Glimpses of Hmong History and Culture

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Glimpses of Hmong History and Culture

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Preliminaries

The Purpose of this Guide is to provide Americans with an introduction to the history and culture of the Hmong refugees from Laos. This is the third of four Guides that the National Indochinese Clearinghouse is publishing on the Hmongs. The first, entitled "The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets," consists of background information, a description of the sounds of Hmong, and a discussion of the alphabet situation. The second, entitled "The Hmong Language: Sentences, Phrases and Words," consists of a brief description of Hmong grammar, and lists of useful words and phrases like clan names, titles of address, days of the month, and so on. The fourth Guide, entitled "An Annotated Bibliography of Materials on the Hmongs of Laos," provides information on books and articles that have been written about the Hmongs.

This Guide consists of an article by Yang See Koumarn on the recent history of the Hmongs in Laos, and an article by G. L. Barney presenting a historical/traditional account of Hmong life.

We are delighted to be able to present these articles, and wish to express our appreciation to the authors.

The Hmongs of Laos: 1896 - 1978

- Yang See Koumarn

[Yang See is a Hmong refugee who is currently a student at Northern Virginia Community College, in the Washington, D.C. area. He was educated in Vientiane, and while attending high school worked with the French anthropologists Jacques Lemoine and Guy Moréchand. Between 1969 and 1975, he worked for U.S. Government agencies and with General Vang Pao's guerrilla army as an interpreter and liaison/communications officer. After six months in the refugee camp of Nong Khai, in Thailand, he and his family came to the United States in November, 1975.]

A. Early History

Because a complete anthropological study of the Hmongs has never been made, our precise origins are obscure. It is clear, from comparative linguistic and cultural studies, that we, along with the Yao or Man people, are more closely related to the Chinese than we are to any other people. (We are the only people in Indochina with such close ties to China.) The Chinese call us Miao; the other groups in Indochina call us Meo; but we call ourselves Hmong, which means "free."

Our exact numbers in Laos are unknown because no census has ever been officially taken. Perhaps the best guess is provided by Yang Dao, a Hmong economist, who estimates that there were about 350,000 Hmongs in Laos in the mid-sixties.

All sources agree that we originated in China, and that we started migrating out of China into Southeast Asia about 150 years ago. Explanations of these migrations vary. Some say we were forced to migrate to unoccupied lands in the mountains because of pressure from hostile neighbors. Others maintain that we wanted to find new territory for farming and raising livestock. Both factors may have contributed to our moving to the mountaintops of Indochina, and perhaps our present move to resettle in third countries.

Our preference for establishing small villages high in the mountains explains why there was little objection to our migrations during the nineteenth century -- no one else was interested in the lands we chose. In these mountains, we lived relatively peaceably with our Vietnamese, Lao, Thai, and Burmese neighbors, and were free from colonial government interference.

In the 1890's, French control was established over much of Indochina, including the area that is now Laos. About 1896, the Hmongs there became subject to the French colonial tax system, a system based not on income but on population: so much per family had to be paid, regardless of how much or how little wealth the family possessed. Many Hmong could not pay the tax, and village chiefs refused to try to collect it. Yang Dao writes:

> "In 1896, a new tax system, which the Hmong chiefs of Kaitong deemed not very democratic, led the chiefs to refuse to collect such burdensome taxes from their people, who had not even been told about them in advance. The reaction of the local Franco-Lao authorities was to send some Indochinese guards (guerrillas and militiamen) into the mountains around the Xieng Khouang plateau to intimidate the Hmong. The Hmong Kaitong ordered an attack on them at Ban Khang Phanieng, 20 kilometers east of Ban Ban. Word of this reached the higher French authorities, who at once ordered a cease-fire. It was immediately accepted by the Hmong who, anxious to live in peace, delegated Moua Kaitong to enter negotiations at Ban Ban with the commissioner of the Government of the French Republic and the Lao Chaomuong of Ban Ban." (Translated from Yang Dao's Les Hmongs du Laos Face au Développement.)

Between 1919 and 1921, the Hmongs in North Vietnam rose up in a similar, but much bloodier, revolt against the tax system. This was the "Madmen's War," as the French call it; Yang Dao says it was the vexations, tyranny, extortion, misappropriations of tax money, and injustices of every kind which drove the Hmongs to revolt, as the only way of making themselves understood.

Between 1921 and 1941, there were no major incidents, and Hmong life proceeded much as Dr. Barney's article on the following pages describes. We were politically controlled by the Lao and French, but developed economic strength through our cultivation of opium poppies. Opium production was a legal activity during the French colonial period, and we and the other hill tribes were the major cultivators, as opium poppies grow only at altitudes over 3,000 feet, i.e. only in the lands we occupied. Our economic strength, and our sense of cultural identity, caused the colonial government to view us with more care than they did the other minorities in Laos, according to most writers; in any event, Hmong clan leaders came to be called upon by the Laotian district or provincial authorities to report on the status and living conditions of their people, and to be given positions in local governments.

B. The Emergence of Hmong Leaders and the Guerrilla Army

Between 1941 and 1945, Laos was occupied by the Japanese. The Hmongs joined French and ethnic Lao forces against the Japanese, developing a reputation as guerrilla fighters. At this time, the Hmong leader Touby Lyfoung rose to power and prominence as the field commander of a Hmong militia that furnished intelligence and guerrilla support to the regular French/Lao army.

Between 1945 and 1953 when Laos became totally independent, different factions in the country struggled for control. Touby gained support and respect in one of these factions, the one that eventually became the Royal Lao Government. In a parallel manner, another Hmong leader Faydang Lor, became the foremost Hmong in the Lao Issara, the faction that favored Lao independence with no French involvement, and which later established ties with the Viet Minh in North Vietnam and became the Pathet Lao.

Touby, the first Hmong to be educated, was promoted to higher and higher positions within the Royal Lao Government, until in 1962 he was appointed to the cabinet position of Minister of Health. (He was the first member of a minority to hold such a high rank in the Lao government.) In his article "The Meo of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos," Barney says of Touby that:

> "He has consistently championed the Meo people. While holding positions of influence within the government administration, he has retained the respect, confidence and support of the Meo people. He is known throughout the whole area, and the Meo are quick to respond to requests by him." (p. 281)

Faydang Lor developed similar prestige and support among the Pathet Lao - he is now vice-chairman of the Pathet Lao Administrative Committee - and among his Hmong tribesmen.

Throughout the war in Laos, then, Hmongs have been on both the Royal Lao Government side, led by Touby, and the Pathet Lao side, led by Faydang.

As the war escalated and progressed in Laos, another Hmong emerged as leader. Vang Pao rose rapidly to the rank of major general in the Royal Lao Army, and in 1963 was appointed by a royal decree to command the Second Military Region of Laos, succeeding General Khamkhong. (This region was composed of the provinces of Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang, where 70 per cent of the Hmong population lived.)

The Laotian governor in each province was responsible for the civilian administration of his province only. In contrast, the Regional Military Commander had responsibility for controlling the military situation and providing security for the people living in all the provinces in the region. In 1961, the crucial city of Xieng Khouang was taken over by the Pathet Lao, forcing the governor of the province to retreat to Vientiane and reorganize, along with the governors of other northern provinces. Touby and his brothers Tou Geu and Tou Lia also moved to Vientiane, where they took part in the civil reorganization.

General Vang Pao, as military commander, could not retreat and re-establish his commanding headquarters in Vientiane, but stayed in Xieng Khouang province. By this time, there were thousands of displaced Hmongs clustered in areas aroung the villages of Long Tieng, Sam Thong, Muong Cha and Ban Xon; they had fled to these sites, as air and ground raids made life impossible in the villages in the mountains. Because of the lack of leadership among these relocated Hmongs (traditional Hmong political organization did not naturally extend to groups larger than the village, which typically was composed of one or two clans only), Vang Pao found it necessary to appoint civilian officials to lead them; as the governor of the province was in Vientiane, and communications were inadequate, Vang Pao had to act independently. None of the officials appointed by Vang Pao to the position of naikong (supervisor of a few district chiefs) or tasseng (supervisor of village chiefs) were recognized or paid by the Royal Lao Government, even after fifteen years of handling the civil administration within the provinces.

The officials appointed by Vang Pao performed two principal roles. The first was, of course, to establish immediate order and regulation among the relocated people. The second was to screen and recruit young men to serve in Vang Pao's "Armée Clandestine," or guerrilla army.

The guerrilla army was composed mostly of Hmongs and other minorities, and quickly became recognized as the most efficient fighting force in Laos. This was the army that was eventually supported and advised entirely by the Americans, specifically the CIA.

One of the factors in the success of the guerrilla army was that the minority groups - not only the Hmongs - were commanded by their own chiefs.

Vang Pao, recognizing that minority soldiers were at a disadvantage in the regular Lao army under Lao commanders, strongly urged the most prominent civilian leaders he had appointed, to join the guerrilla army. He carried out his promise to appoint them as commanders of groups they had previously recruited for the army. The result was that the soldiers were better understood, better treated, and happier; they were also more obedient and willing to fight, especially since the land for which they fought was needed by their families.

Although the guerrilla army was led in field operations by clan leaders who previously did not know one another, competition and jealousy did not occur much among them. All received straight orders from Vang Pao, who was most of the time present with them on the battlefield or circling above them in an airplane. Vang Pao's strong leadership, along with his political and military ability, made his guerrilla army by all accounts the best fighting force on our side of the war.

