

Hmong Visual, Oral, and Social Design:
Innovation within a Frame of the Familiar

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A Thesis

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Abstract
of

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In highland China, Laos, and Thailand, Hmong social organization has been described in prior research as one based on patrilineal kinship and shifting cultivation, and characterized by cross-cousin marriage, virilocal residence, and strong patriarchy. The social pattern is influenced by available land, applicable and available agricultural methods, methods for obtaining cash and entering a market economy, the proximity of kin, ties with affinal groups, the whims of “fortune,” the actions of spirits and the well-being of ancestors. For the Hmong in the United States are added the constraints of vocational opportunity, family size, increased interaction between members of a patriline and non-Hmong, and increased understanding of Hmong in a wider social context.

Past research on Hmong social organization places primacy on the environment and obligatory kinship relationships in the overall pattern of social groups. The work of Mary Douglas suggests that a group’s social patterns are revealed in the patterns that characterize the various forms of cultural expression. Nicholas Tapp and Patricia Symonds have contributed to the understanding of the role of oral history, ritual details, identity maintenance, and gender differences in social design over time and space.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine four cultural expressions (stitchery, sung poetry, elaborate expressions, and folktales) for an underlying structural pattern that links them in “Hmongness,” and to

look at the process by which innovation is accommodated. The pattern and process will then be compared to the Hmong social organization as described in the literature, and as found in one Hmong *caj ceg* (patriline) and *pab pawg* (collaborative group) as conceptualized by one of its members.

The conclusion is that visual and oral expressions can be characterized as successive frames, expressed in oppositions or contrasts, surrounding a meaningful “kernel” at the center. The compositions are innovative juxtapositions of familiar core elements that are identifiably “Hmong.” Likewise, social groups can be visualized frames within frames, surrounding a kernel group—a family, at its most elemental, the daughter-in-law and her husband—surrounded by successive frames of identity. The social group is not defined by external factors, but is an active and creative manipulation by individuals acting within groups. The design emerges from core elements (kinship, marriage, chance encounter, and reciprocal obligation), creating a design that is recognizably “Hmong” and will bring reputation and renown to the group. In general, the creation of textile design is the work of women, while the creation of social designs is the work of men, and both create sung poetry.

Committee Chair’s Signature of Approval_____

Preface

When I first began to work with Lue eleven years ago, he would occasionally tell me a proverb and give me an explanation of its meaning. These ventures into the world of the Hmong hooked me into learning more, but he would never tell me more than one or two. After a while, it occurred to me that he would tell me a new proverb after I had helped him with the proof-reading of a college paper, or provided one of his many relatives with assistance, and so on. Finally, I understood that within an oral society, knowledge is valuable; bits of knowledge can be exchanged like money or given like gifts. Obviously, if someone gave me a dollar, it would be unthinkable to ask for fifty more.

For this thesis, he has given me thousands of “dollars.” He has given me his story, his experiences, the names of the people who are important to him. In the world of reciprocal obligation, I owe him a lot. And, because he is part of a group—some *kwv tij* (patrilineal kin), some *neej tsa* (affines), some *phooj ywg* (friends)—he has given me other people’s knowledge as well; I now owe them all.

I hope that the outline of his story, an incredible tale of innovation within the frame of the familiar, will someday become a best-seller, written by him.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

The refugee Hmong and their offspring have presented Americans with opportunities as well as challenges. Although the very first Hmong¹ to set foot on American shores was Vang Pao, who came to visit the White House in 1968 (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:198), and the next four were post-secondary students studying here in 1971 (Yang Dao 1993:99), significant immigration did not begin until 1975-76. During the past eighteen years, since the fall of Laos to the communist Pathet Lao in May 1975, more than 80,000 Hmong have entered the United States as political refugees or their accompanying relatives. The current population is known to be at least 90,082 (U.S. Census 1990), although it is thought to be between 100,000 and 120,000, considering the margin of error on the census tabulation by ethnicity, and the arrival of post-1990 refugees.

The first Hmong—like the Iu-Mien, Khmu, Lahu, and T'in from Laos, and some of the Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, and Chinese from North Vietnam—would never have qualified to enter the United States through regular immigration channels. Without prior education, they lacked basic literacy skills, and as shifting cultivators, they had no experience with wage labor. Immigration law carries a requirement that immigrants be able to “read and understand” a language and demonstrate that they will not become a burden to society (Hutchinson 1981:414, 468), although close relatives are exempt from this qualification, as are those “fleeing religious persecution.” When the definition of persecution was expanded to include political and racial status in the 1960s, the exemption from exclusion followed. For these reasons, the Hmong and other rural groups did not have to meet the literacy or the “burden” requirement when they came to the United States.

In addition to the costs associated with supporting the housing, medical and food needs of the Hmong, the cultural distance between American and Hmong norms requires an understanding of relativism that is not automatic to the ordinary person of either group.

Understanding the lifeways of newcomers has not been important in American society until recently, and there are few resources or models for a populace that tolerates and accepts diversity. Newcomers who had prior experience in mixed urban settings, or who were familiar with Western-style education, religion, and logic (Cole and Scribner 1974; Logan 1986; Luria 1976; Scribner and Cole 1981; Slobin 1971) underwent tremendous acculturative pressures, but the underlying cognitive processes and world-view were similar enough to mainstream Eurocentric America that they fit in fairly quickly. Their successful assimilation did not require much understanding from mainstream Americans. Although Americans have had prior opportunity to understand groups of people similar to the Hmong in world-view, conceptual systems, and cognitive processing (the more than 1,000 Native American groups), little has been learned or practiced; problems that stemmed from not understanding others were resolved when the Native Americans chose either assimilation or separation.

The significant presence in the United States of the Hmong and a climate that accepts increased diversity offers researchers new opportunities for understanding the maintenance of ethnic identity in the face of cultural contact. The teacher and educational researcher is confronted with a living laboratory for examining the relationships between crosscultural cognition, rural isolation, and literacy. Anthropologists and linguists have an unprecedented opportunity for interacting with and studying cultural and linguistic groups who have moved in just down the street. The rigor of participant observation, as Malinowski modeled in the Trobriand Islands, has given way to commuter participation with exotic and little-known groups. Outside of “survivor anthropology” practiced with Native Americans, anthropologists have not until now had such an opportunity to look at social structure and the maintenance of identity in the face of cultural contact.

While the Hmong have presented researchers in all social disciplines with a rich field of human research, the information collected, analyzed, and catalogued has as its foundation a few early travelogues, missionary

journals, and government-sponsored feasibility studies. The studies completed since the arrival of Hmong in the United States often incorporate whole-cloth the observations and conclusions of a handful of French, German, American, and Thai men (Bernatzik 1970; Chindarsi 1976; Cooper 1984; Geddes 1976; Graham 1954; Heimbach 1969; Lebar, Hickey and Musgrave 1964; Lemoine 1972; Mottin 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982; Pollard 1919; Savina 1930). When Americans began interacting with Hmong in the late 1970s and early 1980s, few of the people could speak for themselves, and even fewer had read the accounts put forward by non-Hmong. The problem of institutionalized misinformation from which this group of people at the threshold of literacy now learns about themselves has significant impact on Hmong identity, and underlines the role of literacy in identity maintenance and transmission.

Serious research about the Hmong has been limited to ecological studies that are at least in part government-supported feasibility studies (Crooker 1986; Cooper 1984; Geddes 1976; Lee 1981; Mischung 1986), linguistic work (Fuller 1985; Jarkey 1991; Lyman 1979; Mottin 1978; Ratliff 1992; Smalley 1990), and descriptive ethnographies with an emphasis on cataloguing the natural world, material culture, or describing world-view (Bernatzik 1970; Chindarsi 1976; Lemoine 1972, Tapp 1989). Recent studies in the United States have focused on education and acculturative stress (Findlay 1992; Goldstein 1985; Griffin 1990; Hvitfeldt 1982; Jacobs 1987; Janssens 1987; Jewell 1992; Lemieux 1985; Lopez-Romano 1991; Miller 1991; Miles 1990; Ostergren 1991; Sonsalla 1984; Strouse 1985; Vang 1992; Walker 1989), history (Hamilton-Merritt 1993; Vang, Yang and Smalley 1990; Yang Dao and Blake 1991), health (Bliatout 1983; Cumming 1988), and anthropology (Donnelly 1989; Dunnigan 1982; Scott 1986; Symonds 1991; Weinstein-Shr 1986). The works most relevant to this thesis are Kunstadter (1980-1990), Mottin (1979, 1980), Radley (1986), Symonds (1991), and Tapp (1989), the latter two of which offer insightful descriptions of Hmong identity and social patterns.

The bulk of Hmong research has been driven by economic questions, and the conclusions reached have reflected an economic bias in

describing the social structure. William Geddes found that Hmong decide where to live and with whom to associate based on the availability of land for cultivation of the opium poppy, and secondarily, for rice. Robert Cooper found that social groups are changing in response to resource scarcity, and as groups become tied to geography social classes will develop, as they did in other societies based on permanent rice cultivation. Jacques Lemoine and Nicholas Tapp, both Chinese scholars, found a Chinese influence in Hmong social structure, although Tapp suggests that the cultural borrowing may have occurred in the opposite direction, in antiquity. These studies suggest that the defining elements of the composition of Hmong social groups are kinship, economics, and political alliance.

Hmong social structure has been described by most researchers as one characterized by patrilineal descent groups (clans), virilocal or patrilocal residence, a preference for matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, and strongly patriarchal groups. Sublineages of the Hmong clans—the *caj ceg*² ('root branch')³ groups—are the significant economic and social groups, but the functional groups are the *pab pawg* ('group' 'pile'). In Hmong terms, a specific patriline or lineage group is the *caj ceg* or *pab pawg*, terms used interchangeably to refer to those recognized as "brothers" or "fathers" or "grandfathers," and so on. For the purpose of this thesis, even though it is probably more restrictive than Hmong usage, the *caj ceg* is the patriline with a known ancestor, and the *pab pawg* is a collaborative group, the "actual" as opposed to the "potential." The etymology of *pab* deserves investigation: it means both 'help' (*koj pab kuv*, "you help me") and 'group' (*ib pab ib pawg*, "one group"). Did the meaning "help" evolve from the term for a group of people who can expect help from one another, and who are obligated to help in return, or did the term for "group" come from the verb? Although *pab pawg* in its widest sense would include those who have been "adopted" into the patriline by virtue of hypothesized ancestral kinship relationship, as shown by ritual similarities, in a narrow sense I will use *pab pawg* to mean the collaborative group of kin and non-kin alike.

Hmong themselves point out that the elaborate textile crafts, sung

poetry, and the music of the *qeej* (“reed pipe”) are symbolic of Hmong identity throughout time. These three forms of expression have parallels in cultures with whom the Hmong have had contact over the centuries (Proschan 1989), but is there something in either the expressions themselves or the process by which they are created that communicates “Hmongness”? Is it possible to look at cultural expressions to see the patterns that characterize the social organization of the Hmong? From a functionalist point of view, enduring cultural practices are kept in place by the role they play in important areas of life. Why then would elaborate cultural expressions with little economic function or social result remain in place despite cultural changes over time and place?

Anthropologist Mary Douglas, in the introduction to *Implicit Meanings* (1975:8), observes that in the many styles of communication employed by a group of people, the social patterns of relationship that bind the individuals in that society are restated again and again.

Since the whole social process is too large and unwieldy for dissection, there are great problems of method in trying to study how related channels of communication agree so well that they tend to deliver the same message each in its different way.

Other researchers have looked at cultural expressions to find social meaning. Weiner (1976, 1988, 1992) is a recent anthropologist who looks at women’s work—the crafting of skirt bundles among the Trobrianders—to discover the inner workings of social structure. She says (1988:164-5):

Thus the objects in Trobriand exchange are more than economic in value and more than sociological in content. The meanings embedded in these objects direct our attention to the existential values that are both the animating armature and the fuel of all social activity.

Tapp (1989) argues that the adaptability and flexibility of the living oral tradition facilitates the ability of a conceptual system to absorb and accommodate change.

Relatively little research exists to support the notion that gender role definition extends beyond what is seen on the surface. Cooper (1984) is

only one of many who conclude that in the Hmong world, women are exploited in service of the men. While this may signal the authors' level of concern about gender inequity, it represents a fairly shallow knowledge of the Hmong social world. Patricia Symonds, in her dissertation on cosmology, birth, death and gender as they apply to the White Hmong of northern Thailand, places women and men in equally important, but different and collateral, roles; she states that there is a gender distinction between the physical and social worlds (1991:186):

It is males then who are responsible for creating the social individual. ... While women produce the body of the child it is the men who are actually the reproducers of social life in Hmong society.

In reference to the observers' role, Symonds (1991:272⁴) says:

If anthropologists limit analyses solely to what they themselves see rather than to what the informants see they will conclude that the Hmong patriline is carried on by males. However, if the perceptions of the Hmong are attended to, they will see that the patriline is continued by women as well.

Are the social linkages determined by marriage, childbirth and death, or is there room for active manipulation of the social structure? Are the processes of creating design—the women textiles, the men social groups—each a reflection of the other? Are the structures of *paj ntaub* ('flower cloth,' "stitchery"), the *kwv txhiaj* ("sung poetry"), language (*txwv lus*, 'pair word,' "elaborate expression"⁵), and folktales related to one another? Is it possible to see a general pattern of social relationships and social processes by looking at the different kinds of cultural expression? I will argue that men create the close and collaborative social worlds as surely as women stitch together triangles and bands of color to create recognizably Hmong *paj ntaub*. Men craft their pattern of social ties from the raw materials of kinship, marriage, chance encounter, and reciprocal obligation just as the women create intricate patterns with needle and thread, and as both men and women construct elaborate oral expressive forms.

In highland China, Laos, and Thailand, Hmong social design is limited by the constraints of available land, applicable and available

agricultural methods, strategies for obtaining cash and entering the market economy, the physical nearness of kinsmen, ties with affinal groups, whims of “fortune,” and the actions of the spirits and the ancestors. For Hmong in the United States are added the constraints of vocational opportunity, family size, increased interaction between members of a patriline and non-Hmong, and increased understanding of Hmong in a wider context.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine one Hmong *caj ceg* and the actual composition of a *pab pawg* as conceptualized by one of its members, and to compare its design and the process by which it is created to the continuing themes in textile and oral expressions. This study will offer an alternative to the past explanatory pieces that conclude that economics and kinship, particularly when focused on one gender, are prime determinants of social decisions, chiefly with whom one decides to establish collaborative, reciprocal relationships.

Although kinship trees and charts of economic benefit are more conducive to replicability, people’s behavior, both individual and cultural, is inadequately explained without reference to the unobservable factors of pattern, belief, creativity, and identity. This kind of explanation, however, takes us into speculation and creative license with observable facts, more the venue of art than science. Geertz (1973) has laid the groundwork for a kind of description (rather than explanation) that recalls the blind men describing an elephant: only by touching the elephant in various parts, moving from trunk to tail, ear to eye, tusk to toenail can the blind man put forth a representation approaching reality, a description that others might recognize as salient.

The thesis is divided into three major sections: background; cultural expressions; and the case study of a single patriline. In the first section, I summarize prior anthropological research related to social pattern (structure, organization), and then touch upon domains of psychology that relate culture to behavioral choices. I summarize what is known about the Hmong throughout history, drawing upon other researchers’ interpretations of original Chinese documents and history. I then look at the most important research conducted on the Hmong of Laos and

Thailand in recent years, identifying factors that restrict their conclusions. The Hmong social pattern is described, using the notion of oppositions that are salient in self-identification, drawing upon data collected by earlier researchers as well as contemporary examples. In the second section, I look at four kinds of cultural expression to see if there is an underlying structural pattern that links them together in “Hmongness”: stitchery, sung poetry, elaborate expressions, and folktales. In the final section, I look at the family history of my Hmong friend and colleague, identifying potential and actual members of his patriline (*caj ceg*) and collaborative group (*pab pawg*). My goal is to describe “the Hmong” in a way that increases others’ understanding, to illustrate Douglas’ assertion that cultural expressions “deliver the same message” over and over, and to offer an explanatory description of the processes underlying the creation and maintenance of Hmong social pattern.

Chapter 2.

Background

Social Pattern in the Literature

Anthropologists attempt to discover, describe and explain the universal features of human social groups and the differences between groups, particularly the behaviors and knowledge that are acquired during socialization, known collectively as “culture.” British anthropologists look to the social group for answers to the questions *why*, while the Americans look to the individual within a historical context. Boundaries have been erected between closely related disciplines, in this case anthropology and psychology, and boundary maintenance prevents constructive approaches that take an “inside—outside” tack when searching for answers to the broad questions: “Why does she do that?” “Why do they do that?” As a “soft” science, anthropological research founders when dealing with *why*, but excels in describing *how*. On the other hand, psychology can deal with tightly scientific questions, but faces the procedural wall when considering the synergistic effects of interaction between individuals comprising a group.

Anthropologists of this century look at the total social and historical context to understand social groups, and rely on the idea that social facts exist because they have a either a biologically-based or structurally-based function in the overall social order. Past efforts to find the universal features of humanity have given way to the search for differences that exist between human groups. Initiated by Boas, who placed cultural elements and cultural change in the context of each group’s history and interactions with others around them, descriptive ethnographers stress understanding rather than explanation. Separated from the scientific rigor of hypothesis-testing in laboratory-like settings, the nature of understanding a culture is subject to the creativity of those proposing answers to the big *whys* of human behavior. Anthropology becomes *art* when words are chosen to effect understanding in others—a verbal

description of a mental construction of reality. The question is then whose version of understanding is correct, to the extent that a poem or a painting can be correct.

Supporting this artful approach is recent research from a distant discipline—computer engineering—that suggests a shift in the way the mind works, whether the mind of the observer or the minds of those being studied. Neural networks differ from existing computers in the way in which electrical pulses are sent from one “switch” to another. Rather than sending electrical information from one switch to another in a straight line, neural networks consist of switches (artificial neurons) that have multiple inputs, and send their information on to the next artificial neurons after a certain threshold is reached. It is no longer a choice between two alternatives, *on* or *off*, the elemental components of a binary language. Existing computers process a series of instructions in a flow chart, from a beginning through branching paths, to an end. Computers accomplish these sequential tasks to produce correct answers much faster than the human brain. However, in optimization problems—how to recognize a person’s face after a haircut, how to recognize a voice with a cold, how to find the “best fit” between alternatives—existing computers fare very poorly. Yet an infant can recognize a change in its mother’s face, and can recognize a voice despite a raspy cold. The neural network promises information processing that begins with a series of representative examples, and establishes generalizations (prototypes), from which responses to novel situations are not only possible, but remarkably accurate.

Those involved with neural networks come from varied disciplines: math, computer engineering, physics, philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology. They call themselves “connectionists” (Allman 1989), and propose a new approach to inquiry. This “connectionist” scientific approach relies on producing answers from a number of points of view, processing a variety of representative examples, from which generalizations emerge, to be refined through additional experience. This expands the concept of the linguistic model to a “generalization-producing” model, of which language acquisition is but one specific

instance. In developing a description of Hmong social pattern and its processes, this study will draw “representative examples” from anthropology, psychology, art, ethnomusicology, linguistics, and oral history to arrive at generalizations.

Ethnography as a discipline can provide description, as Malinowski demonstrated, or can propose explanatory theories, as Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Levi-Strauss, and Douglas, among others, have done. Fortes (1978:2-3) talked about the ethnographic fieldwork task he shared with Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, and Gluckman:

What we all had in common was a kit of somewhat miscellaneous conceptual tools, an array of descriptive tools, an array of descriptive models with which to match our observations, some guidelines of method, and the basic premise that a people’s customs and beliefs, economic and social institutions, all hang together in a systematic way and fit in with their forms of social organization.

He also said (1978:6) that fieldworkers should assume

a people’s culture works for them, serves ends, meets needs, pursues goals—describe it how we please—and fieldwork in this operational framework was the key ...

He called for using powers of observation, along with cognitive and affective approaches to understanding the social reality that exists apart from the observer. The key paradigm for understanding what he observed was that of complementary or polar opposition—a paradigm drawn from structural linguistics.

Contrast plays a prominent role in the way that observers conceptualize what they observe and the way in which peoples characterize their own social worlds. Lévi-Strauss (1963:206-31) who analyzed the social world with linguistic tools, searched for oppositions, or contrasts, especially in myth. Pan-human oppositions—man: woman, endogamy: exogamy, elder: younger, heaven: earth, high: low, right: left, good: evil, light: dark, hot: cold, culture: nature—are laid out, and then mediated or resolved by a third element. The logical relationships between the opposing elements of myth mirror the relationships in the social structure of the group.

Peacock (1986:31), in discussing the fundamental culture-nature opposition, draws upon earlier work by Ortner (1974) when he states that, broadly speaking, men stand in a parallel analogous relationship to women: “Women have traditionally been linked to birth, nurturance and food-gathering; men, to governance, priesthood, and high technology...” After pondering what Lévi-Strauss might make of odd juxtapositions, Peacock concluded:

Such queries, idle and incidental in some ways, nevertheless lead toward perception of pattern, and show that the structuralist approach and the nature-culture distinction are at least suggestive at many levels.

Not the least difficult is the task of defining terms and articulating overlapping domains. Social structure has as many definitions as researchers, but common to all definitions is the idea of enduring relationships between the elements of a social group. Radcliffe-Brown (1958:177) defined social structure as

the continuing arrangement of persons in relationships defined or controlled by institutions, i.e., socially established norms or patterns of behaviors.

Evans-Pritchard described social structure as the configuration of stable groups. To Leach, social structure is a set of ideal norms or rules. To Lévi-Strauss social structures are models. Role, lineage, caste, marriage preferences, inheritance rules, taboos, and so on are some of the elements of social systems and family, clan, church, school, and factory are some of its institutions. Fortes (in Kuper 1983:96) commented that Radcliffe-Brown and his American students tend to regard the kinship system as equivalent to social structure in tribal societies.

Firth (1950:39-40) drew a distinction between social structure and social organization, and emphasized the role of decision and choice in accounting for change.

Continuity is expressed in the social structure, the sets of relations which make for firmness of expectation At the same time there must be room for variance and for the explanation of variance.

This is found in social organization, the systemic ordering of social relations by acts of choice and decision ... Structural forms set a precedent and

provide a limitation to the range of alternatives possible—the arc within seemingly free choice is exercisable is often very small. But it is the possibility of alternatives that makes for variability. A person chooses, consciously or unconsciously which course he will follow. And his decision will affect the future structural alignment. In the aspect of social structure is to be found the continuity principle of society; in the aspect of organization is to be found the variation or change principle ...

If this is applied to the Hmong social world, the “structure” is the *caj ceg* (patriline), and “organization” is the collaborative group (*pab pawg*).

In addition to decision and choice, the other primary force of social change is contact with other cultures. The Hmong who are now in the United States carry a culture and social organization that have been in contact with five major cultures over time: the Chinese, the Lao, the Thai, the French, and the American. While the social structure has changed—absorbing and adapting some innovations, disregarding others—there are enduring features that are recognizably Hmong.

Although anthropology, which questions why human groups appear and function as they do, generally opposes psychology, which questions human behavior from an individual and internal point of view, the two fields approach one another when attempting to link culture to human behavior (group characteristics) or human nature (universal characteristics). The explanatory force varies: Malinowski stressed biology, or basic needs; Steward and Harris ecology, or man’s relationship to the material world; Sapir and Benedict psychology, or the ways in which the brain deciphers experience to produce “mind”; Douglas the human “impulse to order”; and Levi-Strauss the human impulse to communicate with others. Theorists look for patterns in the behavior of those who make up a social group, and the search for pattern most often involves asking how one part is related to another, and why each element endures over time. Functionalism, as some conceive of it, links patterns of behavior to more-or-less universal human concerns: caring for and enculturating the young, finding mates and establishing economic units, eking survival from the environment, forming alliances and fending off enemies, and exerting some sort of human control over uncontrollable natural phenomena. Functionalism may account for why cultural

institutions are maintained, but does little to explain how they come to be.

To be explanatory any theory must account for motivation: *why* do humans socialize, symbolize, create gods and marriage rules? Identity, a construct associated with psychologists Erikson and Rogers, among others, has application on a social scale. Goodenough, Spradley, Wallace, and Redfield have used identity in one form or another to explain why humans create social forms and meanings as they do. While psychologists tend to use striving for positive psychological adjustment as a motivating force, anthropologists tend to relate identity to social interaction and interpretation of events (world-view). Wallace and Redfield are associated with this latter position; Redfield (1953:86) speaks of world view as the “structure of things as man is aware of them” and Wallace (1970) relates identity to cultural features like values, themes, and ethos. “Identity” may, in fact, be a credible Western homology to what the Hmong, among others, refer to as “soul.”

Honigmann (1973:1202), in a summary of culture and behavior, states that five differentiating assumptions underlie a serious consideration of identity as the motivating factor that links behavior to culture: (1) identity affects belief and behavior; (2) self-awareness of identity is necessary for social interaction; (3) identity is formed and maintained through interaction with others; (4) there is at some level a human “need” for what Rogers calls “positive regard,” Goldschmidt calls “positive affect,” and what is colloquially known as “positive feedback”; (5) this need causes striving for confirmation from others about identity (Wallace 1970). Honigmann goes on to outline four types of identity (self, social, public, and personal) and suggests that it is the attempt to achieve some sort of congruence between them that drives social behavior.

Kinship provides one sort of identity, more salient for social behavior in some societies than others. Descent theorists (Fortes, Goody, and Gluckman, among others) conceive of kinship as a fairly rigid structure that provides for “corporate” groups—sets of kin who cooperate for mutual benefit. Alliance theorists (Lévi-Strauss, Needham, Dumont, and Leach, among others) see exchange and reciprocity as the forces that

attach kin to one another in social groups, and suggest that all relationships, kin or non-kin, are based on reciprocity. In Hmong social organization, both kinship and alliance are salient factors.

Network analysis is an approach that looks at the connections between people, whether forged by kinship, exchange, political aggrandizement, ecological adaptation, or psychological processes (Mitchell, Wolf, Boissevain, among others). As a method, network analysis tends to obscure the fundamental idea that in personal networks individuals are actively involved in creating patterns of relationship by making decisions about with whom and under what conditions to interact with others. It is this idea that has application to this thesis—links between the individuals in a social pattern—whether kin-like, hostile, cooperative, manipulative, competitive—are raw material for the creation of social designs just as fabric, wax and thread are raw materials for textile design; rhymes, metaphors, and innuendo the raw materials for the creation of sung poetry; and familiar episodes and idioms the raw materials for folktales.

Hmong History in the Literature

Hmong social patterns and cultural expressions of today resonate with echoes from the past. Without a written record of their history, it is difficult to identify the source of recurring core elements in textiles, sung poetry, expressive language, folktales, and social organization. In this section, the history of the Hmong, as it appears in the written record, is reviewed, and commonly appearing elements are placed into their historical context.

The earliest accounts of the Hmong were written by missionaries and travelers in China (Betts 1900; Bridgman 1859; Broumton 1881; Canton Miscellanie 1831; Clarke 1904, 1911; deBeauclair 1956, 1960; Graham 1954; Graves 1869; Lockhart 1861; Pollard 1919; Savina 1930). Tapp (1989) and Radley (1986) provide clear and detailed accounts of the Hmong in China, drawing upon the work of Chinese historians Lin Yeuh-hwa (1940,

1944) and Reuy Yih-Fu (1960).

A fundamental issue when examining historical records is the terminology used by the authors. The group Miao comprised 5,030,000⁶ individuals in 1982 China (Wu 1991:1–2), but only 44% of that population is Hmong (see Table 1). Hu and Bain (1991:16) note that *Miao* is generally translated by Westerners as *Hmong*, but it is necessary to trace out linguistic affiliations between the various Miao subgroups and the Hmong of Laos and Thailand to estimate figures for the “Chinese Hmong.”

Strecker (1987:4–5), in an article about the linguistic categorization of Miao-Yao language groups, says:

... Hmongic, also called Miao, is extremely diverse ... In Chinese publications, Hmongic languages are subdivided into *mia!o yu&* (‘Miao language’) and *bu~nu&yu&* (‘Bunu language’), according to whether the speakers are culturally Hmong (*mia!ozu!*) or Yao (*ya!ozu!*).

Thus, some subgroups (Pu-Nu, Nu-Nu, Pu-No, Nao Klao, Nu Mhou, Pa-Hng, Hm-Nai, Kiong Nai, and Yu-Nuo) speak a Hmongic language, but culturally are Yao.

Strecker identifies *Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan* group (*mia!oyu& chua@ngia!ndia@n cî~fa@ngya!n*) as the dialect group to which Green Hmong and White Hmong belong (Strecker 1987:2, 44). Graham (1926) referred to the Green Hmong as Ch’uan Miao (from Sichuan), and the Ya-ch’io Miao glossary listed by Clarke (1911) of a Guizhou group is very close to Green Hmong.⁷ In Table 1, Strecker’s subgroup names and the 1982 Chinese population estimates are listed and compared.

Tapp (1990:18) says that the Hmong, along with other groups, are sometimes termed “aboriginal Chinese” (Wiens 1954, in Tapp 1989:174) because of the “likelihood that they were among the very first groups in ancient, pre-feudal China.” Tracing the historical roots of the Hmong is difficult and requires extensive knowledge of the contexts of the documents produced by the Chinese and the predilections of the later Chinese historians who serve as today’s interpreters of the past. Ruey Yih-

Linguistic group (Strecker, 1987)	Ethnic designation (China) (Grimes, 1988)	1962 (Chinese Institute of National Languages)	Percentage of 1962 population	1982 Chinese Census
Hmongic languages		All Miao: 2,600,000		All Miao: 5,030,897
QoXiong (Krohsiong)	Xiangxi Miao	440,000	17%	estimate 855,252
Mhu (Hmou)	Qiandong Miao	900,000	35%	estimate 1,760,814
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: (Green Hmong, White Hmong)	Chuanqiandian Miao	1,150,000	44%	estimate 2,213,595
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: A-Hmau	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: Guiyang Hmong	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: Mhong	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: Mashan, Mang	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: A-Hmyo	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: Mhong	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Sichuan-Guizhou- Yunnan: 8 other dialect groups	? Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
?	Red Miao		All other Miao: 4%	All other Miao: estimate 201,226
Bunu groups (9)	Yao: Punu	220,000		All Yao: 1,402,676
Ho Nte languages				
Ho-Nte	She			369,000
Mienic languages				
Mien-Kim	Yao: Iu Mien, Biao Min, etc.	740,000 (1976)		All Yao: 1,402,676
Mien-Kim	Yao: Mun (Lantien)			All Yao: 1,402,676
n/a	Yao: Laka (a Tai dialect)	6,000 (1977)		All Yao: 1,402,676

fu (1960), often quoted in deep histories of the Hmong, uncovered use of the term “San-Miao” in the works of Mencius, the *Shu Ching*, and the *Tai Li Chi* to refer to people banished by the possibly legendary Emperor Shun who reigned from 2255 to 2206 B.C. During this time a Miao king, Ch’ih-yu, was associated with resistance to Chinese efforts to subdue the San Miao in a region between the Tung-t’ing and P’eng-li lakes along the Yangtze River. Ch’ih-yu was still prominent in myths recorded by Savina in 1900 (Savina 1930:viii; Hudspeth 1937:9, in Radley 1986:13-14). They did not reappear in the annals for a thousand years. Ruey concludes that the periods of Miao history can be divided into a legendary period (2300–200 B.C.), an undifferentiated period (200 B.C.–A.D. 1200) during which the Hmong were grouped together with others under the term Man (“barbarian”), and the modern period (A.D. 1200 to the present).

