Hmong there during their New Year's festival. There I also attended many Hmong New Year's feasting events and met with Hmong of all walks of life, including Mr. Thao, an official of the Hong He Naxi and Yi Autonomous Prefecture. I also met with Mrs. Xiong, one of the most successful Hmong entrepreneurs in Yunnan Province. Additionally, I met with several Hmong professionals, teachers, computer engineers, and local officials. I attended Hmong New Year ceremonies, including the food offering to their ancestors and their private New Year dinner. The New Year feasting is an occasion for family and friends to get together. The New Year dinner is only for family and close relatives. Their most important public New Year celebration activities are bull fighting and Tsa Hauv Toj or the erecting of the New Year tree.

Before heading to Kunming, I went to Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture to see their New Year tree erecting ceremonies, but due to the unusually cold weather, most of these events were postponed to later dates. In Wenshan town, I met with a Hmong and retired Wenshan official who was an advisor to the Lao People's Army from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. He showed me one of his photos in the uniform of the Lao People's Army. The Secret War in Laos, which occurred from the early 1960s to 1975, was included the involvement of the Americans and the Communists of North Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union. In Kunming, I visited several villages, including an A Hmao (Flowery Miao) village that is predominately Christian; approximately 95 percent of the villagers there were Christian. My host in this village related that they called themselves A Hmao and he believes that the A Hmao and the Hmong are related. My host also related that his family has been Christian for more than 90 years, long before the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Christian

singing group of this village has become very famous in recent years, resulting in more Chinese tourists visiting this village. In response to this, the Yunnan Provincial Government is building a paved road linking Kunming to the village to facilitate even more tourism. I also visited a group of 4 Hmong villages near Kunming. These villages were parts of the program of my 2004 Fulbright-Hay Group Visit to China. This time, I found these villages to have a new paved road and that many new homes had appeared. When I commented about the changes in these villages, Professor Gu Wenfeng, who took me to these villages and was my contact person in 2004, replied that my 2004 Fulbright-Hay group had contributed to their new road. She said, after the Fulbright-Hay Group visited these villages in 2004, the Yunnan Provincial Government learned about the visit of a group of American Professors, teachers and students, so they decided to build a new paved road to these villages, hoping that more visitors would come. I also think that the Yunnan Government felt embarrassed by the conditions of the road connecting to these villages, so they decided to do something about it. I learned a long time ago that, if I want to make changes in China or other Asian countries, I should not directly criticize them, but to just visit and get involved passively and humbly: positive interaction is likely to lead to changes.

The last part of my visit to the Hmong in China involved Guizhou, Sichuan and Hunan. For the purpose of this paper – to focus only on the ethnic Hmong - I will only cover my visit to the Hmong in Sichuan. These Hmong call themselves, Hmong. They speak the Western Miao language, which is the language of the Hmong in Southeast Asia and the West. Their Qeej and costumes are very similar to those of the Hmong in Wenshan, Yunnan, which is similar to those in Southeast Asia. I found the Hmong in Sichuan to be warm, very friendly and hospitable. They seemed to be better off economically and educationally than those of other places I have

visited. And, most importantly, they appeared to be more independent. For example, their officials hosted me at a formal banquet and their local television channel broadcasted my visit to their town and villages during the prime time evening news program. They even have their own Hmong program on the local television channel. The Hmong people here appeared to be well fed and clothed. Their young people appeared to be among the most beautiful Hmong people I have seen.

After visiting China, I returned to Thailand to visit the Hmong in Thailand, and most importantly, to visit former Hmong refugee camps in Thailand. I flew from Kunming to Chiang Mai to visit several Hmong in Chiang Mai, namely Dr. Prasith Leepreecha (Tsav Txhij Lis), Pracha Yeunyonkul (Tsawb Yaj), and my nephew, Tong. Dr. Prasith Leepreecha earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Washington in the U.S. in 1998 and became the first Hmong of Thailand to hold a doctoral degree from the West. He is now a researcher with Chiang Mai University's Social Research Institute. After a short stop in Chiang Mai, my nephew and his brother-in-law drove me to Ban Vinai and Tham Krabok to visit the remnants of these two former Hmong refugee camps. Along the way to these camps, we passed through Hmong ginger fields, villages, and stayed one night at Chiang Khan, a Thai town on the Thai side of the Mekong River, just north of Vientiane. My nephew is a graduate of Chiang Mai University and has been unemployed since his graduation more than three years ago. His brother-in-law is an excellent driver, and also unemployed. He has done odd jobs to survive day to day, including driving, ginger farming and assembly work. Ban Vinai, the most well known Hmong refugee camp in Thailand in the late 1970s and 1980s, is now home to a new Thai community. Some of them are actually Lao and former post-1975 refugees from Laos. They

told me that many graves in the area have been leveled, so the land can be used for agriculture. Among those structures that survive are a few concrete foundations of the camp's hospital and offices and the statuettes built by Hmong Chao Fa.<sup>10</sup> The sign of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is still there, but the building is now the home of recent Thai settlers. In Tham Krabok, I visited the graves that had been desecrated and have become a hot topic in the news during the past three years. According to the remaining Hmong in Tham Krabok, the Tham Krabok Buddhist monks authorized the desecration, which was carried out by a foundation in Bangkok. It was emotional to see the emptied graves and the empty refugee camp. At the time of my visit, there were only about 10 Hmong families remaining in Tham Krabok; most of these refugees will move to the United States as soon as they can pass medical examinations. Many of them were left behind due to positive results from tuberculosis tests. One Hmong family refused to either come to the United States or return to Laos, so they were left in Tham Krabok not knowing their future destiny.

In addition to these former refugee camps, I also visited Khek Noi and met with Nao Ong Yang, the highest elected official of Hmong ancestry in Thailand. He, at the time of my visit, was a member of the Assembly of Phetchabun Province. Khek Noi is home to about 15,000 Hmong, possibly the largest Hmong concentration outside of China and the United States. I also went to the White Water Hmong refugee camp, but could not enter the camp because of the Thais' prohibition of outsiders from entering the camp. I, however, was able to see the camp from afar, which gave me a view of the crowded camp conditions and the sounds of the people who live there. It was sad to see the camp and to think of the uncertain destiny of the Hmong people in this camp... that they are not classified as refugees and they are very likely to be

deported back to Laos. It is indeed a sad chapter in the history of the Hmong of Laos; the war ended more than 30 years ago, but the refugee movement has not yet ended.

Bangkok was my first stop and also my last stop. In my last stop in Bangkok, I visited a group of Hmong assembly workers. I met with three women and one man. Most of them came to Bangkok from rural Hmong villages in Northern Thailand. They possessed very little education and had no means of making a living in their villages, so they came to try their luck in Bangkok as assembly workers. The majority of these young Hmong were female and single. I was invited to visit their home and learned that four young women were living in one studio room without cooking facilities or privacy. They earned the minimum wage and spent a large portion of their earnings on rent, and food. They bought their food from the street because they had no stove to cook for themselves. Their assembly jobs did not provide them with any skills or possibility to move up to get better jobs. As Hmong and people of minority backgrounds, they were poor economically, socially, environmentally, and spiritually. They exuded hopelessness as they had no connections, no access to education, resources, or power to change their socio-economic condition.