C. Effects of Relocation: 1955 - 1975

The long years of war between 1955 and 1975 severely disrupted the pattern of Hmong life that Dr. Barney describes in his article. The provinces in which most of the Hmongs lived either were occupied by the Pathet Lao, or passed back and forth between the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao. Military activity in these areas made it impossible for Hmong life in the mountain villages to continue with day-to-day security.

Thousands of families were forced to abandon their villages and flee to the areas I mentioned before, leaving their houses, possessions and livestock behind. This abrupt relocation into new regions and inhospitable climates was especially hard on old people and children, many of whom died. Raising crops was difficult in the new locations, as there were only the women and children to do the work, and as traditional Hmong agricultural techniques were based on there being relatively large amounts of land supporting relatively few people. Food supplies would be furnished by the Welfare Department (the supplies themselves came from the United States Agency for International Development) by air to a group of people whose village had been attacked and occupied by the enemy, forcing them to another location, but only for a year,

or until the following crop cycle had been completed. After the year, the supplies would stop, unless the people had in the meantime been attacked and forced to move again.

After ten years, one could see the virgin forest surrounding Long Tieng and Sam Thong shaved back miles and miles, by the 45,000 people living in the towns. The lack of arable land forced Hmong farmers to use the same piece of land for two or three or more consecutive years before allowing it to lie fallow. From 1969 to 1973 these fields were not planted, because both towns were frequently attacked by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese and all the civilians had been evacuated. But in 1974, the people came back, and the same slash-and-burn agriculture was continued.

Another aspect of relocation that was particularly difficult for the Hmongs was the necessity of living in temporary huts, which typically were covered with plastic and had walls made of rice bags. These huts were too small for a special place to be reserved for the veneration of ancestors.

A traditional Hmong house is divided into two parts: one for family activity and cooking, the other for sleeping, food storage, and the honoring of the household's protective spirits. Each house has two doors: one, which always faces east, has a single panel and is used for ordinary purposes; the other, which always faces the down side of the mountain, has two panels and is used for ceremonial purposes like funerals and marriage arrangements. It was very hard for Hmongs, who are so strongly and religiously ancestor-oriented, to live in huts which could not be constructed according to tradition.

The custom of polygamy, which was a widespread phenomenon among the Hmong, became even more widespread as the war in Laos progressed and Hmong men died in the fighting. Traditionally, Hmong leaders would take on more than one wife to maintain stable relationships and political support from rival clans. Or the younger brother of a dead man would take on his brother's widow as a second or third wife, so that the brother's children and property would remain in the household, and so that relationships with the widow's clan would be preserved. The war contributed to the spread of polygamy: there were many, many widows with children who needed support.

The massive relocation affected opium production severely. As I said before, opium grows well only at high altitudes; it is also a difficult crop

requiring constant attendance and care. After 1960, the enemy occupied most of the suitable poppy-growing land, and it was almost impossible to grow poppies to any great extent in the areas where the Hmongs were relocated.

In traditional Hmong society, opium had two uses. Its first was as a source of income. We used it to buy things like silver, fabric, cooking utensils, shoes and thread from Chinese and Lao opium dealers who came from downtown up into the hills to stay with us during the period when we collected latex from the poppies. We also used it to hire other ethnic groups to work for us. (Hmongs do not ordinarily hire other Hmongs to work for them; there is a strong tradition of helping one another, and as long as a household is able to help another household, it would like to do so without charging a fee. We feel that selling something to one's neighbor might destroy the relationship with him.)

The other use of opium in traditional Hmong society was as a painkiller, especially among the elderly. (The use of opium among healthy young people is considered disgraceful.) We rarely had medicine, and customarily used opium to ease the pain of infections, malaria, headaches, fevers, toothaches and intestinal problems.

In the areas where we relocated, the climate was too warm for poppies to grow well. Even if we were assured on planting seeds that we would still be there to harvest them, the poppies often wouldn't grow tall enough to give fruit. We used the opium that we did manage to collect for personal medicinal purposes.

While the war, and the relocation of Hmongs, destroyed much of our traditional way of life, it also had the effect of uprooting us from our isolation. It forced us to leave our scattered, independent villages and group together for security. Such grouping allowed for the development of education that was impossible when we were scattered.

Fifty years ago, no young Hmong went to school. Hmong children learned orally from their parents or from the wise men in the village. Girls learned how to do household tasks, and were taught the folk songs and poems they recited while dating boys at New Year festivals. Boys were taught skills such as hunting, and also learned the ceremonial songs, prayers and blessings which are part of weddings and funerals. They were also urged to participate in discussions about divorce, robberies, adulteries, and so on, so that when

the time came they could function wisely as members of clan councils, or as householders.

During the French colonial period, many Hmongs served in the French army, and were appointed as district chiefs. These Hmongs learned to speak French, so they could communicate with the French authorities in daily activities. Some learned to read and write in Lao, not through school but through friends or relatives. These Hmongs did not learn to read and write French because there was no one to teach them.

When the Americans came to Laos in the early 60's to train the Hmongs in the guerrilla army, many young Hmongs were anxious to learn English. It was amazing to see numbers of Hmong soldiers and officers speaking English fluently by the end of the decade, although only a small group of them could write it. They could communicate very well with American military advisers and pilot crews; they were even able to speak English well enough to guide high-speed fighter-bombers to enemy locations through radio communication.

It was in the relocation areas, though, that real progress in education was made. Wherever there was a large group of people, the Lao government wanted to build schools for the children. But the national and local governments, which had no money for education, could not provide school buildings or teachers for the children of the relocated Hmongs.

The United States Agency for International Development gave us these. Everywhere in the northern provinces, Hmong people provided free labor in cutting down trees and sawing them into panels and posts; USAID gave tin roofing sheets, chalk and blackboards, and helped to train teachers.

These schools were elementary schools, which taught reading and writing in Lao and primary French. To provide teachers for these schools, a six-months training program in pedagogy was established in 1964 by the Ministry of Education and coordinated by Moua Lia, the Hmong Primary School Inspector. The program was for young men and women who had graduated from elementary school. After they had completed the pedagogical training, they were sent to villages where school buildings and children were waiting.

Some Hmongs that had finished elementary education went to Vientiane to continue their schooling, either at French high schools or at other equivalent schools. Others went to the national École Supérieure de Pédagogie, which was a national teacher training school, where every student lived on

campus and received food, lodging and pocket money from the government. The Hmong young people that couldn't get in to these schools went to high schools which had been established in San Thong and Ban Nam Mo in the early sixties by a joint effort of the Ministry of Education and USAID.

According to Hmong soldiers who had been captured by the Pathet Lao and had escaped back to our side, there was a parallel development of primary school education for Hmong people among the Pathet Lao. It is doubtful whether many of them continued high school, or went abroad for university studies, because the Pathet Lao put more emphasis on Communist indoctrination than on higher or technical education. Confirmed sources say, however, that the children of Faydang and his brother Lo Foung (The Hmong leaders on the Pathet Lao side) have been sent to study at Hanoi Univeristy.

Another effect that the way had in bringing us more into the mainstream of modern life was in the development of trade. Traditionally, the Hmong household or village was self-sufficient. The head of the household made plans to grow and store enough rice to last the household, and enough corn to last the animals, for a year; this was necessary because the villages were usually too far from market centers to depend on them for replenishing the granaries. Actually, enough rice and corn to last fifteen months was planned. Once a new crop was harvested, the remainder of the old was set aside, to be shared from time to time with neighboring villages facing unexpected shortages, or to be used in a wedding feast or a funeral, which could last three days or more, and during which all the people who visited must be lodged and fed. (The guests for a wedding or funeral also typically brought rice to give to the host family, so that the family's stores were not depleted before the new crop was harvested.)

So every household was expected to be self-sufficient throughout the year. It was considered shameful for a household to have to ask for help to get through the year. In emergencies, however, there was a strong tradition of mutual help; except for cattle, pigs, horses and other things of great value, goods and favors were freely exchanged. For this reason, commerce was not developed to any extent among the Hmongs until the war years.

Starting in the early sixties, we were increasingly involved in fighting the war. Many of the men were drafted into the army to fight, and were correspondingly paid consistently. This source of money enabled us to start

small businesses, and for the first time we started trading with one another. (Before this source of cash, we used silver bars and coins for our transactions, which were limited to the sale of high-priced items like opium and cattle; we did not use cash for little things like a cup of coffee, a bowl of noodles, or a dozen eggs.) The military payroll brought paper money into our hands, and made it easier for us to set up small coffee stands and noodle stands along the roadsides of the relocation towns. These small stands developed into food shops.

As the war continued, and airplanes brought new commercial items into the area, more and more of us became traders, middlemen and brokers. Small shops selling fabric, shoes and ready-made clothing were established along with the food stands; a few merchants got together to start a small shopping center, at which the above items were sold as well as fresh meat and vegetables; Hmong owners of large herds of cattle made lots of money killing their animals and selling the meat to soldiers fighting in the field. For the majority of us, these enterprises replaced opium production as the major source of cash. Here is Yang Dao's description of a Hmong market:

> "When we went in October 1969, there were already three daily markets to the south of the Plain of Jars, which operated from morning til night. The biggest was the one in Long Tieng, which every day drew more than 2,000 people, around 600 of them sellers - men and women. Each day they slaughtered and sold 14 - 16 hogs, 8 - 10 water buffaloes, and 1 - 2 oxen." (Translated from Les Hmongs du Laos Face au Développement.)