Two hundred years before the birth of Christ, Emperor Huang Ti (Ch’in Shih Huang, the “Yellow Emperor”) pushed the Miao king out of the Yangtze basin sometime during the period 221-210 B.C. (Mencius, from Lo Jao-tien in Radley 1986:17). One hundred years later, as part of various methods to Sinicize and govern the minorities, the Chinese instituted a monopoly on iron and salt. The salt monopoly was still in effect as late as 1911. Salt is prominent in legends, idioms, and proverbs, and continued to be a critical need for Hmong in the mountains of Laos.

It was not until the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960–1279), a thousand years later, that the Miao who were identified as one of five ethnic groups living in Hunan province near the Yuan River can be linked with the group that is today’s Miao (Ruey Yih-fu 1960:143; de Beauclair 1960:129). By 1433 Chinese records speak of a rebellion by the Sheng (‘raw’ or “uncivilized”) Miao in Kweichow⁸ province (deBeauclair 1960:134). By this time, the Chinese had instituted a system of using native lords to govern the tribal groups. The native lords with authority over the Miao were usually Tai or Lolo, the groups who controlled the lowlands.

During the reign of Wan-li (1573-1620), the Yang Ying-lung uprising occurred and de Beauclair (1956:11) says that as late as 1947 the Miao of Guizhou could remember the events of that rebellion. The Miao helped Yang Ying-lung, a ruler of Po-chou in northern Guizhou, in an attempt to

gain independence from the state. There were also Miao fighting on the side of the Emperor.

During the 1600s, authors described events that echo in today's Hmong culture. Lu T'zu-yün in 1684 wrote about a "moon dance" (Lin Yüeh-hwa 1940:330, 1944:49-50) that is nearly the same as "tossing the cloth ball" (*pov pob*), a courtship activity practiced during the new year festivities. Huang Ming, a general of defeated Wu San-kuei, took 100 men and sought refuge in the mountains shortly after 1681, and married a Miao woman. He brought with him a flintlock rifle, which the Miao replicated (deBeauclair 1960:134-5). Weddings described during this time are also remarkably like current marriage customs. It was during this time that the Han people were brought to Kweichow to populate the area, and the Miao were severely restricted, in access to land, as well as the wearing of ethnic clothing and speaking their own language (Lombard-Salmon 1972:220-9).

Periods of repression and rebellion created waves of southward movement in 1872, 1795, 1775, and possibly as long ago as 1728 (See Figure 1). Colquhoun (1883) transcribed the "Miao Albums" (Ch'ien Miao t'u shuo), written by Ch'en Hao, in which a suppression of the Miao in 1727 was described. A Jin, "king of Miao" and native lord, sold both Miao and Chinese as slaves. He was captured and executed in 1725, and reprisals against the Miao began (Mottin 1980:32; de Beauclair 1960:135). Between 1725 and 1728, the Miao responded by invading and capturing Chinese towns. In 1727-28, Prince Ortai, governor of Guizhou, sent General Zhang Kwang-si to crush the Miao rebellion (Wiens 1954:232-3). Ortai slaughtered at least 18,000 Miao. Nevertheless, by 1734, the Miao had captured several large towns—Qing-jiang; Zhen-yuan, Kai-li, Ghong-an-jiang, Huang-ping, Yu-qing, Si-zhou (Mottin 1980:33).

Pere Amiot, a missionary, described another revolt that was put down severely in 1775 (de Beauclair 1956:1-2). Amiot wrote about the Miao "king" Sonom, his family, and two shamans who were taken to Peking and ritually executed (Bernatzik, translation of Amiot 1970:22-3). Following this 1775 defeat, reprisals followed, in which 12,024 villages were burned (only 388 spared), and half the 27,000 Miao prisoners

executed (Li Ung Bing 1914:444-446). Wiens (1954) argues that as a result of these reprisals the Miao moved deeper into the mountains, and began movement towards Indochina.

In 1795 a Miao revolt began in T'ung-jen, Yung-sui, Feng-huang and Ch'ien-chou. The Miao overran and sacked cities along the frontiers of Hunan, Guizhou, and Sichuan⁹ provinces. Wu Pa-yueh, a Chinese, proclaimed himself king of the Miao and built a fortified city at Ping-lung, which withstood many attacks by Chinese. After his death, his sons continued the revolt until it faded in 1802 (Mottin 1980:35-37; Savina 1930; Wiens 1954:190-91). Miao began appearing in Laos by 1810, eight years after this rebellion ended.

Graham recorded a myth from the 1920s Szechuan Miao in which the leader was named Li Shan, and was betrayed by his General T'ao Ssu. Li Shan was a messiah, proved by superhuman abilities like making a flag stand erect. This may have been the forerunner of another messianic movement today at Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand. According to Radley (1986:44), banners were significant during this time, and they were square with three colors—red, green, and white. These flags are remarkably similar to the textile pieces known as *noob ncoos*; typically these funeral squares are square pieces of layered fabric, with red, yellow, white, and green appliquéd crosses, squares, and diamonds. These pieces are given to the parents of a girl on a grandchild's first birthday (or thereabouts), and the pieces are saved to be placed under the head in the coffin when the time comes. Red (sometimes the English fuschia) and green figure prominently in most other traditional textiles.

From 1851-1864 the Taiping rebellion shook China. In Yunnan province during this period (1853–1873) Muslim and Miao joined in uprisings against Han encroachment and new taxation. Chang Hsiu-mei (in Tai-kung) rose up under a banner calling for establishment of a Miao territory. The uprising lasted 18 years until 1872 and covered all of Guizhou, and the borders of Hunan, Kwangsi,¹⁰ Yunnan and Sichuan. In 1870 Chang Hsiu-Mei's headquarters in T'ai-kung fell and he fled to a mountain stronghold. Food shortages caused one of his commanders to defect; the traitor gave information to the Chinese who captured and

executed Chang Hsiu-Mei (Teng 1971:366-371). Twenty years after the revolt, Wingate (1899:641) traveled through the area and found the region almost deserted with ruined towns and villages. This is the time when reports of Miao in Indochina became more frequent; probably the majority of the Miao emigrants left China after this failed rebellion.¹¹

Another Miao messianic uprising was reported in 1860 by deLaJonquière (1906:295-97). It was led by a shaman, King Sioung,¹² in today's Vietnam. Sioung possessed superhuman abilities, including the ability to jump to the top of a tall tower. After inspiring the ransacking of Lang Dan and Quan Ba and the killing of more than a thousand fugitives, he was killed by his father-in-law after he murdered his wife to marry her younger sister. Annamese troops on elephants pushed the Miao into the mountains.

Yet another rebellion, led by messiah Paj Cai, current in the lore of Hmong, occurred in Laos, from 1918 to 1921. Yaj Soob Lwj,¹³ who invented what he reported as a divinely inspired orthography for the Hmong language, also figures as a messianic leader; he was assassinated in 1971. His followers have continued the messianic movement, centered around a temple constructed in Ban Vinai refugee camp and the Chao Fa resistance fighters inside Laos. Tapp (1989:131-143) ties these historical messianic figures to a frequent character in legends, Tswb Tshoj, who is most likely also huab tais ("king"). Tapp suggests that the *Tswb Tshoj* stories demonstrate how stories of opposition to the "powerful other" are central to the maintenance of Hmong ethnic identity. Parables of opposition are also frequently encountered in orphan stories, refugee songs, proverbs, and explanations of contemporary events. Proschan (1989:185-190) cites several Austro-Asiatic cultures, including the Khmu, Stieng, Black Tai, Laha, Lao, Thai, and Phuan, whose stories feature a character who symbolizes a subjugated people.

Father Savina's account of the Miao in China¹⁴ in the late 1920s is often quoted by later authors. His was a sympathetic missionary's view of an unknown and harassed people, perhaps, he wonders, fragments of an ancient race from the steppes of Asia. He is well known for the quote (1930:vii, translated in Geddes 1976:3):

From time immemorial there has existed in China a race of men whose origin we do not know. Living continuously on the heights, away from all other Asiatics, these men speak a particular language unknown by all those who surround them, and wear a special dress which is seen nowhere else.

Other studies have focused on the Miao in China. David Graham (1954), in *Songs and Stories of the Ch'uan Miao*, preceded translated texts of folklore with a brief description of the background of the Miao in Sichuan province in the 1920s and 1930s. Inez de Beauclair (1956 1960) provided often-quoted descriptions of Miao history and culture; Lombard-Salmon (1972) a historical study of Guizhou Miao during the 1700s; Reuy Yih-fu (1960) and Lin Yueh-hwa (1940, 1944) reconstructions of ancient Chinese records and characteristics of Miao groups.

Research on the Hmong

Research of Hmong life outside of China generally comprises sponsored studies of the White Hmong of Thailand since 1965. Early ethnographic material appeared in Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964), a Human Area Relations File publication, and Kunstadter (1967). The *Akha and Meau*, originally written in German and later translated into English (Bernatzik 1947, 1970), is essentially a detailed record of daily life and the material culture of two tribal groups living in the highlands of Thailand in the late 1930s. In the 1950s, the Thai government began to research the tribal groups so that they could find ways to control their forest-clearing, their growing of opium, and their vulnerability to the communist movements in rural areas. In 1958 a Thai official in the Border Patrol Police wrote up descriptions of the various groups, including the Hmong. The Thai government then sponsored three major research studies. The first was written by Gordon Young, son and grandson of Baptist missionaries, who was raised with tribal groups in Burma and Thailand (Young 1961), surprisingly condescending in its tone. The second study

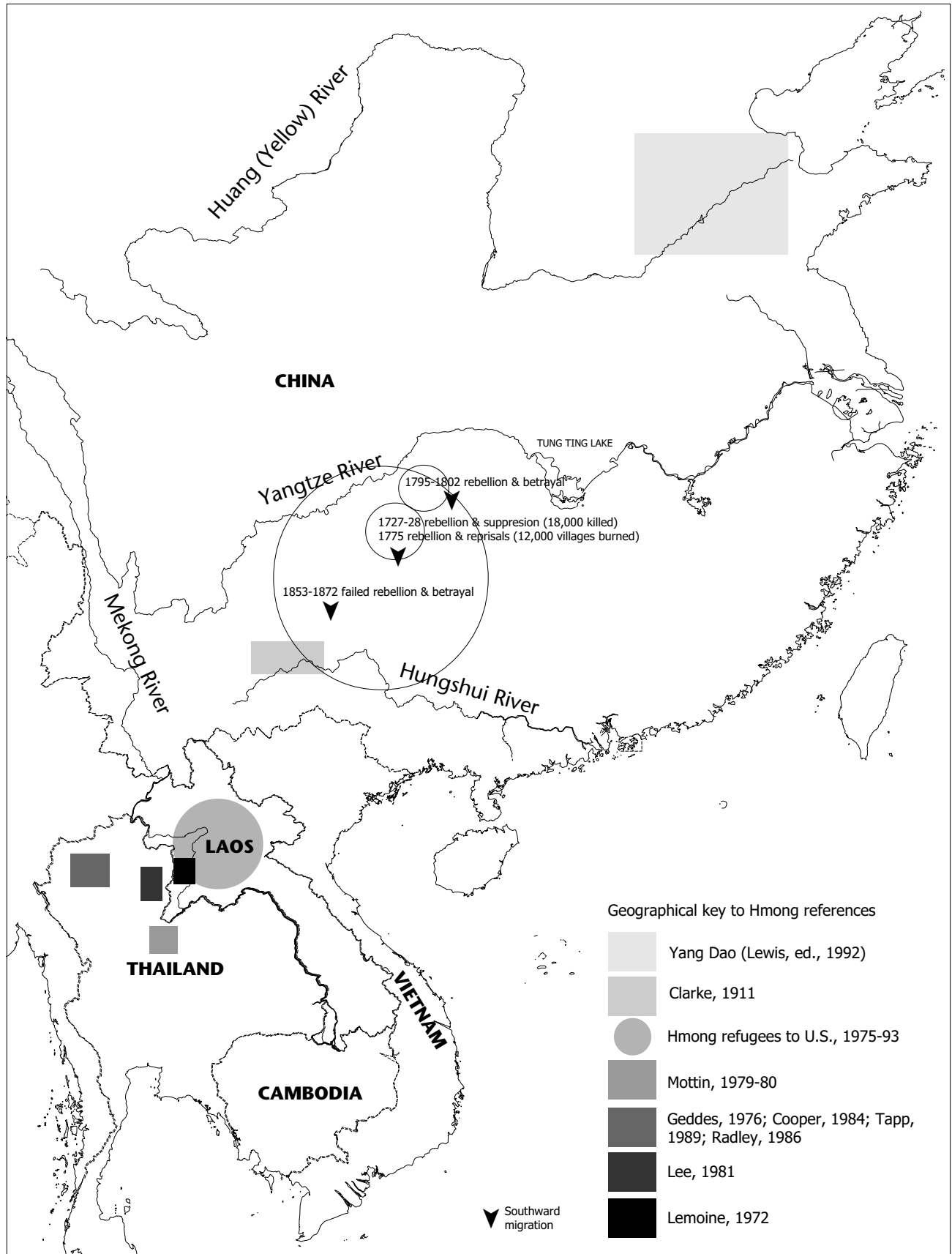


FIGURE 1. Hmong in the historical record and research.

was a joint venture by international agencies and the Thai government, based on field work during 1961-62 (Department of Public Welfare 1962). Because of its recommendations, the Tribal Research Center was established at Chiang Mai University, and the government sponsored programs of work with the tribal villagers. The third major government study, funded by SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization), was conducted by Patya Saihoo during 1962. He pulled together the research done until that time, and recommended that the Thai government learn more about the people before attempting to change their lives (Saihoo 1962).

One of the first research projects after the Tribal Research Center was established was a study of the Green Hmong in the Mae Sa region northwest of Chiang Mai to find out why Hmong moved to new areas (Geddes 1976). Most other studies of the Hmong in Thailand have looked for the reasons for moving, for growing opium, for cooperating with government programs, for not limiting family size, and so on. The interest of the Thai government in establishing the Center was to gather accurate information about the various hill tribes in the area, to formulate plans by which the villagers could receive government social and economic development. The two chief factors behind the Thai interest in offering development programs to the villagers were the demands of increasing population on a limited amount of land, and the international pressure that the Thai government eliminate opium production.¹⁵ William Geddes had already completed his first extended fieldwork with the Hmong in Pasaliem for several months in 1957, and returned for a visit in late 1958. Geddes felt that a sympathetic anthropologist had a role to play in formulating policy decisions that targeted the Hmong and other hill tribes, and he wanted to be that anthropologist. He was brought to the newly formed Tribal Research Center in Chiang Mai in 1964, and continued his research with the Hmong, in Meto, in 1965, where the earlier Pasaliem group had relocated. His “ecological study” (Geddes 1976:33) laid out the aim of the research:

We believe that the Miao behavior [migration] is largely due to the types of

crops they grow. When they are cultivating hill rice, which is the main crop of most of the people who follow the cyclical method, they too tend to follow it. But cash crops of various kinds induce a different pattern. This is especially the case with the opium poppy. We suspect that it is their devotion to the opium poppy which makes the Miao shifting cultivators¹⁶ in the complete sense of the term—not only the cultivations but the people themselves shift. The main purpose of this book is to show why this is so.

To demonstrate his thesis, Geddes enumerated the population of a six-village complex, concentrating on their clan and sub-clan affiliations and describing in detail how the people farmed. He concluded that the migratory ways of the Hmong were due to the fit between the people, the land, and the resources, with survival as a primary determinant of residence and migration. He allowed that other factors might be important in the choice of residence for a particular group, but he made few observations of such choices. Geddes (1976:34) noted:

As we have seen, there are other reasons too [for staying on the mountain tops]—their love of independence, their suspicion of other peoples, the competition for land, and their general cultural adaptation to the mountain environment. Opium production reinforces all these factors and adds its own dynamism, pushing the people ever further abroad in search for new uplands where the poppy will bloom ...

However, he allowed that there may be other ways to characterize the Hmong:

... we had in mind mainly economic affairs which are the subject of this book, but a different viewpoint, as for instance that of religion, might yield another order [of categories of social relationships].

In fact, his assistant, Nusit Chindarsi, published his study of Hmong religion the same year.

Robert Cooper (1984) proceeded with a similar thesis in his book: environmental conditions determine social pattern and decisions about where and with whom to live. Cooper concluded that a scarcity of resources (land) leads the Hmong to produce more and more opium in order to buy more and more rice. As a result, they come to depend more and more on paid labor (hired hands) or unpaid labor (wives) to produce

the opium. He suggested that the movements throughout history and the adoption of opium growing were both responses to resource scarcity, and that today in Thailand, these responses have reached the limits of their effectiveness. Movement to recreate a population:resources balance that would permit a new cycle of swidden exploitation is no longer possible. Cooper stated that he in part diminished Geddes' idea that migration is due to dependence on the opium poppy, and rather found that the change from swidden rice to swidden opium actually allowed villages to remain in the same site for a longer period of time, and that the Hmong pattern of migration was really no greater than that of other (non-poppy growing) tribes. Cooper saw the new relations between household heads and labor as the forces that impell change from the historical swidden rice-opium economy to a new economy based on permanent terraced fields and orchards. With this new pattern of agriculture, Cooper predicted the emergence of a class structure in Hmong society that will eventually dominate the social structure in the way that class relations (mainly land-owner and laborer) are part of other permanent irrigated rice communities in insular Southeast Asia. He further characterized men as exploiters of free labor in the form of wives, and painted a picture of men lying about smoking opium while the women worked in the fields to produce crops for the family's survival and, if possible, surplus to sell. It was this characterization that first made me think that the picture was somehow incomplete, that Cooper was a blind man feeling the tail of the elephant and describing the elephant as a creature long and thin and scaly.

However, Cooper included data in his study that can be analyzed for patterns of social design. He looked at four villages and found different patterns of clan and lineage affiliation in each, as well as different patterns of migration leading up to their presence in the villages at the time of his study. He found a gradual shift from a village consisting of a single lineage group to multi-clan groups, and that there was no village level corporate economic activity; the "household constitutes a virtually autonomous economic and political unit" (Cooper 1984:217). However, rather than take a random sample of villages, he chose his research

villages carefully to represent different positions on a continuum of survival choices.¹⁷ For this reason, his conclusions have limited value in generalizing to other Hmong.

Neither Geddes nor Cooper included information on the choices that people made before and after moving to the research sites, except occasional references. It is these occasional references that I will analyze to reconstruct the factors considered in the process of creating social design.

The only account of Hmong in Laos was written in French by Jacques Lemoine in the 1960s, and is a rendering of the lives of the Hmong Njua (*Hmoob Ntsuab*) or Green Hmong, also called Hmong Leng (Hmoob Leeg),¹⁸ living in western Laos. It draws heavily on his knowledge of Chinese village structure and customs. Lemoine studied the Hmong in Laos between 1964 and 1967, in the area near the Mekong as it winds through western Laos on its way from China. The Pha Hok region is directly east of the areas studied by Geddes and Cooper, on the same side of the Mekong River, but on different sides of the political border between Laos and Thailand.

Lemoine's villages were farther from "civilization" and the forces of change produced by government programs, exposure to a market economy, and in a region less pressured by competing interests for the resources, namely timber and land for farming. In addition, many villagers in Laos were, at the time of his study, uprooted because of the war, although less so in the area of Pha Hok than in eastern and central Laos. Lemoine's work resembled to a some extent the descriptive work completed earlier by Bernatzik in Thailand. Lemoine looked in depth at several villages in close proximity to one another, but focused on the largest of the four, Pha Hok, to determine whether a Hmong settlement is actually a community or an agglomeration.¹⁹ He looked at the factors that were related to the type of agricultural production, and whether or not the social organization in reality corresponded to the ideal structure described by Hmong and in the literature. He concluded that the type of communities he encountered in the Pha Hok region were fundamentally the same as Chinese villages: the primary units were the extended family, along with occasional affines and several generations who trace their

descent to a common ancestor, and these allied groups form a political unit. However, the lineages were not traced back as far as is common in China, as the absence of writing precluded tracing genealogy past three generations. As a result the lineage was more informal and less institutionalized than among the Chinese. He was unable to determine whether this social organization was indigenous to the Hmong or whether it was adopted through cultural contact with the Chinese.

The distance from Geddes' Meto area to Pha Hok, Laos, is about twice the distance from Pasaliem and Meto, two locations populated by a segments of a single patriline. The travel time between Lemoine's villages and Geddes' or Cooper's villages was about seven or eight days, twice the distance Geddes' group had moved, a three to four day walk. These three accounts study roughly the same group of Hmong, within a ten year span of time. In fact, the Hmong from Sayaboury (Laos), Luang Prabang (Laos), Nan (Thailand), and Chiang Mai (Thailand) resemble one another in features of dress and headdress.²⁰ These Hmong are those on the frontier of the movement southward; they represent the southernmost edge of the distribution of Hmong in Asia, except for the low-altitude villages in the Khek Noy region in north central Thailand. There are no more high mountains further south. Characteristics of the Hmong living in northern Thailand and western Laos may represent regional differences, or even characteristics of Hmong who move the most or move the furthest south. Those who traveled furthest first may represent the least successful of the Hmong as a whole. Although Geddes', Cooper's, and Lemoine's interpretations have been broadly applied to Hmong as a totality, a comparison of the southernmost Hmong with those in Laos, northern Vietnam, various places in China, and in the United States would shed light on the validity of such generalizations (see Figure 1).

Gar Yia Lee's study (1981) is the only economic study conducted by a Hmong. He looked at the effects of redevelopment programs at Nikhom Paklang in Nan province in Thailand. Because of insurgent activity in the mountains of Nan province in the late 1960s, where the border between Thailand and Laos is an invisible line, the government relocated villages into a conglomerate settlement closer to the lowlands. The village

comprises several ethnic groups, and has government officials working and living in the village. Many of the post-secondary students in Chiang Mai today hail from Paklang. This village represents a type of economy and social interaction midway between remote mountain villages and mainstream urban centers.

Other economic studies include Binney's doctoral thesis (1971), prepared under sponsorship for the U.S. Department of Defense, and supervised by Geddes. He looked at the economic organization of the White Hmong of northern Thailand, and included relatively little social or cultural information. Radley, a British researcher, also prepared a doctoral dissertation (1986) on economic marginalization and ethnic consciousness of Hmong, in his case the Green Hmong of northern Thailand. He included extensive documentation of the Hmong history in China, and analyzed tiger myths for the ways in which Hmong identity is represented within the group, and passed on to children.

Few anthropologists have concentrated on the cultural and linguistic aspects of Hmong life. Chindarsi, Geddes' assistant, wrote a description of Hmong ritual (1976). Morechand (1968, 1969) wrote about White Hmong shamanism. Jean Mottin, a French Catholic missionary who lived near a Hmong village in Pitsanulok province in Thailand for seven years, developed a White Hmong grammar (1980), and wrote accounts of cultural life in Khek Noy, including the new year (1979), legends and folktales (1980), sung poetry (1980), and shamanic chants (1982). Yves Bertrais developed a French-White Hmong dictionary (1964), and is now at work transcribing more than 200 hours of taped oral lore collected during his stays in Thai and Lao Hmong villages. Subsidiary works like that in The Department of the Army's *Minority Groups of North Vietnam*, described the habits and customs of the Mèo (culled primarily from the HRAF publications and missionary works). Symonds' recent doctoral dissertation (1991) is based on a year's fieldwork in a White Hmong village in northern Thailand, looking at the role of women in ethnic continuity over generations, focusing on birth and death.

Tapp (1989) has published his Ph.D. dissertation as a book, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*. In

addition to the most thorough reconstitution of the Chinese record, his work is a major contribution to the investigation of sublineages and the way in which they are defined by details of funerary ritual. In addition, he suggests that the resilience of Hmong identity can be attributed to the ways in which they contrast themselves to the more powerful “other”: no literacy, no land, no rulers. He wrote (1989:175):

For the Hmong, it seems, the significant parts of their more recent history have been: their original claim to the lands of China; the deprivations and depredations of the Chinese; their encounters and conflicts with the Chinese; the victory of the Chinese; the flight or exodus of the Hmong out of China through water; the loss of their power, territory, and writing; and their settlement in their new lands of abode.

Peter Kunstadter (1984, 1988, 1990, 1992) and his wife, Sally, have been important demographers of the Thai hilltribe populations, their characteristics, and changes over time. Their surveys include more than 230 Hmong villages in northern Thailand. They compare characteristics in the 1960s to characteristics in the 1980s. Kunstadter found that the Thai Hmong, in comparison to the Karen and other hilltribe groups, are strongly patriarchal, male-biased in terms of material investment, much more likely to purchase “lowland” items like trucks and radios, more successful at helping infants survive the first year, and at the highest limits of human reproductive capacity. He also found that the characteristics were moderated by the type of economic activity; those who had moved to transitional areas in the lowlands or to the cities approached the mainstream in terms of all characteristics.

A recent study by McNabb (1992) looked at hilltribe students living in Chiang Mai from August 1990 to June 1991 to find out how they were able to achieve despite limited opportunities. McNabb found that Lahu and Karen took advantage of conversion to Christianity to make their way from village to town, and that the Hmong students found other ways to support their attendance at vocational schools or the university.²¹ In the survey, students were asked to identify their major sources of financial support during their primary, secondary, and higher education. The pattern that emerged is that outside of family support, missionary

groups and nongovernmental agencies are the two most influential educational sponsors. The Hmong students were very resourceful in finding financial support. They were able to elicit help from a variety of sources at different times in their educational careers—Border Patrol police, development project people, nongovernmental agencies, anthropologists, and so on. Serendipity—what the Hmong might call *nyob ntawm txoj hmoov*—played an important role. McNabb cites a helicopter landing in the village, and the Queen of Thailand granting a parent's request for a scholarship for his child.

Chapter 3.

The Frame: Identity and Oppositions

Tapp looked at the way in which the Hmong have used the oral form of history to define and continue their ethnic identity, and concludes (1990:196): "... so that identity has become difference, and difference identity."

The most general conclusion to emerge from the book is that the Hmong have, in the course of their history, made use of certain oppositions to characterize their differences from other ethnic groups, and consequently define their own identity [Tapp 1990:196].

Tapp (1990:195) also wrote:

This book has dealt with the relationship between the worlds of the possible and the realm of the actual. Thus, the actual village situation was defined ... in terms of polar, alternative oppositions; between a mixed economy and a permanent-field economy of non-poppy crops, between loyalty to the Thai state and support for the Communist Party of Thailand, between the adoption of Thai Buddhism or foreign Christianity. Obviously these oppositions were not all of the same order, yet they all had one thing in common, which is that none of them adequately described the village. ... It was the interactions between their polar oppositions, in the choices and decisions which confronted the villagers in their economic, socio-political, and ideological lives, that the actual situation of the village was defined.

In dealing with "Hmongness," the people call upon various contrasts, depending on the situation and the prevailing conditions around them. The primary contrast is between themselves as Hmong and all others; within the Hmong world, the clan is contrasted to all other Hmong to whom marriage is allowable. Within a local world, it is the sublineage or patriline, contrasted to others of the same clan by details of ritual. Other contrasts that are salient to different degrees in different situations are dialect group, religious orientation (loosely, world-view), region, livelihood and education, and political orientation.

Opposition 1: We, the people ...

The first level of identity is to be Hmong, as distinct from other non-Hmong peoples. Proverbs and other idiomatic expressions refer to the past ethnic oppositions in that *suav* ('Chinese') is now used as a word for any non-Hmong. Likewise, from *mab-sua(v)*, a compound form, *mab* synonymously means 'non-Hmong' or "outsider." In folktales and songs, *suav* are often the antagonists, as illustrated by this proverb (Vang and Lewis 1984:74):

Tsis ua luam ces txiv tub
not-do trade-then-father-son

Ua luam lawm ces suav dub.
do-trade-already-then-Chinese-black

When not doing business, be like father and son;
When doing business, be like the black Chinese.

If Hmong do not use *suav*, when talking about people in general, they speak of *haiv hmoob* ("Hmong ethnic group") as contrasted to *luag* ('others') or, somewhat technically, *lwm haiv neeg* ('next' 'ethnic group' 'people'). Thai Hmong use ethnic identification for non-Hmong, with whites called *falang*, a corruption of "France" (*fa-ran*; the "fr" blend separated by a vowel sound), a term borrowed from the Thai. In the United States, Hmong also refer to non-Hmong by ethnic identification: American (for "white," *as mes li kaa*, or *neeg dawb* 'person' 'white'), black (*neeg dub*, 'person' 'black'), Mexican, Chinese (*suav*), Japanese (*nij poos*, from Nippon), Vietnamese (*nyab laj*), Cambodian (*ka mee*), Lao (*los tsuas*), Mien (*co*), and so on.

The boundaries of "Hmongness" are defined by language and self-identification—by use of *Hmoob* before the name of the clan—and, for many, by the recognition of an individual by Hmong ancestor and household spirits. This boundary is usually marked by marriage; Hmong marry other Hmong. In the past, in social situations in Thailand and China, there was relatively little contact with non-Hmong.²² Geddes noted that other than hiring non-Hmong for day labor, there was little

social interaction with others in Thailand, and there was almost never any marriage outside the Hmong social group.²³ When a man does marry a non-Hmong, she becomes a member of his social group, and is expected to conform to the role expectations of a Hmong wife. If a Hmong woman marries a non-Hmong, it is assumed that she is no longer Hmong, but adopts the identity of her husband's social group.

The word *hmoob* ('Hmong'), according to Geddes (1976:55) represents the concept of "clan." However, other peoples of the world refer to themselves by a word that translates as "the people," distinguishing themselves from all others, who are not like them: *Inuit* (called "Eskimo" by most non-Inuit), *Ankwehonwe* ("Mohawk"), *Ashinabe* ("Algonkian"), *Diné* ("Navajo"), *Deutsch* ("German"). It is likely that the word *hmoob* functioned in a similar way, to indicate, for example, that this *Vaaf*²⁴ is *hmoob*, not Chinese or some other group. The oft-quoted meaning "free man" was a misstatement of something said by Yang Dao to *National Geographic* photographer and writer W. E. Garrett (1974:78): "We have always called ourselves Hmong, which means 'free men'." At about the same time, Yang Dao wrote in his doctoral dissertation, originally in French, "The word 'Hmong' means man or human being. It is the name by which the people have always called themselves" (Yang Dao 1993:xvi).

Opposition 2: Consanguine (kwv tij) vs. Affine (neej tsa)

Within the social world of Hmong, the primary distinction, still salient, is between the patrilineal descent groups, or clans (kwv tij, 'young brother' 'old brother'). Anthropologists characterize patrilineal descent groups as a mechanism for maintaining control over a limited amount of resources. In societies without a way of recording the identity of ancestors, there are other methods for avoiding inadvertent incest; for example, the Hmong use clan names, and the Khmu the use clan totems.

When asked to describe their society, Hmong first tell about their clans (whether twelve, seventeen or nineteen), and the marriage taboo

that prevents marriage and social intercourse between potentially marriageable persons of the opposite sex who carry the same clan name. Those to whom marriage is forbidden are *kwv tij*; all others are *neej tsa*. When listening to a Hmong give a speech to a group of Hmong, they greet *kwv tij* and *neej tsa*, not “ladies and gentlemen,” as in the American style. Sometimes *cov phooj ywg* (“friends”; interestingly, *phooj ywg* is a loan word from Chinese) is added, perhaps following an American pattern.

There have been many changes in the Hmong social structure in the different environments in which they have come to live over the past thirty years, so that the older Hmong can within their own lifetimes see and express the extent of change. What has characterized the Hmong society over the past several centuries was the slowness of change in the basic social patterns, perhaps because they purposely placed themselves out of the reach of contact with other social groups. Also, in the past, with no descriptions of Hmong society available for reading and comparison, the Hmong relied upon the personal histories of their own lineage and regional groups as models of how social relationships should be conducted. Finally, cross-generational enculturation of the young maintained continuity in behavioral norms.

