

**Hmong Across Borders or Borders Across Hmong?
Social and Political Influences Upon Hmong People: Keynote Speech by Dr. Prasit Leepreecha,
at the Hmong Across Borders Conference, University of Minnesota, October 4, 2013.**

Hmong Studies Journal, 15(2): 1-12.

Abstract

The Hmong are a transnational ethnic people, because of their dispersal from China into Southeast Asia in the early 19th century and from Southeast Asia to Western countries from 1975 onward. However, even within the context of Southeast Asia and southern China, the Hmong are a transnational ethnic group, due to state boundaries and the enforcement of international laws. Scholars speak as though the Hmong population has crossed political and legal borders by their movement across state boundaries and international borders. However, I argue that it is the political, social, and legal borders that have cut across the Hmong people and subjected them to be citizens of different modern nation-states. Even in the present time, these borders still, and continuously, play important roles that cross and divide the Hmong people into distinctive subgroups and fragments. In this article, I will start by describing the generally understood situation of Hmong being across national borders, and then will explain my argument that borders are across the Hmong.

Keywords: Hmong, ethnic group, cross border, transnationalism

Hmong Across Borders

Many recent social science studies about the Hmong emphasize and explore the transnational state of Hmong in Asia (Tapp, et al, 2004, Millett 2002) and in Western countries (Schein 2004, Tapp and Lee 2010, Vang 2010, and Yang 2008). The key concepts these scholars take to explain transnational Hmong include the diaspora and transnationalism. One common issue these studies emphasize is the existence of state boundaries and sovereignty, with the Hmong people having recently migrated across such boundaries (Culas and Michaud 2004). The image of "Hmong across borders" has been overstated by recent studies on Hmong networks across Southeast Asia and Western countries in the globalization context (Lee 2006, Leepreecha 2008, Schein 2002, Vang 2010). Importantly, the Hmong themselves have been exposed to this same perception as well.

If I can recall my memory as a Hmong boy who lived close to the border of Thai and Laos in Nan province of Northern Thailand, Hmong people in my village were Thai citizens, while our relatives who lived on the other side of the mountain range were Lao citizens. When the Communist insurgency occurred along the Thai-Lao border in the late 1960s, my father moved my family down to a resettlement village in the Thai lowlands in order to stay closer to Thai government officials. From my lowland village in 1975, I saw many Hmong refugees from Laos, including our close relatives, flee to the nearby Pua district government office, which is only five kilometers away from my village. Later on, they were placed in Nam Yao refugee camp, which is about 20 kilometers from our village, where I occasionally accompanied my parents and elder brothers to visit our relatives. While visiting Nam Yao refugee camp of Nan province and conducting research in Ban Vinai refugee camp of Loei province in 1980s, I witnessed emotional scenes between Hmong family and lineage members who were leaving and those who were staying behind in refugee camps. For those who decided to leave for third countries, after shaman rituals (*ua neeb*) had been performed to protect them, they boarded buses

with their valuable belongings on the leaving day. At the parking lot, which was also the camp's soccer field, both those who were leaving and those who were staying behind cried and couldn't imagine if they would ever get a chance to meet again (see pictures and contents, Yang 2008).

Fortunately, the resettlement of Hmong refugees from Laos to third countries in the West occurred during the transition of both global politics and communication technologies. In terms of global politics, the end of the Cold War reduced political tensions between the two opposite ideological poles of democracy and communism, such that the Hmong in Western countries, especially scholars and business owners, had the opportunity to return and visit their own people in communist countries, including China and later in Laos and Vietnam. Such reunification was possible because of modern communication methods, which is part of globalization. To the transnational Hmong, the means of communication in 1980s and early 1990s relied on tape cassettes, letters, and very rare and expensive long-distance telephone calls. From the late 1990s up to the present, people have adopted various modern means of communication, which have united Hmong in Western and Asian countries together. Today we can have live conversations, even when we live in different countries and time zones.

In Asian countries, from what we learned from our parents and grand-parents, Hmong people lived in the two different areas of "*Tuam Tshoj*" (big empire) and "*Xov Tshoj*" (small empire). Culturally, those who lived in mainland China were identified as "*Hmoob Suav*" Chinese Hmong (Hmong in China) or "*Hmoob Tuam Tshoj*" (Main kingdom Hmong), while Hmong in upper mainland Southeast Asia were known as "*Hmoob Xov Tshoj*" (Small kingdom Hmong), due to geographical and cultural distinctions. Politically, Hmong had been subjected to citizenship of different modern nation-states since the colonial period. Furthermore, political confrontations during the Cold War period—indeed the Vietnam War was a hot war in upper mainland Southeast Asia-- caused tremendous conflict between Hmong who had been pressured to join the opposite political sides of communism and democracy.