### **Common Issues among the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China**

From my own observations during a two and a half month visit to the Hmong in Asia, and conversations with Hmong of many walks of life, I have identified many characteristics and issues that appear to be common among the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China. These characteristics and issues include rural and highland residence, poverty, a lack of education and access to resources and political representation, a growing trend of marrying out of their ethnicity among the educated and economically independent Hmong, and a growing

impact of globalization and technology. The next pages are devoted to a discussion of these issues.

Rural and Highland Dwelling: Almost everywhere and in every country I visited, I found the majority of Hmong to live in the rural areas and highlands of their countries. Although more and more Hmong of Laos and Hmong of Thailand have migrated to the city to take government jobs, get an education or to do business, the majority continue to live in their rural villages and with their traditional ways of life, including traditional agricultural practices. In Thailand, a small number of Hmong has become employed in government institutions, such as the case of Prayath Nanthasin of Kasetsart University in Bangkok and Dr. Prasith Leepreecha of Chiang Mai University's Social Research Institute. Many Hmong come to the city to work for private industries, such as the above mentioned Hmong girls and the internet technician that I met in Bangkok. There are some Hmong who travel from city to city to sell their goods to tourists; many of these individuals end up taking permanent residence in the city. Although the above experience of Hmong is becoming more common now, it represents only a small proportion of the Hmong of Thailand. The majority of them continue to live in the rural and highland areas of Thailand.

Among the Hmong of Laos, the move of Hmong from rural areas and the highlands to the city appears to have been rapidly increasing during the last three decades. For example, there are many Hmong ghettos in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury and Phonsavanh that appeared to be the result of migration from the rural areas and highlands to the city. The Hmong ghetto in Luang Prabang, which is sandwiched between Souphanouvong University and the Luang Prabang International Airport, was not there prior to 1975, when I was a student in Luang

Prabang. Another example is the number of Hmong individuals in the public and private sectors that appears to have increased since the changing of hands of the government of Laos in 1975. It is estimated that there are more Hmong civil servants now than pre-1975 (Lee, 2008), and there are many high ranking officials of Hmong ancestry, including a member of the Politburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, the ruling party of Laos, one minister with portfolio, one minister in the Prime Minister's Office, and two Vice Ministers. There is one Hmong with the rank of Brigadier General and several Colonels who serve in the Lao People's Army. There is also one Hmong with the rank of Brigadier General in the police forces. Most of these individuals, including those I visited in Vientiane, who are now city dwellers had been on the side of the Pathet Lao during the war years. Furthermore, it is observable that more and more Hmong speak better Lao than Hmong, especially in the cities. This might be the result of schooling and more interaction with the Lao than with their own Hmong community, which is often too far away. Despite these advances, the majority of the Hmong in Laos continue to live in the highlands or rural areas with very little or no access to education and resources. An analysis conducted in 2003 indicated that nearly 80 percent of the Lao, the majority of the people of Laos, live in villages with all season road access and more than 60 percent have electricity whereas only 22 percent of highlander minorities, including the Hmong, have access to roads and 20 percent have access to electricity (Andersson, et al., 2006).

In Vietnam, I found many Hmong city dwellers and Hmong ghettos, but the number seems to not be representative of the Hmong population in Laos. Many of those who live in the city tend to be government employees. In Hanoi, I found Prof. Vuong Duc Quang, who told me that there are about 10 Hmong families in Hanoi. Given the number of 800,000 Hmong in

Vietnam, it was normal to anticipate more Hmong living and working in Hanoi, but that was not the case. In the town of Sapa, which is historically a Hmong district, the majority of the people in that town are not Hmong. Sapa is derived from the Hmong word, “Suab Puam.” Hmong legend has it that the early Hmong settlers to Sapa found a small river there to be very sandy, so they call the area, Suab Puam, which in Hmong, means sand. French colonialists and missionaries found the area to be very beautiful and breath-taking. They asked the name of this area from the local Hmong who said, Suab Pua. The French could not pronounce it, so they wrote down as Sapa, which later became the official name of the district. The town of Lao Cai, the capital of Lao Cai province, is home to only a handful of Hmong families, mostly families of officials. In the recent past, the Governor of Lao Cai was a Hmong, who has been transferred to Hanoi to be an official in the Office of Minority Affairs. It is no different in China. In the town of Wenshan, Capital of the Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, I was told that there were about one thousand Hmong who were residents of this town, and that most of them worked for the local government and private sector. Hmong continue to live in the rural and highland areas of the prefecture. Many Hmong officials lived in Wenshan during their working years, but returned to their villages in their retirement years. A case in point is Yang Xiaolong, who was an official of the Wenshan Prefecture. He retired in the early 1990s and a few years later, moved back to the village he came from (Yang, Kaiyi, 2008).

Poverty: From my observation, it is obvious that the Hmong are poorer than the majority and some of the other ethnic groups in these countries. In Thailand, some Hmong are seen to sell gift items, such as Pa Dau (Paj Ntaub), at the tourist attractions and in major cities, such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai. They could not afford to have a shop of their own. In the rural

villages, many Hmong live in poverty; more and more young people do not own land and have no means to make a living. Case in point is the brother-in-law of my nephew, who is a landless young Hmong. The land surrounding his village was divided by the government to Hmong families long before he began his own family. So, after he got married, he had no land of his own and had no money to buy or to lease. He continued to farm with his parents. Eventually, his parents' small piece of land could not accommodate all sons, when his younger brothers also had their own families to feed. In the end, he and his brothers had to try to find a way to earn a living elsewhere. A study of poverty in Thailand found that Hmong households are relatively poorer than the local northern [Thai] households (Sricharoen, 2005). Lee (1987) wrote about minority politics in Thailand and stated that, "[t]his vicious cycle of poverty, sickness, land scarcity and low productivity has sometimes resulted in a feeling of hopelessness about their life circumstances. It helps explain why certain groups of Hmong in the past had chosen to join an insurgency who promised to deliver them from their economic predicament and social oppression." Joom Xiong (2008), one of a very few Hmong Thai women who has earned a graduate degree, summarized the poverty conditions of the Hmong in Thailand:

Poverty is obvious among the Hmong in Thailand. For the older generation like my parents' generation, very few of them have Thai education, and as a result of this, the only work they can do is as farmers. Farming these days depends very much on external factors e.g. markets, fertilizers and insecticide companies, so for those farmers with no Thai education, their life have been very difficult. Hmong Thai farmers these days are facing a lot of health problems especially from using a lot of chemicals. Thab berk in Phetchaboon is an example.

In Laos, there are an increasing number of Hmong who own business, land, fields of rubber trees and other cash crops, but these are the minority. The overwhelmingly majority of the Hmong I met and have visited continue to be poor and hopeless; most of them are poorer than the Lao and other ethnic groups, such as the ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese in Laos. Most shops in towns, such as Phonsavan and the Kilometer 52, are owned by non-Hmong. Kilometer 52 was a town established and built by Hmong, but economic power there has slowly slipped out of the hands of the Hmong. Visiting the many Hmong ghettos in Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Sayaboury, it is obvious that the residents of these ghettos are poorer than the other residents in town. An analysis conducted in 2003 of the role of ethnicity “suggests that the higher poverty incidence among minority households is due to their limited access to productive resources rather than lower efficiency in resource use,” (Andersson, et al., 2006). This analysis also confirmed early findings “that poverty is concentrated and more severe among ethnic minorities,” including the Hmong in Laos.