The number of Hmong clans depends on the region, the dialect group, the informants, the recorder’s knowledge of Hmong, and the degree to which sub-clan identifiers are assumed to be separate clans. Boundaries between the clan groups are defined by the incest taboo. Marriage to a person from the same clan is strictly forbidden, and continues to be as strong today in the U.S. as is the idea of brother-sister marriage is to Americans. When two people of the opposite sex meet, the first question is *Koj yog Hmoob xeeb dab tsí?* (“you are clan what?”). If the two are of the same clan, the budding social relationship ends at that point. There is speculation that the incest taboo and restricted choices in isolated areas led to the creation of “new” clans, for example *Vaaj* and *Faaj* (Lue Vang 1993:personal communication). Table 2 summarizes the clans identified by different researchers in Laos and Thailand, and the spellings that are encountered in the record.

Although the clan affiliation was transformed into a surname when

Hmong processed through immigration channels, it was customarily not used in that way. In a village or regional context, it was sufficient to say,

Table 2. Clan names as recorded by Geddes (1976), Lemoine (1972), Mottin (1980), and Cooper (1984).

	In Hmong spelling (White/Green)	Geddes ²⁵ White/Green	Lemoine ²⁶ Green	Mottin ²⁷ White/Green	Cooper ²⁸ White/Green
USA		NE Thai, 1965	W Laos, 1965	NC Thai, 1972	NE Thai, 1975
Fang				Faj	Faj*
Hang	Ham/Haam	Tang (Hang ²⁹)	Taag	Ham/Taag	Hang
Her	Hawj	Her	Hawj	Hawj/Dluag	Hawj*
Kha/Khang	Kha/Khaab		Khaab	Khab/Khaab (Tsom)	
Kong	Koo		Koo	Koo	
Kue	Kwm	Goo	Kwv	Lauj/Kwv	
Lee	Lis	Tchai (Lee)	Lis	Lis/Cai	Li
Lo/Lor	Lauj		Lauj	Lauj/Nkws	Lauj*
Moua	Muas		Muas	Muas/Zaag	Mua
Pha	Phab		Phab		
Thao	Thoj	Kloo (Tow)	Dluj	Thoj/Dlub	Tao
Cha/Chang	Tsab/Tsaab	Jang	Tsaab	Tsab/Tsaab	Tsab*
Chue	Tswb		Tswb		
Va/Vang	Vaj/Vaaj	Wang	Vaaj	Vaj/Vaaj, Vu	Wang
Vue	Vwj		Vwj	Vwj	Vwj*
Xiong	Xyooj	Mow (Song)	Xyooj	Xyooj/Mob	Shong
Ya/Yang	Yaj/Yaaj	Yang (Ma)	Yaa	Ya/Yaaj	Yang
?		Tong			
?		Jow			
Cheng	Tsheej			Tsheej (in Laos)	
?					Ma

He's *Hmoob Vaaj*, and if it's not clear, *you know him, son of Cher Pao (Txawj Pov)*. In general, it is enough to know what clan a person belongs to, and it is this habit of language that makes reputation a central issue in social relations. When walking around the park during Hmong New Year in the United States, a Hmong friend sees someone behaving in an unusual, unacceptable way, or dressed in extreme punk style, and says, *Oh, he's Hmoob Lis*. Or, in a positive sense, the nationwide grapevine

carries the news that *Hmoob Yaaj have four people in Ph.D. programs*, or there's a *doctor in Fresno who's Hmoob Thoj*.

Despite the clan changes over time, the differences in reporting to people unfamiliar with the connotations of the language, and the differences between dialect and regional groups, most Hmong in the U.S. today are members of one of these 18 clans:

Table 3. Hmong clans in the United States.

White Hmong		Green Hmong	
English spelling	Hmong (RPA)	English spelling	Hmong (RPA)
Fa	Faj	Fang	Faaj
Ha	Ham	Hang	Haam
Her	Hawj	Her	<i>Hawj</i>
Kha	Khab	Khang	Khaab
Kong	Koo	Kong	<i>Koo</i>
Kue	Kwm	Kue	<i>Kwm</i>
Lo, Lor	Lauj	Lo, Lor	<i>Lauj</i>
Lee, Ly	Lis	Lee, Ly	<i>Lis</i>
Moua	Muas	Moua	<i>Muas</i>
Pha	Phab	Phang	<i>Phaab</i>
Thao, Thor	Thoj	Thao, Thor	<i>Thoj</i>
Cha	Tsab	Chang	Tsaab
Cheng	Tsheej	Cheng	<i>Tsheej</i>
Chue	Tswb	Chue	<i>Tswb</i>
Va	Vaj	Vang	Vaaj
Vue	Vwj	Vue	<i>Vwj</i>
Xiong	Xyooj	Xiong	<i>Xyooj</i>
Ya	Yaj	Yang	Yaaj

For a complete list of White/Green Hmong variants, see Appendix 2.

Lemoine suggests that the patrilineal clan system was borrowed from the Chinese, due mainly to the similarity in the names of some of the clans (Vang/Wang, Lee/Li). Tapp, on the other hand, argues that the Hmong system of clans predated contact with the Chinese, and similarity in names is due to absorption of Chinese, Muslim, or Lolo men into Hmong villages (1989:173). The Mien, linguistically closely related to the Hmong, have twelve clans, with names similar to the Chinese hundred

families. They, along with the Vietnamese, use the Chinese system of using generation names to identify sublineages. The question is why the Hmong didn't also adopt this useful linguistic mechanism for identifying close kin? Was there another mechanism already in use that made a generation naming system redundant?

Chinese and Vietnamese use of generation names can be seen as a linguistic mnemonic device for remembering long lines of ancestors, as well as instantly recognizing marriageable and non-marriageable persons with the same family name. For example, Vietnamese king Minh Mang wrote a four-line, twenty-word poem that is in actuality a mnemonic device for naming twenty generations of the royal family (this was to differentiate the royals from the commoners). The first line of the poem is "MIEN HUONG UNG BUU VINH" (Chhim, Luangpraseut, and Te 1989:155). The first generation all carry the middle name "Mien"; the second generation "Huong"; the third generation "Ung," and so on. Upon hearing the family name and generation name, a person knows whether or not a social relationship is possible. Additionally, it makes clear the generation relationships between two people, so that the appropriate personal pronoun can be chosen from among the many choices in those languages.³⁰

Hmong, who cannot marry within the clan, do not need to use generation or sublineage names, but the Mien and Chinese, for whom intra-clan marriage is no longer taboo, do need to identify sublineages within the clan to avoid inadvertent incest.

Exogamous marriage to neej tsa

A major preoccupation of men and women in society is the forming of ties with other groups through marriage. The pairing up of individuals is less a focus than the joining of clans, of specific sublineages, *caj ceg*. An individual bride and groom have several sets of "parents," those who gave birth to them or adopted them, plus the other men of the father's *caj ceg* and their wives. Political alliances are formed by joining clans at several points by marriage, and by forming marriages with as many clans as feasible.

Part of the negotiation for any particular marriage includes

consideration of the terms of future marriages between other children of the two *caj ceg*. The indebtedness incurred by payment of bride price is an important part of the social relationship that is created between the two clans. Hmong say that without bride price, divorce is inevitable; this is consistent with Leach's observation in *Social Anthropology* (1982:170) that all social relationships rest on indebtedness, and relationships between persons who are not related by blood are marked by "gift exchange." When two *caj ceg* are joined several times through marriage, the indebtedness criss-crosses, and the resources (silver, money, livestock) are not lost—as if the same silver bars are exchanged several times. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage keeps resources in an especially small group.

In Hmong society, kin-like relations are formed through the practice of reciprocal exchange. The giving of something valuable creates the potential for future return, an unfulfilled promise. This state is not resolved until the original giver receives something of equivalent value in return. The exchange of women, who represent a form of wealth, for silver is a form of reciprocal exchange that reaches over time and space. In the Khmu, the practice of exchange is highly formalized, so that clans (totem groups) stand in a wife-taking or wife-giving relationship at birth.

One reason that it is important to have many children is so that there are many individuals to fill the roles of bride and groom, offspring whose ages span at least a decade, creating many potential matches. A Hmong "flower word" (*paj lus*) that refers to this ideal of exchanged daughters between groups is:

Koj qaib pw kuv cooj; kuv os pw koj nkuaj.
 you-chicken-sleep-my-coop; my-duck-sleep-your-stable

Your chicken sleeps in my coop; my duck sleeps in your stable.

In addition to establishing wider alliances through indebtedness, marriage is a way to mediate the potential enmity between clans. Leach reports that many ethnographers have been told by their informants, "We marry our enemies" (1982:171).

The relationship between the man's mother and her daughter-in-law (his wife) is an important social bond of significance. The mother-in-law to daughter-in-law relationship is more comparable to the Western mother-daughter bond. In the case of cross-cousin marriage, there is a sanguine bond as well as an affinal one. Symonds (1991:247) observes of the White Hmong in Thailand

As cross-cousin marriage is the preference for Hmong, although not always adhered to, phauj³¹ was also the woman's mother-in-law.

and of the kin terms used by the girl's mother (Symonds 1991:153):

... interesting to note that the mother-in-law will call the young man 'son', not 'son-in-law' (vauv) and he will call her phauj, not 'mother-in-law' (niam tais).

A Hmong woman looks forward to the coming of her daughter-in-law as a life milestone, a coming of age. Her own daughter is taken from her after thirteen to fifteen years, and is never really considered a life-long companion in the way that a daughter-in-law is. A daughter is born to a woman to raise for marriage and inclusion in another family; the bond is from birth a "temporary" one. Thus, the Hmong women with marriageable sons (*hluas nraug*) take an active interest in the young women (*hluas nkauj*) at the new year festivities. The choosing of a wife or husband is influenced by the attitudes of many people—the boy's mother, who wants to find a daughter-in-law who will become her own daughter; the girl's mother, who wants her daughter to be found suitable and sought after as a bride; the fathers (and kwv tij) of both, who look for ways to form politically and economically favorable alliances. Geddes said (1976:72):

The creative principle is marriage. It will connect a girl not only to a new set of clanspeople, and her old clanspeople to the new people, but also her blood relatives to all the relatives of her husband's family ...

The links between a group of kinsmen and their wives' groups plays an important role in the overall design of the social pattern, particularly in the choices of where and with whom to live. This interconnectedness is

difficult to describe clearly, because the men, who are generally the informants, learn their particular lineage group's membership and ritual identity, but neither the men nor the women can describe the links between members of the husband's lineage and the wife's kin past one or two generations, except in the most general way.

The preference for cross-cousin marriage makes the details of kinship convoluted, so that the exact relationship of two individuals may be both consanguinal and affinal. These affinal links are not made clear during an interview, unless there are tekonyms that can be chosen to represent a relationship from the female's side. This is usually not the case; tekonyms are revised upon each marriage, and although women maintain their clan name upon marriage, all kin are referred to from the husband's point of view. Thus, even though these affinal links are significant in actual crafting of collaborative groups, they are not part of the oral history of the group.

This interlinkage of lineages confuses the issue of residence. It is generally believed that a man never goes to live with his wife and her parents (uxorilocal or matrilocal residence). Geddes wrote (1976:71):

With regard to settlement arrangements, for example, there appears to be only one compulsory principle: that marriage may not be matrilocal. It may be virilocal but the effect of the rule, in the Miao cultural context and in the situation of the groups we studied, is to make it generally patrilocal.

However, when two lineages are linked at several places by marriage, the man could actually be living in the midst of his wife's kin, who are married to his kin. He thinks in terms of his lineage's point of view, and replies to inquiries that he is living with *his* kin: patrilocal; and if his wife lives in his house: virilocal. It is very likely, then, that decisions about with whom to live often involve the *neej tsa* as well as the *kwv tij*.

Affinal links in Geddes', Cooper's, and Lemoine's data

It is difficult to reconstruct the interconnectedness of lineages in the Meto villages because Geddes noted the clan of the wife in only 14 of 71 households, generally when it helped explain the presence of a minority clan in a village. Lemoine, likewise, noted only infrequently the

connection between the husband's and wife's kin. Cooper was the only researcher who listed the clans of the wives. However, it is not possible from his documentation to tell to what extent the wives were "new" or from previously linked lineage groups. (See Table 4).

TABLE 4. Who married who in Cooper's Thai Hmong villages³²?

W's clan	Haam	Lis	Ma	Thoj	Vaaj	Xyooj	Yaa	
H's clan	Total Hs							
<i>Huai</i>								
<i>Mena</i>								
<i>(27)</i>								
Vaaj							10	10
Yaa				1	13	2		16
<i>Pha Nok</i>								
<i>Kok (17)</i>								
Haam				1				1
Lis							2	2
Muas				1				1
Thoj					3	1	1	5
Vaaj							2	2
Xyooj				1	1			2
Yaa				1	3			4
<i>Khun Sa</i>								
<i>(20)</i>								
Lis				1	1	1	1	4
Thoj		2				1	5	8
Vaaj				1			1	2
Yaa	1	1		3	1			6
<i>Pha Pu</i>								
<i>Chom</i>								
<i>(20)</i>								
Haam		2		4	1	1		8
Lis	1		1	1			2	5
Thoj	1	1			3	2	1	8
Vaaj	1							1
Xyooj		1						1
Yaa		1						1
Totals	4	8	1	15	26	8	25	

In Cooper's four villages, there were 9 men of the Hang clan, 11 Lee, 1 Moua, 21 Thao, 15 Vang, 3 Xiong, and 27 Yang. These men preferred women from the Thao (15), Vang (26), and Yang (25) clans; the other wives' clans were: Hang (4), Lee (8), Ma (1), and Xiong (8). Thus, Thao, Vang, and Yang men tended to marry Thao, Vang, and Yang women, but since those with the same clan name cannot marry, they married in

various other clan combinations. Of a total 63 men and 66 women of those three clans, there were 48 matches (see Table 5).

TABLE 5. Summary of Thao, Yang and Vang matches in Cooper's villages.

	Thoj (Thao)	Vaaj (Vang)	Yaaj (Yang)
Thoj (Thao)	taboo	6	7
Vaaj (Vang)	1	taboo	13
Yaaj (Yang)	5	16	taboo

It is reasonable to expect that for the majority of these wives, residence was virilocal, in that they moved into their husband's family's houses. Cooper did not identify which of these women came in from other villages, but it is reasonable to assume that many of them were from groups resident in the villages, or related to those in the villages. In these cases, the question of residence depends on how the question is asked; for women, it is both virilocal and matrilocal (with the husband's family, but in the "neighborhood" of the wife's family).

There is often conflict in the community between the various clans. Although favorable marriages between clans reduces the conflict, the opposition serves to identify the social boundaries between groups, between "us" and "them." Common enemies or outside threat serve to bring clans into closer accord, as the link to non-Hmong is more remote than the link between clans. To some extent, inter-clan rivalries and conflicts on the rise in American communities is an indicator of the relative security in which Hmong find themselves.

Opposition 3: Sublineage (*caj ceg*)

After greeting a stranger and inquiring about his or her clan, the next question concerns the identity of the ancestor three or four generations distant, and the details of the spirit worship and taboos, particularly the details of the funerary rituals.

The most meaningful group to an individual male is the sublineage, or those males who are descended from a known common ancestor. This is the basic economic group, the men who pool resources and share labor; these are the boys who call each other “brother,” who play together as children, and whose relationships with each other are more important than those between any individual man and his wife. In actual practice, within the *caj ceg* is formed a group of related males who may prove to be compatible and willing to work cooperatively; the enduring relationships actually formed are closer than the general *caj ceg* relationships, more like the relationships Americans establish with spouses (or “significant others”) in that they are self-determined rather than the result of genealogy. This subset of the lineage, along with non-kin, form a *pab pawg*.

Tapp (1989) provides ample evidence for the way in which funerary practices and other ritual details are used to identify sublineages. For example, one *caj ceg* may leave the deceased inside the house for the entire pre-burial time, and other *caj ceg* move the body outside on the third day. The tiny specific details of household rituals and procedures take the place of written genealogy records, and it is important that the sons in a lineage group attend and observe carefully his group’s rituals. Similarities in ritual and custom mean that two people share an ancestor, at some point in the past, and so, one can die in the house of the other (Lue Vang 1988, personal communication). In reality, *caj ceg* are ritual groups, while *pab pawg* are collaborative groups.

By some reckoning, the ritual differences became sub-clan identifiers, and may have evolved into separate clans. For example, Mottin, who worked with Hmong in the north-central part of Thailand

(Khek Noy) identified fourteen clans, with sub-clan variants for Yang, Vang, Xiong and Lee. The subgroups that Mottin identified for the Vang, Yang, Xiong, and Lee clans were based on similarities of funeral practices. In the case of the Vang clan, there were two subgroups, *Vaj Ntxhoos* and *Vaj Tshiav Mab*. The first group prepared a litter for carrying the corpse to the grave with nine stakes, and the second group used five. Among those using nine stakes, one group used the Chinese method of covering the grave with stones, and the other used the Hmong method of using dirt, resulting in *Vaj Ntxhoos Suav* and *Vaj Ntxhoos Hmoob*.³³ The *Xyooj Suav* ("Chinese Xiong") claimed ancestors who were Chinese, while the *Xyooj Hmoob* ("Hmong Xiong") claimed only Hmong ancestors. The *Xyooj Suav* were also called *Xyooj Loj* ("big Xiong") because the Chinese were seen as having a robust constitution; the others were alternately known as *Xyooj Me* ("small Xiong"). The Lee clan was likewise subdivided.

In another example, one Vang *caj ceg* differs from others only in the specifics of the ceremony to install the door spirit in the door of the house. One group always uses a dog sacrifice one year, alternating with a pig sacrifice; they refer to themselves as *dev quas npua* ('dog comes between pigs'). In addition, part of this group observes a household prohibition on the father-in-law entering the bedroom of the daughter-in-law (*caiv txaj*), and vice versa. Another part of the *dev quas npua* group does not observe this prohibition, although there is some disagreement over whether or not they should have followed it but have somehow dropped it.

A patriline is identified by the name of the common ancestor, or by a *kwv tij* who held an important position or was well-known in the region. *Thoj Pov Nplias Tub* (clan—given name—ancestor's name) is an example, in which a man has adopted the name of this ancestor as an American surname. Bruce Bliatout is actually *Pov Thoj Nplias Tub*; he is *Pov* of the *Thoj* clan, and his lineage ancestor was *Nplias Tub* of the *Thoj* clan. His kinsman is Sam Bliatout; the clan is not readily apparent unless *Nplias Tub*, Hmoob Thoj is known and remembered.

In the "old days," a woman taught her daughter the rudiments of needlework or batik, and left it to her daughter's mother-in-law to

complete her training. Although all evidence is lost to time, it is conceivable, and logical, that women perpetuated lineage distinctions through the specific designs of batik or embroidery just as men identify lineage groups through subtle differences in custom and ritual. If true, this would reinforce the practice of cross-cousin marriage, to keep the patterns “within” particular lineages and sublineages.

Opposition 4: Dialect groups

Generally, there are only two dialect groups in the United States, the *Hmoob Dawb* (White Hmong) and *Hmoob Ntsuab* (Green Hmong). A third group, *Hmoob Txaij* (Striped Hmong), while different in terms of costume, speak the same dialect as White Hmong. In Thailand, *Hmoob Quas Npab*, is identified as a separate group, but this is likely a different name for Striped Hmong. Another group named in Thailand is *Yob Tshuab*; while the name is probably the same as “Ya Ch’io” identified in Clarke’s 1911 book on the Miao in Guizhou province, the dialect is very similar to Green Hmong (see Note 7).

Dialects differ in the number of tones, in the salience of some consonant blends and several vowels, as well as differences in lexicon. The difference between dialect groups is like that between American English and British English, but extensive enough that White Hmong speakers have difficulty understanding Green Hmong.³⁴ The Green Hmong are thought to be closer to the Miao groups still in China, in that they have been less Sinicized. However, Dr. Yang Dao, in 1988, talked to a White Hmong girl of the Thao clan in Guangxi province, about 20 kilometers from the Laotian border, and he said that her dialect is virtually identical to the White Hmong of Laos (Yang Dao 1992:personal communication).

Generally there is a feeling of superiority of one’s own dialect group over the other, and women prefer to have a daughter-in-law of the same dialect group, so that there are fewer conflicts in language and custom. There are different needlework techniques associated with each of the dialect groups, but the differences are disappearing as women live in

mixed groups and borrow techniques from one another. Historically, the batik design, cross-stitch, and layered appliqué were the specialty of the Green Hmong, whereas the cut-and-reverse appliqué was the province of the White Hmong.

Current efforts to revise the orthography reflect an increasingly benign environment for Hmong identity in the United States. Although the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) was developed in conjunction with White Hmong informants, it can represent the variant sounds of Green Hmong very well. Most published works use White Hmong as the standard spelling, and this has caused the Green Hmong to propose publishing books to reflect their dialect. The issue of orthography appears to be settled by practice, but the question of how to write compound words (multisyllabic words) has not yet been resolved. In addition to a very good dictionary based on the lexicon of remote village life (Heimbach 1969), there is a volume produced since resettlement in the United States that contains American lexicon, but is marked by frequent errors; it is written in Green Hmong (Xiong, Xiong, Xiong 1983). Bertrais' French-Hmong dictionary uses White Hmong, and the only description of syntax thus far (Mottin 1978) uses White Hmong.

Difficulties in communication between groups of Hmong is becoming more apparent between Hmong of different nationalities. The words incorporated from national languages for new concepts is transforming Thai Hmong into a dialect separate from Laotian Hmong and American Hmong. As the loan words are most often taken for concepts that are new to Hmong, it is the same words that have national variants. For example, at a recent conference in Chiang Mai, American Hmong used English words for "university," "success," "society," "education," and so on, whereas the Thai Hmong used the Thai words (*ma-hah-vit-ta-ya-ha-ly*, *sahm-ret*, *sahng-kohm*, *seuk-sah*) for those same concepts. Because many of the Thai Hmong have studied English, the English variants were the more commonly adopted in conversation. Within the United States, Hmong words are coined for new concepts, but there is regional (often individual) variation in the way words are coined.

For the first time in history, however, there is the possibility—and

likelihood—that Hmong from the various countries can communicate regularly and can establish kin-like relationships with one another, through the nurturing of ties of reciprocal obligation.

Opposition 5: Regional groups

Hmong observe regional differences (see Figure 6 and Illustrations 1 and 2). There are costume distinctions in headdress and form of silver jewelry, as well as the sound of the sung poetry and instrumental music. Hmong refer to one another as *Hmong Xieng Khouang*, *Hmong Sam Neua*,³⁵ or *Hmong California*, *Hmong Minnesota*, and *Hmong Thai*. In the United States, money pools (for major purchases or borrowing) sometimes form around a nucleus of people who came from the same village in Laos (although it is likely that many are lineage kin and affines as well). Hmong who were in the military together, who were students in the capital or overseas at the same time, or who were in the same displaced person areas within Laos also use these commonalties as the basis for different kinds of collaborative groups. Within the United States, links are springing up between unrelated Hmong who share similar professional, educational, or religious pursuits. As the circle of potentiality widens, the makeup of collaborative social groups, *pab pawg*, also changes.

More recent oppositions

Christians vs. spirit worshippers (dab qhuas)

As with other village peoples, missionaries have had a significant impact, both positive and negative, on the lives of the Hmong. While not as divisive as the “Christian vs. traditional religion” splits within the Mien community, there are fundamentalist Christian Hmong groups who regard themselves as very different from ancestor and spirit worshippers. Missionaries have provided a written form for the language, albeit so that the Bible could be translated. It is this orthography that is

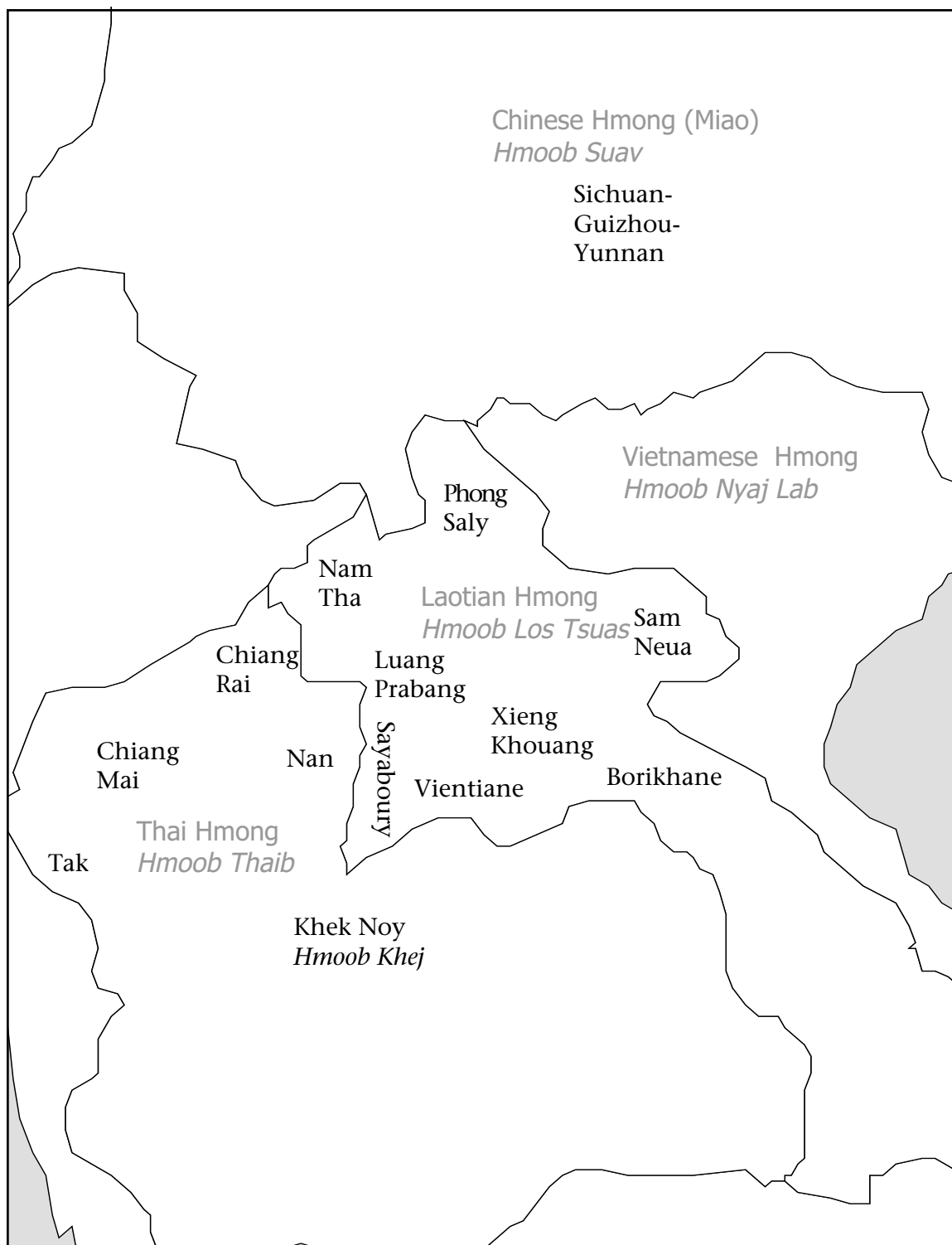


FIGURE 2. Regional distinctions among the Hmong are reinforced by differences in dress and characteristics of sung poetry, yet broad similarities tie the groups together over space and time. The Thai Hmong tend to refer to *Hmoob qaum teb* ("northern Hmong": Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan) and *Hmoob qab teb* ("southern Hmong": Hmong from the area of Khek Noy, a major Hmong settlement in Phitsanulok province). Hmong from Chiang Rai, Nan, Sayaboury, and Luang Prabang are more similar to one another in dress than any of them are to other regional groups.

widely used today. Missionaries have also provided selected individuals with the encouragement, help, and financing to leave the remote villages for lowland or foreign schools (McNabb 1992; *Nom Npis, Hmoob Lis* 1986:personal communication).

Urban/rural; educated/uneducated

Increasingly evident in Thailand is the distinction between urban and rural Hmong. Kunstadter characterized Thai villages as traditional, transitional, or urban. Within the American Hmong, there is also a distinction, often invisible to Americans, between those who used to be in transitional or urban settings before resettlement. This distinction can be seen most clearly in terms of access to education beyond the third grade in Laos. Reder's survey (1981) was conducted in Portland, Oregon, in the early 1980s, and 332 of 334 identified Hmong households were interviewed. Of 1399 individuals, 73.1% had no schooling in Laos; another 12.5% had 1 to 3 years of school. Fifty individuals, 3.6%, attended Lao secondary school, and 0.7%, or 10 individuals, entered the tertiary system, probably outside of Laos.

In Thailand today, there is still a low level participation in education. In the Mae Sa Valley (northeastern Thailand), in 1974, Crooker found that in four Hmong villages, 88.7% of the Hmong over seven years of age had no schooling at all (Crooker 1986:261); 10.8% had some primary school, 0.5% attended secondary, and none attended tertiary schools. The four villages in Crooker's study area all had Thai primary schools in the villages. Kundstadter et al. (1988:9) found that 72.3% of Thai Hmong men aged 15-34 in 12 villages in 1986 received "zero" years of education; for Hmong women the percentage was 95.8%.

As acculturation progresses in America, there is an increasing gap between those who drop out of high school, those who accomplish high school graduation, and those who enter some sort of tertiary education. Hmong are also beginning to diverge in terms of "upward mobility." Some families have taken advantage of educational and occupational opportunity and have incorporated new economic strategies into their lives. At the same time, others are destined to one or two generations of welfare dependence. Differing aspirations for children and the family are

becoming a significant contrast, cutting across other oppositions.

Political orientation

Finally, a significant distinction has developed as a feature of “refugeeness.” Hamilton-Merritt’s *Tragic Mountains* (1993) provides detailed information on the way in which Hmong who are still strongly involved with the political situation in Laos that caused their flight feel about the future; they look back. Other Hmong, generally those who have acculturated and see the promise of success in this country that would never have been possible in Laos, look forward. This split in the Hmong community crosses all the other boundaries.

Chapter 4.

Cultural Expressions

Of the ethnic markers, the Hmong paj ntaub ('flower' 'cloth,' textile ornamentation) is the most immediately recognizable, and enduring over space and time. The dress of Heh (Black) and Ya Ch'io Miao in Guizhou province at the turn of the century (Clarke 1911) and contemporary Miao costume, in all its regional variety (Hong Kong Museum 1985; Cultural Palace of Minorities 1985), are remarkably similar to White, Green, and Striped Hmong of Laos in 1964, of the United States in 1984, and Thailand in 1986 (see Illustrations 1-6). All except the White Hmong (who sometimes wear black pants) wear front-tied pleated skirts, the opening covered by an apron, and overtied with colorful or decorated sashes. All have decorated collars, although some wear them face up, others face down. All wear some kind of silver neck ring, some with the chains hanging down in front, some with the chains hanging down in back. The headdress and hairstyle show extreme variety, as do the details of embroidery and appliqué. The Green Hmong skirts are based on indigo-dyed batik, and the man's Green Hmong costume features pants with long dropped crotches and short rib-tickling shirts. The White Hmong women wear white skirts or black pants, and the man's costume is similar to the Green Hmong except that the shirt is longer and the crotch shorter.