Perhaps with the exception of the Hmong who lived close to the China-Vietnam and China-Laos borders, those whose grandparents took them far away from China (like myself in Northern Thailand), knew China through folktales, legends and myths, which meant that China was another world for us. We learned about Hmong people from the Chinese caravan traders who sold fabric and other goods from Yunnan province in our mountainous villages in Northern Thailand. In addition, our parents and grandparents told us about the long migratory journey from Southwestern China to Northern Thailand, when our ancestors separated themselves from the majority Chinese people. After being separated for 5-6 generations, most of us had entirely lost contact with our relatives in China, and had lost connection with those who settled in Laos. My lineage group didn't have the opportunity to contact and know our relatives in Laos who share the same great-grandfather who originally migrated from China and settled down in Udomsai province of Laos, due to communication difficulties. However, in the post-Cold War period with modern communication and transportation methods, we were able to travel and find our relatives in Laos. Unfortunately, it has been impossible for us to find our relatives in China, as the trail has long grown cold.

Through kinship and ethnic connections, transnational Hmong people, no matter whether Hmong in Southeast Asia or outside of the region, have both been reunited and recreated since the

late 1980s, not only in terms of family reunion for cultural issues but also in terms of economic connections as well. For example, mass production of Hmong dresses in Southwestern China provinces have resulted in this clothing being exported through Northern Vietnam and Laos to markets in Chiang Mai, Thailand. In addition, Hmong in Thailand and Laos have sent their food and herbal medicine to relatives and friends in America, Canada, France, and Australia. Similarly, international mobility among Hmong persons has occurred after visits and through the process of transnational marriage between Hmong in Southeast Asia and Western countries. Importantly, the transnational movement of goods and people is not as smooth as people thought it would be, due to international laws and regulations. For instance, Hmong in Thailand and Laos often do not have international passports, due to financial and distance barriers in applying for passports and visas in major cities. And while Hmong in Western countries are easily able to obtain permission to enter Thailand and Laos, Hmong in Thailand and Laos are often denied visas to visit relatives in Western countries.

The physical dispersal of Hmong persons from China to modern nation- states of Laos and Thailand and to Western countries resulted in the Hmong gradually perceiving themselves as a people who live across borders of political entities. Hmong studies in the recent years have explored “Hmong across border issues” or transnational Hmong issues. Scholars in different disciplines have focused on the flow of capital, technologies, goods, and peoples across national borders. However, to my point of view, such studies still follow the Western concepts of transnationalism, which means taking Western concepts and outsiders’ perspectives to explore, describe, and analyze empirical phenomena in the transnational Hmong society, rather than attempting to investigate external contexts, such as socio-political borders which have been imposed on Hmong people. It seems to me that scholars have built their analyses upon an underlying assumption or assessment that state boundaries were demarcated long before Hmong people migrated to settle in mainland Southeast Asia countries, which ignores the historical fact that Hmong had occupied these areas before state borderlines were drawn during the colonial period in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, no scholars have explored the development of Hmong people’s own concepts or explanations of such phenomena, as Nicholas Tapp challenged us in his 2004 article entitled “The State of Hmong Studies” in his book “Hmong/Miao in Asia”. He pointed out that “Indeed, it must be everybody’s hope, and hopefully in a way which needs no longer be patronizing, that an increasing proportion of these researchers can be Hmong themselves, ...” (2004: 22). Therefore, as a Hmong Social Science scholar, I would like to propose an opposite view on understanding the transnational Hmong--by exploring the outside contexts or borders that have been imposed upon the Hmong people.

Borders Across Hmong

According to Lamont and Molnar (2002: 167), “In recent years, the idea of “boundaries” has come to play a key role in important new lines of scholarship across the social sciences. Boundaries and its twin concept “borders” have been the object of a number of special issues in scholarly journals, edited volumes, and conferences”. In political and geographical aspects, on the one hand, borders were important to delineate the extent of modern nation-states, which originated in Europe. The demarcation of modern nation state boundaries in other continents derived from the