The poverty of the Hmong in Vietnam and China is no less obvious than in Laos and Thailand. At the very least, Laos has Hmong who are in high-level government positions and those who own hotels, rubber tree farms and other businesses. A World Bank study on poverty in Vietnam found that “61 percent of ethnic minority people were still poor in 2004, compared to only 14 percent of Kinh [Vietnamese] and Chinese people who were still living in poverty”(Swinkels & Turk, 2006:2). The Hmong are included in the minority groups and perhaps poorer than many other ethnic minority groups. An anthropological study of two Hmong villages related to their food security and cash crops found that:

the status of food security at household level in this ethnic group remains unsustainable. More than 80 percent of the households in those villages are insufficient in food while their cash income to buy food is unstable, particularly in Suoi Ho village, a wide gap in income and food security between rich and poor household groups remains.

The direct cause of this situation is first of all the land condition. A shortage of cultivated land, particularly wet fields, gardens and sedentary upland make the locals very difficult in food production and cash crops. Land limit and low crop outputs under-develop livestock breeding. Besides, sideline occupations have not been developed, thus limiting the Hmong in generating their income, (Vuong Xuan Tinh, N.D.:19).

I could not find any Hmong in Vietnam who own businesses or have access to resources and political power. The Hmong in Vietnam appear to not only be poor, but desperate and hopeless. Many have turned to Christianity, and many Christian preachers link the coming of Christ to Hmong mythical beliefs of the coming of a Hmong king. These beliefs and preaching can be dangerous as Vietnamese Hmong do have a history of Hmong messianic resistance, including Pa Chay, who claimed to have messianic power and used his influence to rally the Hmong in Vietnam to rebel against the French colonialists before he was forced out to Laos, and continued to carry his rebellion against the French in Laos from 1919 to 1921 (Lee, 2008). I also learned that because of the above preaching, a few Hmong individuals have become disillusioned, climbing to the roof of their homes to be picked by God (Tan, 2008). Hmong officials expressed grave concern not only about messianic beliefs and their potential dangers, but also with the preaching of Christianity that claims to be the only true religion and that Christians must not associate with believers of other religions. This is against Hmong and

Vietnamese tradition and beliefs, explained Phang Ching, who is a retired official of the Lao Cai Office of Minority Affairs.

I was approached by many Hmong Christians; one of them wanted to see me in private. When I inquired his reason to see me in private, he said he wants to tell me of the mistreatment of Hmong Christians by local Vietnamese officials. In Asia, diverse religions co-exist and tolerate one another; people do not have to register for one religion and the priest does not criticize other religions nor preach that other religions are cults. People can go to the Buddhist temple for one purpose and then visit the Taoist temple for another need. A Buddhist may make food offerings to his or her ancestors or consult with a shaman or spiritual healer. It is worthy to note that the first question many Hmong Vietnamese asked me was, “Puas yog koj tuaj qhia kev tseeg?” It can be translated as “Are you here to preach Christianity or are you here to do missionary work?” When I told them that I am a university Professor and came to see the Hmong, they had no idea what a professor was.

In China, I was told that there are very few Hmong entrepreneurs in Yunnan Province and that most of them are running small businesses. One of them was Mrs. Yen Fei, who started to sell clothing at the open market when she was 17. She did well and went on to trade jade. When I met her in Mengzi, she owned houses in both Mengzi and Kunming, and was considered by many Hmong I talked to in Yunnan as one of the most successful Hmong entrepreneurs. The Mengzi economy depends heavily on its tin and antimony mine, but I could not find one Hmong who worked in mining. The Hmong in Yunnan continue to rely on traditional agriculture and are economically poor. Wang Chaoxing explained to me that the Han Chinese are overall richer than the minorities; below the Han Chinese are the Yi, Zhuang, Naxi and then the Hmong. Billy

Tao (2008), a Computer Programmer, went further to state that “among those of all minority backgrounds in China, the Hmong's economic and education situation is nearly the worst one.”

Lack of education: The number of college educated Hmong in Thailand appears to have increased over past three decades, but the majority of the Hmong in this country continue to lag behind the Thai and other ethnic groups in term of educational attainment. Moreover, many of those who have completed college educations continue to be unemployed. A case in point is my nephew, Tong, who graduated from Chiang Mai University more than three years ago, but could not find employment. To get a civil servant position, one must pass the very competitive examination, and have connections. Hmong college graduates are often the first generation to enter university and they have neither cultural connections nor cultural capital to begin with. Consequently, there is no incentive to get a college education. When inquired about the education of the Hmong in Thailand, Joom Xiong (2008) provided the following account:

In the past 10 years, young Hmong have more opportunity for higher education, both girls and boys because of the student's loan projects initiated by the Thai government. However, there are still many young Hmong who decided not to go for higher education after completion of their secondary or/and high school due to various reasons e.g. no will for higher education, due to lack of employment, etc.

Another important issue is their citizenship. Many Hmong who live in the remote villages and do not have or could not afford to go to town to apply for identification cards are not considered Thai citizens, and, as a result, their children do not have access to education and civil servant jobs (Lee, 1987). As of 2008, there are only three Hmong in Thailand who have completed their doctoral studies. Dr. Prasith Leepreecha (Tsav Txhiaj Lis) earned his doctoral degree in Anthropology from the University of Washington, United States. The second person is Dr. Songwit Chuamsakul (Ntxoov Fooj Haam), who completed his doctoral studies in Native Studies from Kent

University, Canada, and the third person is Dr. Danai Chowwiwat (Nyiaj Nruas Vaj) who received his Ph.D in Education from Hamline University, Minnesota, United States.

The educational situation of the Hmong in Laos appears to be improving, but continues to lag behind the Lao and other ethnic groups. For example, the 1996 Census of Laos revealed “that the number of Hmong who have never been to school is nearly twice (67.2 %) the national average (37.6%)” and the literacy rate for Hmong aged 15 years and over is 26.5 percent compared to the national figure of 60.2 percent (Lee, 1998). On the positive end of the educational extremes of the Hmong of Laos, many young Hmong who live in the city enjoy not only their city-dwelling life, but education as well. In 1998, it was estimated that about 50 Hmong of Laos have completed their doctoral studies (Lee, 1998). After 1975, many Hmong were sent to the communist countries for education, and in recent years, some of them have been sent to non-communist countries as well. Dr. Vang Chu, for example, earned all of his graduate degrees from both communist and non-communist countries. He was sent to Cuba in the late 1970s to study medicine and after completing his Doctor of Medicine program from the University of Oriente, Cuba, in 1983, he returned to Laos. Soon after his return, he was appointed Deputy Director of the Xieng Khuang Provincial Hospital. From there, he was assigned to various tasks and positions before he was sent to Tasmania, Australia, in the middle of 1990s to study medical science. He earned his Master Degree of Medical Sciences in 1996 and then enrolled in the Doctoral Program of Medicine at the University of Tasmania, where he earned his Ph.D. in Medicine in 1999. He is one of a few cardiologists in Laos, who holds both an MD and a Ph.D. Additionally, he is fluent in Hmong, Lao, English, Spanish, and French.