Another type of business which rapidly developed among us (many westerners have commented that we are fascinated with, and undaunted by, machinery) was the taxi business. Once a dirt road had been constructed to link the three major relocation towns of Sam Thong, Long Tieng, and Muong Cha, many people turned the jeeps which they had gotten through military channels into taxis. Many Hmong families combined their resources to buy jeeps for the same business. In 1973, the road linking Long Tieng and Vientiane was built; the taxi service then expanded to transport passengers and goods to and from Vientiane and Luang Prabang and the relocation towns. Eighty percent of the taxis were owned by Hmongs.

Although small businesses cropped up everywhere among the Hmongs, there wasn't enough money in them alone to support the households; agriculture was

still necessary. So the older members of the household, who were unable to work in the fields, would preside over the shop; the able-bodied men would join the army to earn additional cash; and the remaining members of the family - the women and children - would work in the fields.

A few Hmongs specialized in raising only pigs and chickens. From a lack of technical skill, and from the high incidence of epidemics among the animals, these breeders found it difficult to get animals to market. In 1963, a new source of food was introduced into Hmong life in the shape of fish. Wherever there was a source of water, a fish pond would be dug, and stocked with carp, catfish or other kinds of fish. As fish are easier to care for than the domestic animals usually raised by the Hmongs, and as fish is a good substitute for meat, fish farming rapidly caught on.

D. The Fall of the Royal Lao Government: 1972 - 1975

A ceasefire agreement between the Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government was signed in Vientiane in February, 1972. This agreement paralyzed the activities of the Royal Lao Government troops, as the Pathet Lao troops advanced and occupied more territory.

A year later, in 1973, an agreement for a coalition government was signed, and a joint political council was formed, headed by the Pathet Lao leader Prince Souphanouvong. Under the terms of the agreement, the Pathet Lao were allowed to bring soldiers and policemen into Vientiane and Louang Prabang, the Royal Lao capital. The Pathet Lao also pushed their troops forward beyond the ceasefire line into our territories.

In April 1975, in parallel with events in Cambodia and Vietnam, the Pathet Lao consolidated their political and military power, and took the upper hand. There was no bloodshed, but instead "a genteel sort of collapse."

This collapse began early in May when the political and military strength of the Royal Lao Government ebbed swiftly in the face of Pathet Lao pressure. Two ministers resigned and went to Thailand. Another minister was killed by the Pathet Lao in Vientiane. The resignation of the defense minister, and his subsequent escape to Thailand, brought parallel resignations from several generals, including General Vang Pao.

Vang Pao was concerned with evacuating not only his own family, but also those of his aide-de-camp and staffers, and the Hmong population in general.

From May 10th to May 14th, he airlifted about 1,000 from the military base at Long Tieng to the Nam Phong camp in Thailand; after that, it was impossible for planes to land, as the enemy had surrounded the area. The remaining tens of thousands scattered, working their way overland through the jungle to Vientiane and across the Mekong River into Thailand.

Meanwhile in Vientiane the government was turned over to the Pathet Lao. In December, they proclaimed Laos the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Prince Souphanouvong was named President of the new republic, and Kaysone Phomviharn, a political and military strategist in the Pathet Lao, was named Prime Minister.

The 600 year-old monarchy that had ruled Laos was abolished. King Sisavang Vatthana, who had just abdicated the throne, was appointed as "supreme adviser" to the president, at the latter's request. Crown Prince Tiao Vongsavang was appointed to one of the 45 member people's supreme assembly, nine seats of which were allocated to supporters of the Royal Lao Government.

E. Fleeing into Thailand: 1975 -

According to U.S. State Department figures, there are now (August, 1978) about 55,000 Hmongs in the camps in Thailand. No one knows how many more drowned trying to swim across the Mekong, or how many died or were killed as they fled across Laos. Why should the Hmongs continue to escape Thailand, rather than live as citizens of the Lao People's Democratic Republic? It would seem that our cooperation with the Americans, and possibly our reputation as fighters, have made us a favorite target for North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao reprisals. Ogden Williams, a writer who recently visited the camps in Thailand, comments:

> "...the formal end of the war in 1975 did not halt the continuing decimation of the Hmong people. Communist mopping-up operations, which are still going on, are estimated by Vang Pao to have cost his people an additional 14,000 casualties from among the 90,000 Hmong who still resist subjugation. The question is often asked why the Hmong do not simply surrender, given the hopelessness of their situation. Hmong refugees now in Thailand consistently reply that surrender is not a real option for those Hmong who were associated with the Vang Pao forces and with the Americans. They insist that such people, branded as 'tools of the CIA' or "lackeys of American imperialism', are often shot out of hand, women and children included. In any case, confirmed information is available as to what happens to those surrendering Hmong who are not shot: they are taken away to 'seminar' -- the curious term used in Laos to describe the 're-education' process -- and then are sent to labor battalions from

> which, since 1975, only a few escapees have ever returned. In this situation the Hmong resisters feel that surrender amounts to death sentence one way or the other, so only two real choices remain -- to go on fighting with an ever-dwindling supply of arms and ammunition, or escape to Thailand." (From an article to be published in Washington, D.C.)

A policy of suppression of the pro-American Hmongs seems to have been put into effect immediately after the collapse of the Royal Lao Government. In early May of 1975, when I was still in Long Tieng, I picked up a pamphlet that had been scattered through the streets; I read it quickly and passed it on, but remember one of the predictions it made: "With the war, the Hmongs stand; without the war, Hmongs die."

According to the particulars of the policy, the fields and houses of any pro-American Hmong village were to be burned, the animals therein were to be slaughtered, and the people who lived there were to be chased down and killed.

The policy was first carried out on a group of about 3,000 Hmongs at Muong Gnam, about 150 miles east of Vientiane. According to the Lao pilot who led the air operation (and who is now a refugee in France), the people in the village had fled into the surrounding jungle by the time troops arrived to burn the village and kill the animals; so thousands of rounds of napalm-like rockets were fired to burn down the jungle in which the people were hiding.

There are many, many reports of similar reprisals. My wife's uncle, who spent three months with the Pathet Lao between May and September of 1975, personally told me about skirmishes between the Pathet Lao troops and a group of about 5,000 Hmongs who had hidden themselves in Phou Bia, the highest mountain in Laos. Mr. Williams' article reports that the same area was repeatedly attacked throughout the spring of 1978:

> "Overhead, Vietnamese MIG-21s and Laotian T-28s hit the Hmong villages with bombs, napalm and tear gas while artillery, both U.S. 105s and Soviet 130s, pounded Hmong positions manned by about 3,000 lightly armed tribesmen who were trying to protect 55,000 unarmed villagers....Survivors of the fighting say that the Hmong suffered more than 5,000 casualties in the Phu Bia fighting up to the end of May, and that 3,000 more have tried to flee to Thailand. Some 2,200 checked into Thai refugee camps between March 1 and May 1, and Thai police officials think that about 1,000 more have died during the long trek from Phu Bia to the Mekong River. Additional thousands who have retreated further into the mountains around Phu Bia face starvation.

Life for pro-American Hmongs in the towns is equally dangerous. Newspapers in Thailand, and foreign news services, report attacks on Hmong civilians by Pathet Lao troops. In June, 1975, for example, Pathet Lao soldiers threw explosives into various partitions of the market in Long Tieng, killing a man and two women; later in the month, a taxi in the Nam Yen River area was fired on, and one passenger was killed and five others wounded. And so on.

Not picked up by news services are the daily deaths and disappearances of one or two people in a Hmong community. This frequent loss of people we knew, loved, and cooperated with, and not knowing who will die or disappear tomorrow, has made life unbearably insecure, and has made escape to Thailand the only possible alternative.

Many householders swim along across the Mekong, intending to buy innertubes and then return across the river to pick up their families. But with the new Thai policy in which escapees are interned until their status as refugees is determined, these householders often can't get back to their families for several weeks - and by that time, often, their families have been killed.

Life is boring for us in the refugee camps. We are used to hard work, and in the camps there is nothing to do. All but a few of us are longing to be accepted by a third country, so we can start living and working again. Of the four countries - France, Australia, Canada and the United States - that have taken Hmong refugees, the United States is our first choice.

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THE HMONG OF NORTHERN LAOS

- G. Linwood Barney

[Dr. Barney, who is currently with the Alliance School of Theology and Missions in Nyack, New York, worked as a missionary among the Hmongs in Laos from 1950 to 1954. In addition to his missionary work with the Christian Missionary Alliance there, he collected the basic linguistic data upon which analyses of the sound system of Hmong--not to mention the alphabet for Hmong which is being used in the United States--have been based.

This article, which is basically the second chapter of Barney's MA thesis written at the University of Minnesota in 1957, describes Hmong life and culture as of the early '50s, before it was seriously disrupted by the war in Laos. The article has deliberately been left unupdated, to give you an unhampered picture of the life that the older Hmong refugees remember.]

A. The People and the Area

The Hmong people spread over the mountain areas of much of Southeast Asia. While estimates as to how many of them there are in an area vary widely, they seem to number about two and a half million in China, two hundred twenty thousand in North Vietnam, fifty thousand in Thailand, and fifty to five hundred thousand in Laos.

The Hmong are in the process of drifting southward. Since they are such vast numbers and yet have no territory of their own, they have been i a state of unrest for centuries. Henri Roux and Tran Van Chu, who have fo lowed the development of Hmong history in Indochina, state: "It seems, if one can judge by the transformation which they [the Hmong] have carried to the terrain during the forty years that I have followed them, that their first migrations do not go beyond 120 to 140 years. Those who were alread 'village elders', some of whom were over forty years of age, informed me that their fathers came from the extreme west of the Chinese province of 'Sze-Tchouan', from the eastern slopes of the Himalayas."[1] This would give credence to statements of the writer's Hmong friends that their ancestors first entered Kieng Khouang Province about a century ago.