expansion of European colonies, in order to divide and rule over local geographical areas. Such ideologies and strategies were concomitantly implemented with the modern technology of mapping. It was the expansion of powerful European colonies upon local kingdoms. On the other hand, in terms of social and cultural aspects, a border is defined as the edge where the practices of two distinctive cultural forms or ethnic groups meet, such as Barth's "ethnic boundaries" (1969). According to Barth, "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundation in which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and independence" (Barth 1969: 295). The importance of social and cultural boundaries is that they are naturally occurring and have existed among different cultural groups in human society, rather than being imposed by outsiders. Therefore, in the case of the Hmong ethnic group, I would like to argue that throughout the Hmong history in Southwestern China and upper mainland Southeast Asia, external influences, which here I mean both political and social borders, have divided the Hmong people into separate spheres and opposite identities and groups. The information I'm going provide to support my argument is based on chronological evidence that have had political, social, and cultural influences on Hmong society.

Modern nation-state borderlines

The earth land surfaces are mostly divided into national territories. According to Thongchai (1994), borderlines of modern states in mainland Southeast Asia had been clearly demarcated by European colonies in the early 20th century. The emergence of modern nation-states in Southeast Asia has divided the Hmong people into citizens of different countries. According to Mottin (1980: 42), the Hmong started to migrate into the Tonkin area, which is at present the northern part of Vietnam, in two migration waves from 1800 to 1860. As for migration into Laos, especially in Nong Hat city of Xieng Khoung province, Yang Dao pointed out that the Hmong people started to migrate and settle from 1810 to 1820 (see Culas 2000: 35). The migration into Northern Thailand happened during the nineteenth century. Mottin (1980) noted that Hmong people travelled into Northern Thailand from 1830 to 1840. I point out that our Hmong ancestors settled in this area before the creation of the modern nation-states of Southeast Asia, when the present day boundaries of countries had not yet been set, as the French did not officially take control over Laos until 1893. Prior to the colonial influence of modern nation-states, mainland Southeast Asia was a "galactic polity", to use Tiambiah's term (1977). The power of kingdoms emphasized manpower rather than geographical features. Through decades of negotiation between the French and British colonies, together with the Siamese kingdom, state boundaries were clearly demarcated in the early 20th century. Thongchai Winichakul (1994) identified such a process and the emergence of the Siam kingdom as the creation of a "Geo-body".

The French used land features such as the Mekong River and other high mountain ranges between Nan province of Thailand and Xayabuli province in Laos as boundary lines, similar to their drawing geographical borders between other countries in the region. In the case of Thailand and Laos, my grandparents told me they saw French people come and place flag poles on high mountain spots (*roob fuablab tsa ntoo/ tsa chij*) to mark the border between Thailand and Laos. Subsequently, our relatives who resided on the other side of the mountain top were informed that they were Lao citizens, while my grandparents were subjected to be Thai citizens. Nevertheless, there was no

restriction on migration across the new state boundary, so Hmong relatives often moved across it, being that it was a very remote area. However, later on, modern nation-states gradually played the essential role of imposing the “imagined community” (to use Benedict Anderson’s term (1991)) on Hmong people who were subjects of each new country. Finally, Hmong people were identified according to their residence in the modern nation-states, as *Hmoob Thaib* (Thai Hmong), *Hmoob Los Tsuas* (Lao Hmong), *Hmoob Nyablaj* (Vietnam Hmong), *Hmong Suav* (Chinese Hmong), etc.

Following state emergence was sovereignty. Nation-states in Southeast Asia adopted international laws and policies about dealing with people who move across state boundaries. Such laws and policies obstructed Hmong relatives who were subjected citizens of different countries from visiting each other or reuniting. Crossing borderlines to the other side, Hmong relatives have to ask for official permission from local authorities. Presently, among Hmong in Southeast Asia countries, passports, visas, and border passes are required. However, for the Hmong people, moving across borders, especially between Laos and Thailand, has its own restrictions and limitations. In 2012, about 120 Christian Hmong from Laos were travelling to Thailand for a meeting of the Yexus Fest in Chiang Mai when the officers at the Laotian border checkpoint questioned their crossing, despite their holding passports and official approval; only after much discussion were they allowed to cross. Another situation occurred in 2004-2009, when 8,200 Hmong were prevented from traveling from Huay Nam Khao in Phetchabun, Thailand, by Thai state officers because they were seen as “Lao Hmong in Thailand” aiming to enter Thamkrabok monastery and be resettled in America. The group was forced to settle in Huay Nam Khao for a few years before being repatriated back to Laos in 2009 (Supang and Tawin 2011). Such phenomena implies that to the Hmong people, state boundaries are not as important as family and ethnic reunion, so they are willing to struggle in their attempt to escape state regulations.