Dr. Vang Chu is now an Associate Professor of Cardiology at the Lao University of Health Sciences, President of Lao Cardiac Society and a representative of Laos in the ASEAN Federation of Cardiology and in World Heart Federation. He is also a Cardiologist at the Lao-Luxembourg Heart Institute, Mahosot Hospital, Laos. He lives in Vientiane, Laos, with his wife, Dr. Oulay and their four children. Lytou Boaupao, who is, as of 2008, the Vice Minister of Education in Laos, earned his Master's Degree from the Universite de Sherbrooke, Canada, in 1994.

From my observation, there are three barriers that prevent Hmong children from fully accessing the education system in Laos. The first barrier is that many of their remote villages have no access to schools, roads and other infrastructure. The second barrier is that the government's effort to expand schools to remote villages has been a slow process. Lastly, there is no incentive for getting an education. A college education does not necessarily translate into a job and economic benefits. Laos is still a very poor country and there are not too many available jobs in the private sector. Anyone who wants to get a good job in the civil service system must either bribe one's own way into it or have a good connection. Most poor peasants and minorities, including Hmong, do not have either of these options.

The education situation of the Hmong in Vietnam is, from my observations, behind that of the Hmong in Laos. Although I found schools in almost every Hmong village I passed through, most young Hmong I talked to have no more than six to nine grades of education, including those who live near town and work as tour guides in Sapa. When asked about the number of Hmong students attending university, no one seemed to know. Professor Vuong Duc Quang said that there are less Hmong university students now than in the past, when he was a student, because during or after the revolution, the government made special efforts and provided incentives to recruit minority

students by providing them with scholarships and jobs after college. A study found that it “is not “backwardness” that is an education problem for ethnic minorities, but that the delivery of education services fails to deliver comparable educational outcomes for ethnic minority and Kinh children,” (Swinkels & Turk, 2006:11). This same study indicated that “a combination of lower quality teaching, poor facilities, long travel times and language issues mean that grade 5 children in ethnic minority areas are learning less than those in other parts of the country” (13).

Because of the better economy, the educational situation of the Hmong in Yunnan, China is probably better than that of the Hmong in Vietnam, but there are very few Hmong there who go on to university and graduate schools. For example, Li Yunbing , who is now with the Nationalities Institute in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, is the first and only Hmong of Yunnan to hold a doctoral degree (Gu, 2008). The second Hmong of China to hold a doctorate is Shi Maoming, who is a researcher at the Central Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. I met with several teachers, computer programmers, government officials, and researchers. Most of these individuals received their educations during the 1970s and 1980s, when more incentives and scholarships were given to minority students. Many of those that I met graduated from the institute for nationalities, a second class university system in China designed to train minority students and send them back to their rural towns to serve as cadres of the state and party. I visited many villages and talked to parents as well as young Hmong; I found very few of them who had gone beyond high school. Most young people in the villages had only completed six to nine grades. There is a trend of young educated Hmong in Yunnan, who not only married out to non-Hmong, but who have married to Hmong Americans and have become part of the brain drain. Almost every Hmong I talked to in Yunnan knows at least a person who has married a Hmong

American and immigrated to the United States. In his paper on Hmong migration, Kou Yang (2008) listed several specific examples of Hmong Chinese brain drainers.

The first case involved a Hmong Chinese acupuncturist, who married a Hmong American man and came to the United States in the early 1990s. She is now an acupuncturist in the United States. She grew up in Kunming, Yunnan, and after high school, she went to a college of traditional Chinese medicine and got to know a Hmong American man. After the completion of her medical training, she married her Hmong American boyfriend, and soon immigrated to the United States. The second case involved a Hmong Chinese lawyer, who married a Hmong American woman and then immigrated to the United States in 1999. His brother, who was a foreign student in Thailand, met a Hmong American woman while studying in Thailand. They later married and he immigrated to the United States as well. These young Hmong Chinese grew up in the city and enjoyed the benefits of education, but they left their community and brought with them all of their training, skills and talents. They are the brain drainers, or “bright, talented scientists, engineers and other techies from all over the world migrating to the United States” (Webber, 2004:1).

Government and Related Issues: Civic participation and political representation is a common issue among the Hmong in Asia. This has a lot to do with the lack of accessibility to civic participation and political representation. For example, in Thailand, there has been no Hmong appointed to the administrative position of Nai Amphoe or District Mayor or above. The highest position they have achieved is the position of Kamnanh or chief of a group of villages, There is also no known Hmong with the rank above major in the Thai armed forces. Only one Hmong has achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Thai police (Leepreecha, 2008). Only

one Hmong person has served as an elected Representative to the Assembly of Phetchabun Province. There are many young Hmong who have college educations in public administration or law, but have not been able to enter the Thai civil service system. For example, my nephew, who I have mentioned numerous times above, has a B.A. degree in Law, but he could not get into the Thai civil service system; many of his friends also hold similar degrees yet are similarly unemployed. First, the Thai civil servant examination is not only competitive, but designed for those who have cultural capital, such as the children of the elite. Thai society is well stratified and their language, culture and education reflect this stratified society; minorities and peasants do not have the proper language, education and cultural capital to easily pass the exam and overcome other barriers to the civil service system. Secondly, passing the exam, is only the first step, the second step requires something that Hmong or minority people do not have: connections. Lastly, there is no special affirmative program for minorities to get into the civil service system. To gain civil servant jobs, Leepreecha (2008) said:

One must be a Thai citizen, pass the Thai civil servant exam and have connections. It is very difficult for minority children to get into military and police institutions, for example. Another factor is that it is very high competition. Hmong and other ethnic minority students who finish high school in rural areas, with low standards of education, have a hard time to pass the exams, even entrance examinations to universities.

Civic engagement and political participation in Thailand are also not only inaccessible to Hmong and other minorities, but complex, and exclusive. All offices above the Kamnanh, such as town mayor and provincial governor are appointed by the central government, and appointees are usually members of the elite, who have connections and can get into the civil service system.

To get elected to office is not impossible, but very difficult. A Hmong who has previously run a successful campaign for a local office related that, “the Thai do not view Hmong and other minorities as citizens of Thailand. They said they do not vote for foreigners, although I am Thai citizen. They don’t even take my money to buy their votes.” It is very common in Thailand for candidates to buy votes, which is another barrier for minorities and candidates from poor backgrounds. In responding to the question about the civic and political participation of the Hmong in the Thai government, Dr. Prasit Leepreecha politely offered the following explanation:

In Thailand, there are different levels of administration, and the administrative position in some levels is not from elections. For village (village headman-phuyaiban) and Tambol (Kamnanh), they got the positions by voting. Also, in the Tambol level, there is a Tambol Administrative Organization (Ong Garn Boriharn Suan Tambol). The head of this organization is also from voting. This organization is more on development and budget control, while Kamnanh is more on general administration. For the district level, there are only permanent positions appointed by the central government. There is no position from local elections. That's why no local Hmong come to the Nai Amphoe. However, some of my friends who graduated from University and passed exams to be district officials have reached the high level of District administration at this point. For the Provincial level, there are two systems. The first one is a permanent system led by the governor, appointed from the central government. Another one is the local system, led by the Provincial Administrative Prime Minister. This position is from election. Under this system, there are also representatives from local Districts (Amphoe), for which very few

Hmong, Karen and Lisu get votes for a term of 5 years. For national parliament, both provincial representative and senator, there are no Hmong who have been voted, but there were some Karen ethnic minority people.