Skirts, sashes, and collars are elaborately decorated with patterns that, like fingerprints, are unique but composed of familiar elements. Baby-carriers and noob ncoos ('seed' 'pillow,' "funeral squares") are part of ceremonies that connect birth and death, and the families of a man and his wife. Elaborate funeral robes are mark the passing from the world of the living to the world beyond, as one becomes an ancestor to be honored in rituals by the descendants. Each of the traditional pieces contains the design elements that are mixed and matched in today's commercial decorative squares. The symbolism of the patterns and the evolution of particular changes in design are lost to time, but are the subject of

speculation.

Like *paj ntaub*, oral expressions carry identifying characteristics that mark dialect group and region, and conceivably, clan or lineage group. Kwv txhiaj (“sung poetry”; lug txhaj in Green Hmong), proverbs and paired words, folktales, and speeches contain familiar elements that are learned, then mixed and matched to suit an individual’s creativity and message. Evaluation of a task well-done, whether visual or oral, is based on the skill with which the familiar elements are remembered and the mental agility with which they are juxtaposed and elaborated upon in expression. Both visual and oral design contain kernels of meaning, often oppositional, surrounded by concentric frames that guide the observer towards the center, towards the meaningful features.

Paj Ntaub, “flower cloth”

The men’s upper garments do not reach their waists and their trousers do not cover their knees. Where their upper and lower garments meet they bind embroidered sashes. ... They hold fifes which consist of six tubes, two feet in length. ... The flounces [of the women’s clothes], sleeves and collars of their clothes all have embroidered borders. The embroidery uses fabrics inferior to those of the Chinese, but their ancient patterns are uncommonly delicate and have nothing of the modern style. ... Their skirts are minutely plaited like butterfly wings. The young men wear no shirts with their trousers and the maidens no trousers under their skirts. Where their skirts and upper garments meet the maidens also bind embroidered sashes [Lin Yueh-hwa 1940:330-331].

Lin Yueh-hwa (1940) translated this description of the Miao in China in 1684, yet it could be used to describe Hmong today in Laos or Thailand, or in the United States.

In the United States, the Hmong have become well-known for their elaborate and colorful needlework, and this beautiful skill stands in stark contrast to the traditional lives of the craftswomen. In Thai Hmong villages, the contrast is startling: a fuschia-banded baby-carrier or girl’s skirt fanned out over a bamboo “clothesline,” against a backdrop of browns and blacks, a work of art standing against weathered split bamboo walls. A woman with earth-stained fingers pulling a pristine white and fuschia sash from a plastic bag, taking almost invisible stitches with a tiny

needle, never leaves a smudge on the fabric. Inside houses that have dirt floors, no lighting, and cooking fires, the colors of the jungle beyond are vibrant, as they show through the splits and gaps of the bamboo walls. The colors of the poinsettia, the poppy, the roosters, and the parrots take the breath away. The hilltribe women capture this contrast in their stitchery.

The costumes distinguish dialect groups as well as regional groups. It is possible to pick out the Lao Hmong girl in the midst of the New Year in a Thai Hmong village. It is possible to tell without asking whether a woman hails from Xieng Khouang, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Sam Neua, or Nam Tha provinces in Laos by looking at the style of head cover and necklace. It is even possible to approximately date a skirt by the amount of cross-stitch and appliqué, the colors of fabric and thread used, whether or not the base fabric is homespun or purchased, and whether or not the long straight strips of appliqué have been attached by hand or by treadle-foot Singer.

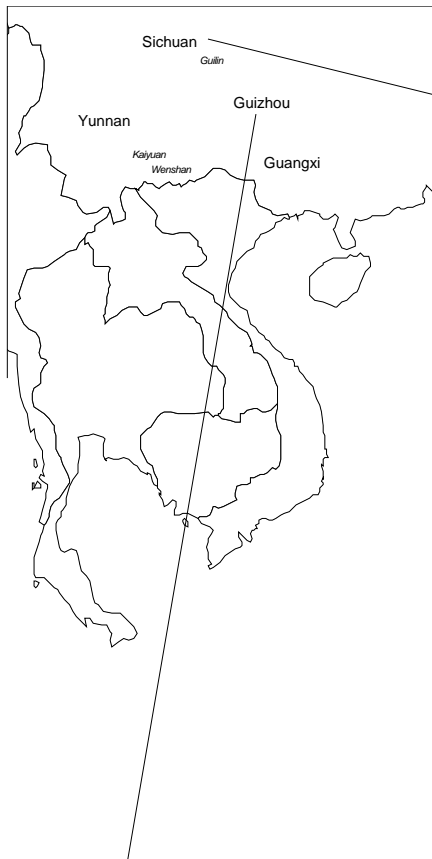
For a group of people who can recognize themselves in descriptions from hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago, the rate of change in costume detail is bewildering. The costumes seen in California New Year festivals are recognizably Hmong, but they are much different from the costumes of ten or twenty years ago. Regional and dialect group differences disappear as head covers change to accommodate Western hairstyles and ease of use; as White Hmong girls buy Green Hmong skirts because they are more beautiful; as Laotian Hmong girls in the United States buy Thai Hmong skirts. The flurry of innovation that is seen from year to year in the United States can in part be traced to changes in the Hmong social pattern over the past twenty years. Hmong in the refugee camps produce many of the articles of clothing that were formerly crafted by the women themselves, as American Hmong girls have more money than time. The plain black fabric of the shirt has been replaced by French velveteen into which metallic flowery patterns are woven. The traditional headdresses have been replaced by glittery hats patterned after a child's "rooster" hat. The Green Hmong skirts, covered with cross-stitch and appliqué so that the underlying batik pattern is completely obscured,

contain neon-bright colors of nylon available in Thailand (the actual coordination of elements between the batik section of the skirt and the cross-stitched/appliquéd section has a structure which has changed over time in a similar way). White Hmong skirts, which used to be plain white, are now decorated with sequins and tinsel. The aprons, which used to be plain black, are now made of velveteen to match the shirt, or heavily embroidered and embellished like the collars, sashes and coin purses (see Illustrations 1-6). These articles of clothing, outward signs of ethnic identity, are in a sense symbolic of the processes at work in the culture itself: familiar elements in new materials and new combinations, still recognizable and significant in their social meaning. In costume choices, there is a blending of dialect, regional, and national groups into a “global” Hmong.

This year-to-year change in the costume’s appearance originally triggered the idea that innovation within familiar boundaries is a fundamental part of the Hmong “personality writ large” (Benedict 1934 in Silverman 1981:142). “A culture,” she says, “like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action” (Benedict 1934 in Bohannan and Glazer 1988:176). The key to understanding the differences between cultural groups is to understand what drives the emotions and thinking a society, often in contrast to another. To understand Hmong, it seems, is to understand how change is contrasted with continuity, how individuality is contrasted with conformity, how individuals create the composition of visual, oral, and social design.

The visual designs contain recognizable elements: layered bands of appliqué, triangles, squares tilted and superimposed on contrasting, squares, lines and dots, spirals, and crosses. While it is tempting to extract complex hidden messages from a piece, or to extrapolate the designers’ names for the elements into significance, the validity of such claims will probably be forever unprovable. It is just as intriguing to compare styles within region, within clans, and even within *caj ceg* to see if there are differences that help define the boundaries of patrilineal groups. Comparison to the use of tartan plaids to identify the clans of the

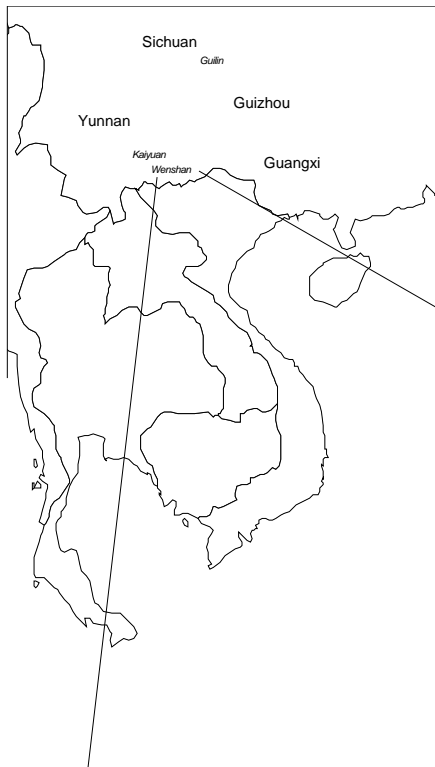
ILLUSTRATION 1. Chinese Hmong dress.



Miao from Guilin, Sichuan (Hong Kong Museum 1985:55).

Miao from Guizhou (Wangmo district) (Cultural Palace, 1985:183). Batik with applique.

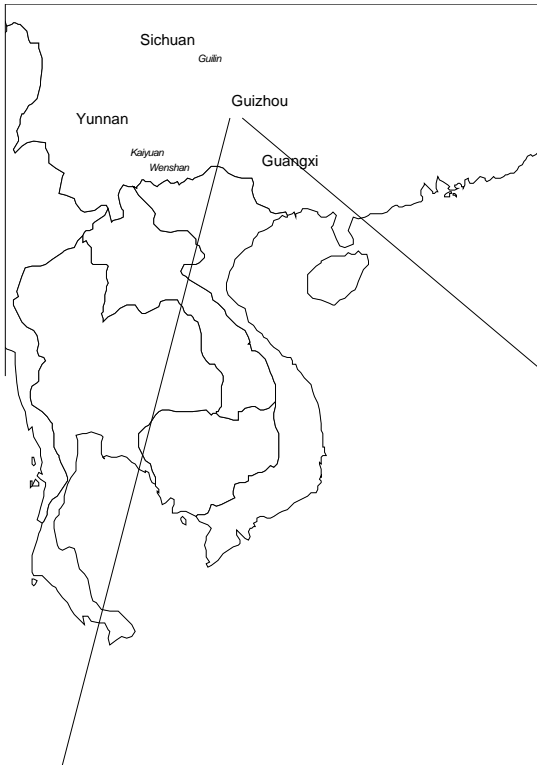
ILLUSTRATION 2. Chinese Hmong dress.



"Chiubei" style, Yunnan, near Wenshun (Cultural Palace 1985:179). White skirt, spiral cut-and-reverse applique.

Miao from Wenshan, Yunnan (Hong Kong Museum 1985:56).

ILLUSTRATION 3. Chinese Hmong dress.



Black (Heh) Miao mother and daughters, early 1900s, Panghai, Guizhou (Clarke 1911: facing 34). This dialect group is fairly far removed linguistically from either White or Green Hmong of Laos, yet their "flood" song is remarkably similar to contemporary folktales (see text); the neckrings are identifiable as Hmong, and the skirts, while too dark to see well, are indigo-dyed with embroidery along the bottom edge.

Miao from Guizhou (Hong Kong Museum, 1985:52).

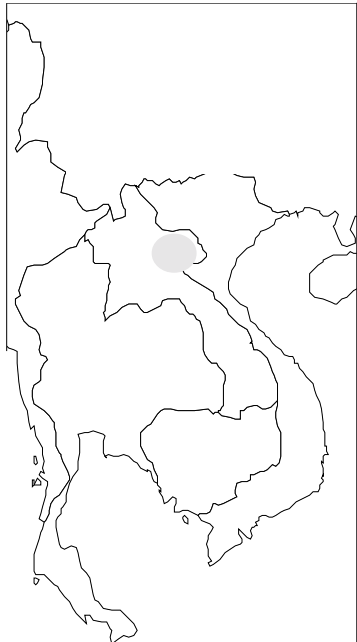
ILLUSTRATION 4. Identity markers (dialect & regional group): White Hmong from Laos and Thailand.



White Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb*) from Sayaboury (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1984).

White Hmong from Luang Prabang, "modern" fabric (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1985).

ILLUSTRATION 5. Identity markers (dialect & regional group): Striped Hmong from Laos.



Striped Hmong (*Hmoob Txaij*)
from Sam Neua area (Houa
Phan province), Laos (Photo
by the author, Sacramento,
California, 1985).



Striped Hmong (*Hmoob Txaij*)
from Laos (Photo by the author,
Ban Vinai refugee camp, Thailand,
1986).



Striped Hmong (*Hmoob Txaij*) (Photo by the author,
Rancho Cordova, California, 1984). Embroidered stripes.

ILLUSTRATION 6. Identity markers (dialect & regional group): Green Hmong.

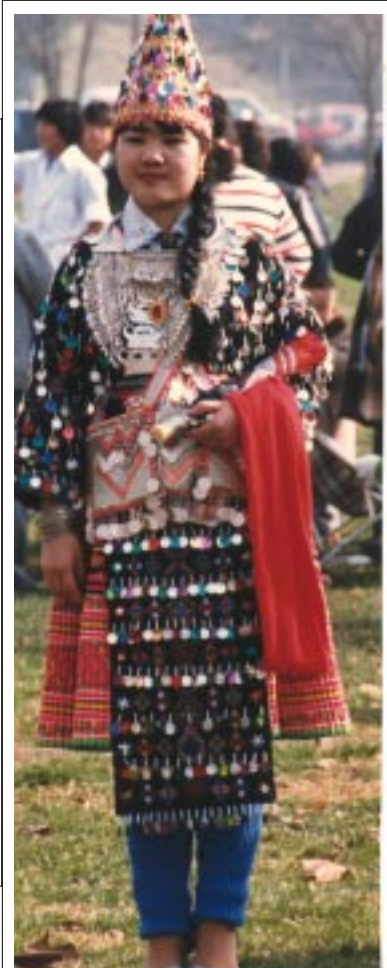


Green Hmong from Xieng Khouang, skirts purchased from the refugee camp (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1985).

Green Hmong, one with traditional Xieng Khouang headdress, one with new rooster hat (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1985).



Green Hmong (*Hmoob Ntsuab*, *Hmoob Leeg*), from Xieng Khouang province, Laos (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1985). Updated with "rooster" hat, glittery disks.



mountaineers of Scotland suggests that in exogamous societies immediately visible markers of clan serve an important social function. It takes only a short conceptual leap to imagine that batik patterns or the style of embroidered collars at one time identified one's clan or *caj ceg*.

In all likelihood, however, the textile techniques were influenced by thousands of years of contact with the Chinese. Dover (1976:173), in a reprinted 1931 outline of Chinese symbolism, says that textile ornamentation reached its zenith during the reign of Emperor Chien Lung, 1736-1795; this was the time just before the exodus of the majority of Hmong from China to Indochina (see Figure 1). Chinese noble's robes were typically decorated with twelve symbols: the sun, moon, stars, mountains, dragon, pheasant, goblets, pondweed, fire, rice, axe, and a Chinese symbol representing rank and stature.

Also typical of Chinese ornamentation was the use of border patterns, thought to give a piece a sense of completeness; certainly border patterns are characteristic of Hmong design. In a curious linguistic twist, *affine* derives from the Latin *ad finis*, "border"; the importance of "borders" in the Hmong social world has been addressed in the previous section on identity and oppositions. A man's affines are all those to whom he might be married, his *neej tsa*, all clans but his own. It is not difficult to visualize an individual in the center of a patch of clansmen, surrounded by a border separating his world from all others, all his potential affines.

Pieces crafted for new year (courtship) skirts, baby-carriers, collars, and *noob ncoos* contain familiar core elements. These pieces are part of socially important events—birth, marriage, renewing ties with affines, death, rebirth—and they most likely carry the core elements of design. The most commonly occurring elements are crosses or "x"s, spirals, lines and triangles.

Crosses of various types are commonly used (see Illustration 7). A Green Hmong woman from Xieng Khouang province of Laos calls the crossing pieces of appliqué in *noob ncoos*, baby-carriers, and skirts *tsuw tsum*, ('idea/plan' 'cross, as a fallen tree crosses a road,' "cross design"). In batik, she calls the crosses *txaj khaub-lig* ('mark' 'cross,' as "x" or "+,"

“cross mark”) . Crossing pieces of appliqué on the baby-carrier and *noob ncoos* sometimes resemble the swastika or “reversed swastika,” which in Chinese symbology represents fire and by extension the sun. Bessac (1988:3) suggests that the cross design is the *tus ncej dab*, or “spirit post” of the house next to which the placentas of the *caj ceg* are buried, and by extension a symbol of the patriline. She says:

If the cross is a symbol of the patriline, the question is to which of three overlapping, yet distinct, patrilineal groups does it refer. The cross may symbolize the known ancestor, mothers and fathers, of the resident male line, the putative ancestor of the surname group or xeem which among the highly mobile Hmong acts often like a political unit, or the founder of a territorial unit set apart by costume [Bessac 1980:3].

A cross could, alternatively, symbolize the intersection of clans through marriage, and the series of crosses (see Illustration 7) the interconnectedness between two to several *caj ceg* through repeated marriages.

Batik is a feature of the baby carrier, the skirt, and the funeral clothing of the Green Hmong. Looking at batik from China and Laos, the differences are evident, but the basic identity as Hmong batik is unmistakable. Within the Miao groups of China today, batik is most typical of Huangping, Danzhai and Anshun counties of Guizhou province (areas in which the Hmong lived in the late 1700s) and Xuyong county of Sichuan province. Illustration 8 (bottom) shows a section of the batik panels of a skirt Xuyong county of Sichuan province (Hong Kong Museum 1985:82).

The Green Hmong of Laos are most closely related to the Chuan-Qian-Dian group of Miao in China, concentrated in Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces. Illustrations 1–6 show typical Miao and Hmong dress. Although black and white photos do not capture the importance of color, the similarity to Hmong design of modern Laotian, Thai and American Hmong women is startling, particularly when recording of the designs in drawings or photographs, rare enough, have not been available to the women doing the work.

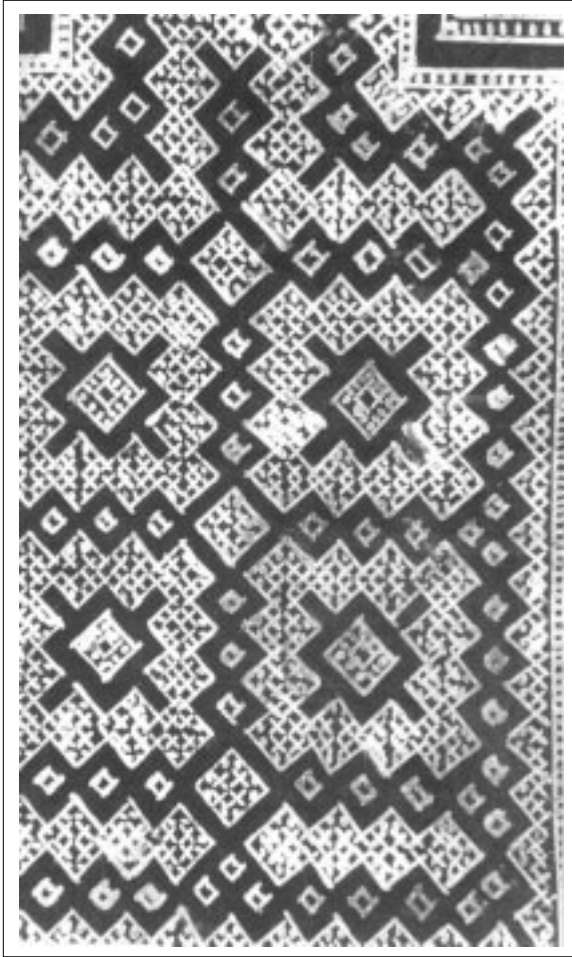
It is fascinating to watch a woman bring the batik pattern from a

mental representation to cloth-and-wax reality. She begins by scoring the blank fabric with horizontal and vertical lines, dividing the plane into a grid. She then draws in melted wax a field of parallel diagonal lines of different lengths. She then returns to the beginning point and draws in the second piece of each cross (or “x”). The design—is it completely visualized mentally?—emerges only after all the second slashes are completed. See Illustration 7, a close up of one of her wax designs. The designs have names that differ from group to group; names are utilitarian, like “wax marks” (*txaj cab*), or drawn from the environment, “water buffalo horn mark” (*txaj kub twm*), and so on.

Another common element in textile design is the spiral, which Bessac (1988) links to the Striped Hmong of Houa Phan province. However, it is also seen on the collars, sashes, and coin bags of White Hmong from both Laos and Thailand, and Miao of China (see Illustration 8; 2; 5). In Chinese ornamentation (Dover 1976:409), a spiral conveys the idea of revolving, and is an archaic symbol for “cloud.” Pang Vang, the batik artist mentioned here calls the spiral “snail” (*qaab qwj*).

Triangles are very common in the textiles of all dialect groups. They are prominent as appliqué on the *noob ncoos* and collars of the Green Hmong. Pang Vang calls the triangle *lub nplai* (‘scale,’ whether or fish, turtle, or reptile; ‘kernel of corn’); *nplai ntaub* is an appliquéd triangle; *nplai cab* is a batiked triangle. A Chinese vessel in Dover (1976:121) shows a pattern called “fish scale,” a series of triangles with rounded tips, overlapping one another; could this be a comparable pattern in Chinese, evidence of contact and influence? Triangles serve as boundary markers between sections of design. The center section of a Green Hmong skirt is a long band of fabric that has been batiked, a sequence of squares of design, each square bounded by lines and triangles. Triangles also border almost every commercial *paj ntaub* square. Interpretations of the meaning of the triangles vary: they are mountains that surround and protect the villages; they look like the colorful spine of the dragon *zaj*; they mimic the paper cutouts that are part of the *xwm kab*, or household altar; they could even be bands of people, conceivably the generations, that define the particular “family” that lies at the center of a piece.

ILLUSTRATION 7. Crosses.



Unembellished batik center of a Green Hmong baby-carrier. Crossing strips of bright applique will be sewn into spaces between the lines of the series of crosses (*tswv tsuam*) (Photo by the author, Sacramento, California, 1984).



Corner of a *noob ncoos* (funeral square). Crossing applique (*tswv khaub-lig*), cloth coins (*lub txab ntaub*), overlapping strips along the edge (*plooj noob ncoos*) (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1984).



Middle section of a Green Hmong skirt. Batik design has strips applique in the spaces between marks. The bottom section (cross-stitch) has a pattern that repeats or complements the batik & applique. Triangle (*lub nplai ntaub*) and straight lines (*tswv yag*) separate sections. Crossing strips are *tswv tsuam* (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1984).

ILLUSTRATION 8. Spirals.



Section of a White Hmong sash from Thailand (compare to spirals on the Striped Hmong costume, Illustration 5, and the Chinese costume, Illustration 2 (Yunnan) (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1993).



Chinese Hmong (Yunnan) sash; note the spirals (Cultural Palace 1985:181).

Piece of the batik & applique section of a Sichuan (China) Hmong skirt (Hong Kong Museum 1985:82).



Other common elements of appliqué and batik are straight lines, overlapping bands, zigzag lines, and squares. A straight line is *tswv xyaab* ('design' 'extend out') or *tswv yag* ('design' 'straight'); an appliquéd zigzag line *ntaub tswv nkhaus* ('cloth' 'design' 'crooked'); in batik it is *cab tswv nkhaus* ('wax' 'design' 'crooked'); and in cross-stitch *xuv tswv nkhaus* ('thread' 'design' 'crooked'). Overlapping bands of material framing a design are *plooj noob ncoos* ('join edge to edge' 'seed' 'pillow') or *plooj ncauj nyas* ('join edge to edge' 'mouth' 'baby-carrier'). An appliquéd line might be one band of cloth "pressed down" on another, or *tswv nas* ('design' 'press down'). The element known as a *txaj ntaub* ('coin' 'cloth') is a cloth square tilted on its diagonal sewn on top of a square. This is a feature of the *noob ncoos*; sashes and other clothing items have real coins stitched to them.

The batik or the embroidery designs are thought to encode a long-ago forgotten script for the Hmong language. Bessac (1988:9) reports that this idea originated with deBeauclaire, who lived with Miao groups in China in the early 1900s. DeBeauclaire (1954:48-59) reported that Pollard, a missionary, used the skirts to teach the Hmou (a Miao group) how to read and write their language. Pollard did devise a script (derived from the Chippewa Cree script commonly used by missionaries of the time) and adaptations of the script are in use today in some Chinese Miao groups. While the idea of a secret language innocently passed on by clever women under the repressive eye of the Chinese has appeal, this idea is likely tied to identity maintenance, as explained by Tapp (1989). The Khmu, among others, have legends that explain why only some people can read and write (Proschan 1989).

Generally speaking, the cut-and-reverse appliqué and embroidery is the specialty of the White Hmong, and the batik, cross-stitch, and layered appliqué is the specialty of the Green Hmong. Both groups have a decorated collar piece; those with cut-and-reverse appliqué and embroidery, worn face up, are White Hmong, and those with layered appliqué or cross-stitch worn face down, are Green Hmong.

The pieces in evidence today in the United States—decorative squares, dresses, aprons, pillow covers, bedspreads, checkbook covers,

and scenic panels—are innovations for the marketplace based on elements learned from sewing the traditional pieces, both White and Green Hmong. Commercial pieces of *paj ntaub* show the same process of creating and stylizing that can be seen in the crafting of costume. The proportions of the commercial decorative squares are carried over from the funeral squares, or perhaps the sections of design in the batik section of the skirt; Graham (1954, plate 18) recorded squares sewn by the Ch'uan Miao, but he did not say for what purpose. The commercial squares are essentially enlarged sections of a traditional piece, somewhat like an early American sampler, surrounded by layers of colored fabric and a row of appliquéd triangles. The color combinations are chosen to suit the tastes of the potential customers, and have become standardized as refugee agencies buy huge quantities of eight standard colors of polyester-cotton blend for camp artisans to use. As American Hmong sewing projects become established, there is more color variation, but it is still aimed at the taste of the buyer. I bought early pieces, before the standardization was in place, and the colors are unusual: green and purple; brown and purple; gray and green. These are not color combinations usually seen in Hmong costume, so it may have been that Hmong women were trying to guess what color combinations Americans favor, or they used whatever they could find in the bags of castoff clothes.

The story cloths (see Illustration 9), for which there is no Hmong name other than *paj ntaub*, represent a distinct change from the decorative squares. There is no piece of traditional textile that contains embroidered figures showing actions in settings, although the Lao, Cambodian, and Thai wall embellishments contain figures in secular or spiritual activities. Chinese textile ornamentation, especially that of the Miao from Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces, shows figures rather than geometric designs. Bessac (1988:27) speculates that Miao from China have taught Laotian Hmong women a representational stitchery that is common in China. Sally Peterson, who researched the creation of story cloths in Ban Vinai refugee camp says (1988:8), “most concur that sponsors organizing sales noticed and encouraged a newly developed vernacular form that struck them as more marketable ... ”

ILLUSTRATION 9. Story cloth. This is a recent innovation, created as a handicraft to sell. Lao, Thai, and Cambodian buildings are decorated with scenes, and in some Chinese provinces figured embroidery is part of the costume (Photo by the author, Rancho Cordova, California, 1984).



*ILLUSTRATION 10. Silver medallion that hangs down from a neckring (Xieng Khouang style: in the front; Luang Prabang style: in the back). Incised design on the medallion is similar to the design of *paj ntaub* squares—triangles, frames, center design (Photo by the author, Sacramento, California, 1985).*



Whatever the impetus for this kind of stitchery, the process of evolution has been similar to that already described: a memorized pattern is reproduced, with individual variations and stylistic changes; those that are admired or that sell best are maintained and developed, and the others disappear. War scenes are difficult to locate; in 1985, I bought a five foot square piece called “second air war,” showing both communist and anti-communist troops, weapons and aircraft, and brilliant displays of blood. The piece cost only \$80, when folktale or village pieces of a similar size were selling for \$300–\$500. Since that time, I have found no other similar war scenes for sale. In the bazaar in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1986 and 1992, there were story cloths showing scenes from the Bible and other motifs aimed at the Western buyer, like a couple circumscribed by a heart, kissing. Peterson’s article (1988:15) outlined the process by which Sue Lee, daughter-in-law of General Vang Pao living at Ban Vinai refugee camp in the mid-1980s, commissioned story cloths that captured a shared vision rather than a shared memory. It was a “unity flag” that showed a map of Laos with Hmong, Mien, Khmu, T’in, and other minority groups in identifiable dress; this piece was produced to raise money and support the efforts of the resistance to retake Laos from the communists.

Whatever the particular form of the needlework, the process of expression is the same: a basic core which is immediately identifiable is learned, then altered with individual creativity and skill.

New Year, United States, 1984

Yee Her’s costume and singing ability is a product of her mother and the women in her group. When others admire her, they compliment those who taught her and prepared her. To have ardent admirers, to attract the attention of other clans to whom alliances are desirable—all of this competition and public demonstration underlie the many kinds of events during the new year. New ways of expressing accomplishment are put before the public each year. Last year, the Hmong college students sponsored a gathering, and among those who acted as “master of

ceremonies” was a girl. She is an anomaly—she is too old, too independent, outside the role of “daughter” or “daughter-in-law.” If the future mothers-in-law look at girls like her, ones who can operate in the American system well enough to benefit her husband’s family and yet “know how to behave” (are identifiably Hmong), then this may become another variation in the kinds of cultural expression that are showcased during the new year.

Two Hmong girls who were known for their dance (more a matter of decoration and poise than intricate skill) presented a variation in their usual Lao-derived dance: they bounded on stage clad in leotards and tights, gyrating to the popular song, “Like a Virgin.” Fortunately, most of the adults in the audience could not understand the lyrics, but the thumping beat and unencumbered torsos delivered the message. This particular routine has not since been repeated, nor elaborated upon. To interpret this in terms of the idea that innovation takes place within a frame of cultural reference—that the expression is immediately recognizable as “Hmong,” then is varied—their dance routine was unacceptable in the same way that a piece of *paj ntaub* without the bands of fabric and triangles surrounding the center would be rejected, and in the same way that sung poetry without the distinguishing rhyming pairs would be ignored.

Yee Her’s Hmong dress is different from the White Hmong dress depicted in photographs taken in her native Laos twenty years ago. Black velveteen, roses of silver metallic threads woven in, has been used instead of plain black homespun for the jacket, pants, and apron. The blue trim is still in the appropriate places on the costume, banding the edges: cuffs on the sleeves, front edges of the jacket and edges of the aprons. The center of the aprons are embroidered with cross-stitch (in the past, the centers were plain), and decorated with the glittery round disks; this same decoration is applied to her jacket. The back of her jacket has a rectangular piece attached at the neck, rather like a small-sized sailor collar. The rectangular piece is finely worked with cut-and-reverse appliqué and embroidery, surrounded by narrow strips of colored fabric layered one on top of the other. The pattern of the collar piece is

geometric, the white space inside the banded frame is cut in a regular way by triangles, squares, spirals, and diagonals. The attaching stitches are all but invisible, and embroidered designs are stitched in the spaces created by the intersecting patterns. The colors are dominated by neon-pink, lime-green, and yellow, on a white background. Although some other women in colorful skirts wear the rectangular collar piece face down, Yee Her wears hers face up. The layers and layers of sashes and coin bags that are wrapped around her midsection repeat the needlework techniques used on the collar piece, and hundreds of silver coins dangle and jingle from the sashes and bags. Each of the pieces is banded with two or more strips of fabric, framing the center design. Around her neck is a silver neck ring, two hollow tubes collaring her face. Down her back, nearly to her waist, hang chains of silver, to which engraved medallions of many shapes are attached; these chains are part of the silver neck rings. One story is that this piece of jewelry signifies the neck rings with which the Chinese held Hmong captive, rather like handcuffs for the neck. On closer inspection, the medallions' engraved pattern mimics the design on the collar piece: frames within frames, and in the center a geometric or flowery design. Yee Her's headdress looks much like those in the old pictures; a black cloth is wrapped around her hair, concealing all of it. The ends of the head-fabric are embroidered with cross-stitch, and bright yarn pom-poms are attached so that the back of her head is a cluster of flowery colors. Around the black turban is tied a black-and-white checkered ribbon. This identifies that she hails from Luang Prabang province. She wears pale lipstick and gold earrings, but no other face decoration. Her age is difficult to determine; she has the height of a fully grown woman, her body's shape is well-concealed under layers of clothing, her demeanor is that of a young girl of early adolescence, but she handles the microphone and task at hand with surprising calm poise.