State laws and policies of more developed countries impose rules against people from less developed countries who want to enter their countries, while in contrast, governments of less developed countries privilege people from more developed countries. In the case of Hmong in Southeast Asia countries, restricted policies of Western countries block them from visiting their relatives, while policies of Southeast Asia countries are wide open for Hmong to visit from Western countries. Practically, in the visa offices of US ambassador in Vientiane and US Consulate in Chiang Mai, there is at least one Hmong applicant who walks in for a visa interview every working day, but very few people receive a US visa to visit their families in America. Conversely, Hmong in America are generally welcomed to freely travel to Thailand and Laos (except some American Hmong who are suspected by the Laotian government to be a national security threat).

Ideological and cultural influences are the two main consequences of modern nation-states upon frontier ethnic minorities, especially the Hmong ethnic group. The Hmong people who have become citizens of different countries have been influenced by each state’s nation building projects. They have gradually adopted their state’s national identity to identify distinctiveness among themselves. Such new state identities that Hmong have adopted are referred to as “us” and “them” within the transnational Hmong ethnic group. On the negative side, such ethno-state identities have influenced Hmong who live in different countries to look down upon (*saib tsis taus*) relatives who live in less economically and socially developed countries. Moreover, political, social and cultural aspects,

which have been imposed by outsiders, have now also become essential borders that separate Hmong people.

Political borders

I define “political borders” as the national and international political regimes imposed upon the Hmong people in different segments of space and time. Such political borderlines have cut across the Hmong people and have segregated them to be in opposite or in different political fragments. In China, the Hmong/Miao people were politically divided into “*Hmoob nyoos*” (raw Hmong) and “*Hmoob siav*” (cooked Hmong), based on their refusal of acceptance of the integration policy of the Chinese government. Moreover, the policy of building nation-states and imposing high taxes by central or local governments caused the Hmong people to resist the control and domination of the central Chinese government. Hmong, and other ethnic minority groups, who were then accused of being rebellious (see Jenks 1994); in every rebellion against the government, were severely suppressed which resulted in the migration of Hmong people from Southwestern China into the northern parts of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma in the late 1800s. Among the Hmong ourselves, we are known as “*Hmong Tuam Tshoj*” and “*Hmoob Xov Tshoj*”. Among the Hmong ethnic group in China, they were subsumed under the broad category of Miao nationality, under the state’s classification project in early 1950s (Brown 1996). There were distinctive ethnic groups under the Miao nationality, including Hmong, Hmu, Ahmao, Koshiong, Qanao, Ge, etc. Under such a fixed and broad category of Miao, each subgroup tried to identify itself in order to gain official recognition by Chinese government (Chueng 1996).

In Southeast Asia, particularly in Laos, the French colonial regime played crucial roles in segregating Hmong leaders into two opposite sides. The French administration appointed and supported Touby Lyfoung to ally with Lao Royal government, while the Pathet Lao or Communist side supported Lo Bliayao. These external political opponents, which had been imposed upon them, eventually divided the Hmong in Laos, especially the two clans of Lee and Lo, to be members of opposite political groups. Although the French left Laos after the Second World War, its legacy continued to affect Hmong political divisions in Laos.

During the Cold War period, the conflict was hot in the battlefields of upper mainland Southeast Asia, which is known as the “Vietnam War” among Westerners and the “American War” among the Laotian and Vietnamese. The two main world political ideologies caused Hmong people in Laos and Thailand to take up weapons to fight against each other, from the late 1950s through 1975, known to Americans as the Secret War in Laos. In addition to Touby Lyfoung, who played an essential role in the Royal Lao government, Vang Pao became a prominent Hmong army leader entirely supported by the CIA of America who fought against the Communist Pathet Lao and Vietnam. On the opposite side, Faidang Lobliayao and other Hmong leaders were supported by the Pathet Lao or Communist movement in the jungle fighting against the Royal Lao and CIA. Despite the war ending in 1975 with the Pathet Lao side winning (and with Hmong who had joined the Royal Laos Army fleeing the country for Thailand and eventually being resettled in Western countries, especially in America,) the Secret War in Laos tremendously affected Hmong people on both sides. Importantly, the greatest and longest consequence was the political ideological conflict between the Hmong who joined the two different sides. For the Hmong in Laos, this conflict continuously segregated them until recently, between those majority Hmong who gained power under the Lao government, and the minority Chao

Fa group who were based in the jungle and between the leaders of Lao Hmong and American Hmong. In the case of the conflict between both sides in Laos, from 1975 to mid-2000s, it was known among Hmong people that those Lao soldiers and policemen who cruelly killed the Chao Fa Hmong were Hmong. Meanwhile, the Hmong in Western countries and Laos have been reunited after the Laotian government opened the country for foreigners, especially tourists, in the early 1990s, and after General Vang Pao passed away in America in early 2011.

