CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN HMONG CULTURAL IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF HMONG REFUGEES FROM LAOS IN WAT THAMKRABOK, SARABURI, THAILAND

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ในขณะที่ผู้ลี้ภัยชาวม้งจากลาวที่อาศัยอยู่ที่ถ้ำกระบอกได้ใช้พื้นที่บริเวณวัดถ้ำกระบอกเป็นที่อยู่อาศัยมาตั้งแต่ระยะต้นทศวรรษ 1960 ม้งอีกจำนวนมากได้มาอยู่กับเพื่อนและครอบครัวที่ถ้ำกระบอกในปลายทศวรรษ 1980 และต้นทศวรรษ 1990 เพราะได้ปิดแค้มป์ผู้ลี้ภัยทั่วประเทศ เพราะอยู่ในสภาพเป็นผู้ลี้ภัยเป็นระยะเวลาที่ยาวนานและไม่ได้รับการช่วยเหลือจากต่างประเทศจนเมื่อไม่นานมานี้เอง คนม้งที่ถ้ำกระบอกเช่นเดียวกับชาวม้งในศตวรรษที่ผ่านมา รู้จักเปลี่ยนแปลง ผสมกลมกลืน และปรับตัวให้เข้ากับสภาพแวดล้อมที่เด่นชัด ทำให้สามารถดำรงความเป็นม้งอยู่ได้ แม้ในสภาพที่ยากลำบากและซับซ้อน เพราะไม่สามารถกลับไปอยู่ยังถิ่นฐานเดิมได้ แต่การปรับตัวก็ทำได้จำกัดเนื่องจากไม่ได้สิทธิเป็นพลเมืองไทย และจนกระทั่งธันวาคม 2003 ยังไม่สามารถไปตั้งหลักแหล่งในประเทศที่สามได้

ในกระบวนการของการปรับเปลี่ยนนั้น ประเพณีนิยมเดิมๆ ของคนม้งยังดำรงอยู่ได้ แต่เอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมบางด้านได้ถูกปรับเปลี่ยนเพื่อให้สามารถคงสภาพความเป็นกลุ่มทางวัฒนธรรมที่โดดเด่น ทั้งๆ ที่ถูกจำกัดการไปมา และเข้าถึงแหล่งทรัพยากรและโอกาสได้อย่างจำกัด

การศึกษานี้มุ่งที่จะระบุถึงประวัติวัฒนธรรมคนม้งอย่างย่อๆ เพื่อจะได้นำไปสำรวจและวิเคราะห์เอกลักษณ์วัฒนธรรมของผู้ลี้ภัยชาวม้งที่วัดถ้ำกระบอก จังหวัดสระบุรี การระบุถึงเอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมที่เด่นชัดของคนม้งที่ถ้ำกระบอกเห็นได้ชัดเจนว่า ประเพณีนิยมหลายอย่างยังคงดำเนินต่อไปอย่างที่เคยเป็นๆ มา ความต่อเนื่องที่ว่านี้เกิดขึ้นได้เพราะกลไกวัฒนธรรมที่สำคัญสี่ประการของคนม้ง คือ ภาวะผู้นำ ภาษา ศาสนา และครอบครัว ซึ่งจะปรากฏให้เห็นในพิธีกรรมเกี่ยวกับปีใหม่ การแต่งงาน และพิธีศพ อันได้กลายเป็นวิธีการที่สำคัญในทางคงสภาพเอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมเอาไว้ ในประเด็นที่คนม้งจักต้องปรับตัวมักเป็นเรื่องทางเศรษฐกิจ เพราะไม่สามารถหางานทำถาวรได้ ทั้งยังต้องเลี้ยงดูครอบครัวโดยไม่ได้รับความช่วยเหลือใดๆ จากนานาชาติ

สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา ลายมือชื่อนิสิต .....

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While some of the Hmong refugees from Laos living at Thamkrabok had made their homes on the temple's grounds since the early 1960s, many others came to join friends and family there in the late 1980's and early 1990's as refugee camps throughout Thailand were closed. Given their prolonged refugee situation and the lack in international assistance until recent years, the Hmong of Thamkrabok, like Hmong in centuries past, have adapted, assimilated, and adjusted to their distinct circumstances in such a manner that has enabled them to persist despite the very difficult and complex situation in which they are found themselves unable to return to their country of origin, were greatly limited in their current location because of their ineligibility for Thai citizenship, and until December 2003, were unable to resettle to a third country.