Oral Expressions

Sung poetry (*kwv txhiaj, lug txhaj*)

In the park are two to three thousand Hmong, but clustered near the public address speakers is a densely packed crowd of two hundred or so men, women, and children. Several people are holding “boom boxes” and other kinds of tape recorders shoulder height, aimed towards the center of the crowd. People look serious, gazing at the ground, looking around, once in a while talking to one other, but all are standing relatively still. The November wind cuts through the jackets and blue plaid head scarves, and lifts the glittery plastic trims on Yee Her’s jacket away from the fabric, so they twirl and dance on the beaded anchor strings. The silver coins, also tied to the costume by threads, are unaffected by the wind, but jingle as she moves towards the picnic table bench. She stands up on the bench, holding a microphone in her right hand and a folded flowery umbrella and the microphone cord in her left. Her face is incredibly smooth and pink from the chill, her eyes shy and unsure where to rest, her mouth occasionally smiling slightly as the announcer describes her talent at composing and performing *kwv txhiaj*. Her mother, blue scarf tied around her head in a style favored by the older Hmong women and wearing an old corduroy car coat over her new blue blouse, stands near the young girl giving words of advice while the announcer talks. Yee Her, the young girl, doesn’t visibly acknowledge her mother’s words, and appears to be fighting nervousness.

The task at hand is to perform her sung poetry for the crowd; the powerful speakers carry the sound to the far reaches of the park, to the ears of the thousands of Hmong gathered there to mark the coming of their new year. Her sounds are not like songs in the Western sense, as there are only five or so notes, and a slow chanting cadence. Some syllables are stretched long and thin, and others are cut off abruptly, swallowed suddenly. Certain syllables are repeated at fairly regular intervals, signposts along the aural road. From the attitude of intense concentration, she’s mentally involved in a strenuous task. She sings for

about five minutes, then steps down from the park bench and stands in the crowd.

Taking her place in the center of the crowd, but not up on the picnic bench, is a Hmong man, many years her senior, also holding a microphone. He sings, and the structure is similar to hers (long sustained “ni yai” followed by chanting, and ending with an abruptly cut off “ey” or “o”). Those in the crowd don’t look at him, nor do they appear very interested, but they stand still in the wind and look at nothing; every once in a while they laugh and nod, and the singer smiles while continuing. Yee Her’s mother tries to wrap her in the car coat, and stands just behind her right side.

After the man’s turn ends, she returns to the bench to begin again. They take turns like this several times, and the entire set lasts thirty or forty minutes. One such exchange goes like this:

(The man sings)

Nij..... yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee....
 tam tseeb ni nkauj-hmoob, sim me neej no
 es kheev lam muaj txoj hmoov;
 lub ntuj txawj qees lub teb txawj qaws
 es yuav qaws tau me nkauj-hmoob.
 Txiv-tub muab koj phim tau li lub nkoj **teeb**;
 sim neej no tawm rooj plaws lub teb lub chaws
 tus hlob tus yau los xyuas,
 yuav zoo puav tam li Suav-tuam-los-pav ua luam **yeeb**.

Ni.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....
 goodness oh Hmong girl, in my life-time
 if it’s possible that I have good fortune;
 if heaven selects you, if earth chooses you,
 then you are meant to be my girl-friend.
 I would dress you special, like a boat **bobbing** on the water;
 when we go out, everyone in the world,
 the old and the young, would notice us,
 like the Chinese merchant coming to trade **opium**.

Nij.....yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.....
tam tseeb ni nkauj-hmoob, sim me neej no
es kheev lam muaj txoj hmoov;
lub ntuj txawj qees lub teb txawj qaws
es yuav qaws tau me nkauj-hmoob.
*Txiv-tub muab koj phim tau li lub nkoj **co**;*

*sim neej no tawm rooj plaws lub teb lub chaws
tus hlob tus yau los xyuas,
yuav zoo puav tam li Suav-tuam-los-pav ua luam pob-txha-tsov.*

Ni.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....
goodness oh Hmong girl, in my life-time
if it's possible that I have good fortune;
if heaven selects you, if earth chooses you,
then you are meant to be my girl-friend.
I would dress you special like a boat **bouncing** in the water;
when we go out, everyone in the world,
the old and the young, would notice us,
like the Chinese merchant coming to trade **tiger**-bone.

(The girl responds)

*Nij.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis.....txiv-tub
koj niam thiab koj txiv noj tag tsav yam nuj tus dab-tsi los yug koj
es yuav yug tau koj tus me ntiv-tes ntiv-taw yiag quj-qaim
es yuav ntxim tag koj niam koj txiv ntiv-nplhaib **kub**;
Nij...yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis.....txiv-tub
koj niam thiab koj txiv noj tag tsav yam nuj tus dab-tsi los yug koj
es yuav yug tau koj tus muaj lub paj-plhu mos nyuj-nyoos tawb neeg **hlub**.*

Ni....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....Hmong boy,
what kinds of food did your parents eat to produce you,
and raise you to have beautiful fingers and toes,
worthy of your parents' ring of **gold**;
Ni.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....Hmong boy,
what kinds of food did your parents eat to produce you,
and raise you to have a gentle flower-face to attract people to **love** you?

*Nij.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis.....txiv-tub
koj niam thiab koj txiv noj tag tsav yam nuj tus dab-tsi los yug koj
es yuav yug tau koj tus me ntiv-tes ntiv-taw yiag quj-qaim
es yuav ntxim tag koj niam koj txiv ntiv-nplhaib **nyiag**.
Nij.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiis.....txiv-tub
koj niam thiab koj txiv noj tag tsav yam nuj tus dab-tsi los yug koj
es yuav yug tau koj tus muaj lub paj-plhu mos nyuj-nyoos tawb neeg **nyiam**.*

Ni....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....Hmong boy,
what kinds of food did your parents eat to produce you,
and raise you to have beautiful fingers and toes,
worthy of your parents' ring of **silver**;
Ni.....yaiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.....Hmong boy,
what kinds of food did your parents eat to produce you,
and raise you to have a gentle flower-face to attract people to **like** you?

These two perform for the crowds what was traditionally sung privately, between a young boy and girl, testing each other's knowledge and quick wit. While composing and singing *kwv txhiaj* the girls are catching tennis balls in their right hands, throwing them back underhanded to the boys facing them. As the two exchange verses, they throw and catch a ball. When asked, the Hmong respond that *pov pob* (tossing the ball) allows shy marriageable youth to face each other; the throwing and catching keeps them within social distance long enough to get to know one another. The songs, along with the stitchery, were ways to judge the other qualities of a girl—how hard-working she might be, how well she knows the “patterns” of life, how clever and alert her mind is, and how well she attracts the admiration and notice of others. The singing, which is very quiet, requires the two to come closer together to hear, and the social distance narrows. The ways in which the girl answers the boy's verses tell him whether or not she is interested in him, and vice-versa. The mothers and fathers watch the potential sons-in-law and daughters-in-law with as much interest as the participants themselves.

Now that the Hmong no longer live in isolated villages, coming to meet people from other villages during the new year break in the year-long work cycle, there is less need for these customs that allow people to quickly get to know one another. Even though young Hmong freely intermix in American communities and schools, there is still interest in traveling to see others during the weekends of November and December. There is still much interest in seeing what others have, do and wear. A common element of the activities appears to be demonstrating to others what one has accomplished, what one can do, how much has been accumulated.

Kwv txhiaj, its sounds, structure, individual innovation within a set pattern represents “Hmong,” just as the bamboo wind pipes called *qeej* do, and just as the elaborate *paj ntaub* do. These are the ways in which Hmong demonstrate their identity in this new environment, but both these forms of cultural expression are different today than they were five years ago, ten years ago, fifty years ago. *Kwv txhiaj* continues to be

admired, even as new Western styles of song are incorporated into the Hmong ways of expressing themselves. The stitchery continues to be important, even as elements of costume are transformed into commercial products, and as the style of traditional dress changes. Costumed girls at the new year gatherings conform to a basic image, but there are individual variations and innovations within the general style of traditional dress.

The instrumental equivalent to sung poetry is music produced with the *qeej* ("windpipe"), the *raj* ("flute"), the *ncas* ("jew's harp"), and even the *nplooj* ("leaf"). Amy Catlin (1981:171) calls this kind of song "surrogate speech" in that the notes blown on the instrument are in reality the tones and even the vowels of speech; only the consonants are lost. I remember a Hmong woman laughing out loud when she understood the message sent by an old man blowing on a folded camellia leaf during a stage performance. She clearly understood the words of his song, which evidently invited some lovely young girl on the other side of the valley to come visit. In the same way, a man blowing into a *qeej* for more than eight hours during a funeral relates the clan history, from the time the family was in China. In the same way, too, a young man can tell a girl things impossible to say aloud by twanging a jew's harp and shaping the vowels and varying the pitch. Whatever the type of delivery, the structure is basically the same as for *kwv txhiaj*.

At the heart of the sung poetry composition is a pattern of two pairs of rhymes, related to each other in meaning or syntax. Although there is no research on the way in which singers learn to craft sung poetry, listening to the same singer compose several songs in different circumstances shows that the singer has learned several core rhyme patterns, and then elaborates those "kernels" with layers of image, innuendo, and personalized communication. Like the *paj ntaub*, sung poetry reveals dialect and regional differences, immediately recognizable from one mountaintop to another. One verse of sung poetry might be represented schematically as frames within frames, with the treasured kernels of rhyme buried at the center of the structure (see Figure 3).

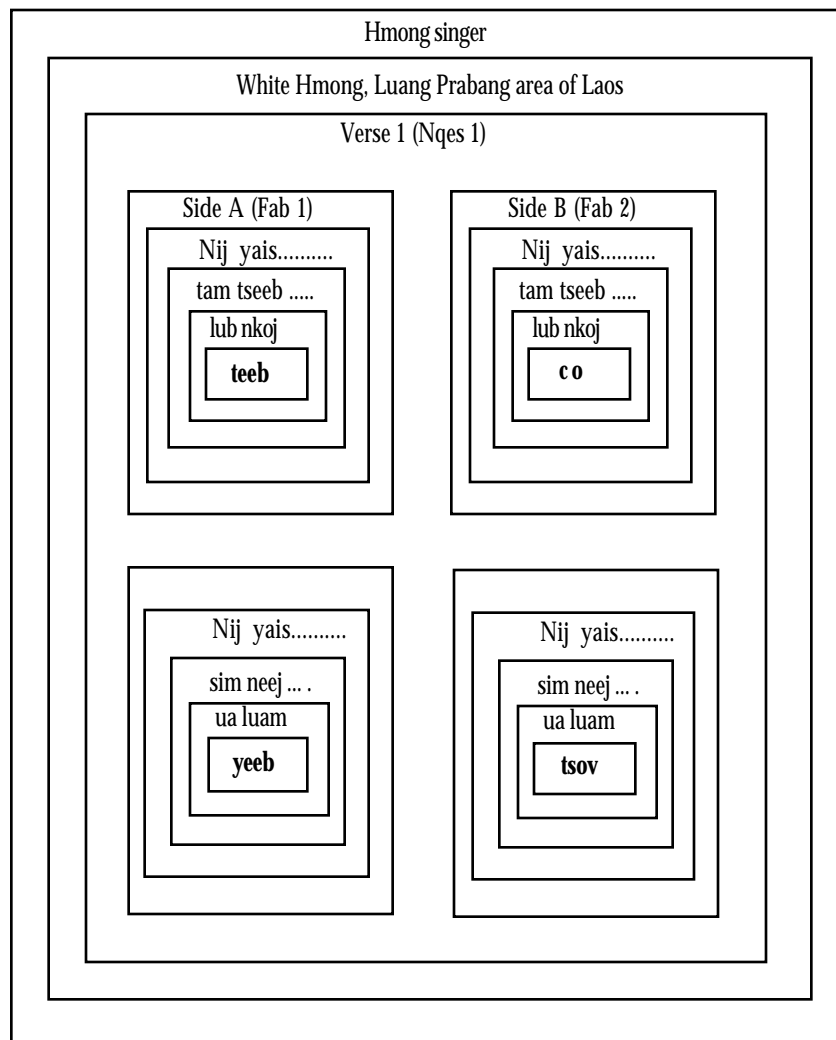


Figure 3. Diagram of kwv txhij verse. Compare this to the first verse of the man's performance.

Structure of sung poetry

There is a regular structure to the songs that are sung, which has been described by Jean Mottin (1980) and Amy Catlin (1981, 1987). The singer is actually creating the song while singing, but there are certain rules that he or she must follow. A song has verses, each consisting of two parts or sides; each side contains a pair of rhymes that are semantically related and as much clever word play as the singer is able to devise.

The lines are of indefinite length, and may contain "fillers," that give the singer time to formulate the word play and rhyme. The rhyme scheme is the most important feature of the song, and the listeners figure

out a “puzzle” which the singer presents. Since the listener does not know exactly when the second rhyming word will appear, there is a sense of anticipation and suspense that builds until the word appears. A song without four rhyming words in each verse (two in each side) is not a song. It may be that singers memorize certain core rhyme patterns, which can be added to and adapted into any of the different types of *kwv txhiaj*. The extent, cleverness, and fit of the additions are dependent on the singer’s ability.

The songs contain many clichés (familiar phrases heard in other songs), Chinese idioms, and images taken from nature. The singer never uses personal pronouns like “I,” “you,” “us,” but standard phrases instead, like “this young Hmong girl” (me), or “your father’s son” (you). The songs contain an introduction, several verses which contain rhymes and word play, and a closing.

The opening line of a song contains standard words that identify the type of song to come, as well as the dialect of the singer, and perhaps the singer’s regional affiliation. The words are sung on a long high pitch. The opening words may also be repeated at any time during the song, usually at the beginning of each verse and side, as the singer wishes. They may also be repeated here and there, to give the singer a pause. In the example, the opening words are *nij yais*.

Each song contains three to ten verses. A verse is *ib nqes*, which contains *ob txwg*, or “two pairs” of rhymes. Each verse contains two sides (*ob fab*, or “two sides”). Each side is identical, or very similar, except for the manipulation of the key words and rhymes. Soon after the last rhyme, the verse ends. In this example, the man sings one verse, and the girl an answering verse; singers who can actually tailor their answering verses to what has gone before are the ones who gain a reputation for really knowing how to *hais kwv txhiaj*. One of the reasons that Yee Her was asked to perform publicly was because of her voice and composure, but also because she knew how to answer. The man playing the role of the suitor was also chosen because he knew how to formulate clever responses.

Rhymes are *ob lub suab sib phim*, or “two sounds that match.” The

rhymes are the most important elements in a song, but there is some flexibility in acceptability of rhyme (generally, a vowel sound and tone that match), but a failed semantic match makes the verse unacceptable. Since the songs are not written but composed extemporaneously, and since the “breaks” in the flow of words are dependent on breath, not meaning or phrasing, the rhymes are not necessarily at the ends of lines. In the example, only *teeb/yeeb* and *kub/hlub* are rhymes. (In the Hmong orthography, the final letter is not a consonant but a tone marker.) The rhyming words in a song are sometimes old Chinese words that cannot be literally translated, which makes translation of *kwv txhiaj* difficult. Likewise, rewriting a Green Hmong song in White Hmong loses the rhyme pattern to keep the semantic matches intact. The rhyming words are part of the word play or turns in meaning.

The word play is similar to English sayings or jokes that depend on puns or on words with double meanings for their value. In sung poetry, the turns in meaning are often synonyms, antonyms, reversals of elements of common word pairs (like “ice-cream” and “creamed ice”), or parallel structures (like “ring of silver,” “ring of gold”). The listener uses the rhymes to mark the part that is played upon. In the example, one side contains *lub nkoj teeb* (“boat bobbing in the water”), and the opposing side contains *lub nkoj co* (“boat bouncing on the water”); the second word play in the verse is *ua luam yeeb* (“trade opium”) and *ua luam pob txha tsov* (“trade tiger bone”). This particular example contains word play that is fairly simple, not as intricate or complex as in the following verse taken from an “orphan” *kwv txhiaj*:

Nij yai....ntoj lis nuag los txog rooj niag teb no, es
 leej-kwv leej-tig twb tsis los es
 haus cawv tuaj cawv twb tsis puag **khob** ais.
 Lub ncauj tsis hais los nplooj-siab xav ywb-ywm tias:
 "Nyob tsam muaj plaub muaj ntug,
 tsis muaj chaw vam
 tsis tau lub chaw mus **nyob**," os kwv-tij Hmoob.

Los txog rooj niag teb no, es
 tsis muaj kwv tsis muaj tig, es
 noj mov los mov tuaj tsis puag **caj**.
 Ces tu-siab twj ywb-ywm tias:

"Tsis muaj kwv muaj tig,
 nyob tsam muaj txiab mus muaj nkees
 tsis muaj chaw nyob
 tsis tau lub mus chaw **vam**," mog.

Ni-yai....I arrive in this foreign land,
 but my young brothers and old brothers do not come.
 I drink wine, but the wine does not fill the **cup**.
 My mouth does not speak, but my heart quietly thinks that
 if it could be that there are disputes and disagreements,
 then there's nothing to hope for, no place to **stay**, oh Hmong cousins.
 I arrive in this foreign land, but
 I have no young brothers, no old brothers,
 I eat rice, but the rice does not fill my **throat**.
 I quietly feel sad that I have no young brothers, no old brothers.
 If it could be that there is sickness and disease,
 then there is no place to stay, nothing to **hope for**.

In this example, the word play is indicated by the boldfaced portions. Although the translations cannot give a very close approximation of the kind of manipulation, it is easy to see that this singer has the ability to keep several strands going until the verse ends with the second rhyme of the second pair.

The song concludes with one or more lines that summarize the sentiment of the singer. The end of the song is marked by *om*, a vowel with falling tone distinguished by a glottal stop of air, making it sound as if it has been swallowed. For the above passage, the conclusion is:

Ces yuav chim laam xeeb om
 so- will-unhappy -"laam-xeeb" (weapon)-concluding syllable

We'll be as unhappy as the time in China, when we were betrayed by a Hmong with a laj-xeeb, and we had to leave the land we loved.

Kernels

Jean Mottin (1980) published transcribed sung poetry collected in Khek Noy (Thailand) and Ban Vinai (Thailand) in the mid and late 1970s. In Table 6, below, are listed the rhyming pairs extracted from four of songs from Mottin's collection. (Each row represents one verse; the end of one song is marked by a double line.)

TABLE 6. *Kernels of rhyme and meaning from kwv txhiaj (sung poetry)*

Rhyme 1a (side A)	Rhyme 1b (side B)	Rhyme 2a (side A)	Rhyme 2b (side B)
kav ³⁶ (govern)	hnav (wear)	coj (lead)	noj (eat)
nroo (murmur)	zoo (good)	nrov (sound)	sov (warm)
liab (red)	ciab (wax)	ntub (wet)	dub (black)
pem (up)	npe (melody) ³⁷	ub (yonder)	lub (lyrics)
zeb ³⁸ (rock)	deb (far)	cav (log)	dav (wide)
po (pancreas)	nco (think of)	dua(v) (back)	tshua (care for)
zoov (jungle)	hloov (change)	nrog (with)	coj (wear ring)
nyiag (silver)	lias (scatter & follow)	kub (gold)	ncuv (flutter & follow)
ntu (section)	su (lunch)	rais (“acre”)	tshais (breakfast)
tawv ³⁹ (leather)	nrhawv (? intensifier with “nrho”)	do (barefoot)	nrho (completely)
nkoj (boat (tree))	coj (lead)	nthuav (open (tree))	yuav (marry)
nciab (black)	siab (heart)	nkawv (?)	nrhawv (completely)
m ⁴⁰ (cold)	tso (put in place)	nqhis (hungry)	txig (even in height)
hlub (love)	ub (ago)	txog (“drink to,” toast)	ntxov (early)
hnos (food)	pog (grandmother)	rawg (chopsticks)	yawg (grandfather)
	yawg (grandfather)		pog (grandmother)
hlub (love)	ub (ago)	txog (“drink to,” toast)	ntxov (early)
qhua (guest)	xyuas (observe)	ntsaib (loom part)	saib (watch)
dab (spirit)	pab (help)	cuas (loom effect?)	xyuas (observe)
coj (lead)	npoj (friends)	tshua (care for)	luag (others)
nrov (sound)	xov (message)	nroo (murmur)	moo (news)
zoo (good)	moo (news)	sov (warm)	xov (message)
xib (plant fibers)	ntsib (meet)	ntsug (plant shoot)	cuag (reach)

The structure of the sung poetry not only helps the singer compose, but also helps the listener decipher what is heard. For example, in the third song, the first verse contains the two rhyming pairs *tawv/nrhawv* and *do/nrho*. *Tawv* refers to a kind of shoe, *khau tawv* ('shoe' 'skin,' 'leather shoe'). *Nrhawv* is one of the many Hmong words that has no real translation, but is part of a commonly used modifier, *nrhawv nrho*, which conveys the sense of an action finished "completely." *Do*, the final piece of the puzzle, is part of the phrase *khau do* ('shoe,' 'bald/vacant,' 'barefoot'). A listener can fill in any missing blanks (pretend you didn't quite hear *nhrawv*) by referring to the pieces that are known (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. Relationships among kernel words.

	A	B	
1	tawv	?	rhymes
2	db	nrho	rhymes
	"leather shoe"	words go	
	"barefoot"	together	

After pulling out the kernel words from many of the songs in Mottin's text, several typical rhyming pairs appear again and again (this is in part because he used the same singer for several songs). For example:

<i>zeb</i> (far)	<i>deb</i> (far)
<i>teb</i> (land)	<i>deb</i> (far)
<i>ntoo</i> (wood/tree)	<i>zoo</i> (good)
<i>nroo</i> (murmur)	<i>zoo</i> (good)
<i>cev</i> (body)	<i>tsev</i> (house)
<i>kev</i> (way)	<i>cev</i> (body)
<i>cav</i> (log)	<i>dav</i> (far)
<i>cawv</i> (liquor)	<i>plawv</i> (center)
<i>tshiab</i> (new)	<i>siab</i> (heart)
<i>liab</i> (red)	<i>siab</i> (heart)
<i>dub</i> (black)	<i>hlub</i> (love)
<i>kub</i> (gold)	<i>hlub</i> (love)
<i>xyoob</i> (bamboo)	<i>roob</i> (mountain)
<i>poob</i> (fall)	<i>roob</i> (mountain)
<i>nrov</i> (sound)	<i>sov</i> (warm)
<i>coj</i> (lead)	<i>noj</i> (eat)
<i>toj</i> (summit)	<i>noj</i> (eat)

<i>ci</i> (shine)	<i>ntsib</i> (meet)
<i>ci</i> (shine)	<i>nqi</i> (value)
<i>yeeb</i> (opium)	<i>neeb</i> (spirit)
<i>chaw</i> (place)	<i>taw</i> (foot)
<i>quaj</i> (cry)	<i>tuaj</i> (come, not home)

Semantically related pairs also appeared in various contexts, for example:

<i>nco</i> (think of)	<i>tshua</i> (care for)
<i>ntsib</i> (meet)	<i>cuag</i> (reach)
<i>kub</i> (gold)	<i>nyiaj</i> (silver)
<i>los</i> (come home)	<i>tuaj</i> (come, not home)
<i>coj</i> (lead)	<i>yuav</i> (marry)
<i>tub</i> (son)	<i>ntxhais</i> (daughter)
<i>ntuj</i> (heaven)	<i>hli</i> (moon)
<i>hnub</i> (sun/day)	<i>hli</i> (moon/month)
<i>ntuj</i> (heaven)	<i>teb</i> (earth)
<i>ntsuab</i> (green)	<i>daj</i> (yellow)
<i>moo</i> (news)	<i>xov</i> (message)
<i>kab</i> (line)	<i>kev</i> (way)
<i>siab</i> (heart)	<i>plawv</i> (center)
<i>rooj</i> (door)	<i>ntsa</i> (wall)
<i>noj</i> (eat)	<i>hnav</i> (wear)

Modern sung verse: what elements remain the same?

The following lyrics are from a song—*Khaws Cua Nab* (“Gathering Earthworms”)—written and performed by a young man living in Canada.⁴¹ This first verse, while sounding very Western, contains elements of traditional *kwv txhiaj*:

Verse 1, “Side” A

Kuv khaws cua nab
I-pick up-earthworm

Ntuj teb tag hmo,
sky-land-completely-night

Kuv khaws cua nab
I-pick up-earthworm

Ntiaj teb txias to
world-land-cool-quiet

Verse 1, “Side” B

*Luag lub caij pw tsaug **zog**,*
others-clf-time-lie down-sleep

*Ua cas yog kuv lub caij sawv nrhiav **noj**.*
why-be-I-clf-time-get up-search-food

*Luag lub caij pw saum **txaj**,*
others-clf-lie down-on-bed

*Ua cas yog kuv lub caij sawv khaws cua **nab**.*
why-be-I-clf-time-get up-pick up-earthworm

Refrain

Khaws cua nab
pick up-earthworm

Khaws cua nab
pick up-earthworm

Khaws cua nab
pick up-earthworm

Verse 1	Side A	Side A	Side B*	Side B*
1st of pair	nab (worm)	nab (worm)	zog (sleep)	noj (eat)
2nd of pair	hmo (night)	to (quiet)	txaj (bed)	nab (worm)

* atypical
pattern: aabb
instead of abab

The refrain is a new addition, as is matching the voice to instrumental music, played on a synthesizer. Within the verses, there are rhymes and simple word play, although the rhyme pattern is atypical, and the words are repeated, a construction that would draw little praise in *kwv txhiaj*. An important difference is the way in which the song’s lyrics are predetermined, memorized, and matched to the music, rather than individually and extemporaneously composed.

Paired words (*txwv lus*)

Called “elaborate expressions” by Matisoff, after Haas (Lewis 1992:193), these four-word expressions are a feature of Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Mien, Lahu and other languages of the area. The expressions function as nouns, verbs, and modifiers, and are especially prominent in ritual language. The elements stand in semantic or rhyming relationship to one another, and in Hmong, the two parts are often bound or compounded words whose parts are separated. For example:

teb chaws (‘land’ ‘place’; “country”)

kav teb kav chaw (‘rule’ ‘land’ ‘rule’ ‘place’; “govern,” “reign”)

poob teb poob chaw (‘fall’ ‘land’ ‘fall’ ‘place’; “lose the country”)

tsiv teb tsaws chaw (‘flee’ ‘land’ ‘set to one side’ ‘country’; “be a refugee”)

luag teb luag chaw (‘others’ ‘land’ ‘others’ ‘place’; “someone else’s country”)

In these examples, the two parts of *teb chaw* “country” are separated by *kav* (‘rule’) to create “govern” or “rule the country” or “preside.” In the second example, *poob* (‘fall’) is used to create an expression that means “to lose one’s country,” “to lose a war.” Was this expression created during the past centuries’ failed rebellions, or is it the product of the recent war in Laos? Likewise with the third example, using the related verbs *tsiv* (‘to flee’) and *tsaws* (‘to set to one side, as when taking a pot off the fire’), to produce an expression meaning “to become a refugee.” In the fourth example, *luag* (‘others’) produces an expression that is the product of continually living in someone else’s country. Conceivably, the innovative speaker could substitute other words, following the familiar pattern, to make a new but creative and meaningful expression, for example, *muag teb muag chaws*, “to sell the country” (as the Lao communists are selling the country to the Vietnamese).

The concept of flexible interchangeability characterizes social relations as well as paired words and other expressions. The social world

comprises relatively few categories of persons, each with very well defined roles characterized by tekonyms, which carry implicit codes of behavior and obligation. Personal names are not used for kin. “Wife of husband’s younger brother” can refer to any of the wives of the husband’s younger brothers, including those who, in American terms, would be “cousins.” All the women who are called by this tekonym are socially equivalent and interchangeable.

Folktales

Hmong folktales (legends, myths), unlike their European counterparts, are not circular; the story moves from character to character, from one incident to another, and the characters at the end the story are completely different from those who began it. The stories are composed of “sub-stories” and actions that appear again and again in different stories. Likewise, “story idioms” (jars of silver, jars of gold; dewdrop on a leaf; eight of this and nine of that) are elements that appear in different story sequences, told by storytellers from one hundred years ago in China, twenty years ago in Laos, ten years ago in Thailand, or five years ago in Minnesota. Each story is at once familiar and original.

Bessac (1988:13) says of the relation between oral literature and stitchery:

Hmong myths are told in many different variations just as the embroidery patterns are subtly varied in myriad ways. The Hmong try to recite the rituals for death exactly, but allow or even welcome much variation in other aspects of their aesthetic culture. This is in part because they value indirection and incompleteness in order to protect the power that esoteric knowledge provides, but the variations also allow the individual a sense of personal uniqueness while at the same time remaining within the rigid artistic boundaries provided by Hmong culture.

The image of a girl weaving on a loom at the bottom of a lake, usually a dragon’s lake (*lub pas zaj*), made visible after some creature or event has emptied the lake of its water is most often encountered in

episodes in which *Nraug Ntsuag* ('unmarried eligible male' 'orphan') is the clever protagonist, but appears in other story lines as well. Example A below is from a story told by a Laotian Hmong living in Montana; example B is from a story told by Thai Hmong; examples C and D are two versions of a story told by the same Laotian Hmong woman living in Minnesota; example E is from a different Laotian Hmong woman living in Minnesota; example F was collected by Mottin from a Thai Hmong, probably in the mid-1970s; and example G was from a story—not one about *Nraug Ntsuag*—told by a Laotian Hmong living in Sacramento in 1984.

A.

Jua-ji went off right away and caught nine strings of grasshoppers which he brought to the frog. Frog ate them quickly and then began to drink the water of the pond. He drank and drank until the pond was dry. Then Frog led him down to the bottom of the pond to see Flowery Comb (Niam Nkauj Zhuag Paj). ... Frog led him over to where Flowery Comb was sitting at her loom weaving. Next to her Old Thunder was fast asleep, guarding her (Xia Long Mua, Missoula Montana, Laotian Hmong) [Bessac 1988:48].

B.

He went into the Dragon's Lake and he entered the water and started to sink deeper and deeper under the water until his head was under the water and then he found that there were people there living in villages, just like on earth. They were drinking and eating and they offered him some liquor to drink (Thai Hmong) [Tapp 1989:215].

C.

Qav kaws hais tias, "Aub, tau thiab, yog koj txhob luag wb kiag no wb pab koj," no ces. Ob niag qav kaws thiaj li haus haus haus lub niag pas zaj tas kiag tshuav me me. Ces nws ntsia zoj na has ua cas pom Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj ua ua nto hauv ces; nqos yim plawv plias hauv (Lug Lis, storyteller) [Johnson 1985:196].

The toads said, "Very well. If you will not laugh at us, not at all, we will help you." Then the two toads started drinking water from the lake. They drank and drank, so that what had been a big lake was just a little puddle. The Orphan looked quickly and saw Nia Ngao Zhua Pa weaving at a loom, down on the lake bottom, with her shuttle flying back and forth.

D.

Ces thiaj rov qab haus dua; ces haus haus haus tas nrho. Ces pom Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj ua ntos plawv plias hauv; ces tus me nyuam ua ua si (Lug Lis, storyteller) [Johnson 1985:165].

Then the toad went back to drinking again. He drank and drank, until he had drunk absolutely all the water from the lake. Then the orphan saw Nia Ngao Zhua Pa at the bottom of the lake, weaving on a loom, with her baby playing beside her.