In the case of Thailand, political borders played crucial roles in dividing the Hmong people, especially during the Cold War. The opposing world political ideologies of communism and democracy created political divisions amongst Hmong family groups in Northern Thailand. Starting during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Communist propagators from China and Laos targeted Hmong and other ethnic groups along the border of Laos and Thailand. Concurrently, Thai officers, especially the Border Patrol Police, were sent to persuade the Hmong and other frontier peoples to side with the Thai government. In response to negative experiences with Thai state officers, some Hmong in Chiang Rai, Nan and Petchabun provinces fled to join the Communist movement in the jungle, while their relatives joined the government side. The recruited Hmong were trained both as Communist fighters and as Thai soldiers, such that they fought against each other from early 1960s until 1982 (see more in Yuepheng Xiong's documentary film and the movie "Hmong: Blood for Freedom"). Political conflict amongst the divided Hmong ended when the Thai government issued an amnesty act, in the national context, and Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, in international context. The essential point is that world politics drew political boundaries that separated the Hmong people into two opposite groups, killing each other for one and a half decades. Furthermore, the recent democratization of the Thai government on one side allows Hmong villagers to be involved with local politics but on the other causes political divisions among people, especially between and within clan and lineage members. As I have described, in the case of Hmong in Laos and Thailand, the political borders imposed by outsiders divided the Hmong people into two opposite political sides and caused serious conflicts among them.

Social and cultural boundaries

Prior to the adoption of development in the early 1960s, there was little social and economic hierarchy amongst the Hmong people in Thailand and Laos, which is exemplified by marital processes. When young men and women wanted to marry, their families didn't raise any objections based on higher and lower social status or richer and poorer family backgrounds. Rather, the obstacles that caused parental disagreements were orphanage, leprosy, seizures, mental incapacity, and unresolved conflicts between the families.

Presently, there are various social, cultural, and economic boundaries among the Hmong people, even in the same village in Thailand or Laos, due to outside influences. The more Hmong people have been exposed to social, cultural, and economic development, the more they have become divided. First, exposure to these external social contexts has created a social hierarchy in Hmong society. One example is the Hmong leaders who have achieved new social positions based on external social statuses, such as political and governmental leaders, military leaders, medical staff, and doctoral academic degrees, respectively referred to as "*Nais Baan*" (village headman), "*Nais Phong*" (general), "*Nais Maum*" (medical doctor) or "*Doctor*", and "*Ajarn*" (professor). Another example is the adoption of

kinship titles adopted from mainstream societies that have replaced Hmong kinship terms, such as the Thai “*Phij*” (elder brother or sister), Laotian “*Aib*” (elder brother), and American “uncle” (elder and younger brother of either father or mother’s side). Secondly, adoption of outside cultural features has caused cultural division in Hmong society, such as conversion to Christianity, which has happened in every country. Christian Hmong generally view their relatives who still follow Hmong traditional beliefs as primitive people who live in a dark, dirty, and devil-led world. Meanwhile, those who still follow Hmong traditional religious customs see their Christian relatives as people who disrespect Hmong culture and threaten traditional Hmong beliefs and rituals. Lastly, economic boundaries now exist among the Hmong, creating divisions between rich and poor Hmong. For example, back in the self-sufficient economy system in Southeast Asia, Hmong didn’t hire Hmong to be laborers but practiced labor exchanges when many people were needed to complete farming and village activities, such as planting rice fields or building a house. If they had been paid, Hmong people would have felt that they had lost their dignity. However, after capitalism was imposed on Hmong, an economic hierarchy was created. Villagers who have more access to outside information and market networks have more opportunities to make a higher income and gain more benefits from cash crop production and trading. Meanwhile, villagers who lack information and networks with outsiders are more disadvantaged people residing in mountainous villages. As time has passed by, the poor Hmong have become cheap laborers for rich Hmong and non-Hmong people. To my observation, no matter whether in Laos, Thailand, or America, compensation by cash has become a necessity when asking for help with an agricultural activity, even if the laborer and owner are close relatives.