Two other issues facing the Hmong of Thailand are citizenship and assimilation. Not every Hmong of Thailand is a citizen of that country, whether or not they were born there. Toyota (2005:131), in discussing the case of the ethnic minorities in Thailand without Thai citizenship, wrote about the dilemma of getting Thai citizenship as follows: "Those who could afford to prove that they entered Thai territory before 1976 would be entitled to Thai citizenship. Those who could not manage to prove would not be entitled to legal status as either 'refugee' or as hill tribes, and hence would not be eligible for Thai citizenship." Many Hmong and other ethnic minorities in the rural and highlands of Thailand either could not afford to prove citizenship or are not aware of this law, and as a result, are not considered citizens of Thailand. Without citizenship, they are not entitled to government services, including education and political participation. The second issue is that Hmong must change their Hmong names into Thai names, if they wanted to be accepted into Thai society. Almost all educated Hmong or Hmong in the city have Thai names. For example, the names of Drs. Leepreecha, Chuamsakul and Chowwiwat are Thai names. One Hmong Thai scholar, who wished to keep his identity anonymous, summarized this issue as follows:

I can tell you that the Hmong people in Thailand today are facing the same issues as the Chinese people did in Thailand about 50-60 years ago. Those times, the Chinese had been forced to be assimilated into Thai culture. Otherwise, they were not accepted to live peacefully in Thailand. The Hmong have more suffering than the Chinese in

Thailand because they have less power in the economy, education, politics, population size, history, etc. You can imagine that most bankers and higher government officials in Thailand are [owned by] Chinese. However, they cannot use their Chinese names and Chinese language [in public].<sup>11</sup>

In Vietnam, there were, in the past, some Hmong who did hold important district and provincial leadership positions, such as the Governor of Lao Cai and Mayor of Muong Khuong, but that generation has passed. Currently, there is no Hmong holding a governorship in Vietnam. Additionally, the relationship between officials of Hmong ancestry and the Hmong people in Vietnam is not strong or well connected. Most Hmong I talked to seemed to have no idea about any Hmong who held leadership positions. One person angrily said those Hmong in leadership positions have sold out because most of them do not serve the interest of the Hmong, and most of them married non-Hmong and live outside of Hmong society.

In China, there are many Hmong at various levels of local government, but almost no one who holds an important position in the provincial and central governments.<sup>12</sup> Most of those who work in Kunming are either working for the Office of Minority Affairs or for research-related institutions. For example, Gu Wenfeng, who is from the Li Jiang area, but lives in Kunming, is the Vice-Director of the Religion Institute of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. Xiong Youyao, who came from the He Kou area, is a Hmong language researcher at the Linguistics Institute of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. His wife, a native of Wenshan, is a staff member of the Yunnan publishing house. Recently, a popular Hmong leader, who is the Vice-Administrator of Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, was transferred to the Yunnan Provincial Government. Many Hmong did not see this transfer as a promotion, but an

outstation; removal from a powerful position to a desk job that has no real power. Because of the lack of representation, the issues and needs of the Hmong are rarely addressed and responded to, making some of them feel that they are being neglected, and on the edge of society.

The situation in Laos is better when compared to those of Thailand, Vietnam and China. As of 2008, there are two Hmong holding cabinet posts: Chaleun Yapaoher is the Minister of Justice and Sengsaly Tengbliayao is a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. The list includes two Vice-Ministers, two Brigadier Generals (one in the Lao People's Army and the other in the Police Forces), and a number of Department Heads. Pani Yathotou holds the highest political office in Laos. She is the first woman and Hmong to have ever sat in the Politburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, the ruling party of post 1975 Laos. She is also the Vice President of the National Assembly. The second most important Hmong in the above mentioned party is Sombath Yialihou, the Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee and Secretary of the Vientiane Party Committee. Previously, he was the Governor of Sayaboury Province. Several Hmong also hold important positions in local and provincial governments. Sivone Yayongyia is the Governor of Xieng Khouang Province and there are several deputy provincial governors and at least 5 district administrators. Also, there are 5 members of the National Assembly of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, who are Hmong. Despite this impressive progress, Hmong in the remote villages have no access to political representation and no opportunity to fully exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Laos. As a result, some pockets of a low scale Hmong resistance movement against the government continues, despite the fact that the war ended more than 30 years ago.

Marrying out of Hmong ethnicity: This issue appears to be a trend in Asia. Visiting the Hmong in Asia, it is obvious that many educated Hmong of both genders have married non-Hmong. In Thailand, for example, Pracha Yeungyongkul, who is a lecturer in Chiang Mai, married a Non-Hmong. In Laos, the list of important Hmong politicians and leaders marrying non-Hmong is longer, including Pani Yathotou, Dr. Vang Chu, and so on. Also, the wedding ceremony I attended in Vientiane involved a Hmong bride and Lao groom. Professor Vuong Duc Quang and many important Hmong Vietnamese have married non-Hmong. As mentioned earlier, six Hmong girls in Sapa married foreigners. In China, most of my hosts, including Mr. Zhang in He Kou, Mr. Wang Chaoxing, Mr. Yang and Xiong in Kai Yuan are all married to non-Hmong.

Although the reasons that many educated Hmong married non-Hmong are not yet known, some of them are related to the goals of marrying up economically, educationally and socially. Other reasons have to do with the interactions and associations the Hmong have had in recent years with non-Hmong. As more Hmong were going to school, living and working with different ethnic groups, they fell in love with non-Hmong and eventually married non-Hmong. When asked his reason to marry to a Non-Hmong, Wang Chaoxing jokingly said he married to a non-Hmong because of his age; by the time he finished school, got a job and was ready to get married, Hmong girls in his village found him to be too old for them. Yang Kaiyi, who has heard this explanation, provided additional reasons. He said educated Hmong tend to want to marry to someone who has a similar education, common interests and lifestyle, and physical beauty, which they could not find in their community. Hmong girls are as physically attractive as girls of other ethnic groups, but their lack of education, poverty and labor in the fields day

after day may make them appear less attractive. In China, there is another factor which is the imbalance of sex ratio. According to the 2000 Chinese national census, the ratio of new-born males per 100 females in China has reached 119.2 persons.<sup>13</sup> There are overwhelmingly more marriageable men than women. Han Chinese men, who could not find Han Chinese spouses, turn to ethnic minority women. In some cases, this gender imbalance leads to kidnapping and trafficking of women. When I was in Sapa, Vietnam, the Hmong there told me of many cases of Vietnamese Hmong men who kidnapped Hmong girls and took them to China, where they sold those girls for cash. A case in point is Txee, 18 years old, who was approached by several young Hmong Vietnamese from out of town. One of them showed interest in her and followed her for several days. She eventually felt in love with him and trusted him. He asked her to go out with him and she did. He took her to Wenshan, China and sold her to an older Han Chinese man, who locked her in his house. Fortunately, her parents looked for her as soon as they realized her disappearance. They also had connections in China, so they looked for her on both sides of the border on their own and also involved the police. They eventually found and rescued her. She is one of the lucky ones as many girls have disappeared without a trace. These kidnappers did not take the girls to cross the border check, but illegally crossed the most remote section of the border, so no paper trails were left for the police or parents to trace them.