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[1] Roux, Henri and Tran Van Chu, "Quelques Minorités Ethniques du Nord Indochine". France-Asie Vol. X (1954), p. 387.

Xieng Khouang Province is located in Northern Laos. The provincial capital which carries the same name is located about 193.5 degrees East of Greenwich and about 19 degrees north of the equator. The province is largely a plauteau of about 4,000 feet altitude surrounded by mountains which rise 1,000 to 5,000 feet above the plateau.

In the article quoted above, Roux and Tran also state that an estimated 30,000 Hmong lived in the eastern part of the Province of Xieng Khouang in 1920. It is not surprising, therefore, that a recent estimate (1953) placed the number of Hmong in the entire province as 45,000. This estimate was given in conversation by the Laotian governor.

In the Province of Xieng Khouang there is a general classification of the three major ethnic groups according to the topography:

Lao. The Lao live principally in river valleys, where they carry on irrigated wet rice agriculture, In addition to this staple crop they grow tobacco, straw for making thatched roofs, and diverse minor crops. They know some crafts, such as pottery-making and weaving, but very few of their number approach the status of specialists. The Lao live in elevated bamboo or wooden houses with thatched roofs. A very few live in better houses with plastered walls and tile roofs. Those are usually government officials and merchants.

The Lao are politically dominant in Laos, but maintain only a narrow margin of authority in Xieng Khouang. They are Buddhistic, and their strong adherence to their religion is a cohesive integrative force in their society. Most males spend some years in the "pagodas" in study.

Khmu. The Khmu, who are located in the foothills, carry on both wet rice farming and mountain rice horticulture. They live in houses which resemble those of the Lao in style but which are generally of bamboo, and less durable.

The Khmu are decidedly a political minority. They give little indication of attempting or desiring to attain political autonomy or political recognition. They have borrowed much from the Lao, but have not adopted Buddhism; they have a form of animism.

Hmong. The Hmongs are usually located high on the flanks of the mountains but just below the summit. Their culture is described in the rest of this article, but a few items are given at this point for comparison with the Lao and Khmu.

The Hmongs engage primarily in "slash and burn" agriculture, a term referring to the practice of clearing fields by cutting down the existent vegetation, then burning it to clear the area and provide fertilizer for the crops to be planted. The staple food of the Hmongs is dry mountain rice. Their homes of rough wooden boards are built on the ground. Corn and some vegetables are grown, but the Hmongs are particularly known for their cultivation of opium.

The Hmongs appear to have maintained a higher degree of social and political solidarity than the Khmu. In the material culture, the Hmongs have retained their distinctive dress, are reluctant to use the local currency, and persist in their traditional habitat. In the abstract and subjective realm, the Hmongs continue in an acute consciousness of Hmong society and culture, and reflect this consciousness in their rigid refusal to adopt freely elements of Lao culture.

Minor ethnic groups. With rare exceptions, the minor ethnic groups of the province are located in or near Xieng Khouang town. The town, with a population of about 1,500 people, serves as the administrative and commercial center for the province. Vietnamese artisans, Chinese traders, Indian cloth merchants, and representatives of Western cultures may be found in town. The western cultural influence is carried on by those who represent Western governments, serve as missionaries, operate the office of a commercial airline, and a few legionnaires who have settled in the area as ranchers or artisans.

Since this article deals with the Hmongs who live in the general proximity of Xieng Khouang town, the writer feels it worthwhile to give just a brief description of the area. At the time he was there, the most prominent building in the town was a huge palatial structure which served as the residence for the French Counselor. The Laotian governor, entitled "Chao Khoueng", lived in a large but less imposing home. These and a few other buildings were constructed of brick and tile. Such buildings belonged to officials, the French army, and a few local businessmen. Public buildings consisted of a school, a health clinic, office buildings for the government, and the daily market pavilion. Only one street ran through the town, with the above-mentioned buildings and eight small shops being located along its sides. Back of these more prominent buildings, the general population lived in scattered clusters of homesteads. Some such clusters might be limited to a single ethnic group, while others might be inhabited by sev-

eral groups. The dwellings were of any architecture and built of any combination of materials. One sensed that most of the inhabitants considered their residences to be only temporary.

Only the eighth month festival and the daily market served as integrating elements for the community in Xieng Khouang town. The school was limited in its enrollment, and the numerous religious groups precluded any cohesion along religious lines.

Before the arrival of the writer in this area, a road had been maintained from the coast at Vinh, Vietnam, to the border of Thailand. This road passed through Xieng Khouang. Because of difficulties of maintenance during the Communist activities, this road was closed. Travel in and out of the province had to be by plane. A small airline operated the sturdy DC3 planes during the dry season, and a smaller bush plane during the rainy season. Communications were made either by letter or by the public wireless. These services followed a semblance of regularity, but were never certain.

The rainy season served to isolate the area for the most part. Trails were slippery and dangerous, landslides were common, and air travel infrequent and dangerous. Often weeks would pass with no plane being able to land, but supplies and mail continued to come into the area by parachute. In sharp contrast, the dry season brought much activity in town and even to the remote parts of the province. Fields were being cleared to be burned off later. Trails, roads, bridges, and buildings were repaired, and merchants competed with one another to charter planes to bring in new stocks and to replenish their supplies. Prices would begin to drop as scarce items became plentiful and the rice was being harvested. Nevertheless, air freight charges made imported products two and three times higher than prices at the coast. People moved about, and the market became an exciting place with many new items appearing on the racks. Such was Xieng Khouang town around which lived the Hmong, Lao and Khmu in ever-widening arcs. Except for some small groups who had moved into temporary quarters close to town, the nearest Hmong village was an hour away by trail. Other villages which were five days away from Xieng Khouang still considered the town as their administrative and trading center.

Xieng Khouang was also the home of a very important Hmong personage named Touby Lyfoung. He is singled out at this point because of his unique position. Touby was recognized by the French colonial government, and now is recognized by the independent Laotian government as the representative

of the Hmong population. He is highly respected by both the government and his own Hmong society. Touby and the provincial governor are comparatively young men and maintain a close relationship on both personal and official levels.

Touby has championed the Hmong people. While holding a position of influence with the administration, he also commands the respect, confidence and support of the Hmong. He is known throughout the entire area, and the Hmongs are quick to respond to requests made by him.

Just how and when Touby attained this status is not known to the writer. He lives next to the Laotian governor, maintains a Hmong militia, and has been influential in having Hmong young people admitted to the public schools. During World War II and again during the Communist invasion of 1953-1954, he was given a field station beside the French and Laotian commanders, and through his Hmong militia furnished the government forces with almost uncanny intelligence and "guerrilla" support. Perhaps the latter is a factor in his present role. both the French-Laotian administration and the Hmong people hated the Japanese and Communist forces. Touby helped to integrate the two groups in driving out these invaders.

Today the government sees Touby as the representative of the Hmongs and the communicator between the administration and the Hmong people. The Hmong see Touby from the other side, as one who can influence the government -and communicate the "mind" of the Hmong to the government in an effective manner. Thus Touby appears to be the "connecting link" between the Laotian governmental organization and the Hmongs' indigenous political system which extends only to the district level. In effect, the various districts are now brought together in an office which they have not instituted but in which Touby has been installed, with power, by the government. He is in a position to bring pressure to bear on the government in behalf of the Hmongs, and likewise he is able to influence the Hmongs toward adherence to the government's programs. For the purposes of this article, the writer considers Touby as the paramount chief of the Hmongs in Xieng Khouang Province.

B. Hmong Social Organization

It appears that a patrilineal clan system not only dominates Hmong social organization but also serves as a primary integrating factor in Hmong culture as a whole. (A patrilineal clan system is one in which the society is divided into social groups, or clans, and a child, at birth, automatically becomes a

member of the clan his or her father belongs to. There are about twenty clans in all Hmong society.) The clan system functions in a cohesive manner to interrelate the social, political, economic, and religious aspects of Hmong culture.

The household is the basic unit in the Hmong social structure. The term "household" must be treated somewhat loosely, since it need not refer only to those who live in one house. Rather, it includes those persons who are under the authority of the householder. This means that a man's (householder's) household will consist of his wife or wives, his children, their wives and children, and possibly children in the next generation. In addition, the household may have a few relatives who are too feeble, either physically or mentally, to maintain normal responsibilities, and are dependent upon their relatives in this particular household.

Members of a household always carry their clan name in addition to their given names. The clan names generally find their origin in mythology. Complete strangers who are unable to discover any common ancestry but who have the same clan name consider each other to be "clan brothers" and consequently observe any formalities or behavior which are therefore incumbent on them.

Members of the same clan refer to one another in a common term, ku tyo kue ti, 'my youngers and olders'. In the household the members call each other by specific terms which designate the actual relationship of the individual to any other members of the household.[2] Thus even in everyday speech language serves to reinforce the traditional social structure in the minds of the Hmongs and implicitly indoctrinates the children in the same.

The numberical factor determines the actual domicile of the members of a household. One may observe as many as thirty-five people living under one roof. Frequently a married son may erect a house close to his father's home into which he moves after a child is born. This would not be considered a new household in the sense that the term is used in this paper.

The household as a unit serves to train the children. Although children are basically the responsibility of their immediate parents, it appears that everyone in the household takes a part in the informal education and training of a younger person. Corrections may be made by elders without incurring the bad will of the parents. One never observes corporal punishment of children, but deep respect and obedience to parents and elders are char-

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[2] For a list of particular terms, see the National Indochinese Clearinghouse's General Information Series #15, "The Hmong Language: Sentences, Phrases and Words."

acteristic of the Hmongs.