Throughout this adaptation and adjustment process, many of their cultural traditions have been maintained while some aspects of their cultural identity have been adjusted in order to continue as a distinct, cultural group despite limitations on their movement and restricted access to resources and opportunity.

This particular project sought to determine a brief history of Hmong culture and traditions in order to further explore and analyze the cultural identity for Hmong refugees from Laos living in Wat Thamkrabok, Saraburi, Thailand. In identifying this distinct cultural identity for the Hmong of Thamkrabok, it became clear that many of their traditions continued as they had previously. Much of this continuity was enabled through the four major cultural mechanisms of the Hmong—leadership, language, religion, and family—which were manifested in the Hmong New Year, wedding, and funeral rituals, and served as an essential means of preserving much of their cultural identity. Many of the areas in which refugees adapted and adjusted were due to economic factors because of their inability to secure regular work and still support their families with no international assistance.

Field of Studies Southeast Asian Studies Student's signature ……

Academic Year 2004 Advisor's signature ……

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the rationale

While the precise origins of the Hmong are unknown,[1] they are historically a stateless people, migrating and shifting over centuries and preserving their agriculturally-based lifestyle and distinct culture and traditions. Their first migrations into Southeast Asia from southern China began in the early nineteenth century, the result of Chinese persecution. They migrated out of China and into Laos by way of Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand; during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they made their homes in the highlands of Laos and northern Thailand.[2] It was during America's secret wars in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s that many Hmong aligned with the United States and were employed by the Central Intelligence Agency to fight as guerilla soldiers for the U.S.[3]

When the Prathet Lao government officially took control of Laos in 1975, the vast majority of U.S.-aligned Hmong in Laos fled, while those who remained went into hiding in the dense jungles of the highlands. Thus began the initial influx of Hmong refugees into Thailand. While estimates vary, from 1975 to 1990, 130,000 Hmong refugees have resettled to the United States via Thailand.[4] This initial, massive resettlement took place during the first ten years after the war ended.

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[1] Some scholars believe the Hmong originated in Mesopotamia, while others claim they came from Siberia or Mongolia. Nahal Toosi, "A final wave of immigrants," (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 10 July 2004).

[2] "Timeline of Hmong History."

[3] Ronald Renard, *The Hmong: And Introduction to their History and Culture* (Washington D.C.: The Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004), pp. 5-6.

[4] "15,000 Laotian Hmong Refugees To Be Allowed to Resettle in U.S.," (*The New York Times*, 19 December 2003).

Anywhere from an additional 20,000 to 35,000 Hmong also fled Laos and have since been staying in Thailand.

Camps were established to handle this influx of refugees, however, there was never a long term plan to keep them in Thailand; plans were to either repatriate them back to Laos or send them on to a third country. Thus, in 1989, the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was developed with the objective being to empty all of the Hmong refugee camps in Thailand by 1996. Many Hmong understood this to mean that any refugees who had not been resettled in a third country would be repatriated. As they feared a forced relocation to Laos where their lives and livelihoods may be in danger because of their former allegiance to the U.S., many Hmong fled the camps. Some fled to northern Thailand to join existing Hmong populations and family members there.[5] Others fled to Wat Thamkrabok in Saraburi, Thailand, about 130 kilometers north of Bangkok.

Prior to the early 1990s, there was a small population of Hmong refugees who had been living at the temple since as early as the 1960s. But by 1990, the Hmong population at Thamkrabok had grown to approximately 4,000, with the fear of repatriation under the CPA as the primary motivating factor in seeking asylum at the temple. Throughout the 1990s, this number continued to grow rapidly. At one point, some estimates suggest there were as many as 30,000 Hmong living there, some of whom later fled to Hmong villages in northern Thailand. With the death of the temple's abbot in 1999, the Thai government began approaching the U.S. government to assist in resolving the protracted refugee situation for the Hmong in Thamkrabok.[6]

In December 2003, the United States Department of State announced that it would be accepting any Hmong refugees who had registered with the Thai government at Thamkrabok and passed a processing procedure for resettlement in the

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[5] Joseph Davy, "The Hmong of Wat Thamkrabok," (Hmong International Human Rights Watch, September 1998).