E.

Ces ob tug qav taub txawm haus haus lub paj dej, plab tsau tsau ntsee lees. Ces xub pom Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj lub ru tsev, mam li pom tag nrho Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj lub tsev ces. Thaum kawg ces mam pom Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj ua ntos nthawv ntha hauv (Maiv Yaj, storyteller) [Johnson 1985:136].

So the two tadpoles again drank water. As their stomachs filled with water the level of the lake got lower, until the roof of Nia Ngao Zhua Pa's house came into view. So her whole house was visible. Inside, he saw Nia Ngao Zhua Pa herself, busily weaving cloth.

F.

Nraug Ntsuag hu tau peb zaug, ces Zaj Laug txawm tawm tuaj. Nws muab Nraug Ntsuag nqa dua hauv pas zaj lawm. Xeev Laus qab zog thiab qaum zos thiaj los hais rau Nraug Ntsuag muam nkauj Ntxawm tias: "Zaj Laug muab Nraug Ntsuag nqos lawm!" Nraug Ntsuag muam nkauj Ntxawm quaj quaj lawm. Hos Zaj Laug muab Nraug Ntsuag mus txog hauv qab pas zaj. Ces Zaj Laug muab Nraug Ntsuag tu zoo li. Ces Zaj Laug txawm mus dauv xyob dauv ntoo mus rau Zaj Laug niag Yawg Cuas ua vaj ua tsev [Mottin 1980:360].

Njao Njua called three times, and the Old Dragon appeared. He took Njao Njua and carried him under the Dragon Lake. Seng Lao above the village and below the village said to Njao Njua's sister Nzer: "Old Dragon took Njao Njua and swallowed him!" Njao Njua's sister Nzer cried and cried. Old Dragon arrived at the bottom of the Dragon Lake with Njao Njua. Old Dragon cared for Njao Njua very well. Old Dragon then went to get the bamboo and wood to build a house and garden for his father-in-law.

G.

Tsom kiag rau pas dej. Pas dej nqhuab tib lua. Nkauj zag ua ntos nthawv nthav hauv. Ces Kom-yim-tshaj nrawm nroos mus txog ntua, nthos nkaus nkauj zag caj npab ntug cab.

He pointed them (binoculars) at the Dragon Sea. The Sea was suddenly dry. There at the bottom of the lakebed was the Dragon's Daughter, weaving cloth. Kaw-yee-cha hurried there, grabbed the arms of the Dragon's Daughter and pulled her away [Vang and Lewis 1984:53, 61].

The story of creation below, which appears in similar forms among the Iu-Mien and Khmu peoples (the former linguistically related to

Hmong, the latter unrelated), was recorded by a missionary living with a Heh (Black) Miao⁴² group in Guizhou province for thirty-three years around the turn of the century (Clarke 1911). Although it is recorded in sung poetry form, the elements are remarkably similar to modern versions (Johnson 1981; Mottin, 1980; Lewis 1992; among others).

Zie demanded his sister in marriage,
His sister spoke,
Spoke how?

Thus by rote I sing,
Still don't understand.

Then his sister spoke,
You want to marry your sister;
Lift up a millstone each opposite,
Let go to roll to the valley;
(If) they roll and make one,
You marry your sister.
If the stones rest apart in the valley,
(We) both go and rest in our own place.
So his sister spoke,
Spoke words thus,
Why don't you understand?

Let the stones go into the valley;
Did the stones make one (or)
Did the stones rest apart?
I who sing don't know.

The stones rested apart.
Zie contrived wickedly,
Put stones in the valley,
Called his sister to come
To see the stones become one.
A-Zie then spoke,
Now we two will marry,
Spoke words thus,
Why don't you understand?

His sister again spoke,
Spoke words nicely,
How did she speak?
Thus by rote I sing,
Still don't understand.

His sister again spoke,

Take knives each on a separate hill,
 Throw the knives into the valley;
 (If they) enter into one sheath,
 We two will marry.
 (If) the knives rest apart,
 We will rest apart.
 So his sister spoke,
 Spoke words thus,
 Why don't you understand?

A-Zie then hit on a plan,
 Made up his mind what to do,
 He would have his sister for wife.
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

A-Zie then hit on a plan,
 He made his heart wicked,
 Made two pairs of knives,
 He placed knives in the valley,
 (They) rested apart.
 Threw and went into the grass,
 (He) called his sister to come
 To see the two knives in a pair.
 Now we two will marry,
 He would have his sister for wife,
 We don't you understand?

Would have his sister for wife,
 The two returned home.
 Who did they ask (about it)?
 Commanded what?
 So the two got married.
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

So the two returned home,
 And asked their Mother,
 Their Mother then said,
 Heaven has no people,
 Earth has no people,
 You two must marry.
 Kill buffaloes, kill cows, receive guests,
 Hang meat on the branches of the "Zan" tree,
 Call your brother cousin,
 Hang meat on the branches of the "Ma sang" tree,
 Call your Mother mother-in-law,
 So their Mother spoke,

Spoke words thus,
 And the two got married.
 Why don't you understand?

So the two got married,
Afterwards they had a child,
 Had a child, what sort?
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

Afterwards they had a child,
Had a child like a hammer,
 Why don't you understand?

Had a child like a hammer,
 Zie saw, did Zie love it?
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

Zie saw and did not love it,
 Zie saw and Zie got angry,
 Why don't you understand?

A-Zie was full of anger,
 Took the child and did what?
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

A-Zie was full of anger,
 Zie drew out a great knife,
 Took the child and chopped it up,
 Why don't you understand?

Zie took the child and chopped it up,
Where did he throw (the pieces)?
Flesh went and got a name,
 What did they become and what were they called?
 Thus by rote I sing,
 Still don't understand.

He sowed them on the hill,
In the morning they became people,
Thus they got a name,
 What they became so they were called.
 Why don't you understand?

[The song undoubtedly continues with the naming of the clans.]

The corresponding part of a story recorded by Johnson (1985:113-120) typifies a modern version of the creation tale, told eighty-odd years later, by a woman from a different country and a different but related language group, all without the assistance of a written record.

... So the brother said that he wanted to marry his sister and have her for his wife. But the sister was not willing, and refused him. However, she said, "If you really want to marry me, we must do this: you and I will each bring a stone and we will climb up on that mountain. When we get there, we will roll your stone down one slope of the mountain, and roll mine down the other side. The next morning, if both stones have gone back up the mountain, and we find them laying together on the mountaintop, then I will agree to be marry you."

After she said this, the brother and sister each took a stone and carried it far up to the top of the mountain. The sister rolled her stone down one slope of the mountain; the brother rolled his stone down the other mountain side.

But since the brother wanted to marry his sister, he got up during the night and carried his own stone and his sister's stone back up the mountain and put them together on the summit.

The next morning, when they went to look, they wanted to take someone along to be a witness, but unfortunately, there was no one to take. So the two of them, brother and sister, went back again alone, up to the top of the mountain. Lo and behold! They saw that the two stones which they had rolled down the two opposite slopes had come to rest together, in the same place, on the mountaintop.

When the sister saw this, she said, "We are really brother and sister, but these stones have come back and are lying together. Therefore we can be married, if you wish it to be so."

So the brother and sister married each other and lived together as husband and wife. Later, they gave birth to a child.

This child was like a round smooth stone.⁴³ It had neither arms nor legs. So the woman said, "What kind of a child is this, round and smooth like a stone! We will cut it to pieces and throw it away!"

So the two of them cut the round egg-like creature into little pieces. Then they threw the pieces in all directions. Two pieces fell on the goat house (*nkuaj tshis*), and these became the clan Lee. Two pieces fell in the pig pen (*nkuaj npuas*), and these became the clan Moua. Two pieces that landed in the garden (*vaj*) became the clans Vang (*Vaj*) and Yang (*Yaj*). In this way they founded all the Hmong clans.

Remarkably, the essence of the tale is intact. It's easy to see how the

storyteller arranges the episodes according to individual style. In the Hmong text, there are predictable phrases, and great creative license with the “matrix” text—all those words that surround the key elements.

Tapp (1989) explores the way in which “real history” is encapsulated and transmitted through the oral tradition, how the core elements define group identity, and how current social conditions are blended into the historical themes. “Within an oral tradition,” he says, “... individual variations and departures form, in a sense, the substance of the tradition, and provide much of its strength and resilience” (1989:136). The resilience of the oral tradition over time and place either reflects or creates a resilience of the people’s conceptual systems, so that social and economic changes are accommodated without fracturing the group. This, it would seem, is of particular adaptive value in a group of people who have known change and disruption since the beginning of time.

The cultural expressions discussed here—*paj ntaub* (stitchery), *kwv txhiaj* (sung poetry), *txwv lus* (paired words), and folktales (*dab neeg*)—show commonalties in the way in which change and innovation are accommodated. Familiar elements, stated in a fairly unchanged form, are juxtaposed with individually created elements in a form that is recognizably Hmong. Tradition and change, opposing forces, are kept in balance, as are conformity and individuality.

Chapter 5.

Social Design: Innovation within a Frame of the Familiar

Past studies of the Hmong, generally explaining choices of residence and livelihood by reference to their economic relationships to the environment, provide only hints about the other factors that might have been important. From those economic studies comes a picture of a group of people who are driven by choices outside their control. Psychologists generally agree with Maslow's "hierarchy of needs," which would support arguments that survival and safety needs have to be satisfied before people are motivated by association, recognition, fulfillment, or other "soft" needs. Because there are always a number of ways in which people can eke out an existence, even survival is subject to the creative manipulation of those attempting to survive. A conceptual system that provides the means for accommodating innovation and experimentation within a familiar framework in retelling the past can also conceive of future possibilities as a field of possibilities.

The question is which factors are important in making choices about with whom to share the work of surviving. Certainly the odds of successfully obtaining enough to eat from a hostile environment is an important consideration, one that has been thoroughly explored. Kinship and alliances with affines are probably also important considerations. Geddes comments that the "principle of immediacy is important" (1976:71):

Within the total range of close relatives personality and practical advantage also often play decisive roles in determining choices. With increasing distance of relationship clanship becomes the predominant principle. The principle of immediacy then operates within a restricted sphere in determining closer ties with sub-clansmen than with other clansmen. ... The importance of different categories of relationships will depend very much upon the social interests concerned. ... The role of the relationships can be assessed only in terms of cultural contexts and the particular circumstances in which the people are situated. This is the case with all so-called social structures, but it is very clear in the case of the Miao where there is considerable flexibility in social behavior.

Chance encounters and fortuitous events are probably not given enough consideration, although the Hmong conceptual system immediately provides an explanation of why some things happen to some people and not to others: the ancestors' burial spots are not right or the living have not cared enough for the ancestors' spirits. In a group in which the oral tradition plays such an important role, reputation and renown are likely to be important in deciding among several alternatives, although one anthropologist might ground reputation in an ability to marry well, and an alliance theorist might see reputation as a resource in making favorable marriages with potential challengers. In fact, the Hmong conceptual system also places importance on reputation because it improves a group's ability to marry well.

I would suggest that recognition and reputation are to local groups what identity is to the Hmong as a whole. In a social jungle in which "one tree is taller than the others," not every member of a patriline has to gain recognition and reputation. Social relations work because of well-defined, interdependent roles; groups develop the specialists they need. Recognition and reputation are specialties; benefits accrue to all those in the group who help a renowned member succeed. The goal is to become one of the elements of the local oral tradition, to provide an example of "living life" that is at once innovative and familiar. Designing a social world to accomplish this goal motivates choices and serves to evaluate outcomes, in the same way that a piece of *paj ntaub* is regarded as skillful, innovative, yet identifiable as "Hmong," or that verses of sung poetry contains clever and skillful rhymes and word play, while retaining features that mark it as "Hmong."

Social design in Geddes' Thai Hmong villages

Geddes diagrammed the social structure of the Green Hmong⁴⁴ in northern Thailand as follows:

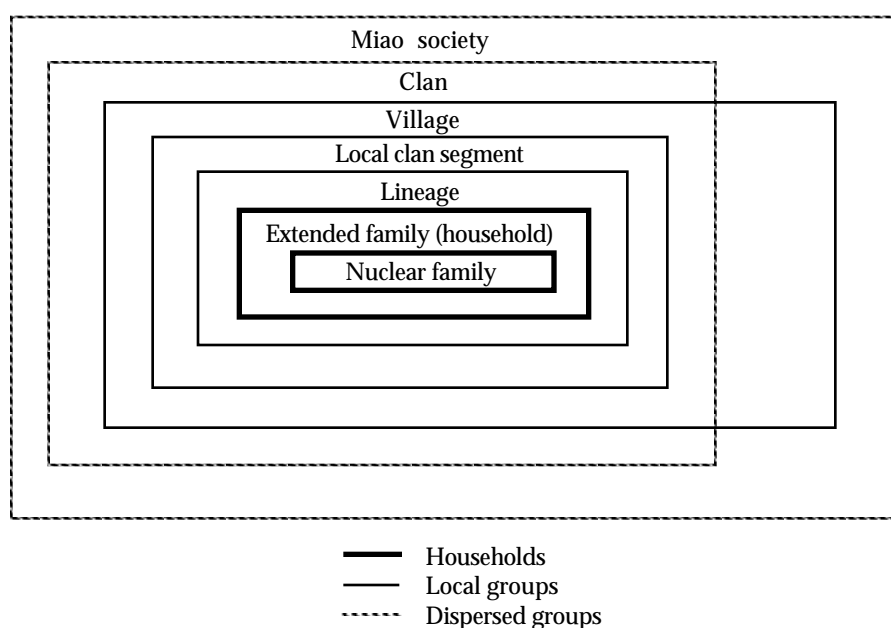


FIGURE 4. Redrawing of Geddes' diagram (Geddes 1976:46).

It was this diagram, along with Douglas' observations that cultural expressions restate social patterns, that began this thesis: look at the similarity between this and a piece of *paj ntaub* (see Figure 9, Chapter 7). If Douglas is right that patterns are restated again and again, and if a group's shared cognitive patterns are the basis of restated patterns, then it makes sense that the way in which the Hmong diagram their social world looks similar to recurring patterns in visual design. After looking for commonalties in oral forms of cultural expression—sung poetry, folktales, elaborate expressions—this general pattern emerged again.

To see if the pattern of innovation within familiar frames of identity works to explain social groups, it is necessary to take a look at another anthropologist's description of a Hmong group, one that bases explanation more on kinship and environment. Geddes' ecological study of the Hmong of Thailand included detail on the people with whom he lived, including their kinship links and the choices made by different members of the patriline over the better part of a decade.

Geddes worked first in Pasaliem in the late 1950s, and seven years later in Meto. He conducted at each site a household census that included a genealogy of the Tang⁴⁵ *caj ceg*, specifically, the patrilines headed by

two brothers, Sai Yi and Song Lau (the third brother stayed in China). When he compared the two censuses, he found that some members of the *caj ceg* moved from the Pasaliem to Meto, but some of them did not. He also found that some people moved to Meto who had not been in the prior site. The common belief at the time of his study was that Hmong groups act as body, forming villages, then picking up and moving to new sites. There were many decisions made by the members of this *caj ceg* that did not fit with the existing beliefs. In fact much of the information that follows was extracted from the incidental details of the text and charts; Geddes concentrated on the production levels of each household, and the economic factors that were associated with each move. I searched the text and charts for clues that other factors played an important role in the decisions the people made.

The following genealogical chart (Figure 5) has been adapted from that of Geddes, and it shows the lineage ties between four generations of the descendants of Sai Yi and Song Lau. It also shows the choice of residence during the time that Geddes stayed with them: Meto, Pasaliem, and both Pasaliem and Meto (not shown nor mentioned in the text are others who were in neither village). It is likely that this chart is incomplete, in that Geddes mentions in the text great-grandsons who should have been represented but were not.⁴⁶ Nor did his standard patrilineal genealogy reveal the ties between affinal clans/sublineages.

Of 19 *kwv tij* at the same generational level (the second generation on this chart), four were deceased, eight lived in Pasaliem, five lived in Meto's village A, and two lived in Meto's village D. Why is it that half the surviving grandsons of Sai Yi and Song Lau lived in a village 150 kilometers from the other half? If, in fact, Hmong society is as strongly patrilineal in the composition of its groups as suggested in the literature, how can this be explained? Following is a brief chronology of the events and choices of where and with whom to live during the few years preceding Geddes' stay in Meto. It is clear that a group's composition was seldom the same from year to year.

There were three trial moves before the Sai Yi's group finally arrived at Meto. The first was a move to Mae Suk from Pasaliem, by a son of Ko Yi,

Wang Ser's third son, followed by Ko Yi himself and another son in 1958.

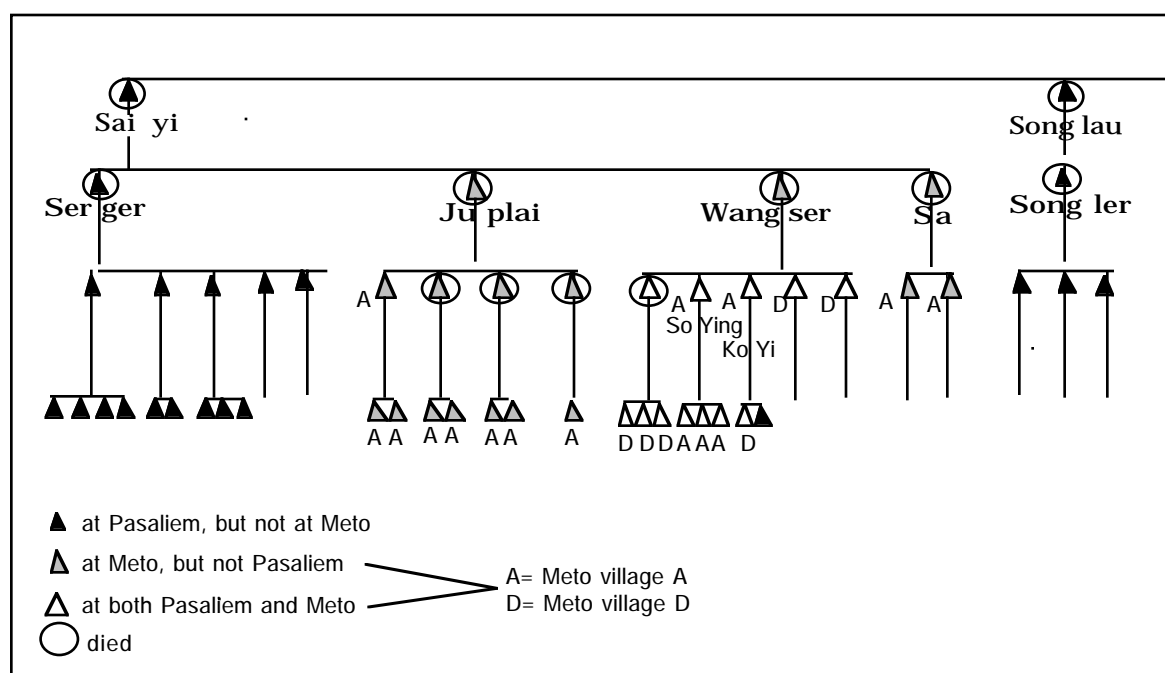


FIGURE 5. Sai Yi and Song Lau's lineage group. Adapted from Geddes (1976:114). The genealogical linkages of the 21 households in the one of the sublineages of the Tang (Hang) clan at Meto, showing residence at the time of the study.

In 1959, two sons of Wang Ser's first son, two sons of Wang Ser's second son, and Wang Ser's fifth son joined Ko Yi in Mae Suk, along with a Vang man who was married to the sister of one of Tang men. During 1959, a grandson of Ju Plai also moved to Mae Suk.

In 1959, the people in Mae Suk heard that there were good fields in another location, Bo Luang, near Meto. A group from Mae Suk went to Meto to look over the area: two grandsons of Ju Plai, one grandson of Wang Ser, and a man of the Chang clan, who was headman of Mae Suk when the others arrived there. On a return trip to the area, these men were joined by a son and two grandsons of Wang Ser, one other Chang man and two Yang men. They were chased off the fields by other tribesmen, and returned to Mae Suk.

In Mae Suk, there was a meeting to decide who wanted to move to Meto. In 1961, a new group left for Meto: three grandsons of Wang Ser,

and one of Ju Plai, along with six Chang men, and one other man. In 1962, several of Sai Yi's lineage, living in another village, Om Koi, joined their relatives in Meto: the surviving son of Ju Plai and all seven of Ju Plai's grandsons; two sons of Sa; six other Tang men of other lineage groups; and the headman of Om Koi, who was not counted in Geddes' census. In addition, four Yang and four Vang, also from Om Koi, went to Meto. In 1963, four more Vang moved from Om Koi. Also in 1962 and 1963, others from Mae Suk moved to Meto: one son and two more grandsons of Wang Ser, and three more Vang men.

Later, households from other villages arrived, and in 1964 six households of Tang clansmen came and became village C; these six families only stayed one year, but were counted in the census, which took place in 1965. Geddes says (1976:140) that most of the later arrivals were related to the earlier settlers either by blood, marriage, or had been residents of an earlier site together.

Thus, although the composition of Meto in 1965 was predominated by Tang clansmen of five different sublineages, there were many others who made the decision to move based on other reasons. In addition, from Figure 5, it is clear that not all of Sai Yi's group⁴⁷ reunited in Meto, nor were they joined by Song Lau's line. Geddes did his earlier fieldwork in Pasaliem, where he became closest to the members of Sai Yi's group, and it is they who moved to Meto, where he did his 1965 fieldwork. It is possible that this group realized direct or indirect benefits from their association⁴⁸ with a *falang* visitor, and his presence was also a factor in their decisions to rejoin in Meto. It is likely that Geddes had become part of the social design of the Sai Yi's lineage.

By looking at the group's movement after 1965, one can see that the ultimate design of Sai Yi-Song Lau's social group was not finished at the time Geddes lived with them. New choices, new compositions were tried out. Some remained as part of the final design, while others were reworked. 1965 was only one year, a random sample of time that may or may not be a reliable and valid description of the total lifetime social design. Geddes or his assistant were in Meto from December 1964 until January 1966; by mid-1966, all 57 houses of Meto villages A, B, C, D, and

E were gone. By 1970, the area was another jungle valley.

Although the houses were gone, the people still farmed essentially the same fields, and the composition of some of the households was different. In 1971, the total number of houses in the area was only six less than it had been in 1965. Geddes examined the households, and found that some people had left the area and then returned, new people had arrived, and some people had moved away permanently.

A grandson of Ju Plai moved to be nearer his fields in 1966; others were spending less and less time “at home” in the village, and more time in second houses built nearer their fields. A grandson of Wang Ser, along with two other grandsons of Ju Plai moved to a new location, to be nearer to a wife’s clan and to be closer to the fields. Next, the father of one of the grandsons who moved wanted to leave, because the fields were so far, and the rest of the people in Villages A, B, C, D, and E generally clamored to move (none wanted to be left alone). Thus, the entire composition of the old Meto complex was moved several kilometers away, but the actual composition stayed relatively intact.

Later in 1966, a son of Wang Ser died, and kin from far and near assembled for the funeral. One of Wang Ser’s grandson’s wife’s kin lived in a distant village, Pa Khia. He asked several others to make the move to Pa Khia. The move was attractive because several of Ser Ger’s lineage were already there, having moved from Pasaliem to Pa Khia in 1959. Wang Ser’s other son, two of his grandsons and two other kinsmen made the move to Pa Khia, along with three Vang households who were related to these houses by marriage. One Tang household (not part of this lineage) and four Vang houses moved to another distant village, Huai Ngu.⁴⁹ Two other Vang households returned to Mae Suk. One Vang and one Yang household moved to Mae Sa Noi, another distant site. One second wife paid back her bride price, took her children and moved back to her parents’ village. Another household moved to a Karen village to set up a store. Four Chang households moved to two other villages, but two of them returned to the Meto area in 1968 and 1969. A Tang household moved to the village of a brother’s son. Thus, by 1970, 27 of the 71 villagers had moved out of the area; six were close kinsmen who

comprised Village C for one year. Only three of Sai Yi-Song Lau's group moved away: a son and two grandsons of Wang Ser.

The least that can be said from the chronology above is that there were frequent moves for a variety of reasons: location and fertility of fields, residence of *kwv tij*, residence of *neej tsa*, hopes for success, escape from misfortune, and possibly to continue an association with a *falang* anthropologist who could influence their future favorably. These factors, like the triangles, spirals, crosses, and straight lines of the textiles, the story elements and phrases, and the word play and rhymes, are the elements of a social design. What is unclear from the description, but likely, knowing the preference for cross-cousin marriage, are the affinal connections, and the impact the wife's or mother's family had on a man's choices for his family's residence.

Social design in Hmong villages in Laos

Another anthropologist, Lemoine, provided information on a group of Hmong living in Laos. His emphasis was on describing the material culture and the environment in which the people lived, rather than demonstrating ecological relationships between social groups and their movements. I looked at these roughly contemporaneous groups to see if factors other than kinship and ecology played a role in their decisions about where to move and with whom to live—their social designs.

The settlement history of Lemoine's villages in Laos shows a similar pattern of initial settlement, with people arriving and leaving over a period of several years. Phou Hong was originally settled before 1951 by an extended family of the Xiong clan that encountered a catastrophic drowning accident; by 1951, only one of the younger sons remained in the area, at Pha Hok. In 1952 three households of three different clans related to one another by marriage joined this Xiong household: one Xiong, one Her, and one Tang. In 1956, these three households left for two different locations across the mountains in Thailand. In 1954, four Tang families arrived (two families fleeing bad spirits in a former

location), one of which was headed by the brother-in-law of the original Xiong. A few months later, three more Tang households arrived. In 1955, two more Tang households arrived, each fleeing a typhoid epidemic that ravaged the villages on their mountain. In 1956, three Xiong households (of the same lineage as the original Xiong), two Tang households, and one Lo⁵⁰ household came. These households had lived in the same villages as earlier arrivals, had visited Pha Hok and liked the appearance of the soil, the angle of the sun, and the tranquil relations with the Lao authorities. In 1957, three more Tang households, related to earlier families by marriage, two Vang households, and later in the year, two more Vangs. In 1958, three more Vangs arrived; later that year one Tang and one Vang household arrived. In 1959, two Tangs, one Moua, and four Lo's arrived; the two Tangs fled dysentery in a former village, and the Lo's needed more opium land, fled sickness, and rejoined a kinsman already in the area. In 1960, one Tang household arrived, fleeing the communist insurgents in their area. During this time, households also left the Pha Hok area, and others stayed in the area, but rebuilt houses in new locations.

Lemoine did make note of factors other than field fertility in documenting the relocation choices of the households in Pha Hok, and affinal relations appear to be of at least passing importance in deciding where to live. Because he did not note the affinal connections between households, it is not possible to confirm or refute the importance of affinal connections or of cross-connected lineages.

Traditional villages were thought to be one-clan towns, preferably one-lineage groupings. However, if this was ever the case, it is clearly no longer the case, as shown in the summary of clan makeup of the villages studied by Geddes, Lemoine, and Cooper. Different clans may or may not be affinal to the majority clans. Joining a majority clan or lineage within a village is a consideration in deciding a move. As shown on Table 8, in Laos and Thailand, villages were composed of one to five clans, but two or three clans (probably lineages) represented a clear majority. In Geddes' villages, the Tang and Vang clans comprised 54 of 68 households, or 79%. In Cooper's villages, the Yang and Thao clans were 65% of the total, and

in Lemoine's villages, Tang (or Hang), Vang and Xiong comprised 82% of the total.

TABLE 8. *Clan makeup in research villages of Geddes (1976), Cooper (1984), and Lemoine (1972).*

Clan makeup Village Thailand (Geddes)	Taag Tang (Ham)	Vaaj Vang	Tsaab Chang	Yaaj Yang	Thoj Thao	Xyooj Xiong	Lis Lee	Muas Moua	Lauj Lo
Meto A	17	1	3						
Meto B	4	1							
Meto C	6								
Meto D	7	4		1					
Meto E	4	6		3					
Meto F		4							
Boreh			7						
Geddes total	38	16	10	4					

Thailand
(Cooper)

Huai Menao		2		15			1		
Pha Nok Kok	1	3		5	5	2		1	
Khun Sa		2		7	8		4		
Pha Pu Chom	7	1			8	1	1		
Cooper total	8	8		27	21	3	6	1	

Laos (Lemoine)

Pha Hok	16	22			10	17			5
H. Khi Khang	1					11			
Kiou Ko Lo					1	7			
Lemoine total	17	22			11	35			5
Total per clan	63	46	10	31	32	38	6	1	5

The Hmong who are now in America are known as a group for whom links of patrilineal kinship are paramount to existence. Now that an outside ethnic pressure is relatively light, why do Hmong continue to devote time and money to the strengthening of kinship ties, particularly in a society that promotes investment in the individual? In the next section, we will look at the patterns of social ties—potential and actual—in one *caj ceg*, and at those others who make up *ib pab ib pawg* (“group”).

Chapter 6.

A Vang Story Cloth

The new year festivities in Tham Lin Noi (see Figure 6), a mountain village near the border of Vietnam and Laos, have come to an end. *Txaj-lwv*, *Hmoob Vaaj*,⁵¹ had a rice shed full from the recent harvest, and his family was well-prepared for the new year with a pig ready to be slaughtered for the feast. Nineteen fifty-two had been a good year, the villagers recovered at last from the uncertain times when the Japanese had come to the mountains looking for the French. The Japanese had been gone seven years now, and the villagers had settled into an ages-old rhythm.

Txaj-lwv married *Mes*,⁵² a young widow with a daughter named *Ab*.⁵³ Born to *Hmoob Hawj*,⁵⁴ *Mes*'s first husband had also been *Hmoob Vaaj*.⁵⁵ Even though *Txaj-lwv* and *Mes* married soon after the last new year festivities, there were still no signs of children.

The *paaj*⁵⁶ were everywhere, fragrant clusters of spindly white flowers. They, along with the red poinsettia trees and yellow daisies, signaled the new year season. Cultivated fields of poppies brushed the mountainsides with red and white, although *Txaj-lwv* did not grow the poppy. He traded salt and livestock to get silver.

Txaj-lwv was important in Tham Lin Noi. He was anxious for a son to provide him with security in his old age and to whom he could pass on his prestige and knowledge. During the new year, *Txaj-lwv* and his wife visited a fortune-teller. She told them that very soon a boy child would come to them, and if they took good care of that child, he would mature into an important person, perhaps a village chief, or even a district chief. His father, *Xauv-vwg*,⁵⁷ had been a village elder, and his position passed to *Txaj-lwv*, the middle son of his three surviving sons, of a total of eight. *Txaj-lwv*'s brothers, *Txoov-tub*⁵⁸ and *Tsaav-txhaj*,⁵⁹ also lived in the village, and between them they had seven sons.

Not too long after talking to the fortune-teller, *Txaj-lwv* heard

Insert Figure 6)

about a Khmu couple who were in financial difficulty. It seemed that the man had a brother who was ready to marry, but lacked the necessary bride price to complete the negotiations. He turned to his kin for help. This Khmu man had been either very unlucky or very lazy, because he barely had enough to feed his family, much less the one bar of silver he needed to contribute to the bride price. His four sons were ragged and hungry.

Txaj-lwv adopted the Khmu family's third son, and helped his father contribute the one bar of silver. He also agreed to let the family come into his house at any time they needed something—rice, salt, or whatever. They took advantage of this offer several times during the next five years.

The little boy—renamed *Lwm*⁶⁰—was younger than two when he was “picked up” or adopted, just beginning to put together sentences in his own language, when he became Hmong. *Txaj-lwv* introduced the boy to the family's ancestor spirits and household spirits, and he became Hmong. *Ab*, who was six or seven years old, carried *Lwm* everywhere, talking to him in a strange new language.