I want to say more about Christianity, as a significant social and cultural boundary that has recently divided Hmong peoples into opposing identities and groups. Academically speaking, similar to other parts of the world, Christianity was propagated side-by-side with the colonial regime (Savina 1924, Andrinoff and Andrianoff 2000, Barney 1957, Clark 1911, and Mottin 1980) and the development ideology of Western countries (see Tam 2011 and Vang 1998). Christianity came to Hmong society represented as a superior and modern or civilized belief. Westerners, including Christian missionaries, viewed Hmong traditional *kev ntseeg dabqhuas* as backward, irrational, and inferior with the new way *kev ntseeg tshiab* seen as more civilized than the old way *kev ntseeg qub*. Practically, in many cases that I have observed in Thailand and Laos, those relatives who become Christians see themselves as people who have been purified to be clean and white, while their non-Christian relatives still live in a dirty Satan’s world. These ethno-religious identities of *Hmoob Yesxus* and *Hmoob Dabqhuas* have deeply divided Hmong peoples into opposing cultural groups.

Finally, I want to highlight another example of a social and cultural boundary that divides Hmong in different countries—the higher social and economic status of American Hmong than Laotian Hmong. Since the opening of Laos in the 1990s, the number of middle-aged and elderly American Hmong men (and some women) who travel back to their home country Laos and marry young Lao Hmong has been gradually increasing. In addition to economic differences, marriage between American and Laotian Hmong occurs in the context of social and cultural differences. With higher social and cultural status, older American Hmong men and women have more power in marriage negotiations than younger Laotian Hmong. Practically, the way men dress in Western suits and speak Hmonglish in Hmong New Year events in Laos draws the attention and attraction of young Hmong girls and their parents, with the goal of getting married and having the opportunity to move to

America. The way American Hmong express themselves as richer persons while visiting Laos, by using American dollars and buying gifts for young Laotian Hmong, doesn't only draw attention from young Hmong women in Laos but also influences their parents to offer their daughters in marriage to older American Hmong men. Consequently, it causes heart-break and anger among young Laotian Hmong who are boyfriends to these girls, some of whom develop different strategies to take money from the American Hmong. In the meantime, in the United States, Laotian Hmong who visit relatives are seen as laborers by American Hmong. Such social and cultural differences and forms of domination also entail conflict among Hmong in the two countries. These conflicts often are apparent in various forms of media, such as the popular Hmong chat room pathtalk.

Conclusion

Contemporary Hmong people perceive that, in reality, they are citizens of different countries, due to the diaspora of the Hmong ethnic group in Southwestern China, upper Southeast Asia and Western countries after the Communists took over Laos in 1975. Scholars of Hmong studies have examined Hmong people as a transnational ethnic group and the way they, as diasporic people, adapt to new social and political environments in their respective countries. In addition, Hmong studies have investigated the ways that transnational and diasporic Hmong connect with one another in different countries. In multiple ways, contemporary Hmong studies imply that borders of modern nation-states, including political and cultural borders, have been in existence for a long time, with the Hmong subsequently moving across such borderlines.

However, to my point of view, Hmong became a transnational ethnic group and split into different socio-political groups because the modern-state borderlines cut across them. In addition, it was the socio-political borderlines that were imposed upon them by outsiders and not borders of their own making. Such powerful influences were gradually adopted by state officers and the public in general, including the Hmong people. In details I have elaborated above, the roles of modern nation-state borderlines, political borders, and socio-cultural boundaries subjected Hmong people to be citizens of different countries and divided them into different social and political groups, throughout the entire world. Looking at this critical angle, from inside-out, I hope that my perspective and the content I have demonstrated will contribute to a new framework for understanding Hmong studies.

Among the Hmong persons who have scattered in different countries, I hope that my work will not just remind people about the external influences being imposed upon them and the negative connotations of these imposed events, but also awaken them to the possible benefits of being a transnational ethnic people. Today, Hmong live in the globalized world with lesser domination, in comparison to the past. The trend is that states' restrictions on Hmong people are more relaxed, due to the openness of regional and global countries. In addition, modern communication technologies in the globalized world provide more mechanisms for Hmong people to connect with and help one another. Though various borders cut across Hmong people and divide them to be subjects of different countries and socio-political groups, I believe our transnational status can be more useful than harmful for the Hmong people.

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The author would like to thank Dr. Mai Na Lee for inviting him to present this article in the Hmong Consortium Conference at the University of Minnesota in October, 2013. In addition, a special thank to Dr. Kathleen Culhane-Pera for doing editorial work prior to publishing.

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