[6] Davy, "The Hmong of Wat Thamkrabok."

U.S. 15,828 Hmong registered with the Thai authorities and of these, 15,323 were eligible to resettle.[7] With the successful resettlement of all eligible Hmong, the Thai government intends to close the Hmong community at Thamkrabok; there are currently no official plans for how to handle the remaining thousands of Hmong both in and just outside the community who did not qualify for resettlement.

Prior to resettlement, which began in late June 2004, population estimates for the Hmong in Thamkrabok varied anywhere from 15,000 to 20,000 Hmong from Laos. Estimates also suggest an additional 20,000 have already relocated to northern Thailand.[8] Of the entire Hmong population currently in and around Thamkrabok, the majority are children who were born in Thailand. Thus, for the past 20 years, an entire generation of Hmong has come of age at Thamkrabok.

1.2 Rationale

The Hmong of Thamkrabok, like the Hmong in centuries past, have adapted, assimilated, and adjusted to their distinct circumstances in such a manner that has enabled them to persist despite very difficult and complex situations in which they are unable to return to their country of origin, are greatly limited in their current location because they are not eligible for Thai citizenship, and were, until recently, unable to resettle in a third country. Throughout this adaptation and adjustment process, many of their traditions have been maintained while some aspects of their lives and their cultural identity have been adjusted in order to continue as a distinct, cultural group despite limitations on their movement and restricted access to resources and opportunity because of their protracted refugee situation.

[7] Rungrawee C. Pinyorat, "Last of Hmong Refugees," (*The Nation*, 22 June 2004).

[8] Laura Xiong, *Letter to the U.S. Department of State*, (15 August 2003).

1.3 Objectives

The following four items outline the primary objectives of this project:

1. To describe the history of Hmong and their cultural traditions (in brief) to enable readers to best understand and appreciate the cultural context in which this project takes place;
2. To identity Hmong cultural identity in Thamkrabok;
3. To identify and analyze areas of continuity and change in this Hmong cultural identity in Thamkrabok; and,
4. To examine the causes of change in this same cultural identity.

1.4 Hypothesis

The working hypothesis for this project is that Hmong refugees from Laos living in Wat Thamkrabok have adapted and adjusted their cultural identity over time which has enabled them to preserve their identity, despite living in a challenging and unstable situation.

1.5 Scope of study

This project examines the Hmong community physically living within the temple grounds at Wat Thamkrabok in Saraburi, Thailand. This particular Hmong community is comprised primarily of Hmong refugees from Laos and their children who have subsequently been born in Thailand and all respondents in the field research component of this project are from this group of refugees from Laos. As this study seeks to explore the culture and identity of this distinct Hmong community, the project will focus primarily on social issues. Other issues and concerns which fall outside of this objective (i.e. the refugee situation, security, etc.) will *not* be addressed in detail as they are not the focus of this study. Exceptions to this would be situations where any peripheral issues may have had more direct affects the culture and identity of the community in meaningful ways.

1.6 Related theories

Some terminology, in general terms, which may be helpful in understanding the theoretical basis for this project come from what Soviet anthropologists Arutiunov and Bromley have referred to as the links between *ethnos*, "stable human communities, tied together by unity of territory and history of their formation, and by a common language and culture," and *ethnogenesis*, "social processes which, over time, produce, reproduce, and modify the ethnos."[9]

More specifically, Dunnigan (1986) suggests six general areas of Hmong culture which have served to preserve their unique identity throughout extended periods of challenge and instability as the Diaspora has grown over time. These six factors include:

1. *Oppositional Process*: this is the "we vs. they" mentality which the Hmong often use to distinguish themselves from the majority settings in which they live. Mutual assistance is key, and help is rarely sought outside the Hmong community.
2. *The Homeland*: Laos is seen as a symbolic homeland to the Hmong, and is likely to remain so, despite that most Hmong do not anticipate ever returning.
3. *Language*: There are currently two main dialects, the White and the Blue Hmong. As Hmong populations become more settled and bilingual in their new settings, it is likely that the Hmong language will continue to remain an important cultural identifier.
4. *Religion*: While Hmong follow a variety of religions including forms of animism, Christianity, and Buddhism, religion has served and continues to serve as a means of maintaining Hmong culture and social distinction.

