

Overview of Recent Scholarship on Premodern Hmong History

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Introduction

- Purpose of Presentation is to present a short and broad overview of contemporary scholarship pertaining to pre-modern Hmong History
- There is not a single existing study that focuses on the experiences of women in pre-modern Hmong history
- The lack of scholarship on the role of women in Hmong history represents a substantial gap in the literature

Origins of the Hmong People

- Theory of Middle Eastern Origin from F.M. Savina (1924). Histoire des Miao. Hong Kong: Imprimerie de la Societe des Missions-Etrangeres.
- Not supported by any available empirical evidence, not given credence by contemporary scholars

Origins of the Hmong People

Theory of Siberian/Mongolian or Russian Origin

- Gained Prominence in the work of Keith Quincy. Hmong History of a People: Eastern Washington University Press, 1988 and 1995.
- Without providing firm evidence, Quincy strongly suggested the likelihood that the Hmong migrated from Siberia to China sometime between 2500 to 3000 B.C.

Origins of the Hmong People

Theory of Siberian/Mongolian or Russian Origin

- Quincy's theory of Hmong origins north of China has been widely cited in several works including Ann Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and been circulated by students and academics who have read his work
- In recent years, Quincy's *Hmong History of People* has been strongly critiqued by key scholars of Hmong and Asian Studies

Origins of the Hmong People

Theory of Siberian/Mongolian or Russian Origin

- In an introductory essay to the seminal 2004 compilation Hmong/Miao in Asia, Nicholas Tapp calls the Quincy Work and the Siberian origin theory:
“extraordinarily inaccurate and utterly misleading”
- Tapp notes that some of the information used by Quincy to document the Siberian theory was based on long disproved missionary myths pertaining to a supposed high rate of albinism in the Hmong population

Origins of the Hmong People in China

- King Chi You, a legendary King prominent in Chinese History is believed to have been Hmong by many in the Hmong community but scholars are uncertain

A Chinese statue of King Chi You is in the Photo



Origins of the Hmong People in China

- The theory that Sonom was a Hmong King in the 17th century (given credence by Quincy) has been refuted by Entenmann's article in Volume 6 of Hmong Studies Journal (www.hmongstudies.org)
- Hmong are mentioned in Chinese documents going back to 2700 B.C.
- Scholars disagree on how far North in China Hmong may have once lived.
- Linguistic scholar Martha Ratliff in a 2004 article only found evidence of Hmong in Southern China using ancient linguistic records tied to the Hmong language and Chinese historical accounts

Hmong Rebellions and migration out of China to Southeast Asia 1790s-early 1900s

- McMahon (2000) and Jenks (1994) have written of the Miao rebellions (which included Hmong) beginning in the late 18th and through the mid-19th centuries in Southern China.
- The rebellions had many causes including the poor economic conditions experienced by the Hmong minority and persecution by the Han majority

Hmong migration within Southeast Asia

- Culas and Michaud (2004) note that in the mid-nineteenth century, the population of Guizhou province (home to a large Hmong population) dropped from 16 to 6 million due to a series of events including war casualties, epidemics, and famines.
- As a result of these events, persecution and a desire to find new land to farm their primary crops, many Hmong began migrating out of Southern China to the countries of Southeast Asia in the early to mid-19th century

Hmong migration within Southeast Asia

- Some scholars have suggested Hmong had moved to Vietnam as early as 1750 A.D. and Laos in 1810 A.D.
- Culas and Michaud (2004): “the first concrete record of a Hmong presence in the Indochinese Peninsula dates from 1860.” (Hmong observed entering North Vietnam from bordering Yunnan province)
- Culas and Michaud (2004): Hmong settlements in Northern Thailand not documented before 1885.

Contemporary Hmong Population in China and Southeast Asia

- Asia

China – 4- 6,000,000

Vietnam – 787,604

Laos – 315,000

Thailand – 124,000

Burma – 2-3,000

The photo by Ka Ying Yang shows 2 Hmong Women in North Vietnam

In China, Hmong are classified in the broader “Miao” Group. The “Miao” group includes Hmong, Kho Xiong, Hmu and A Hmao.



Hmong in China



It is estimated that 4-6,000,000 Hmong live in Southern China, primarily in Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces in the Southwest.

The map is from The China Webpage <http://www.chinapage.com/map/province-english.jpg>

Hmong in Southeast Asia



In Southeast Asia, Hmong live in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma. The map is from the Perry-Castaneda online map collection of the University of Texas http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/indochina_rel85.jpg

Hmong Messianism in China and Southeast Asia

- Hmong Messianic Movements have been the subject of a few scholarly articles in the past decade (Cheung, 1995 and Culas, 2004)
- (Culas 2004) Hmong Messianic movements have been characterized by the emergence of a personality who is thought to reveal supernatural powers to solve the severe problems faced by the Hmong community at that moment

Hmong Messianism in China and Southeast Asia

- Hmong messianic movements have at times been associated with new writing systems
- Culas (2004) identifies seven protest movements orchestrated by Hmong leaders inspired by a messianic ideology who developed a fiercely loyal following of thousands
- These messianic leaders have included Pa Chay who led a Hmong rebellion against the French in Laos from 1918-1921 and more recently Shong Lue Yang who developed the Pahawh writing system

Key Scholarly Sources Related to Pre-Modern Hmong History

Hmong History in China

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Recent Critiques of Previous Academic Work Related to Hmong Origins

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Tapp, N. (2004). "The State of Hmong Studies (An Essay on Bibliography). In Tapp, N., Michaud, J., Culas, C., and Lee, G.Y. (Editors). Hmong/Miao in Asia. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, pp. 3-38.

Key Scholarly Sources Related to Pre-Modern Hmong History

Early to Mid-20th Century Hmong History in Laos

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