The Hmongs place high value on old age. In their conception, anyone of old age should have respect. This is reflected in the titles by which people of older generations are customarily addressed. These titles may be applied to younger people who have attained special status and deserve this sort of respect. The Hmongs train their young people to be self-reliant, and they admire a strong individualistic spirit. A stranger is impressed by the manners and poise that a young Hmong boy will demonstrate when he is alone. Among his elders, he is just one of a group in the presence of the respected elders.

Within a household a young man may disagree with his father only in the mildest terms, although he may oppose him strongly. As a man assumes family responsibilities, he may become increasingly self-assertive, but should always pay deference to his aging father. The women are recognized as possessing authority over the children, but in all family considerations the father's word is final authority. Yet should a father be the son of a householder, he is expected to acquiesce to the will of the householder.

In a Hmong village one may find from one to forty houses. The average village has about eight houses. A village may have but one household, in which case the householder has the status of authority. Often there may be several households in a village, in which case the eldest householder usually functions as village head. Furthermore, some large villages have more than one clan represented. In this latter case, some complications appear in the pattern. This will be more fully discussed under "Political Organization".

While a distinct unit in the social organization, the household operates in a sphere which is largely defined by the patrilinear clan system. This is illustrated in the concepts of marriage and the events leading to it.

The practice of exogamous marriage--marriage outside one's clan--is part of the customary law. In keeping with the principle that no one should marry a person of his own clan, a modified brother-sister taboo is observed between members of the opposite sex when they are of the same clan. Therefore, it is improper for a young man to manifest frivolity with a girl bearing his clan name.

After puberty a young man may attempt to gain the attention of a girl of his liking. Of course she must be from a different clan. Acquaintance is often made and developed at such events as the New Year Festival Season. A village usually invites villages of another clan to come for festivities,

which include games, contests, visiting, and feasting. The village is likely to receive a reciprocal invitation before the five-day period is ended.

At such times everyone comes in his or her best clothing, along with all the silver ornaments that can be accumulated. Girls proudly wear their colorful skirts as a display of their ability to sew and embroider. The young men demonstrate their prowess with horses and in contests. The playing of various musical instruments and the constant serenades add to the atmosphere of the occasion.

A handball game is always in order. Lines of young men form opposite lines of young women. Partners, each from different clan, stand facing each other. The girl produces a ball which she has made from wads of cloth. This is tossed back and forth with her partner. Serenading accompanies the tossing of the ball, and may continue for hours at a time. Traditionally, scores are kept of all dropped balls with each error being penalized, whereby the guilty party must discard one garment, as in strip poker. The writer never observed this practice in either Christian or non-Christian villages, but he noted other penalties being paid, such as gifts or "dates" for the evening. However, flirting would be a mild term to use for the boy-girl relationship during such festival seasons. The writer has been told by his Hmong friends that sex-play is quite free during the evening hours.[3]

If the relationship between a boy and a girl develops into a serious interest in each other, the boy finds excuses to visit the girl's village. Trial marriage, a normal practice among the Hmongs, is carried on with a semblance of disapproval by the girl's parents. It is customary for a girl who has attained puberty to sleep on a platform apart from the rest of the family. The young suitor may be expected to visit her during the night, but must come and go surreptitiously while the rest of the family is asleep. If the young girl responds favorably to the young man's advances, the romance should end in marriage.

However, marriage can only be realized after considerable maneuvering. The young man must secure a "go-between", usually an elder brother or paternal

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[3] Yang See comments: Although--as in any society--boys and girls always find ways to have sex, pre-marital sex-play is closely controlled and disliked by parents. Hmong custom has it that a virgin bride is a better asset to her husband, his household and his clan than one who is not a virgin. A girl who has lost her virginity will find it difficult to find a husband, unless she becomes a man's second or third wife. A girl who becomes pregnant before she marries is considered a disgrace to her family; she either commits suicide before the pregnancy shows, or her family marries her off to anyone who will have her, to preserve their reputation.

uncle, who will carry on all negotiations with the girl's parents concerning the young man's intentions. Several developments may occur.

The girl's parents may insist that the marriage be postponed. The girl might, for example, have an elder unmarried sister, and her marriage would be somewhat of an insult to that sister. (The boy's matchmakers might persist, and persuade the girl's parents to allow her to marry; this persuasion is accompanied by a pledge to pay a penalty, called ghue hau tyau or 'knee bandage', for the disrespect shown to the elder sister.) Or the girl's parents might consider her too valuable to part with on such short notice, and insist that she is needed at home for another year until the smaller children are older.

If a settlement cannot be reached and the young couple are extremely interested in becoming married, they may resort to an elopement. In such a case, settlements and adjustments must be made later and often involve a decision being made by a panel of neutrals.

If the mediary for the young man is successful in arranging a satisfactory amount of bride-wealth with the parents of the girl, and there are no other objections, marriage is guaranteed, and marriage formalities may be carried out without delay.

Once the marriage is approved, the boy's matchmakers give the bride-wealth to the girl's matchmakers for delivery to her parents. They the boy's delegation buys the biggest gelded pig in the village to feast the girl's household with. On the same day, the girl's representatives have to find a pig to match the size of the one killed by the boy's representatives. Once the boy's feast is over, the girl's feast is expected to be ready and served immediately afterward because the matchmakers of both sides have much of the marriage ceremony to perform during the two consecutive meals.

These formalities are the official announcement and legal evidence for the marriage of the young couple. At the same time, they serve to encourage close relationships between the two households involved, and to some measure between the two clans.

Marriage has very important effects on the girl's relationship with her parents. In theory, she leaves her father's family, household and clan (although she does not take on the name of her husband's clan); she becomes fully identified with the family of her husband. Should he die, she is responsible to the family of her husband. She has no demands what-

soever on her own father's family. In actual practice she may visit her home frequently, and even continue close relations with her family. After all, there may be other marriages being planned between the two clans or even between the two households. However, the wife never benefits from any inheritance in her original family.

Having more than one wife is a common custom among the Hmong, but is usually a result of the levirate, which is the practice whereby a man's widow automatically becomes the wife of his brother. One case in which a man married sisters was observed by the writer. Wealthy men may be able to have several wives. One of them is considered the more important "big wife", and directs the activities of the other wives in the matter of household duties. All wives live together under the same roof, and usually share the same sleeping area. They give no appearance of emotional complexes.

Divorce is possible, but not frequent. The Hmongs frown upon a young man who "runs around" promiscuously in the guise of trying to find a wife. Likewise, the Hmongs dislike divorce, and attempt in every way to avoid it. The writer was invited to sit on a panel which was to hear the complaints between a young wife and her husband. The panel consisted of the householder from the young man's household, the householder from the wife's former household, and the district chief in whose district the two households were located. The writer was invited to sit on the panel since the involved groups were Christians. Both the young wife and the young husband were permitted to voice their complaints and counter-complaints. Then the panel discussed the situation. The district chief finally summarized the discussion of the panel in strong terms of advice to the young couple. The advice was heeded, and divorce was avoided. This is the general procedure in such controversies, and it helps to maintain the stability of a marriage. It would seem that the patrilinear clan system of the Hmongs serves to solidify the marriage and at the same time uses marriage to integrate the clans. Good marital relationships are conducive to good clan relationships, which in turn are conducive to further marriages between the clans. The reciprocal element in the festivals, in the marriage feasts, and in finding marriage partners is a strong cohesive factor in inter-clan relationships. The patrilinear clan system must be considered most important to the solidarity of the Hmong social organization.

C. Hmong Political Organization

It is difficult to determine the full scope of the traditional Hmong political system by observing the people in Xieng Khouang Province. From the history of the Hmongs it appears that they possessed a strong and organized kingdom at some time before they entered Laos.

Today the Hmongs are under the authority of an independent Laotian government. Until recently, they were under the French in an "indirect rule" form of administration; this rule was preceded by Japanese occupation troops during World War II, and before that by the rigid "old colonial" French authority. In spite of this confusion at the summit of administration, the Hmongs appear only mildly disturbed, and continue with a local political system which seems close to indigenous forms.

The patrilinear clan system with its household unit is an integral factor in the Hmong system of authority. On the level of the household, the Hmongs' social and political systems find root in common soil. Thus in describing the household it seems that one is actually describing the foundations for both Hmong social organization and Hmong political structure.

Political authority appears to involve the Hmong concept of respect for elders. A child is responsible to his father. If he is not a householder, a father is responsible for his family to the householder, who is usually his father, grandfather, or an elder brother. The householder apparently holds an ascribed status of authority which extends over the members of his household. In the smaller father-mother-children family units which make up the household, the parents must answer to the householder for the behavior of their children. This does not prevent any older person from assisting in the training of any child, as has already been indicated.

The householder has the final authority in matters of the household. Such authority is not of a dictatorial nature, but reflects the householder's considered opinion after discussion with the adult men under his authority. It appears that that degree of authority which the householder holds over his children and his children's children may vary with the proximity of these offspring. The writer illustrates with three examples.

(1) Zon Tsho with his wife and child left the village of his father, and settled several days away in the Xieng Khouang town area. He did not appear to incur any disapproval from the Hmongs in either area. They considered that he had established a new household.

(2) Ba Si and his wife lived with his parents in their house. His father, the householder, was addicted to opium, and contributed a minimum of effort in providing for the household. This may have been a factor in Ba Si's defection from traditional Hmong behavior. Much to his father's disapproval, he frequently procured odd jobs for cash income instead of assisting his father in the household's rice fields. Although the writer feels that the father was quite incapable of adequately administering his household, the general attitude of the Hmongs was one of criticism toward Ba Si for his lack of respect and deference to his father. A few criticisms were leveled toward his father for not having properly trained Ba Si to conform to the Hmong pattern of authority.