[9] Richard Jenkins, "Social anthropological models of inter-ethnic relations," *Theories of Racial and Ethnic Relations*. Eds. John Rex and David Mason (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 170-86.

Religious ceremonies are performed in the Hmong language by Hmong leaders. While religious practices are diverse, there continues to be a strong tendency toward maintaining uniformity in patrilineal kin groups, particularly during religious rituals.

5. *Kinship*: In Hmong culture this is patrilineal. Important affiliations include both clan and individual ancestors. Associations are developed to include both immediate and extended family members. Kinship is very important to consider when looking at cultural identity because, as Dunnigan states, "a unified association of families is the most effective social arrangement for adapting to a changing and sometimes hostile environment."
6. *Identity Maintenance*: It is important to understand change in Hmong identity by carefully looking at its causes which often include constraints by major social forces that often force the Hmong to revise their social rituals.

Additionally, Weinreich's Identity Structure Analysis (ISA) is also used as the conceptual framework for this project. An important component in ISA is the distinction between internally recognized categories of self as a member of an ethnic group and externally imposed definitions imposed by others outside the group. There is also an important distinction to be made between personal and social identity.

The following two postulates, as proposed by Weinreich, have been important in developing this project:

1. *Resolution of conflicted identifications*: When one's identifications with others are conflicted, one attempts to resolve the conflicts, thereby inducing re-evaluations of self in relation to the others within the limitations of one's currently existing value system.
2. *Formation of new identification*: When one forms further identifications with newly encountered individuals, one broadens one's value system and establishes a new context for one's self-definition, thereby initiating a

reappraisal of self and others which is dependent on fundamental changes in one's value system.

1.7 Conceptual framework

This project aims to determine the ethnogenesis of the Hmong ethnos in Wat Thamkrabok. It is anticipated that this ethnogenesis has been modifying the ethnos to adjust to their situation, while also reproducing the six factors of Hmong identity as suggested by Dunnigan. In resolving these conflicted identifications by adjusting and adapting their six cultural factors to the Thai context, the Hmong have also subsequently developed a new, distinct identification. The ultimate goal of this project is to determine specific ways in which they have reproduced their identity in Thamkrabok as well as how they have further developed this identity.

1.8 Methodology: data collection and analysis

1.8.1 Documentary collection

Data will be collected in two phases. The first phase includes a thorough examination of available documentary materials regarding Hmong history and culture in general terms. The purpose being to develop a model of Hmong cultural identity as it has existed and changed over time and throughout Hmong history. In addition, data available regarding the Hmong community at Thamkrabok will also be carefully examined. All data gathered during the first phase will then be applied to data collected in the second phase and ultimately lead to the analysis and conclusions of this study.

Upon the completion of the documentary collection phase, the following aspects of Hmong culture, identity, and tradition have been established to serve as general guidelines in determining the development and maintenance of cultural identity within the Hmong experience in Thamkrabok:

1. *Physical Environment*: ways in which space is used, homes are constructed, etc.;
2. *Leadership and Lineage*: ways in which clan relations are structured, how the authority structure functions, etc.;
3. *Courtship and Marriage*: courtships practices, bride price and bride wealth negotiations, wedding ceremonies, etc.;
4. *Music, Song, and Dance*: use of traditional Hmong instruments, the role of folk lore, music, song, dance, etc.;
5. *Crafts*: metal work, jewelry production, embroidery/appliqué (esp. *paj ntaub*), etc.;
6. *Religion*: shamanism, traditional ceremonies and rituals, presence of other religions (Hmong messianism, Christianity), etc.;
7. *Funerals*: typical funeral ceremony, etc.;
8. *New Year*: typical celebration and practices, etc.;
9. *Livelihood and Income*: types of work, source of income, etc.; and,
10. *Interactions with Majority (Thai) Society*: who is involved with Thai community, why, how, etc.

1.8.2 On-site collection

The second phase will include data gathered on site at Wat Thamkrabok in Saraburi, Thailand using a qualitative approach via participant observation coupled with both informal and formal, in-depth interviews.