Globalization and Technology: Many aspects of globalization have reached the Hmong in Asia, even in some of the remote areas. Visiting remote Hmong villages, I was surprised to see children watching television programs from foreign countries, people of all ages using mobile telephones, and most significantly, young Hmong, in their daily life, rarely dressing in Hmong. They dress in Hmong only during special events, such as the Hmong New Year. In Laos, I saw

an elder Hmong woman in a rural village talking on a cell phone and in a different village, I saw children watching “The Lord of the Rings.” Many adult Hmong in Laos that I talked to, know the name of the cities of Fresno and St. Paul, or the name of states, such as California and Minnesota. Many of them can give me specific names of the cities where their relatives live in the United States. A Hmong singer in Oudomxay earned a large sum of money from the sale of her songs in the US, so she used the money to build a guest house as well as to do a rubber tree nursery. I was also amazed to see young Hmong in Vietnam text messages to each other in the Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) Hmong language,<sup>14</sup> and to be using Hmong American words, such as SUN, or zero, and so on. Hmong language does not have the zero, so Hmong Americans use the Lao word for zero, which is SUN. Many young Hmong in Sapa, Vietnam, as young as 10 years old, know the internet and have browsed Hmong American websites, and some of them know the names of pop singers and actors in Hmong American films better than I do. The danger seems to be that the majority of Hmong in Asia do not have the needed education or are not prepared to know and cannot separate the positive from negative aspects of globalization.

Monuments: What I did not see during my visit to the Hmong in Asia are monuments honoring their sacrifices and the contributions they have made to their countries, despite the existence of numerous accounts of these contributions. The closest to be called monuments are the tombs of, for example, Lo Bliayao and Ya Thotou. Ya Thotou, who was founder and commander of the Pa Chay Battalion, and who died from a car accident in 1961, was highly praised and honored for his services to the state during the war years, but his tomb was not built by the state. Pa Chay, a Hmong and the leader of the Pa Chay Rebellion against the French

colonialists in Laos, was hailed by the Pathet Lao as the father of Laos' resistance against foreign domination but did not get any monument in his honor. Although Souphanouvong, Kaysone Phomvihanh, Faydang Lobliaoyao and Sithone Kommadanh were the four heroes of the revolution, monuments and other honors in Laos today appear to be for Kaysone. Kaysone Phomvihanh, of half Lao-half Vietnamese descent, is obviously the beneficiary of the revolution. In every city and town in Laos, there is at least one square with a bust (statue) of Kaysone in his honor. There are the Kaysone Phomvihanh museum, Kaysone Phomvihanh City and many others, including his portrait on the Lao currency. Khanthaboury, the second largest city of Laos, was renamed Kaysone Phomvihanh City. Although Kaysone died in 1992, he has become a cult-like figure in today's Laos; he is praised and honored in almost every major function. His son, Saysomphone Phomvihanh is one of the two Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly. Prince Souphanouvong, one of the 13 sons or one of the 21 children of Prince BounKhong, the last Vice Roy of the Luang Prabang Royal House, risked everything for the revolution and he got very little in return; almost everyone in Laos appears to have forgotten all about him. The only major thing he got is a university named after him. The newly established university in Luang Prabang, his birth place, has been named Souphanouvong University. What about Faydang, leader of the Hmong, and Sithone Kommadanh, leader of the Khmu during the war years? The revolution was built on the blood and the backs of the followers of these two leaders of the minorities (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Faydang and Sithone as the figure heads rallied their people to fight and die for the revolution. Not one street in Vientiane, the Capital of Laos, has been observed to carry the name of Faydang or Sithone; they were the forgotten heroes. Moreover, none of their children plays an important role in the contemporary affairs of the country.

Despite the lack of monuments to honor Hmong or other minorities of Laos, the Hmong appear to fare better than their cousins in Thailand and Vietnam. The Hmong in these countries not only lack monuments to honor their heroes, but are also lacking in access to civic engagement and political participation. As mentioned above, many Hmong in Thailand are not considered Thai citizens, although they were born there and might have been there for generations.<sup>15</sup> In China, many counties and prefectures were called Hmong autonomous counties or prefectures; yet there are no high ranking officials of Hmong ancestry in the provincial and central governments. The only monuments erected about the Hmong in China are for Hmong Qeej masters. These represent cultural symbols, and not heroes.

### **Conclusion**

The Hmong that I visited in Asia continue to be poorer and less educated than the majority peoples of their countries. They lack accessibility to education, resources, political power and the technology know-how to advance their socio-economic and education needs and to prepare themselves for the competitive global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization, whether or not the Hmong want it, is beyond their control. It has already reached many aspects of their lives and will likely further influence their culture and ethnic identity.

In spite of being poor, the Hmong of Laos are in a better position to develop their education, economic wellbeing, and other aspects of their lives because they have a long history of being actively involved in the local and national affairs of the country, they have a more educated population and, most crucially, more important roles in the local and national social and political process. They are in a better position to be active participants in their country's

economy, political life, and social justice movements as well as being integral parts of the country's multi-ethnic community.

The influences of globalization, technology, and the market economy in Laos, Vietnam and China have left the Hmong with few good choices. Choice one is for the Hmong to continue living in the highlands and rural villages, so they can maintain a cultural island, which might put them in a position to preserve many aspects of their culture and language. This choice, in the age of globalization and technology, still may not allow them to maintain an island culture anymore, and most importantly, will continue to keep them distant from resources and political power, so they will remain poor and face discrimination and prejudice. The second choice is to migrate to the city and be an integral part of the mainstream culture of their countries. This choice is also not realistic because they have no education, vocational skills and resources to begin with or from which to gain meaningful employment and live in the city. Moreover, this choice will mean rapid assimilation, where their language and culture will be lost in a short period of time. The only choice left for them is to just be flexible and adaptable, so they can adapt to any social and economic situation. This choice is not new; as a people of Diaspora, they have learned to be flexible and adapt to any country or social environment that they are in. It has kept them alive as an ethnic group from the past to the present, but has deprived them of the needed education, technology know-how, resources and power to change their socio-economic situation.

Overall, the Hmong in Asia are very proud of their heritage. They are not hesitant to identify themselves as Hmong and are pleased to talk about their culture. In Vietnam and China, it is common to see girls in Hmong costumes walking in the street. Their pride and adaptability has helped them maintain their ethnic identities as Hmong from the past to the present.