(3) Ntrua, an adolescent, worked for the writer. He lived in Xieng Khouang town, which was about four hours from his home. His father came periodically to receive Ntrua's wages. In turn he gave his son some money for necessary purchases, such as rice and other items for his livelihood. Thus, although he was some distance from his father, Ntrua was clearly under the authority of the father. This was probably due to several factors: the proximity of the town, his youth, and the temporary situation in his employment.

However, it would seem that the authority of the householder is not absolute, but may be modified under certain conditions. Ntrua submitted to his father's will without any question or sign or reluctance. Ba Si incurred public disfavor because of his lack of parental respect. Zon Tsho was considered to be following proper procedure in establishing a new household. He was not without a superior authority, since he was still subject to the district chief and also was under the sanctions of his clan.

A village chief is a householder. In a village of one household, the selection of the chief is automatic. In a village of more than one household, the eldest householder is customarily the village chief. The writer has observed exceptions to this, but cannot explain such unless it would be in recognition of military honors which the individual has received from the government.

On the village level this chief functions between households in much the same manner as the householder does between members of a household. The village has a good measure of autonomy. Therefore the village chief is more than just a representative of the village; he is an honored leader on the local scene. He holds a place of prestige at the local festivals, is

the judge in inter-household disputes, and is expected to administer to the good of the community. He is responsible for the maintenance of the trails, for opening new ones, and for moving operations should the entire village move to a new location. He has authority in emergencies. During the Communist occupation, he was responsible for the evacuation of his village and its defense. Even as the householder in the household, so the chief in his village is not a dictator but with the counsel of other householders he serves to make the community a cooperative unit. Occasionally some family may feel abused, and move to take up residence in another area, thus forming a new household. This means some hardship until such time as they are able to gain an adequate subsistence in the new location.

When a village consists of more than one clan, problems of harmony are more common. The writer is unaware as to just how these villages developed in this manner. Apparently the government recognizes one chief for such a village, while the local population generally considers two men to be chiefs. The eldest householder of each clan is recognized by his clansmen as their village chief. This is an ascribed status from the Hmong viewpoint. In most local affairs there appears to be harmony, but difficulty arises and tensions develop when outside or upper level authority attempts to enforce certain measures through only one of the chiefs. Strong feelings may result in the loss of cooperation between the clans. The writer observed one case which resulted in the minority clan group moving to a new site only five minutes away. Subsequently, the two groups regained friendly relationships, but remained apart.

Above the rank of village chief is a district chief. He may have as many as forty villages under his supervision. It may be at this point that the resemblance with the traditional political organization of the Hmongs begins to break down. The district chief is appointed by the "paramount chief", Touby, in conjunction with the Laotian governor of the province. It seems that Touby attempts to conform to a semblance of what may have been the former Hmong pattern in that the district chief is usually a village chief and is selected from the clan which is predominant in the district. The district chief is primarily the communicator between the village and the high office. The district chief is often called to settle disputes between villages or members of different villages. For example, he sat on the panel to listen to the case of the young married couple mentioned above. The husband and wife had been from different villages, and the parents of

each desired the district chief to attend.

The Hmongs are desirous of settling disputes at the lowest level of authority. Thus, inter-family disputes would be settled within the household, inter-household within the village, inter-village disputes within the district, and inter-district within the sphere of Touby's authority. This does not mean that such disputes had to be between mass groups, but might be between individuals from within these unit categories. Seldom do disputes between Hmongs go beyond Touby. In cases involving the Hmongs with members of another ethnic group, Touby served as counsel for the Hmongs. He has proved himself most influential in this respect before both the Laotian and French officials.

The economic returns of the political offices are significant but not sufficient to support fully the man and his family. The village chief receives gifts from the villagers, but these do not appear as payment to any overt obligation but rather to assist him in the hospitality he is expected to show to all travelers. Both the village chief and the district chief are supposed to receive a small commission on all taxes and fees collected. Fees may be gathered for marriage and birth certificates. Fees and taxes have been exacted of the Hmongs only in recent years. Their cooperation in this program is increasing.

The writer considers the village to be the extent in which the indigenous Hmong political system operates today. The district level seems to be a transition zone which might be likened to a bridge which is anchored on one side in the traditional Hmong system on the village level, with the other side being firmly entrenched in the national government complex. It seems that Touby is a major factor in the maintenance of this relationship. It is important to observe that the houshold is not seriously affected in this situation, and even as it continues to function as the basic unit in the Hmong social structure, so it also serves as a strong integrative force in the Hmong political organization.

A brief word may be given to indicate the Laotian plan of adopting a policy to incorporate all ethnic groups into their political system. Some years back, any individual residing in Laos who could not give sufficient evidence that he was a citizen of another nation was made a citizen of Laos. He was made responsible for taxes, military service, and conformance to Laotian law. Enforcement of these rulings, with all the implications in-

volved, has been gradually developed. The various ethnic groups are gradually being introduced to the political system both as it concerns their responsibilities and as it concerns their privileges. Taxes are collected by cash payment or contributed labor. The Hmongs send representatives to the national assembly, as do the other ethnic groups.

As yet one is not sure whether this is an honest attempt to have these peoples fully represented in the federal government or whether it is a stopgap measure to stem the apparent nationalistic tendencies of the Hmongs. The honor and prestige given to Touby and other Hmong leaders, the educational facilities being offered to the Hmongs on an increasing scale, and the other benefits now available would indicate the former motive. A firm ruling against the Hmongs' having their language in written form might indicate the latter motive. At any rate, the political system appears to be in a process of change, and the influence of French domination is decreasing. None of this seems to have seriously affected the indigenous Hmong form of authority on the local village level.

D. Hmong Economy

The role of the household in the Hmong social and political structure is reflected and illustrated in the Hmong economy. The division of labor is clearly related to the social and political patterns. Subsistence, land tenure, property right, inheritance, and the economic factors relating to marriage and religious rites are all tied into the socio-political aspects of the household.

Rice is the basic food staple for the Hmong population in Xieng Khouang. Its production requires the full cooperation of the entire household, and is supervised by the householder. A regular annual cycle is followed in this rice economy.

Planting is carried out at the beginning of the rainy season in late April and May. The work may be done by any members of the family. During the rainy season, some cultivation is done, but generally the rice stalks must fight their own battle with the weeds.

In late October, at the close of the rainy season, the grain ripens quickly and everyone joins in the harvest. Temporary shelters are erected on the field, since it must be watched until the harvest is completed, and the rice is safely stored in the village. Hand sickles are used in cutting the rice stalks which are gathered into large stacks right on the field.

This is done in urgent haste for fear of losing the over-ripened grain.

The stalks are then flailed and the grain is stored in huge carrying baskets. This work is the main concern of the women. Transportation of the rice to the village may be by human carrier or pack horse. A rice field may be as far as a full day's travel from the village. While the flailing is being done by the women, the men prepare granaries to receive the rice. Some are built on strong platforms outside the house, while smaller ones may be erected inside the dwelling. These granaries are usually made of tightly woven bamboo.

During this entire harvesting process every member of the household is involved in the cooperative effort. Feeble elders watch the infants and prepare meals for everyone. Young boys may be seen leading the pack horses laden with grain. Young girls assist their sex in flailing the rice stalks, gathering rice into the baskets, and performing other chores.

Assured that the harvesting process can be successfully completed, a selected few of the stronger men may actually commence the task of clearing new ground for next year's planting. In the "slash and burn" technique for clearing the field, the heavy vegetation and trees are cut down early in the dry season to give the sun as much time as possible to carry out the drying process before burning time in March. When the rice harvest is complete, the men are joined by others of the household who methodically go through the site of the new field and cut down all vegetation.

By March the area should be dry enough to burn and is set afire. After the field has cooled, the entire family sets about clearning the debris, allowing only boulders and tree stumps to remain. The soil is loosened as much as possible after the first rainy days, followed by the planting of the rice, and thus the cycle is continued. Ideally, new ground is cleared each year, and some poorer soil is permitted to lie fallow. A field may be used for three or four successive years.

Potatoes, corn, squash, and other minor food crops are grown by the Hmongs, but play a small part in the economy. Potatoes are sometimes sold to Westerners, but are most commonly used as fertilizer in the opium field. Corn and squash are used to feed the livestock unless the rice harvest is very slight.

Another important but non-edible crop is the opium poppy. Every household has its opium field. The men erect a woven bamboo fence around a plot of ground near their village. As just mentioned, potatoes are used as ferti-

lizer, and the soil must be carefully prepared. The opium harvest requires much skill and care. Most of the entire process is carried on by the women.

Opium is the main source of cash revenue for the Hmongs. In fact, it often serves as a medium of exchange. The first missionaries in the area were quite shocked to find carefully wrapped "globs" of opium in the offering at church. Embree writes:

> "Supposedly the production of opium is controlled by the French authorities, but both they and others are of the opinion that much illicit trade in opium does not take place. Some of this doubtless goes to Siam in payment for manufactured goods from England and the United States."[4]

At the time of this writer's field work, Xieng Khouang was the only province in all of Indochina where the government officially permitted the cultivation of the opium poppy. The French administrator told the writer that an estimated 60 per cent of the men in Xieng Khouang Province were addicted to opium. Its great worth and economy of transport make opium of unique value to the Hmongs. One kilo of opium is worth one-half ton of rice. It is used as barter in the Xieng Khouang daily market as well as in district markets and in the villages. Obviously opium plays a major role in the Hmong economy.