Tham Lin Noi was home to most of the lineage until families began to move away to either find other ways to better their lives economically or avoid the increasingly demanding communist insurgents. In 1957, *Txaj-lwv*'s, *Nyaj-yig*'s, *Nplaj-xaab*'s and *Num-tswb*'s families walked to Nam Bak, a paddy-rice growing lowland village near Xieng Khouang and Phongsavan, even though the group believed that living in the lowlands was certain death to Hmong. Five other households (*Tsaav-txhaj*, *Txoov-tub*, *Nkag-pov*, *Ntsuab-txhim*, and *Vaam-xwm*) moved to another dry-rice farming area in Phou Khoum. During the next couple of years, *Txaj-lwv*'s family grew paddy-rice in Nam Bak, while he became increasingly involved in the struggles between competing Lao factions and the communists. In 1959 *Txaj-lwv* moved his family again, looking for a safer place to live; he led them across the Ngum River and the Khan River to Phou Khoum, where his kin had earlier settled. The three other families stayed in Nam Bak.

Two or three years later, in 1962, the kin from Nam Bak joined their relatives at Phou Khoum. In July of that year the second Geneva

Agreement was signed, making Laos neutral. Phou Khoum was one of several villages in an area where people displaced by the growing war had gathered. This area, called by the Lao *Muong Meo* (“Hmong-town”) was populated by more than 20,000 Hmong, Lao and Khmu, congregated in villages named Phou Vieng, Sam Pha Ka, and Bouam Loung, in addition to Phou Khoum. According to Than Pop,⁶¹ in August, 1962, one month after the communists were to have withdrawn to Vietnam, some 6,000 villagers around Ban Ban were attacked, pursued, and ambushed by the communists; 1,300 were killed. Survivors hiked 40 miles to Muong Meo, where they joined the 20,000 displaced persons.

At about this same time, Vang Pao visited Phou Khoum to tell *Txaj-lwv* and the others about the Hmong efforts to defend Xieng Khouang province from the communists, since neutrality was a farce. Than Pop was directing the USAID efforts to feed the displaced persons, and for many Hmong, he was the first white they had ever seen. By late 1962, the CIA had resorted to the “third option” (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:123)—counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare. Vang Pao and thousands of Hmong and other villagers were in place, with defense goals of their own, to carry out the third option.

A year later, in 1963, *Txaj-lwv* moved his family to Long Cheng, where Vang Pao had moved his operations base from Pha Khao, and where the CIA had set up a field base. *Lwm* attended school while his father was sent to various sites with his men.

Within the complex social world of the Laotian highlands, *Lwm* was recognizably not Hmong. He said that his father’s position in the military protected him from outright insult most of the time.

When I was twelve or thirteen years old some of the Hmong kids in Long Cheng found out that I was Khmu. The jeering words flew around, and I came home very upset. My father had become a leader in the military, in charge of a group of men for General Vang Pao, and my father demanded that those who had been verbally assaulting me apologize. They did, and their *kwv tij* had to pay a fine to my father. My mother told me never to mention my origins to anyone else.

In 1965, the family moved to Pha Dong, a training and staging area located near Phou Bia, a high mountain. *Txaj-lwv* was killed in the war in

late 1965, in the village of Ban Pha-Khang Kho near Pha Dong. It was November, just before the new year. *Lwm*'s mother accepted the final pay and widow benefits from General Vang Pao, and, despite the suggestions of her husband's kin that she and *Lwm* go to live with the younger brother and his family, she stayed in Long Cheng. *Lwm*'s mother, a strong-willed and stubborn lady, could depend on other kinsmen still in Long Cheng for help. After six or seven months, she married again, to *Nchaiv-txoov*.⁶²

Nchaiv-txoov and *Txaj-lwv* had the same great-great-great grandfather (four generations past). This ancestor's three sons left China for Laos about 1880; their descendants had lived in the Tham Lin Noi area for *ob peb tiam neeg* (several generations). At some time in the past, there had been a split between the son that headed *Txaj-lwv*'s line and the other two, but the three branches remained connected.

During 1971 and 1972, the military situation at Long Cheng became very intense, and the enemy attacked the airstrip and the surrounding positions. Along with thousands of others, *Nchaiv-txoov*, his kinsmen, and assorted others (about 25 households) fled the gunfire south to Phou Xan, where they became a village at the foot of the mountain (*Taw Phou Xan*). The mountain was dotted with other new villages, among them Song Lai, settled earlier in 1970.

In October, 1971, *Lwm* finished his two-week training and became a "boy soldier" for the "close support" operations. Before November was over, he had been assigned with Thai mercenaries to Phou Seu near Lat Seng, had retreated from that position under enemy attack, and had been lost in the jungle for seven days before finding the pickup position. After a month of unpaid leave, he went to Ban Xon for two months. In March, 1972, he was assigned to "airborne (close support)" at Udorn Air Force Base across the Mekong River in Thailand. From there, he and several others flew on reconnaissance flights over Laos, recording and listening to the radio chatter for enemy positions.

Lwm's mother was determined to see her son marry and to have grandchildren before she "closed her eyes." During the new year in late 1972, *Lwm* traveled to Phou Xan to visit his mother and stepfather, and

they talked him in to going to Song Lai, a two-hour walk away, for the new year festivities. Song Lai was populated by many Christian Hmong, chiefly of the Her, Thao, Lee, Xiong, and Kong clans; many of his mother's kin (*Hmoob Hawj*) lived there, as well as *Lwm*'s sister *Ab*, married to *Hmoob Thoj*. Among the villagers there were *Lwm*'s mother's brother, as well as her sister, also married to one the same *Vaaj caj ceg* as *Lwm*'s stepfather. The son of her brother, named *Pov* (called *npawg* in Hmong kinship terminology), had spent much of his childhood with *Lwm*, and his two sisters were ideal marriage choices, according to *Lwm*'s mother. During the 1972 visit, *Lwm* stayed with *Pov*'s family, and was not too interested in either of the sisters; "I stayed in their house, they were like sisters to me and I thought either one was too close for me to marry." After his five-day pass was over, *Lwm* returned to Udorn to work, and his mother continued to fret that he would find another girl to marry who was too distant from their group to fit well with the family.

Lwm worked out of Udorn for about 15 months, until June, 1973, when he returned to Long Cheng to resume work in ground close support. By this time, the Americans were leaving Laos, and the Vientiane Agreement was signed in September 1973. As in 1962, the agreement had little to do with reality in Laos; the communists continued to attack the government and guerrilla positions, gaining ground bit by bit. *Lwm* worked with the ground close support unit assigned to Skyline One on the ridge above Long Cheng. He was part of the Firewater team until November, 1973.

In August, 1973, *Lwm* again took a four-day pass and returned to Phou Xan to spend time with his family. His mother had been busy planning his future, unbeknownst to him. She realized that the match with one of *Pov*'s sisters was out of the question, and she had heard that *Nyaaj Zuag*⁶³ and her husband *Suav-laum* (who was *Mes tus nus*, *Lwm*'s mother's classificatory brother) had a daughter, *Yiv*. *Lwm*'s mother insisted that he return to Song Lai to "look around"; he and his nephew, *Tsu* (son of *Ntxoov-tswb*), sloshed through the late monsoon rain and knee-deep mud to revisit the village of suitable young women. They stayed with *Lwm*'s sister *Ab*, and her husband, and after a meal, *Ab*'s husband's

brother took the two to “*mus yos*” (‘go’ ‘look around’). After visiting a couple of houses, they stopped by *Nyaaj Zuag* and *Kwj Suav-laum*’s house, and yelled greetings in the door. Although the family had already gone to bed, they knew about *Nyaaj Mes*’s son, and were curious to meet him. *Lwm* carried a tape recorder, a rare enough sight in a village, and doctored batteries that could power the recorder all night. He offered to record their daughter and a few friends singing a song. *Lwm* left a few hours later, having met several interesting young women.

The next month, *Lwm* returned to Song Lai with another kinsman, *Kaus*. They spent two nights with sister *Ab*, and while they were there, visited *Nyaaj Zuag* and *Kwj Suav-laum* again. This time, *Lwm* brought two cassette recorders, one for playing a tape, and one for recording the girls singing again. The girls were excited about having the recorder over night, so they could sing and record, listen and record over if they weren’t satisfied. *Lwm* now had a good reason to return the next day.

The next day, *Lwm* and *Kaus* helped his mother’s brother, *Dlaab Khai*, thresh rice and carry bamboo sections. After dinner, *Lwm* and *Kaus* went to *Nyaaj Zuag* and *Kwj Suav-laum*’s house to retrieve the tape recorder and see if *Yiv* and her friends had recorded any songs. Because this was the third visit, *Yiv*’s parents suspected that *Lwm* had more than a passing interest in their daughter. They stayed up late, talking and listening to tapes, before *Lwm* and *Kaus* set off for home.

Two months later, new year had arrived, and *Lwm* returned to Song Lai to visit with *Pov* and his family. This time *Lwm* had a tiny camera, with about 15 shots left. The second day, *Yiv* arrived on the field to *pov pob* (toss the ball), with several friends, dressed in their new year clothes and jewelry. *Lwm* took some pictures and left the village for a neighboring village.

Meanwhile, his parents had arranged for a *mej koob* (marriage negotiator) and the appropriate kinsmen to travel to Song Lai. In the late afternoon, *Lwm* and four men walked across the field full of ball-tossing young people, who turned and stared as they walked by. With curiosity (but a certain foreknowledge) they waited to see whose house the five men would enter.

The negotiations were not easy. *Yiv* was a schoolgirl, and did not want to marry yet. Her parents worried that *Lwm*, who was working for others, would take her far away; she was their only daughter. After two days and two nights, the negotiators settled the deal; the two would marry in six months, after *Yiv* finished her school year. *Lwm's* representatives gave silver bars to *Yiv's* parents and her brothers as symbols of intent, and they returned to their homes.

Lwm spent the next month buying and selling noodles, cigarettes, batteries, copper shell casings, and other goods, in addition to working his regular assignment. During his December four-day pass, his parents informed him that the wedding had been moved forward. He returned to work, and worked twice as hard to sell more goods. With the money he earned, he bought twenty cases of Coca-Cola from the American mess, and had the plane take the soda to Phou Xan. From there his family used horses to transport the cases of soda to Song Lai. The next day, January 10, *Lwm* arrived in Song Lai, and on January 11, he and *Yiv* were married in the village church. Their wedding stood out as the “one to best” for several more years.

Yiv went to *Taw Phou Xan* to live with her new mother-in-law and father-in-law, and *Lwm* went back to work with the Redskin team, at Ban Na, until June, 1974, when air transportation of troops and supplies ground to a halt. The selling business was good in Ban Na, and *Lwm* continued this lucrative sideline, visiting home four days each month. In July, *Lwm* was assigned to a regular military unit, working in the rice warehouse in Long Cheng. *Yiv* moved to Long Cheng to be with him. In January, 1975, *Lwm* left the military and went to work for USAID, as a security guard in Ban Xon.

On May 13 and 14, 1975, the Hmong saw hectic activity at Long Cheng as planes landed, were loaded with people, and took off again. On May 14, the General left. On May 15, *Lwm* left Ban Xon for Phou Xan, and on the 16th he arrived in the village to take his family and escape to Thailand. All the kinsmen on the genealogy in Appendix 1 were in the village waiting to hear what had happened in Long Cheng. *Lwm* gathered everyone at his house, and told them that this time it was not like the

other times in 1969, 1970, and 1971, when they had been evacuated temporarily to safer areas; this time, he told them, it would not be temporary. They didn't believe him; he was too young to know. After a night of talking and crying, the family told *Lwm* and *Yiv* to go ahead, that they would follow later.

Stripped of any evidence that tied them to the Americans or General Vang Pao, they made their way to Vientiane, and across the river to Thailand on May 21, 1975. They were taken to Nong Khai and slept under the roof of a boat shed for a couple of weeks. They were then transported to Nam Phong refugee center, where they stayed until December. They were moved to Ban Vinai, where they were put to work constructing their building. After being denied entry to the United States because he "would never survive," *Lwm* applied again, in 1976, and was approved. He, his wife, and a classificatory brother arrived in San Diego July 20, 1976.

Mes died in late 1976. *Nchaiv-txoov* remarried after he escaped to Thailand in 1979, to a complete stranger, a *Hmoob Yaaj*.⁶⁴ These were the two who came to the United States as *Lwm*'s parents.

After almost 17 years in the United States, *Lwm* and *Yiv* have had three sons and two daughters, and have lived in San Diego, Portland, and Rancho Cordova. He went to work for Frank's Shoe Factory one week after he arrived in the country, and took six months of English through the California Employment Training Assistance (CETA) program. He began interpreting for Linda Health Care Center, and then worked for a refugee assistance agency in San Diego. After funding declined in 1981, they moved to Portland, where a classificatory brother (the same one he traveled to the United States with) lived and worked. *Lwm* worked for Portland School District as an instructional teacher aide, and during the strawberry season, everyone worked in the fields. During the summer of 1982, he came to Sacramento to teach school teachers the rudiments of "survival Hmong," and that fall moved to Rancho Cordova to take a job with Folsom Cordova School District.

Since his arrival in the U.S., *Lwm* has completed a high school program through a correspondence course, earned a bachelor's degree in

behavior science, a master's degree in human behavior, and is about halfway through a doctoral program in the Pacific Rim Leadership International program (adult education with an emphasis in school administration).

His education has cost a lot of money (\$23,000 to date), even with educational grants. Some of those in his *caj ceg* have loaned him money interest-free, and others have given him money for school. These actions establish or confirm closer ties between some members of the patriline (not everyone has helped him with school). [Figure 7 shows a diagram of his patriline, his *caj ceg*, over six generations. Figure 8 shows *Lwm*'s generation; his kin, represented by circles, are potential members of his *pab pawg*, and the blackened circles indicate men with whom ties of reciprocal help have been actualized.] His educational and professional accomplishments bring reputation and renown to the entire *caj ceg*.

Lwm devotes time and money to activating potential kinship ties, by visiting and helping various individuals shown on the genealogy in Appendix 1. Those with whom he shares history are closer than others. On the chart in Figure 8, the names of those kin who with *Lwm* form a collaborative group are shown. In addition to the actual *kwv tij*, there are 13 *Hmoob Vaaj* who became part of the genealogy over time, since the families lived in Tham Lin Noi. Their descendants are considered the same as patrilineal kin. *Lwm* told me that although they could not identify the common ancestor, the details of their rituals were so similar that they must have been part of the same group. This "ritual clause" to lineage membership allows a great deal of flexibility in the kinship structure, allowing non-kin to "be adopted" into the patriline.

There are non-kin who have helped *Lwm* with school, and others whom *Lwm* has helped in financial and non-financial ways. They are named on Figure 8, and form part of his *pab pawg*, his social design. During a trip to Thailand in 1986, *Lwm* met a young man in Bangkok, one of 50 Hmong students attending Bangkok post-secondary schools, whose name is *Xes, Hmoob Vaj*.⁶⁵ *Xes* grew up in Khek Noy, a lowland transitional Hmong village in north central Thailand, the village where Jean Mottin lived and worked for seven years. Since 1986, *Xes* and *Lwm*

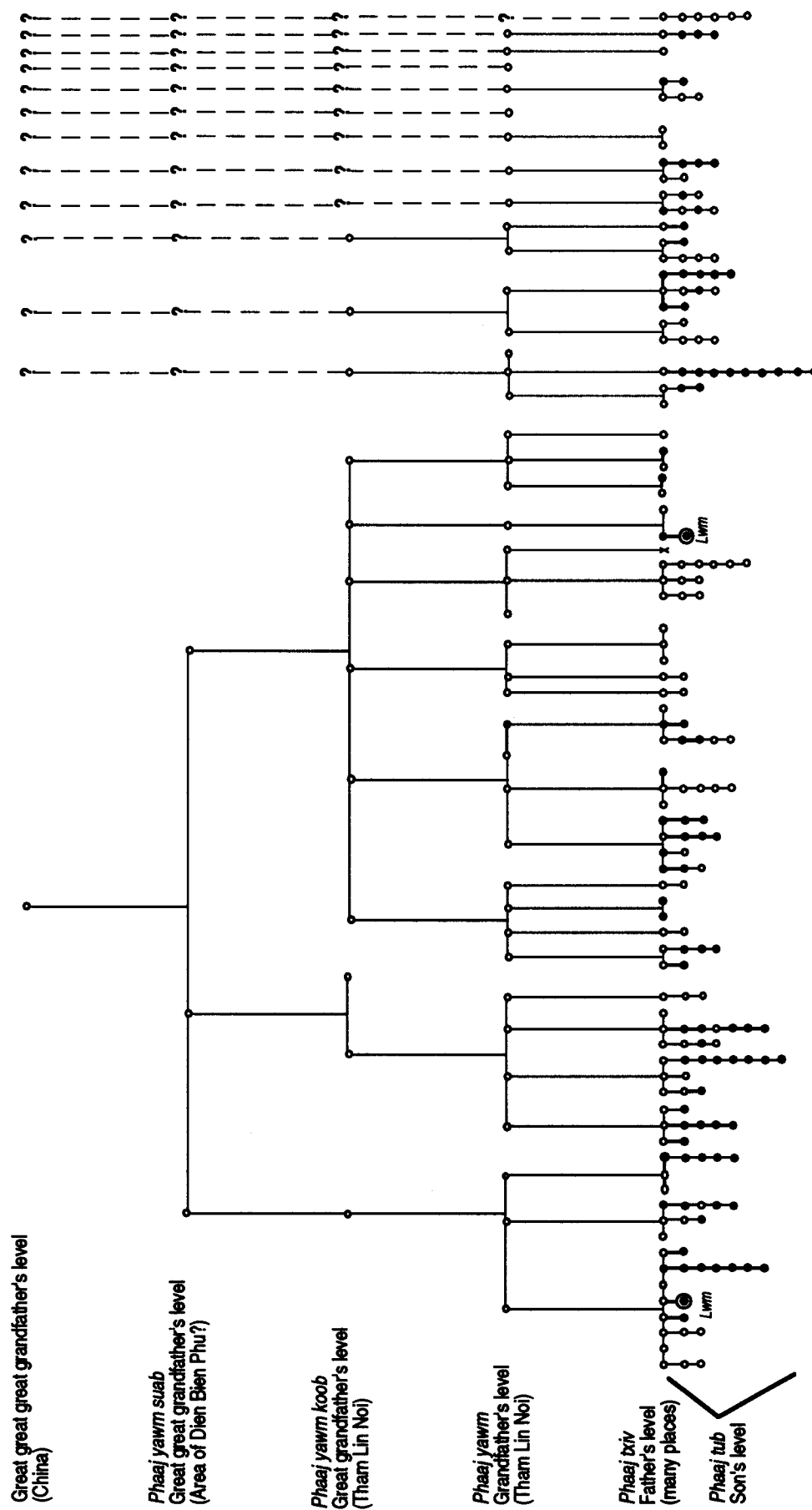


FIGURE 7. Lue Vang's patriline (caj ceg). Notice that Lue is on the diagram twice, once for *Txaej-lwv* and once for *Nchajiv-troov*. The filled-in circles are those kin who have left Laos as refugees. The heavier lines are kinship ties that have been activated by visits and reciprocal help. Notice the number of families who have joined this patriline even though the common ancestor cannot be named (the ? and dashed lines). Not evident are the affinal ties, as females are not represented in a patriline. The 'x' represents *Zuag*, *Lwm*'s mother-in-law.

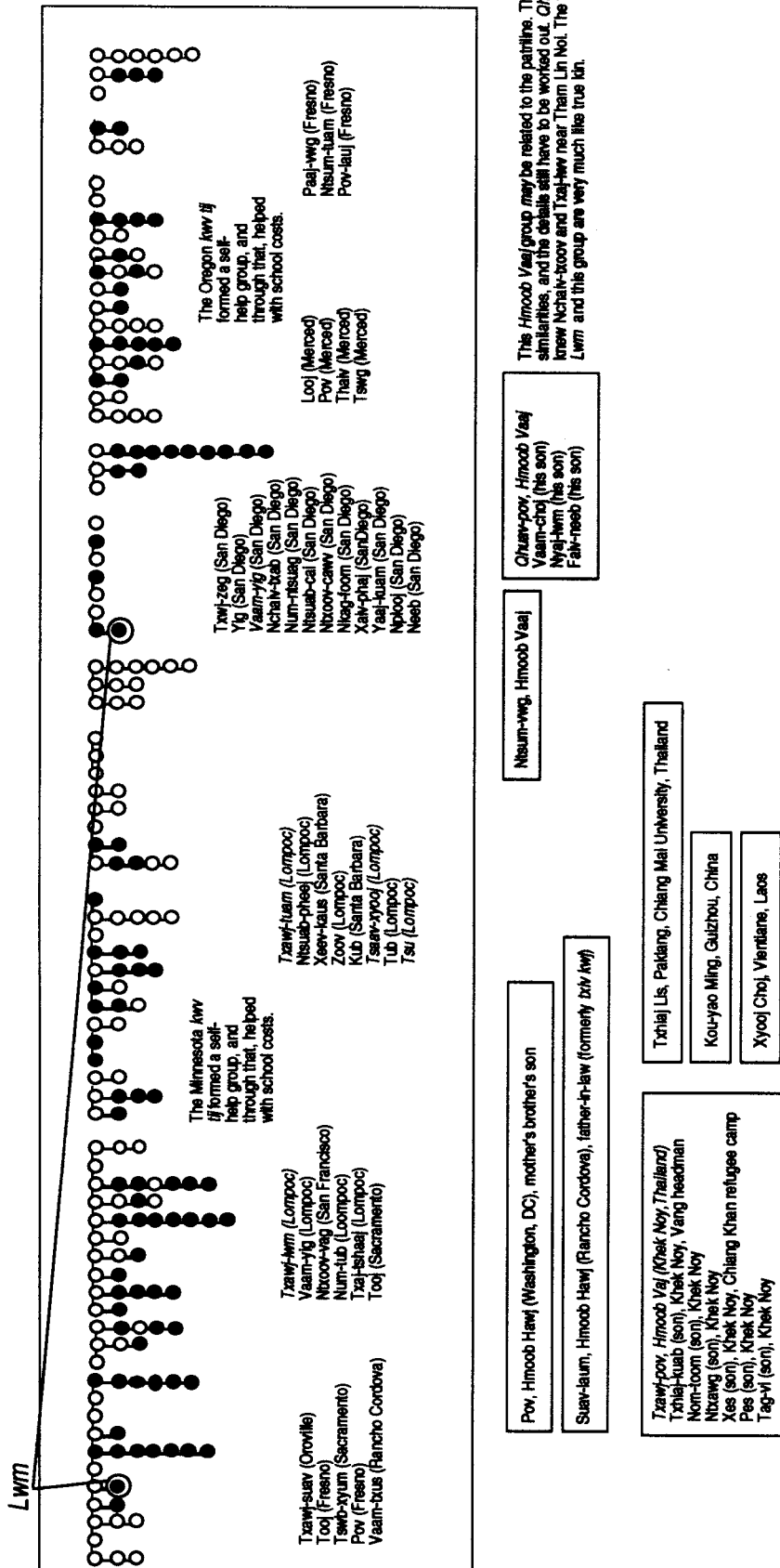


FIGURE 8. The real pab pawg. These are people (kin and non-kin) with whom Lue has established (or is establishing) ties of reciprocity. Notice that some are in Thailand, Laos, and China. Lue's social design is innovative in the way in which he devotes resources (time and money) to nurturing ties that cross lineage and clan boundaries, dialect group boundaries, and even national boundaries.

have activated kin-like ties, *Xes* helping *Lwm* with his pursuits, and *Lwm* helping *Xes*'s group by sending money to buy a pair of breeding cows, and so on. *Lwm* has made two trips to Thailand since the first 1986 trip, and each time, he reinforces links with *Xes*'s family and others. He now has potential *pab pawg* members in Khek Noy village, and Nan, Chiang Mai, and Tak provinces. He has established a reciprocal kin-like relationship with a Hmong graduate student at Chiang Mai University, who is *Hmong Lis*. He is now corresponding with a Hmong from the town of Kai-lee, in Guizhou province in China; in fact, he is hoping to help this Chinese Hmong join an international conference in Thailand this summer. He has begun correspondence with a *Hmoob Xyooj* (married to *Hmoob Vaj*, "you're my *Vaj neej tsa!*") in Vientiane, Laos. In agricultural terms, *Lwm* has sown many seeds, and waters them as much as he can; time will tell which ones take root. This is part of the social design that *Lwm* is creating.

It is too early to see the final look of *Lwm*'s social design. He has not yet even begun to realize the possibilities that his five (soon to be six) children represent in terms of new linkages. What is evident, however, is that the decisions he makes about with whom to associate and how to use his resources of time and money are based on more than mere survival. He believes that old fortune-teller's prediction, and the "orphan" stories (that actually symbolize the plight of the Hmong as a people) tell him that the orphan occupies a special place in a world in which kinship ties are so important. In the stories, the orphan, who is usually mistreated and scorned, turns out to be clever or hard-working and overcomes whatever obstacles (usually the Chinese or symbolic "other") stand in the way of success and renown. *Lwm* has used the raw materials of kinship, affinal links, ties of culture, ties of language, ties of profession and aspiration, along with the whims of fortune to piece together a *pab pawg* deserving of notice.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

Douglas is right that every expression communicates the basic pattern of the social group that gives rise to it. In this study, I have looked at Hmong social pattern by examining four different cultural expressions, both visual and oral, and at the process of creating design, innovating within a framework of the familiar. Hmong social pattern has been typified in past research as patrilineal, patriarchal, and driven by forces of survival; I suggest that those surface features, while salient, overly simplify both the pattern and the role of the individual within the group in creating the pattern.

Hmong social pattern is shaped by their sense of identity, transmitted through oral traditions, and a conceptual system marked by flexibility and resilience. Identity can be described as a series of oppositions that help to place individuals within their social world and in the world at large. These oppositions can be visualized as a series of concentric frames, surrounding a focal piece, the “kernel,” at the center. It is easiest to see this pattern in a generalized *paj ntaub*, derived from the traditional collar, *noob ncoos* (funeral squares), and batiked sections of the skirt and baby-carrier, exemplified by the commercial pieces available today (see Figure 9).

The silver medallion that hangs from the neckring (see Illustration 10) uses this same generalized pattern, a sort of *paj ntaub* done by men in silver. No doubt this generalized visual design can be found in other Hmong cultural expressions as well, and even the oral designs can be conceptualized as a similar pattern.

Kwv txhiaj, or sung poetry, is schematized in Figure 10 as a series of linguistic frames within in frames, moving from identity as Hmong, as a particular dialect group, as a particular region, as a particular type of song, and then within each verse, two sides, and within each side, at least two rhymes that link the sides and verses together, all wrapped in linguistic packaging that helps the listener find the “center” and

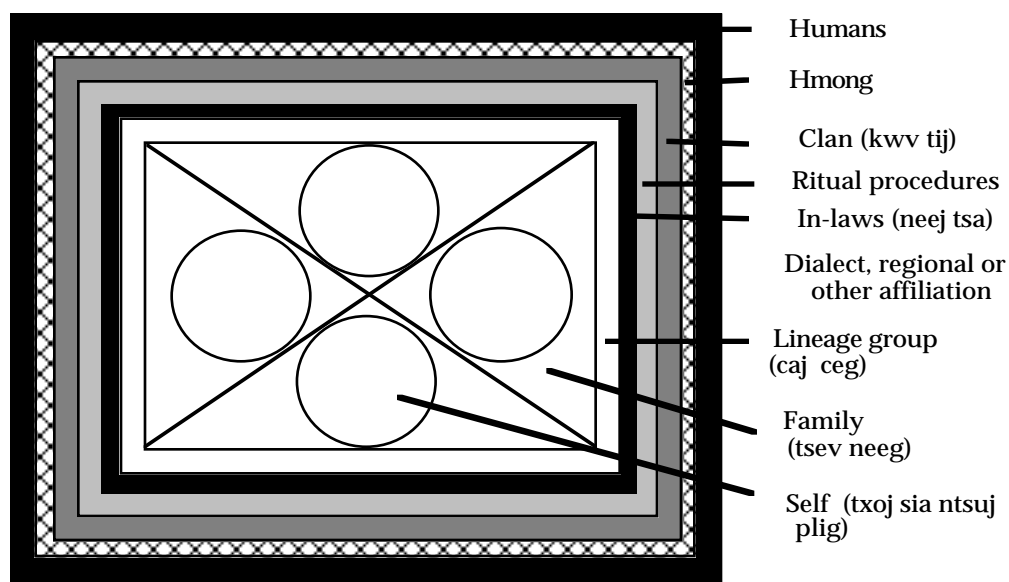


FIGURE 9. Generalized *paj ntaub* as an organizational chart in fabric.

understand its meaning. This is all done extemporaneously, and a *kwv txhiaj* lasts for as long as the notes hang in the air.

By comparing these visual and oral patterns, it is possible to see the similar structure: an example of creativity and skill is placed at the center of a frame surrounded by a frame surrounded by a frame, and so on. If it was only the visual work that was organized in this way, one might conclude that one design borrows from another, but the fact that the verses of sung poetry can also be diagrammed so that a visual representation is similar suggests that cognition plays a role, and the mental representation reflects the basic pattern of the social world.

The second feature of design is the process by which tradition and innovation are integrated into a pleasing and balanced whole. Familiar elements, memorized from repeated exposure, are combined in ways that are at once a mark of the individual and an expression of social identity. In textiles, core elements are found in the batik, appliqué, and embroidery patterns learned at the hearth of first the natal family and then the husband's family. In oral expression, the flexible interchangeability of parts is a fundamental feature of the language, as

seen in paired words, and can be seen in sung poetry and folktales in the occurrence of familiar “sub-stories” and story idioms that appear again and again in different arrangements. Speeches and ritual text, as well as instrumental music, are no doubt created through same process. It is likely, as Tapp (1989) suggests, that the way in which the oral tradition accommodates changing conditions by incorporating them into a familiar pattern creates a conceptual system that is at once creative and resilient.