This visit reminds me of one paragraph of the plenary address made by Professor Yang Peide, President of the Miao Studies Association of Guizhou, at the opening session of the Second International Conference on Hmong Studies that “For five thousand years of emigrations or exiles, we Hmong/Miao people in China and elsewhere have survived generation by generation, simply because we never forget our history, both the glorious and the miserable; simply because we have always had the spiritual blessing of our forefathers with us wherever we go.”

## References Cited

- Andersson, Magnus, Anders Engvall & Ari Kokko. (2006). "Determinants of Poverty in Lao PDR." Working Paper 223 (March 2006). (Retrieved on May 13, 2008).  
<http://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/eijswp/0223.html>
- Sapa City Website, Vietnam (N.D.). (retrieved on May 13, 2008).  
<http://www.itisnet.com/english/asia/vietnam/sapa/e-c-sapa.htm>.
- Cory, Patrick. (2000). "Multiculturalism in Thailand? Cultural and Regional Resurgence in a Diverse Kingdom." *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* (Winter 2000).  
[http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter00\\_millennium/Thailand.html](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter00_millennium/Thailand.html)
- Entenmann, Robert. (2005). "The Myth of Sonom, the Hmong King." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol. 6 (2005). 1-14. <http://www.hmongstudies.org/EntenmannHSJ6.pdf>
- Gu, Wenfeng. Personal Communication (15 October 2008).
- Johnson-Messenger, Tracy. (2003). "Contradiction in Learning How to be Thai: A Case Study of a Young Hmong Woman." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol. 4 (2003). 1-21.  
<http://hmongstudies.com/MessingerHSJ4.pdf>
- Lee, Gary Yia. (2007). "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol. 6 (2007). 1-25.  
<http://hmongstudies.org/GYLeeHSJ8.pdf>
- \_\_\_\_ (2005). "The Shaping of Traditions: Agriculture and Hmong Society." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol. 6 (2005). 1-33. <http://hmongstudies.org/LeeHSJ6.pdf>
- \_\_\_\_ (2008). "The Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims of Totalitarianism or terrorists?" (Retrieved on May 13, 2008).  
<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/Hmong%20rebellion%20in%20Laos.html>
- \_\_\_\_ (1998). "The Hmong of Laos: Overview of their Transnational Adaptation." A paper presented at the first international workshop on the Hmong/Miao in Asia 11-13 September 1998, Aix-en-Provence, France (retrieved on May 13, 2008).  
<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/hmong%20of%20laos.html#Demography%20and%20economy>.

- \_\_\_\_ (1987). "Minority Politics in Thailand: A Hmong Perspective." A paper presented at the International Conference On Thai Studies, Australian National University, Canberra (3-6 July 1987).
- Leepreecha, Prasit, Personal Communication (22 May 2008).
- Lemoine, Jacques. (2005). "What is the actual number of the (H)mong in the World." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol 6, 2005. <http://hmongstudies.org/LemoineHSJ6.pdf>.
- Lyfoung, Touxa. (1996). *Touby Lyfoung: An Authentic account of the life of a Hmong man in the troubled land of Laos*. St. Paul: Lyfoung Foundation.
- Moua, Mai Neng. (2002). *Bamboo Among the Oaks*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Phang, Ching. Personal Communication (2008 January 29).
- Sricharoen, Thitiwan. (2005). "Principal Component Analysis of Poverty in Northern Thailand." A paper presented at the Conference on International Agricultural Research for Development, Stuttgart-Hohenheim: 11-12 October 2005
- Stuart-Fox, Martin. (1997). *A History of Laos*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sun, Jiabin & Kunali Shi. (2002). *Traveling the Silk Road in China*. Xinjiang People's Publishing House.
- Swinkels, Rob and Carrie Turk. (2006). "Explaining Ethnic Minority Poverty in Vietnam: a summary of recent trends and current challenges." Draft Background paper for CEM/MPI meeting on Ethnic Minority Poverty, Hanoi (28 September 2006). (Retrieved on May 13, 2008). [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTVIETNAM/Resources/Ethnic\\_Minority\\_Poverty\\_in\\_Vietnam7.doc](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTVIETNAM/Resources/Ethnic_Minority_Poverty_in_Vietnam7.doc)
- Tao, Billy, Personal Communication (27 May 2008).
- Toyota, Mika. (2005). "Subjects of the Nation Without Citizenship: The Case of the 'Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand.'" In Kymlicka, Will and Baogang He, *Multiculturalism in Asia*, Oxford University Press (2005). (Retrieved on May 13, 2008). Link to view from: [google.com/books?isbn=0199277621](http://google.com/books?isbn=0199277621).
- Vuong Xuan Tinh. (N.D.) "Looking for food: The Difficult Journey of the Hmong in Vietnam." (No Date, retrieved on May 13, 2008). Link to view from: [www.ies.wisc.edu/lrc/live/vxt0211loo.pdf](http://www.ies.wisc.edu/lrc/live/vxt0211loo.pdf).

Xiong, Joom, Personal Communication (26 May 2008)

Yang, Dao. (1992). "The Hmong: enduring traditions." In Judy Lewis (ed.), *Minority cultures of Laos: Kammu, Lua, Hmong, and Iu-Mien*. Rancho Cordova, CA: Southeast Asia Community Resource Center-Folsom Cordova Unified School District.

Yang, Kaiyi, Personal Communication (2 February 2008).

\_\_\_\_ (1996). "Hmong are not Mongols." [Hmong Forum](#).

Yang, Kou. (2008). "The Im/Migration and Emigration of Hmong Americans." A paper to be presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Kunming, China (15-23 July 2008).

\_\_\_\_ (2005). "Research Notes from the Field: Tracing the Path of Our Ancestors- A Visit to the Hmong in China." *Hmong Studies Journal*, Vol. 6 (2005), 1-38.  
<http://hmongstudies.org/YangHSJ6.pdf>.

\_\_\_\_ (2003). "Hmong Diaspora of the Post-War Period." [Asian Pacific Migration Journal](#) 12 (3) (2003). 271-300.

Webber, Alan. (2004). "Reverse brain drain threatens U.S. economy." *USA Today.com*.  
[http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2004-02-23-economy-edit\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2004-02-23-economy-edit_x.htm).

Wikipedia, "Thaksin Shinawatra." (Retrieved on October 14, 2008).  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaksin\\_Shinawatra#Family\\_background](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaksin_Shinawatra#Family_background).

\_\_\_\_ "Han Chinese." (Retrieved on October 14, 2008).  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han\\_Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Chinese)

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup>. This project was partially made possible with a small grant from the Affirmative Action Grant of California State University, Stanislaus. I am also grateful for the help of many individuals, including: Alibaba, Amy Allen, Dr. Prasith Leepreecha, Li Yiru, Prayath Nanthasin, Viengdaly Yathotou, Norki Ya, Vuong Duc Quang, Su Tan, Yang Kaiyi, Wang Chaoxing, Tao Xiaoping, Zhang Xiao, Tong Saelee, Joom Xiong, and many others, who helped me during my long visit to the Hmong Asia.