Flax is probably less important today than in early Hmong history. Chinese merchants trade yard goods for opium. Yet one still sees the women spinning the flax on their thighs and storing it in large balls. It is later woven into long lengths of cloth, and through a mixture of techniques, including cire perdu and dyes, becomes designed materials for the typical Hmong skirt. The hem of the skirt is beautifully embroidered in cross-stitch with silk threads. Pleats are sewn in by hand and a beautiful skirt is formed, being approximately twenty feet wide at the hem.

Livestock plays a very important part in the Hmong economy. Poultry, goats, pigs, buffalo, and cattle are found in most villages. They are used for meat in the household and as cash income at the market. The Hmongs are considered adept in their care of animals. This is confirmed by comparing their livestock with those of other ethnic groups including the European ranchers.

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[4] Embree, John. "A Vist to Laos, French Indochina". Journal of the Washington Academy of Science, Vol. 39 (1949), p. 155.

Little milk is produced by the cattle. Goat's milk is occasionally used, but goats are more commonly raised for sacrifice. Poultry are used for meat, and serve as the most common sacrifice in cases of sickness. Eggs are eaten only occasionally. Other meat-supplying animals may be used for sacrifice if severe illness requires it. A cow would be the last and most expensive sacrifice.

For the Hmongs, a horse serves very practical purposes both for traveling and for transport of material. They are well groomed, fed, and splendidly trained. Hmong horses demonstrate amazing sure-footedness and endurance on the steep and rugged trails of Laos. They will generally bring a better price than the average oriental horse.

Every household has at least one horse, and more often will possess several. The horse appears to have prestige value in addition to economic worth. The horse, owned by the household, is under the supervision of the householder. It seems that a member may consider the horse to be his, but in actuality he means that it is his to use and that he is responsible for its care.

The writer has previously mentioned two young married men, Zon Tsho and Ba Si. Both of these young men purchased horses. Hmong public opinion again was evident and was consistent with its previous expression. It was perfectly legitimate for Zon Tsho to own a horse, since he had established a new household a long distance from his parents. Ba Si was again out of order in considering his purchased horse as his own, since it belonged to his father, the householder, in accordance with recognized Hmong political, economic and social sanctions.

The Hmong house is made entirely of wood. Beams, boards and shingles are hewn out by axe. Inside the structure, a sleeping platform is erected, and may or may not be enclosed. There are no windows, but there are plenty of cracks and also two doors. Two fireplaces are found in every house. One is for cooking, and the other forms a center for all social gatherings. One area of the wall space, which faces the main door and is double-paneled, is reserved for a shrine or altar for the spirits, or tlan.

Every household has at least one rice pounder, a rather clumsy but effective device for knocking the hulls off the rice. One corn mill of rotating stone grinders is also the common property of a household. This particular item is not found among other ethnic groups in Laos.

Tools, saddles, cross-bows, Hmong-made flintlock guns, musical instruments,

and the various items needed for food preparation make up most of the material goods which one finds in all Hmong households. Wealth is tied up in livestock, opium, and silver. The Hmongs use solid silver in bars for trade and in other pieces for ornaments. If one travels a day from Xieng Khouang, he will find it difficult to do any buying with the Laotian paper currency. He should carry old silver coins issued before World War II.

In addition to the implication of division of labor which has been given above, it should be noted that the women are responsible for the preparation and serving of food. This includes the pounding or grinding of the grain, the winnowing, and the cooking. The women carry all the water.

Young men have one special function in food preparation. They pour steamed sticky rice into wooden troughs during festivals, and beat this into a pulp. Then they make patties of it, wrap the patties in banana leaves, and roast them to make what the Hmongs call their greatest delicacy.

Firewood is brought in by the boys, although the older men assist them from time to time in felling trees and cutting the wood into lengths for carrying.

The men build and repair buildings and fences. They care for the livestock. Clearing the fields is mainly their responsibility as well. Specialists serve as silversmiths and gunsmiths. However, this does not provide them with enough income to refrain from the regular work cycle in production of the rice staple. They work during their spare time to produce orders for their customers, and are usually provided with materials and paid for their labor.

Land is owned and used by the ones who have cleared it. Usually a Hmong household will have three or four rice fields and one to three opium fields in production. This varies with the size of household, number of families, wives, and children. A married son may start work on a field of his own, if he can carry on without upsetting the distribution of labor in the household interests.

Married daughters receive no inheritance from their father's estate. Household property is under the supervision of the householder. Upon his death, the property is really not inherited, since it still belongs to the household. The property now comes under the supervision of the new householder, who may be a younger brother or the eldest son of the deceased.

In the event of the death of a husband in the household, the wife has the use of the materials which he had "possessed". Unless she is quite

elderly, she is very apt to become the second wife of her husband's brother. Upon her death, the material she had from her first husband is re-distributed within the household.

In marriage, the bride-wealth is supposedly the responsibility of the groom's parents. The entire household may assist them in procuring the needed amount, but this help is apparently left to the discretion of the householder. It may be conditioned by the latter's evaluation of the marriage and also the manner in which the young man has participated in the task of providing for the household.[5]

In the actual marriage rites the practice of reciprocal feasts and gifts by the two households are always involved. Such procedures are carried out by the household as a whole, and the entire unit therefore carries the economic obligations which are involved. This all serves to integrate the young man more firmly into his household, to make firmer ties between the households and the clans, and to legalize the marriage.

In religious rites, taxes, and funeral expenses, the entire household again carries the financial responsibilities as a unit. Thus again, in the economic sphere, one observes the integral part played by the household in relating this aspect of Hmong life to the social and political spheres. In actuality it is impossible to segregate clearly one aspect from either of the others, because they are so tightly interwoven on the household level.

E. Hmong Folklore and Beliefs

Hmong folklore which carries the history of the Hmongs is of a vocabulary little used in the current vernacular. Either the forms have passed out of use or reflect contact wtih the Chinese. It is given orally in couplet form, and can be recited for days by the few old men who still remember it. Their history contains certain ancestral heroes who are supposed to have taken on pseudo-spirit qualities and continue to aid the Hmongs today. Certain other ancestral spirits became jealous, and continue today their attempts to thwart the benevolent spirits or tlan, as the Hmongs call these spirit phenomena.

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[5] Yang See comments: Customarily, unmarried brothers and sons of the householder cannot accumulate wealth and lay it aside for their future personal use. They work and earn wealth for the household, which the householder keeps in a single account. The householder, however, is responsible for laying the foundation for marriages in his household, and for seeing to it that a man and his bride have what they need to start and continue a successful marriage.

The folklore gives accounts of a first creation, a universal flood with two survivors in a barrel, and a great series of conflicts and exploits leading to the clan "fathers". Apparently these are vaguely identified with the present clans.

(The writer's actual knowledge of Hmong folklore is limited. Few Hmongs actually knew the entire folklore. Pages of text were collected, but the evacuation of Xieng Khouang took place before hardly any translation of the text had been made. The extremely rare vocabulary defies translation now.)

Many stories are attributed to the mythology. They usually revolve around two brothers, one of whom is rather stupid but strong, and the other who is a cunning trickster. These two are usually involved in conflict with malevolent tlan who are intent on harming the Hmongs.

In just what manner one might relate the folklore to present-day beliefs and Hmong culture is difficult to determine. It appears that the Hmong clan system is tied in with the folklore both as far as origin is concerned and as far as internal organization is concerned. It seems that the relationships between personages in the folklore pattern are consistent with the household and clan complex described in this article.

Present-day beliefs among the Hmong are vague and inconsistent concerning life after death and the spirit realm. There is a concept that after death the soul remains in the house and inhabits the next child of the family. Some deny this concept, and believe that the soul goes to dwell in the land of the tlan. At the time of death, the dead person is traditionally given a seat of honor in his house, where he remains several days before burial. Feasts are conducted in his honor, the txi txhia tso, or funeral leader, has special rites with the tlan world in behalf of the deceased, and many dirges are chanted. These are normally sung by young men who learned them from the txi txhia tso. After the proper period of time, the body is buried outside the village.

A dead person is laid in the house for an average of three days. But prominent elders in the village, or village or district chiefs, will remain longer in the house, because more oxen and buffalos will be killed in their honor to feast the people who come to see them from afar. The burial day for a prominent person is a holiday for the entire village; everyone therein puts on his best clothes, and all go out to enjoy the last day on earth of a beloved man.

Hmongs believe that for thirteen days after the burial, the soul of the deceased is changing from a human state to a spiritual or divine state. This lapse of time is called i chu, and after it the soul is invited to join the ancestral divinity residing in the household. A year later, at the anniversary of the death, the soul of the deceased is officially established as a protective divinity among other ancestral souls in a special ceremony and feast called cho pli, or 'soul release'.

From time to time, a Hmong household will observe a kind of interdict or taboo time, during which the doors are shut, and no one is allowed to leave or enter until the time is over. This interdict may last one or several days. A friend who has traveled days to visit the household must find lodging elsewhere until the taboo period is over. Friends of the writer reported that they never saw or heard anything during this period, but knew that they should all be gathered in one house.

The head of a household will decide to observe this interdict for any of a number of reasons. A household member might have seen a bad sign, such as a snake entering the house, a dog climbing on the roof of a house, or a snake swallowing another snake; or two or three members of the household might have fallen sick at the same time. These are signs that mean that the household is surrounded by sickness and death can occur to a household member if he or she goes outside and catches the sickness. The householder, in consultation with the txi neng or shaman, decides to keep members of his family inside the house for a period of one, two or three days depending on how he is advised by the txi neng. In case of an epidemic which could spread to all the people or domestic animals in a village, the entire village might observe the interdict. Signs barring visitors, strangers and merchants from entering the village will be posted on all paths outside the village entrance.