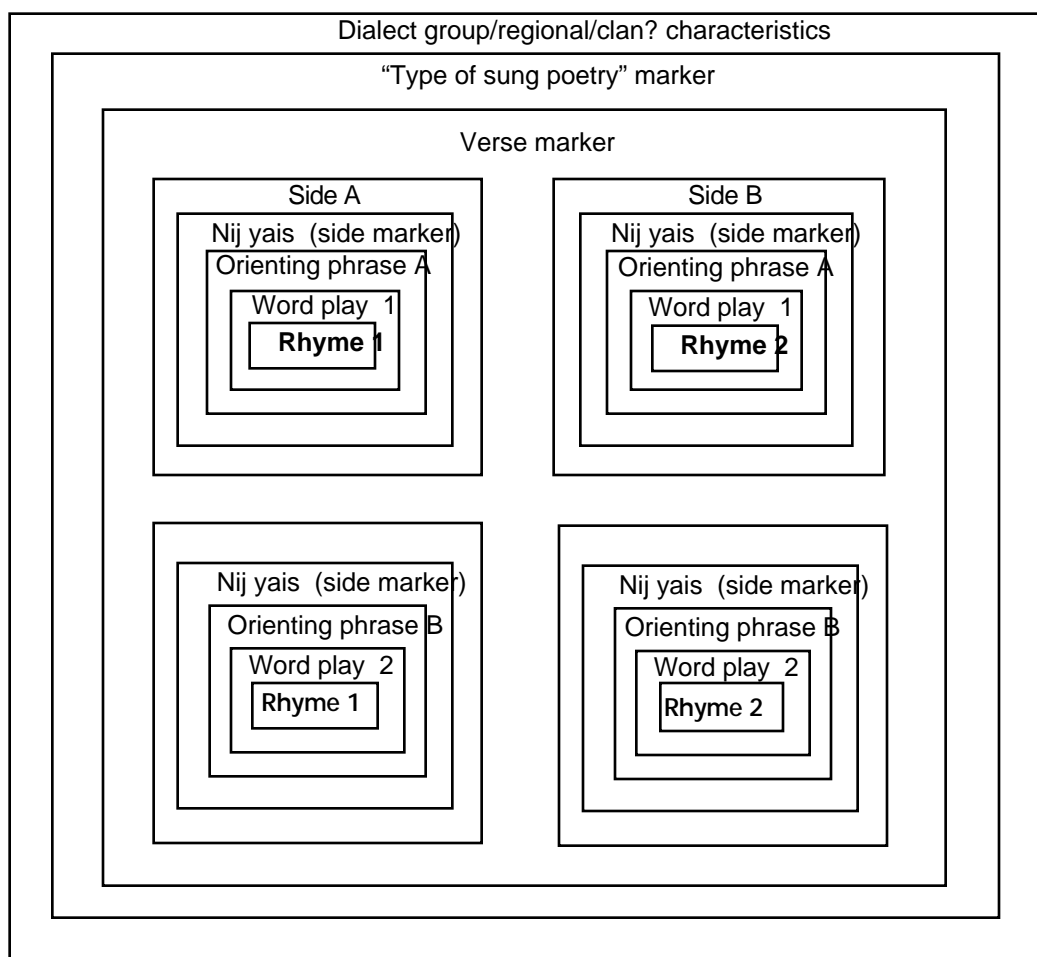


FIGURE 10. Generalized diagram of one verse of *kwv txhiaj*.

Finally, it is the active manipulation of kinship links, marriage ties, and environmental opportunity in the design of *pab pawg* that the process can be seen in the social world. The “kernel” of social designs are the daughters/daughters-in-law, the point at which *caj ceg* are joined to

become new groups.⁶⁶ A group's relationships to others in the community hinge on the sons and daughters. Marriages to other clans create social relationships, and this interconnecting of a limited number of lineages through repeated marriages creates complex social patterns. It is intriguing to think that *paj ntaub* originally depicted a family's social pattern, a kind of shorthand in a world without written records.

The way in which patrilineal kinship relations are recorded in writing by anthropologists limits the recognition of the role of affinal links in the social world. For example, on *Lwm's* genealogy, *Zuag* does not show up because she is female; the fact that she was born to the lineage is remembered because of kinship terms and personal memories, but as time passes, she is remembered because of her role in married life, not because of her father or mother. I can imagine a new kind of computer-generated genealogical chart that is displayed in three dimensions, rotating to show the various aspects of the lineage and its connections to others. I can imagine that it was difficult to understand the structure of the double helix of DNA before a three-dimensional schematic was developed. In a similar way, a three-dimensional genealogy would reveal the interconnections and relationships between patriline and affinal groups.

Men are the creators and keepers of the social design, across space and time, just as women are the creators and keepers of the visual design. Both men and women participate in the creation and perpetuation of oral design. The goal is to accomplish something that is admired or mimicked by others, but still recognizable as a familiar pattern.

The social world of the Hmong is one of groups within groups, linked and cross-linked by ties of obligation and of possibility. The minds that perceive the reality of the social world also create patterns in fabric to attract the eye, and patterns with words and instrumental tones to attract the ear. Each pattern is familiar and predictable, yet each expression is a unique combination of shapes, colors, lines, or of pitches, vowels, rhymes and meaning. Those patterns that are widely admired, and talked about among the people gain recognition and deserve respect. The creators of the expressions do so in order to conform to

predetermined social roles, but at the same time, to create something which provides a model for others to admire and mimic.

The next two decades will show whether or not the Hmong ability to incorporate change and innovation into the framework of their enduring identity will be resilient enough to accommodate the changes that their social world undergone in their move from the mountains of Laos to the cities of America. I think that the *nyab* (daughter-in-law) plays a pivotal role in the social design, but as Hmong girls assume new roles and greater emphasis on individual development, they cannot at the same time occupy their traditional roles. However, there is reason to believe that a new pattern will emerge in which the daughters-in-law are a new kind of “design element,” one in which wives represent a wider range of life choices, or one in which unmarried women are part of the social design. We wait for innovative designs to be put forward to serve as examples for others.

Notes

¹ Also known in the literature as Miao, Meau, and Mèò.

² Hmong words are used when the translation or transliteration does not capture the meaning. White Hmong is used unless words are associated only with Green Hmong pursuits, e.g., batik, the Vang patriline cited in this study. For more on the conventions of the orthography, see Appendix 2.

³ Literal English translations are enclosed by single quotes, and generalized translations, or “gloss”, are enclosed by double quotes.

⁴ Symonds (1991:272) illustrates this by describing the role of *phauj* (man’s sister): “Upon death, a woman’s brother must come to the funeral to assure that all her debts are paid. If they are not she will return to her natal lineage and be malicious. If all her debts are paid, her last official action as a member of her natal lineage is to go to the house of her birth and retrieve her birth-shirt (placenta) which was buried there when she was born. She is then no longer part of her natal lineage and she travels on the instructions of the chanter until she reaches the threshold of the Otherworld, where the chanter tells her ‘your life thread is cut.’ The woman’s soul now joins her husband’s patriline. When this soul is reborn, however, it is reborn into the patriline as a male. The patriline is continued then by souls of former females who come from outside the lineage. Moreover, this also means the same spiritual essence continues to occupy, in the course of cycling through alternating genders, different lineages, and because of the rule of exogamy, different clans. Thus there is no clan hierarchy among the Hmong. In the course of time, spiritual essences, souls, cycle through the whole of Hmong society.”

⁵ See Matisoff (Lewis 1992:232) for references to similar expressions in other languages.

⁶ This has grown to more than 7,000,000, according to Wu (1991:1–2).

⁷ *Yob Tshuab* is the likely equivalent to “Ya Ch’io.” *Yob Tshuab* Hmong are frequently encountered in Thailand, and their dialect is very similar to Green Hmong. The comparative glossary in Clarke (1911:307–312) lists words for Ya Ch’io, Hua Miao, Heh Miao (Black Miao), Chinese, Thai, and other languages of the place and time. Words for Ya Ch’io are the closest match to Green Hmong, for example (in Clarke’s spelling): i (one), au (two), bie (three), bleo (four), de shi (which), lu (come), mu (go), lü (word), klü (black), ndo (many), kle (dog), ba (pig), u (duck), ntü (sun), lli (moon), ku (I), ni (he), klau (demon), a nyi (mother).

⁸ Guizhou.

⁹ Sichuan.

¹⁰ Guangxi.

¹¹ This is probably the time during which the 4th generation ancestors (*phaaj yawm suab*) on the Vang patriline, Appendix 1 and Figure 7, left China.

¹² *Xyooj*, a Hmong clan.

¹³ Yang Shong Lue.

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- ¹⁴ Savina was evidently in Laos during the time of the “Crazy War” (*Rog Paj Cai*) in 1921 (Yang Dao 1989: personal communication).
- ¹⁵ In a visit to this region in late 1986, we found that there were many positive efforts in place to bring Hmong villagers into the mainstream of Thai life and into a market economy. In the villages of Bua Chan, Mae Sa Mai, and Nam Khao, the Thai government had established elementary schools, Buddhist temples, and piped-in water. In exchange, the villagers were to give up opium growing and agree not to cut or burn any new timber.
- ¹⁶ Geddes notes that a Chinese author, Lin Yueh-Hwa (1940:289) documented the pattern of shifting cultivation, as described for those who plant fields in three or four year cycles, at a time in China before they grew the poppy. Therefore, he concludes, the introduction of the opium poppy accentuated a pre-existing pattern (Geddes 1976:33).
- ¹⁷ Huai Menao was chosen as a village with an opium-dominated (cash) economy; Pha Nok Hok depended on both swidden rice and opium, as well as irrigated rice and other cash crops; Khun Sa was dominated by irrigated rice and non-opium cash crops; and Pha Pu Chom was a poor village which had failed at attempts to grow irrigated rice (Cooper 1984:3).
- ¹⁸ The Hmong Leng (Green Hmong, Hmong Njua, *Moob Ntsuab*, *Hmoob Ntsuab*) are one of two major dialect groups; the other is White Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb*). In Geddes’ work, as well as many others, the Green Hmong are called “Blue Hmong.” This refers to *Moob Ntsuab*, and the confusion results from the translation of the word *ntsuab* as “green” or as “blue.” Things that are *ntsuab* are generally called “green” in English, although blue-green objects are also *ntsuab*. Use of the English “blue” comes from an assumption that the dialect designation derives from the distinctive costumes of each group. White Hmong wear white skirts or black pants, while the Hmong Leng wear indigo-dyed skirts appliqued and cross-stitched in brilliant colors. The skirts were never “green” in the English sense; indigo is not called *ntsuab*, but rather *xiav* (“blue”) or a compound of *xiav*. For this paper, Green Hmong (*Hmoob Ntsuab*) is used for the group known as Blue Hmong or Blue-Green Hmong. In Sacramento, this group calls themselves “Hmong Leng” (*Hmoob Leeg*) when contrasting themselves to other Hmong dialect groups. *Leeg* may refer to “to admit,” as in admitting the truth, or “seam or line in clothing.” Although the “seam” makes sense in terms of the skirt decoration, it is just as likely that the association with clothing differences is a fabrication that came about after the original “Hmong,” those who are now called Hmong Leng, split into two groups. Those who became different in dialect and relations with the Chinese were called “White Hmong,” and the original, which had no sub-group designation, was given one somewhat arbitrarily. A more accurate designation would be “Hmong” and “White Hmong.”
- ¹⁹ It is my assumption that “community” implies a sense of common identity and some degree of corporate action in relation to other similar groups; an “agglomeration,” on the other hand, are groups of households situated near one another.
- ²⁰ Lue Vang 1993: personal communication.
- ²¹ The Lahu were 97% Christian, the Karen 89%, the Lisu 56%, and the Hmong 23%. McNabb (1992) speculates that the high proportion of Christians in the student population

may be because so many of the boarding facilities are run by Christians, and that Christian contacts provide links or support for going to Chiang Mai to study.

²² This, of course, was less true in Laos during the period of war and relocation, when Hmong had contact with Lao, Thai, and Americans, as well as other Laotian minority groups: Iu-Mien, Lahu, Khmu, and so on. It was also less true for Hmong who lived in larger villages or cities for schooling, or for those Hmong who were merchants and traveled to the lowland market towns.

²³ This may have been different in areas in which Hmong interacted frequently with other non-Hmong. While it is still very rare, there are several cases of Hmong who married Americans who were stationed in Laos during the war. Hmong who left Laos to study overseas sometimes married non-Hmong, and now in the United States, out-marriage is more common, but no less well accepted by the parents.

²⁴ Hmong names are spelled in the RPA, the Romanized Popular Alphabet, to avoid the confusions that arise from transliterations. See Table 3 for the equivalent spellings in English.

²⁵ Geddes 1976:55.

²⁶ Lemoine 1972:185.

²⁷ Mottin 1979:159.

²⁸ Cooper 1984:33.

²⁹ Notes to Table 2. Geddes reports that the name in parentheses is the name by which these clans are known to outsiders; the first name is the one used when talking among themselves.

*Cooper lists the marked names from Heimbach (1969) in addition to the ones he encountered in Thailand. Cooper's villagers added *Ma* and *Lao* to the seven he listed (his are those without asterisks). Mottin found that for some Green Hmong clans, two different clans observed the marriage taboo, calling themselves *ib pawg*, *ib co* ("one group").

<i>Clan 1</i>	<i>Clan 2</i>	<i>Group name</i>
Tsaab	Koo	Tsaab
Tsom	Khaab	Plua

In the case of alternate names for Hmong Leng clans, Mottin's villagers said they called themselves "*Hmoob Koo xeem Tsaab*" or "*Hmoob Taag xeem Haam*."

³⁰ A Chinese friend can name generation names several levels in history, as well as the names to be chosen for future generations. In her case, the generation names do not fit together into a poem.

³¹ Paternal aunt, or a man's sister.

³² Cooper 1984:64-65, 74-75, 83-84, 87-88.

³³ Evidently there are other ways in which these groups differ: the *Vaj Ntxhoos Suav* align the body "across" the mountain (perpendicular to the range), but the *Vaj Ntxhoos Hmoob* place

the body in alignment with the range; both groups build a canopy of elephant grass (a “*ntxhoos*”) over the body as it lies outside, but the *Vaj Tshiaiv Mab* do not.

- ³⁴ This may, however, reflect a majority–minority status between the two groups. Generally the minority group learns the language of the majority group, but not vice-versa. The early work on Hmong orthography was conducted with White Hmong, and that has become the defacto written form, although Green Hmong can be encoded with the same set of symbols.
- ³⁵ Even though the province in which the town of Sam Neua is located is called *Houa Phan*, Hmong still use *Sam Neua*; likewise with *Moos Loob* (Luang Prabang).
- ³⁶ *Lug Thoj*, Khek Noy, 1975 (Mottin 1980:94).
- ³⁷ Often the word that is the “kernel” is part of a compound or phrase. The translation listed here refers to the word in its context; for example, the song has a “name” (*npe*) or characteristic melody, and *lub*, which acts as a referential pronoun for words, or “lyrics.”
- ³⁸ *Ntxhoo Thoj*, Khek Noy, 1975 (Mottin 1980:86-88).
- ³⁹ *Xyo Muas* Vinai, 1975 (Mottin 1980:34). Xieng Khouang regional style.
- ⁴⁰ *Ntxoov Khwb Yaj*, Khek Noy, 1975 (Mottin 1980:130-132).
- ⁴¹ *Xab Pheej Kim*, *Hmoob Lis*, Toronto, Canada.
- ⁴² From a comparison of words in the glossary in the book, it is not the Heh Miao but the Ya-ch’io Miao who would be closest to the Green Hmong in Laos.
- ⁴³ It’s tempting to think that the translation “hammer” of Clarke’s version is a stone hammer.
- ⁴⁴ Geddes translated the name as “blue,” and used the Chinese term *Miao*: “Blue Miao.”
- ⁴⁵ *Taag* (*Haam*), or Tang (Hang).
- ⁴⁶ In a later chapter (Geddes 1976:138-39), Geddes names two other sons of Ko Yi, the third son of Wang Ser: Chao and Pow. He also names one other son of So Ying, Tu, the second son of Wang Ser. They are not shown on the chart that is Figure 5.
- ⁴⁷ The chart shows 38 household heads who were not dead, and of those, 21 lived in either village A or village D of Meto; in addition to the 38, there were at least 3 others who were not listed. Dividing 21/41 results in 51% of the Saiyi-Songlao lineage who were living in the same are in 1965. The other 49% had made decisions to live elsewhere, with other people.
- ⁴⁸ In Laos, work with French missionaries, aid workers, anthropologists, and military personnel gave some Hmong a “leg up” in competition for limited opportunities for education outside the village and overseas. Some promising village students received financial assistance for their education, either directly from Europeans and Australians who returned home, or from associates of theirs. At the very least, villagers learned some of the language of the groups who wielded influence in rural Laos.
- ⁴⁹ The links there with Sai Yi-Song Lau’s group will provide possibilities for future moves.
- ⁵⁰ *Lauj*, a Hmong clan spelled “Lo” or “Lor” in English.
- ⁵¹ In English, he might be called “Sa-lue Vang.” In this section, I use the Hmong, in italics, for the people in the social group; for other, more readily known proper nouns, I use the commonly used English spelling.

⁵² May.

⁵³ Ah.

⁵⁴ Hmong Her.

⁵⁵ Her first husband was *Yob*, son of *Txaj-lwv*'s father's brother (Appendix 1, A.1.B.1).

⁵⁶ "Flower," more specifically *paaj pov cai*, *paaj kalamaas*, or *paaj nroj tshab*, depending on one's region.

⁵⁷ Sao-vue. See Appendix 1 for the relationships, and Figure 7 for a schematic design of the patriline.

⁵⁸ Song-tou.

⁵⁹ Jang-sa.

⁶⁰ Lue.

⁶¹ Documented in Hamilton-Merritt (1993:121, 544), from the book *Mister Pop* (Schanche 1970:196-197).

⁶² Chai Chong.

⁶³ "Aunt" Zuag would appear on the Vang genealogy (Appendix 1), if females were recorded there. She was the daughter of *Nchaiv-txov*'s father's brother, *Nub-lwv*.

⁶⁴ Hmong Yang.

⁶⁵ Say Vang (*Vaj* indicates that he is White Hmong).

⁶⁶ In addition to *nyab* (daughter -in-law), *phauj* (father's sister) plays an articulating role, possibly between generations, between the living world and the spirit world, rather than between lineages. Symonds suggests (1991) that she mediates between the clansmen of the present generation and the generations to come, through the cycle of reincarnation, in which the affinal women eventually become born to the clan.

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APPENDIX 1. VANG PATRILINE (CAAJ CEG)

I. UNKNOWN (CHINA)

A. TXAWJ-MAIV (CHINA TO LAOS)

1. Kuab-yob (D. Laos)

- A. XAUV-VWG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Vaam-xwm (D. Laos)
 - i. Xeeb (D. Laos)
 - ii. Zeb (D. Laos)
 - 2. Nkag-pov (D. Laos)
 - 3. Ntsuab-txhim (D. Laos)
 - i. Txoov (D. Laos)
 - ii. Kum (D. Laos)
 - 4. Txoov-tub (D. Laos)
 - i. Txawj-suav (Oroville, CA)
 - 5. Txaj-lwv (D. Pha Dong, Laos, 1965)
 - i. Nyaj-lwm (Rancho Cordova, CA) (To Nchaiv-txoov, C.5.a.1, remarriage within patriline)
 - 6. Kaub (D. Laos)
 - 7. Tsaav-txhaj (D. Fresno, CA)
 - i. Npis (France)
 - ii. Sawm (France)
 - iii. Tooj (Fresno, CA)
 - iv. Tswb-xyum (Sacramento, CA)
 - v. Pov (Fresno, CA)
 - vi. Vaam-txus (Rancho Cordova, CA)
 - 8. Kim (D. Laos)
 - i. Phaj (MN)
- B. NUM-YEEB (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Yob (D. Laos, Mes's first husband)
 - 2. Nplaj-xaab (D. Laos)
 - i. Teev (D. Laos)
 - ii. Choj (Canada)
 - 3. Nyaj-yig (Canada)
 - i. Fuas (MN)
 - ii. Lwv (D. Nong Khai, Thailand)
 - iii. Foom (D. Canada)
 - iv. Yeeb (WI)
- C. VAAM-MAIV (D. LAOS)
 - 1.. Mog-xwm (D. Laos)
 - 2. Ntxhoo-laug (D. Laos)
 - 3. Tswb (D. WI 1989)
 - i. Xaiv-ntaaj (WI)
 - ii. Nyaj-laum (WI)

- iii. Xeeb (WI)
- iv. Ntxawg (WI)
- v. Lig (WI)

B. QHUA-MAIB (CHINA TO LAOS)

1. Paaj-kaub (D. Laos)

- A. QHUAU-VAAG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Ntsum-kim (D. Laos)
 - i. Vaam-hawj (Denver, CO)
 - 2. Txaj-tsaab (D. Laos)
 - i. Paaj-kaub (D. Laos)
 - ii. Nyaj-tub (Modesto, CA)
 - iii. Tshuas-tswg (Modesto, CA)
 - iv. Txooj-npis (Modesto, CA)
 - 3. Xaab (D. Laos)
 - i. Ntxhi-tuam (NC)
- B. NTXHI-VWG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Vaam-yig (D. Laos)
 - i. Num-vaaj (D. Laos)
 - ii. Nkag-pov (Boulder, CO)
 - 2. Paaj-khais (D. Laos)
 - i. Vaam-ntsuag (Laos)
 - 3. Ntsuab-teev (D. Laos)
 - i. Npuag-fwm (MN)
 - ii. Tsaav-toj (MN)
 - iii. Qhua-xaab (MN)
 - iv. Num-tswg (MI)
 - v. Nyaj-npis (MN)
 - vi. Txawj-tub (MN)
 - vii. Foom (MN)
- C. NYAJ-LAUM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Tsaav-txhaj
 - i. Nplooj
 - ii. Tsawb (MN)
 - iii. Tswb
 - 2. Txawj-lwm (Lompoc, CA)
 - i. Vaam-yig (Lompoc, CA)
 - ii. Ntxoov-vag (San Francisco, CA)
 - iii. Tooj-xeeb
 - iv. Num-tub (Lompoc, CA)
 - v. Txaj-tshaaj (Lompoc, CA)
 - vi. Tooj (Stockton, CA)
 - 3. Num-tswb (D. Laos)
- D. NTXOOV-POV (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Txawj-kum (Famous, nai-kong in Laos; D. Laos)
 - i. Num-yeeb (D. Laos)
 - ii. Ntxoov-tswb (D. Laos)

2. Ntsuab-ntxhais (D. Laos)

C. NTXHEB-XUV (CHINA TO LAOS)

1. Nchaiv-yob (D. Laos)

- A. YIG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Tooj-choj (D. Laos)
 - i. Tuam (OR)
 - 2. Nchaiv-laum (D. MN)
 - i. Sawm (MN)
 - ii. Tsawb (OR)
 - iii. Fwm (MN)
- B. SOOB-NTXAWG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Paaj-yag (Ban Vinai, Thailand)
 - i. Yaaj-sua (Thailand)
- C. NTSUM-XWM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Ntsuab-tsaab (MN)
 - 2. Nchaiv-txab (MN)
- D. TXHAJ-KIV (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Xaiv-ntaaj (Mong Hong, Laos)

2. Txawj-pej (D. Laos)

- A. NCHAIV-LWM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Txawj-tuam (Lompoc, CA)
 - i. Ntsuab-pheej (Lompoc, CA)
 - ii. Nkag-zeb (D.)
 - 2. Vaam-suav
 - i. Kaub (Laos)
 - 3. Txwj-ntsuag (D. Laos)
 - i. Xeev-kaus (Santa Barbara, CA). Married a girl from Paklang, Thailand, 1993.
 - ii. Xoov (Lompoc, CA)
 - iii. Kub (Santa Barbara, CA)
 - 4. Tsaav-xyooj (Lompoc, CA)
 - i. Tub (Lompoc, CA)
 - ii. Tsu (Lompoc, CA)
- B. TOOJ-NTXAWG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Nchaiv (D. Laos)
 - 2. Tooj-yob (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - i. Kuam (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - ii. Lwm (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - iii. Nyaj (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - iv. Fub (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - 3. Tsu (Lompoc, CA)
- C. NUM-YIG (D. LAOS)
- D. NPLA-YOB (OR, OLDEST LIVING MEMBER OF THE PATRILINE, 1993)
 - 1. Tsaav-sawm
 - i. Hawj
 - ii. Laas (OR)

- iii. Npis
 - iv. Phuas
 - 2. Nyaj-lwm (D. OR)
 - i. Khaas
 - 3. Ntxawg
- 3. **Txwj-ntxawg (D. Laos)**
 - A. XUJ-KAUB (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Paaj-txoov (D. Laos)
 - B. PHE (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Tsaav-txhaj
 - i. Ntsuab-yag
 - C. NYAJ-XYUM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Txwj-ntsuag
 - 2. Tsaab
 - 3. Txawj-suav
- 4. **Nkag-pov (D. Laos)**
 - A. QHUA-XAAB (D. LAOS)
 - B. NYAJ-LWM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Xaiv-ntaaj
 - i. Nchaiv-vaaj
 - ii. Ntsuab-yag
 - 2. Nyaj-tub
 - i. Sawm
 - ii. Ceeb
 - 3. Paaj-ntxawg
 - i. Num-tsaab
 - ii. Suav-nchaiv
 - iii. Nkag-need
 - iv. Yig
 - v. Npis
 - C. TSWB (D. LAOS)
- 5. **Num-cawv (D. Laos)**
 - A. NTXOOV-VAAG (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Nchaiv-txoov (D. Rancho Cordova, CA 1984) Lwm's stepfather, 1966-).
 - i. Nyaj-lwm (By remarriage from Txaj-lwv, A.1.a.5.)
 - 2. Tsaav-ntxawg (Tham Lin Noi, Laos)
- 6. **Ntsum-laaj (D. Laos)**
 - A. TXOOV-TUB (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Qhua-pov (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - 2. Zeb (MI, arrived 1992)
 - B. NYAJ-KAAB (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Suav (Mong Hong, Laos)
 - 2. Txaj-looj (OR)
 - C. NTSUAB-KUM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Pob-tsuas (Mong Hong, Laos)

II. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. Tsaav-nus (D. Laos)

- A. NYAJ-TUAM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Xeev-nyaj (D.)
 - 2. Txawj-suav (D.)
 - i. Txwj-zeg (San Diego, CA)
 - ii. Yig (San Diego, CA)
- B. NUM-POV (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Vaam-yig (San Diego CA)
 - i. Nchaiv-txab (San Diego, CA)
 - ii. Num-ntsuag (San Diego, CA)
 - iii. Ntsuab-cai (San Diego, CA)
 - iv. Ntxoov-cawv (San Diego, CA)
 - v. Nkag-foom (San Diego, CA)
 - vi. Xaiv-phaj (San Diego, CA)
 - vii. Yaaj-kuam (San Diego, CA)
 - viii. Nplooj (San Diego, CA)
 - ix. Neeb (San Diego, CA)
- C. NCHAIV-TXAB

III. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. Num-lwv (D. Laos)

- A. NYAJ-XWM (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Nyaj-pov (D. Laos)
 - i. Txawj-tsaab
 - ii. Tsawb
 - iii. Vaam-tub
 - 2. Vaam-ntsuag (D. Laos)
 - i. Txooj-cawv
- B. SOOB-CAI (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Ntsuab-lwm (OR)
 - i. Txooj-cawv (OR) (Made up a written genealogy in Lao)
 - 2. Tsaav-teev (D. Laos)
 - i. Tooj
 - ii. Nyaj (OR)
 - iii. Ntxawg
 - 3. Txhaj-foom (Merced CA)
 - i. Looj (Merced, CA)
 - ii. Pov (Merced, CA)
 - iii. Thaiv (Merced, CA)
 - iv. Tswg (Merced, CA)

IV. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. Num-ntxawg (D. Laos)

A. LAJ-TXAB (D. LAOS)

1. Num-tswb

i. Tub

ii. Ntxawg

iii. Ntsuag

2. Vaam-txoov (D.)

i. Txawj-pov (Sacramento, CA)

B. NTSUAB-VWG (D. LAOS)

1. Zaam-teev (D. Laos)

i. Zeb (MN)

V. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

- A. LAJ-TSUAS (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Txaj-kim (MN)
 - i. Tuam
 - ii. Nyaj (MN)
 - iii. Maas
 - 2. Ntsuag (D. Laos)
 - i. Pov (MN)
 - ii. Kaus

VI. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

- A. TooV (D. Laos)
 - 1. Vaam-kaub (D. Laos)
 - i. Pob-zeb
 - 2. Num-lwm (MN)
 - i. Paaj-vwg (Fresno, CA)
 - ii. Ntsum-tuam (Fresno, CA)
 - iii. Pov-lauj (Fresno, CA)

VII. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

A. TXWJ-NTXAWG (D. LAOS)

- 1. Tswb**
- 2. Nyaj**

VIII. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

A. NTSUAB-HAAM (D. LAOS)

IX. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

- A. TXWJ-PHAJ (D. LAOS)
 - 1. Ntsuab-xwm
 - i. Lauj
 - ii. Yig
 - 2. Nyaj-ntxawg (France)
 - i. Ntaaj (MN)

X. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

A. KAUB (D. LAOS)

XI. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

A. NTXEB-XUV (D. LAOS)

1. Nyaj-pov

XII. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (CHINA); SIMILAR RITUALS.

A. NO NAMED COMMON ANCESTOR (LAOS); SIMILAR RITUALS.

1. No named common ancestor (Tham Lin Noi, Laos); similar rituals.

A. PAAJ-KAWS (D. LAOS)

- 1. Ntxhoo-yeeb (D. Laos)**
 - i. Suav-nchai (USA)**
 - ii. Txooj-hawj (USA)**
 - iii. Tswb (Canada)**

Appendix 2

Hmong Orthography (Romanized Popular Alphabet)

(From Lewis 1992)

The following charts list the sounds of Hmong: the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) symbol, example words in White and Green Hmong, and the English meaning. (See print thesis for phonetic equivalents in IPA alphabet.)

<i>RPA</i>	<i>White Hmong</i>	<i>Green Hmong</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
p	paj	paj	flower
ph	phem	phem	bad
rp	npua	npua	pig
nph	nphau	nphau	tip over
pl	plaub	plaub	four
plh	plhu	plhu	cheek
npl	nplooj	nplooj	leaf
nplh	nplhaib	nplhaib	ring
t	tub	tub	boy, son
th	thov	thov	ask, beg
nt	ntawv	ntawv	paper
nth	nthuav	nthuav	unfold
tx	txiv	txiv	father
txh	txhiab	txhiab	thousand
ntx	ntxiv	ntxiv	more
ntxh	ntxhw	ntxhw	elephant
c	cuaj	cuaj	nine
ch	choj	choj	bridge
nc	nco	nco	remember
nch	nchuav	nchuav	spill out
d	dev	dlev	dog
dh	dhia	{tl∞õ} dlha	jump
ndl		ndluav	throw out
ndlh			(very rare)
ts	tsov	tsuv	tiger
tsh	tshiab	tshab	new
nts	ntsuab	ntsuab	green
ntsh	ntshai	ntshai	afraid
r	rau	rau	six; put, place
rh	rhiab	rhab	tickle
nr	nrov	nrov	sound loud
nrh	nrhiav	nrhav	look for
k	kab	kaab	insect

kh	Khab	Khaab	clan Kha
rk	nkoj	nkoj	boat
nkx	nkhaus	nkhaus	crooked
q	qab	qaab	delicious
qh	qhia	qha	tell, teach
rq	nqi	nqe	value
nqh	nqhuab	nqhuab	dried up
v	Vaj	Vaaj	clan Vang
f	Faj	Faaj	clan Fang
x	xa	xaa	send
z	zoo	zoo	good
s	siab	sab	liver, "heart"
xy	Xyooj	Xyooj	clan Xiong
h	hau	hau	head
m	mus	moog	go
ml	mluas	mluag	sad
hm	Hmoob	Moob	Hmong
hml	hm los	(mlos)	dented
n	niam	nam	mother
hn	hnub	(nub)	sun
ny	nyiaj	nyaj	silver
hny	hnyav	(nyaav)	heavy
g			(very rare)
l	los	lug	come
hl	hli	hli	moon
y	Yaj	Yaaaj	clan Yang

Vowels

i	ib	ib	one
e	peb	peb	three; we
a/aa	Vaj	Vaaj	clan Vang
o	ɔb	ɔb	two
u	kub	kub	hot; gold
w	nws	nwg	he/she/it
œ	xeem	xeem	clan
oo	Hmoob	Moob	Hmong
ia/a	siab	sab	liver
ua	ua	ua	do, make
ai	saib	saib	look, watch
au	plaub	plaub	four; hair
aw	dawb	dlawb	white

Tones

-b	55	high level	pob	lump
-j	52	high falling	poj	female
-	33	mid level, longer duration	po	spleen
-v	24	mid rising	pov	throw
-s	22	low level, shorter duration	pos	thorn
-m	31?	low falling, abrupt end	pom	see
-g	42	falling, breathy	pog	grandmother