<sup>2</sup>. I am indebted to the many scholars, officials and the Qo Xiong people in Hunan. Their hospitality and warm welcome added meaning and spirits to my trip. In some villages, the whole village came to perform the welcome ceremony for me. They welcomed me as if I were a long lost brother. I was interviewed for their television station and in towns, such as Bai Pi, both the Secretary and Town Mayor came to welcome me and hosted a banquet in my honor. In China, the Secretary of the Party of the town is the most important person, and s/he only shows up for truly special events. I really appreciated their gestures and warm welcoming of my visit. I will write about my visit to lands of the Hmu and Qo Xiong in my other papers.

<sup>3</sup>. I am the fifth generation born outside of China. It is believed that my ancestors were among those of the first wave of Hmong immigrants to enter Laos. According to my family's story, three brothers immigrated with other Hmong to the border of China and Laos, and then they separated. One of the brothers went with his in-laws to Nong Het, and became ancestors of the many heroes of the Pathet Lao as well as those of Laos today. One of the brothers went down to the Northeast of Laos and became my ancestors. The third brother and his descendants have yet to be found. This trip made me feel closer to my roots and my Hmong ethnicity, as well as my quest to learn more about myself and my heritage.

<sup>4</sup>. I did not have permission to conduct research in those countries that I visited, and if I did, it is likely that I would not have been granted access to some of the most important key leaders of the Hmong in Laos, Vietnam and China. Moreover, it would have taken me many months to get a response to my request for research permission, and if I had gotten it, I would not have been given the freedom to conduct research as I wanted. Visiting the Hmong as non-researcher allowed me to meet with many officials and key community persons in Laos, Vietnam and China, but it was not appropriate for me to interview them in this capacity. I also want to note that many of them granted me a visit because of my kinship or friendship with them.

<sup>5</sup>. The Han Chinese refers to the majority of the peoples of China who are assimilated into the Han Culture. There is, however, diversity within this nationality in culture, language, traditions, and other aspects. The term Han is from the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), and it is said that

during this dynasty, which was a high point in Chinese civilization, many tribes in China began to feel that they belonged to the same group (Wikipedia, Cited on October 14, 2008). (“Han Chinese.” Wikipedia. Retrieved December 15, 2008.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han\\_Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Han_Chinese).) This group became the Han Chinese people of today.

<sup>6</sup>. Uyghur denotes a Turkic ethnic group living in the northwestern region of the present China, known by the Chinese as Xinjiang. They are Muslims.

<sup>7</sup>. This estimate is made by the author based on his many discussions with Hmong Americans who have visited the Hmong in Myanmar in the 1990s. The Hmong live mostly near the border of China.

<sup>8</sup>. This was my fourth trip to Thailand, my third trip to Laos since 1975, second trip to Vietnam, and sixth trip to China. Although I only visited the Hmong in Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou during this trip, I did visit the Hmong in Guangxi in 1987 and 1988, and also visit the Hmong in Hong He and Wenshan in 1993. Further, I did visit the Hmong in Anshun and Gaopuo, Guizhou, in 2004. Furthermore, I have visited the A Hmao in Yunnan in 2008, the Hmu in Guizhou and Qiandongnan in 2004 and 2008, the Qo Xiong in Hunan in 2008, and the Miao in Hainan in 2008. In my 2008 trip, I also climbed the Southern Great Wall of China, believed to have been built about 500 years ago as a defensive fortress against the Miao in the area. It is located near Fenghuang, in Eastern Hunan, known as Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture.

<sup>9</sup>. Captain Kong Le, a neutralist, led a bloodless Coup d’Etat on August 9, 1960, which brought down the right wing government and brought Prince Souvanna Phouma to the Prime Ministership of the Royal Lao Government.

<sup>10</sup>. Chao Fa, a Lao word for Lord of the Sky, is the name of a post-1975 messianic resistance movement opposed to the socialist government of Laos. The name Chao Fa also includes those who are affiliated with the above mentioned organization; many of them were refugees in Ban Vinai. This group has their own writing system, known as Pah Haw, and their own religion. The statuettes were built for their religion and mythical heroes. In the 1980s, Chao Fa was reorganized and renamed “the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos.” To read more about Chao Fa, see Lee, Gary Yia, “The Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims of Totalitarianism or terrorists?” Retrieved December 15, 2008.

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/Hmong%20rebellion%20in%20Laos.html>

<sup>11</sup>. An excellent example of high ranking officials of Chinese descent in Thailand is Thaksin Shinawatra, the former Prime Minister of Thailand (2001-2006) and former leader of the Thai Rak Thai Party. His great-grandfather, Seng Sae Khu, a Hakka, was born in Guangdong Province in China and immigrated to Thailand in the 1860s and made Chiang Mai his home. The family

name in Chinese is Khu. As a result of the anti-Chinese pressure in Thailand in the 1930-40s, his eldest grandson adopted the Thai name, Shiwanatra in 1938, which became the name of the family. It is said that Thaksin entered school without good Thai language skills, so other kids called him, Meo, a derogatory term referring to the Hmong in Thailand, which the Thai media use whenever they want to negatively portrait him ("Thaksin Shinawatra." Wikipedia. Retrieved December 15, 2008. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaksin\\_Shinawatra#Family\\_background](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaksin_Shinawatra#Family_background)). Thaksin is not the only Prime Minister of Chinese descent. At least, "three out of the last four Prime Ministers have been of Chinese descent, and the same is true of at least two of the last three governors of Bangkok," (Jory, 2000). See Patrick Cory, Multiculturalism in Thailand? Cultural and Regional Resurgence in a Diverse Kingdom. *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*. Retrieved December 15, 2008. [http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter00\\_millennium/Thailand.html](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hapr/winter00_millennium/Thailand.html)

<sup>12</sup>. There are Hmong holding positions, such as members of the Minority Yunnan Province Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, but these positions come without any real power. A Hmong scholar in Kunming simply compared these positions to a bouquet of flowers that one can hold and look at it, but it are practically useless.

<sup>13</sup>. Xinhua, China mobilizes to tackle gender imbalance, (16 August 2003). (Retrieved December 15, 2008, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/16/content\\_255511.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-08/16/content_255511.htm)).

<sup>14</sup>. The Hmong in Vietnam have their own writing system, also using the Roman alphabet, but it is not popular or widely used. The Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) is easy to use, but that is not the only reason the Hmong Vietnamese use it. They use it because of the influence of Hmong Americans and technology. Many Hmong American websites are in RPA; their pop music and songs are also in RPA. Moreover, the RPA is used by Hmong worldwide and it is technologically friendly.

<sup>15</sup>. It is worthy to note that no Hmong group in the West takes issue with the Thai Government on the many issues of the Hmong and other minorities in Thailand. Many Hmong groups in the West direct all their energy and voices toward Laos, claiming the Government of Laos is an authoritarian regime that hunts Hmong rebels like animals and violates human rights, religious freedom and other issues. It is true that the post-1975 Government of Laos is a one party socialist government and it is not a perfect one, and they should be monitored. The Government of Laos, at least, appears to be more inclusive than other governments in Asia. Moreover, there are no known Hmong graves or cemeteries that have been desecrated in Laos. Despite a half-century of conflicts, wars and destruction in Laos, the tomb of Lo Bliayao, for example, remains in good condition without any type of desecration or vandalism to it.