The Hmongs are animistic. They have numerous tlan or spirits which are classified according to their functions. There are the tlan of the water, of fertility, of the trail, of the hearth, of the sleeping quarters, of the rice field, for hunting, and numerous other categories.

The txi neng in a Hmong village has a very important role. He has certain powers which help to define his responsibilities. These powers are recognized by the Hmong to have been given to the txi neng by the tlan. This power, possibly a tlan which dwells in him, enables the txi neng to cure the sick, determine the meaning of signs and dreams, give security to

a new infant, predict the future through ordeals, and in general communicate between the living Hmong and the tlan world.

The txi neng can be male or female. He or she is accorded status by the Hmongs on the basis of his or her relationship to the tlan. However, the txi neng can achieve status as well if he carries influence in the tlan world. His influence is reflected in his ability to cure the sick, to drive away malevolent tlan, and to influence the tlan world for the welfare of Hmong society. The txi neng is responsible for making all fetishes, erecting altars in the homes, and placing shrines along the trail and at the rice fields. His role does not compete with that of the householder or chief, since he operates in a different sphere of life, although it might appear that their areas of influence overlap.

In cases of illness, the txi neng is called. The Hmong consider that the soul (pli) is attempting to leave the body of the sick person. If the person becomes unconscious, it has departed and will depart for good unless it can be brought back. The txi neng arrives, and orders the area around the altar cleared. The body of the sick person is brought and laid before the altar.

With various "sacred" gongs and rattles, the txi neng attempts to call kindly tlan for help. Having achieved this, he launches into a chant which develops into garbled sounds when "real communication" is being made. Meanwhile, members of the household kill a sacrifice at the doorway. (A sacrifice may be anything from a chicken to a buffalo or cow. It may be determined by the wealth of the household, the prestige of the sick person, and so on. Usually a chicken is first offered, and larger sacrifices will follow if necessary.) The blood of the sacrifice is poured on a paper doll that represents the sick person. This is then buried in the doorway. At the end of the ceremony, which may take many hours, the txi neng casts the split horn of a cow on the ground. The manner in which the two pieces fall determines whether the person will recover. This sort of oracle is also used for other situations.

In time of epidemics, the txi neng erects a type of doorway on each trail leading into the village. Such frames are commonly encountered on the trail.

The Hmong do not consider a txi neng categorically to pass on his role to his or her child, since the position is not inherited but requires appointment and enablement by the tlan. This apointment is attested to by

effective power in pragmatic tests. A village of any size may have more than one txi neng. Some are recognized as having special powers for certain situations. Small fees are paid for services of the txi neng, but he must subsidize this small income with a considerable amount of rice horticulture.

The Hmongs appear to be keenly aware of the unusual. The tlan may cause good and bad fortune. Therefore it is little wonder with the increasing political, social, and economic pressures that the Hmong endeavors to employ the spirit realm to afford some control on his environment. A fallen tree, a washout, a strange rock formation, lightning striking a tree, and many other phenomena require interpretation by the txi neng with any subsequent taboos which he may consider essential. One seldom travels any distance on a trail without observing areas where great numbers of sticks are standing in the ground. This part of the trail is thought to possess some strange tlan, as a murder, accident, or illness overtook someone there. Placing the sticks in the ground by the traveler indicates his recognition of a tlan presence, and guarantees the individual safe passage. Likewise, a drop or increase in the price of opium, rice, and taxes are accredited to good or bad relations with the tlan as the case may be.

Thus, with the Hmong, there is a constant awareness of his associations with the tlan and of the requirements and duties which are incumbent upon him if he is to cultivate their good will and secure their aid. In keeping with this concept, the Hmong are continually showing deference to the tlan by innumerable taboos and ceremonies. Examples of such are the fetishes placed on the body following birth, blessings sought at marriage, before trail journeys or hunting trips, and solicitation of tlan help during the crop seasons.

Individuals vary in their attitudes toward the tlan. Some appear to be deeply confident of the effectiveness of the varied observances. Others appear to hold to it because of tradition and hope it may do some good. It would appear to this writer that the Hmongs whom he observed may have been involved in much more detailed attempts to control the tlan world than would be indicated by reports given by Bernatzik and other investigators he refers to. At the same time, it appears that the Xieng Khouang Hmong are quite disunited in any pattern of beliefs.

Before leaving the religious aspect of Hmong beliefs, there should be mention of the Hmong concept of a supreme being whom they call Fua Tai. The writer does not believe that the nature of his work in Laos has influenced his understanding of this concept. In Hmong thinking, Fua Tai

created all things and originally had close communication with man. He became distraught with man, and left him to the "spirit" world. Fua Tai still exists, but is no longer concerned with the affairs of man.

F. The Hmong Life Cycle

With the Hmongs, life is conceived of as one long series of events with no great traumatic experiences leading from one stage to another. Birth and death are considered the major crises, while marriage is an important event that assures the continuance of Hmong society and culture. The household functions throughout the life of the Hmongs, and serves as the mold in which life is lived.

The Hmong father is recognized for the part he plays in causing the conception of a child. At birth, he assist the wife during the delivery, and receives the child. He cuts the cord, and immediately bathes the baby in warm water. The writer has observed a father dashing water over a newborn infant as he squatted in the doorway of his house on a frosty morning. The writer does not know of any significance which the Hmong place on the father's assisting with the delivery, and never observed any taboos on the part of the father. It is evident, however, that the Hmongs expect the father to be present for the delivery. On one occasion a catechist asked to be excused from school until his child was born. He was asked when he expected the child, and replied that it would depend on the sex of the baby. If the baby is a girl, the Hmongs claim that it takes nine months for maturity; ten months are required for a baby boy.

Shortly after birth of a child, a txi neng is summoned to place fetishes on the child's neck and limbs to encourage the soul to stay in the body. Also, these fetishes may guard against a malevolent tlan which might attempt to claim the life of the infant. This fear is emphasized by the fact that Hmong children, who are often given numbers instead of names, are never named number one. The Hmongs state that the tlan might not look for number two until he had found number one.

During infancy the child is cared for by mother, father, and any of the other children. The mother will generally remain in confinement for only a few days unless she is from a wealthy household. Children are allowed to nurse as long as the mother has milk. There is no traumatic weaning experience for the Hmong child. It is common to observe a mother nursing a child in her arms, and simultaneously nursing another who stands beside her.

There appears to be little toilet training, and only after adolescence has begun does the Hmong go beyond the village limits to perform his toilet.

During childhood the children commence to share in work responsibility. Both boys and girls may follow their mother about and assist her. Boys may follow their father about as he performs his tasks. Primarily, the children serve as baby sitters and also gather firewood. They observe the duties which will later fall to them because of their sex, and make attempts to perform these tasks. They get their first introduction to riding horses, shooting the crossbow, and hunting.

Childhood is a time for recreation, also. Games of tag and hide-and-seek are common. Every boy has his spin top, which is used for a game in which the older boys and even the men may engage to amuse themselves. These tops, wound about by strong cord, are set spinning at a high speed. Experts can place them on a precise spot from some distance. In the contests, one person attempts to dislodge and replace his opponent's spinning top with his own.

No specific rites are performed at puberty. The Hmong girls may start wearing white scarves over their heads to indicate that they have attained puberty. These scarves are often used to cover half the face as an indication of real or affected shyness.

Adolescence is conceptually a time of preparing for marriage. Both sexes become proficient in discharging the work responsibilities that Hmong society demands of them. Recreation takes on new dimensions. Horse racing is common, and sexual adventures become a frequent activity.

Young couples interested in marriage usually practice trial marriage, as has already been described. Although this is spoken of in a joking manner by the Hmongs, they consider it an essential phase in the life cycle and necessary for securing a suitable partner. Except at the time of festivals, little affection is shown between the sexes in public, although there is little doubt that such relationships persist between them.

As the young people gain maturity and become increasingly aware of their desire for marriage, each will seek more earnestly to prove his or her readiness for marriage by demonstrating the perfection of his or her labors. The young man begins to lay aside a reserve for the bride-wealth, while the young lady makes additional skirts and secures a silver neckpiece. The process of contracting a marriage has been discussed above, and does not require repetition here.

Adulthood is considered to begin with marriage. The prime objective in adulthood is to carry on the process of the cycle of life, i.e. raising children and training them in the traditions of Hmong society and culture. To be considered as good parents the adults must not only provide for their family but must successfully rear their children in the Hmong way of life. Life is meaningful to the adult Hmong, not so much in his preparation for old age and death, but as he sees the development of his descendents in the Hmong tradition. He finds that life has special satisfaction if he can observe this continuum in the life of his own grandchildren.

Old people are highly respected by all the people in the village. Those who have attained success in the matters of the previous paragraph enjoy the highest prestige and deference. The writer has often observed the great care and attention which an entire village shows to elderly people, and the measure of pride displayed when he was introduced to these aged Hmongs.

Death closes the life cycle for the Hmong. Adjustments are difficult for the bereaved. Traditionally, the txi txhia tso is called to perform all that is essential to ensure the deceased a safe journey into the next realm. The deceased continues to live in the memories of the bereaved. Dreams are considered desirable, since they are means by which the departed spirit communicates with the living.

From birth to death the individual is not only made aware of his responsibility to the household, but he also learns to reckon on his household for security and status in the social, political, economic and religious spheres of Hmong culture.

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