Because of an outbreak of tuberculosis in the community in late January, the researcher was not allowed to enter residents' homes. She was, however, able to spend time with residents outside their homes, most often sitting and talking with them just outside their homes as they worked on their handicrafts. On other occasions, information was gathered during countless "tours" of the community which were given almost weekly by assorted younger residents under strict instruction

from their parents to speak clearly and politely and show the researcher whatever she was interested in seeing. During these excursions the researcher was taken into every neighborhood in the community as well as the surrounding hills. It was during these "tours" as well as solo trips by the researcher throughout the community, coupled with long afternoons talking with residents outside their homes that the majority of participant observation occurred. She was able to regularly observe residents from all socio-economic levels throughout the camp in or near their homes engaged in a variety of tasks including working, cooking, caring for children, relaxing, and the like. In addition, during some of the "tours" which went outside the residential area and into the hills surrounding the camp, the researcher was able to see and learn about the burial sites for residents, the gathering of wild vegetables, the small plots available for rent to enable residents to plant their own food, fields and other open areas used for play by both young and old, and so forth.

Informal interviews with more than 30 residents were conducted when appropriate with residents during daily activities and interactions. Of these 30 residents, 15 were selected for in-depth interviews; [10] these residents were selected as the researcher had developed close relationships with them and they were most comfortable sharing their experiences in detail.[11] To maintain the privacy of all residents, no identifiable information was used at any point during the project. The group of fifteen respondents ranged in age from 17 to 76 years of age, included both men and women, and lived in all four of the different neighborhoods in the community; one respondent was an officially recognized leader in the community. In addition to these formal and informal interviews, the researcher also interacted with approximately 25 other residents very casually and somewhat regularly in her day-to-day research in the community.

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[10] Note on acceptance and legitimacy in the community: The researcher had previous contact with residents before conducting this research, and close relationships had already been established with many residents and their immediate and extended family members. These residents refer to the researcher as a 'relative' because of these established relationships as well as the researcher's connection to extended Hmong family members in the U.S.

[11] See Appendix A for an example of the questionnaire used during in-depth interviews.

In addition to speaking in-depth with Hmong residents, the researcher also conducted four other in-depth interviews with officials working directly in the community including one official with the Thai Internal Security Operations Center (ISOC), two officials with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and one official with the Center for Disease Control (CDC). One monk who has been living at the temple and working with the Hmong in Thamkrabok for 25 years was also interviewed in-depth. Informal interviews were conducted with more that 20 Thai soldiers working in the community, five IOM employees, one CDC doctor, and one representative from the U.S. Embassy.

The inclusion of the Thai military's, international organization's, and temple's perspectives in the project serves to further deepen and broaden the understanding of the community itself along with its administration, thereby enhancing the project in meaningful ways.

1.8.3 Analysis

Upon completion of the data collection phase, aspects of Hmong culture and identity at Wat Thamkrabok of specific interest in the analysis phase include the six different areas of Hmong culture, as suggested by Dunnigan, used in conjunction with Weinreich's Identity Structure Analysis. In organizing the data in this manner, results show the extent and ways in which these variables are operating in the Hmong community at Thamkrabok. The following factors, which stem from Dunnigan and Weinreich, have been specifically used in conjunction with data gathered from residents in the community to most closely examine Hmong cultural identity in Thamkrabok:

Resolving Conflicted Identifications

- Ways in which Hmong leaders have aligned with one another, both in the camp and within the larger Diaspora, and ways in which Hmong have established alliances with Thai officials;
- Extent of feelings of nostalgia and attachment to Laos;
- Hmong language use;

- Religious practices, leaders, and level of importance; and,
- Association of families and kinship networks and their importance in dealing with hostile cultural situations.

Forming a New Identification

- Ways in which Hmong have established alliances with Thai officials;
- Existence and extent of feeling of attachment or identification with Thailand;
- Thai language-- when, where, how, and why it is used and learned;
- Level of integration with the local Thai Buddhist community-- to what extent and why;
- Extent of involvement in local trade and economy;
- Media and communications as distributed via the Diaspora as well as information received locally;
- Socialization of young people;
- Possession and/or ownership of resources, specifically as related to kinship relations;
- Other levels of integration into the local community;
- Thai government policy;
- Use of social capital;
- Other ways in which Hmong have revised their social rituals; and,
- Any other related topic or issue that may arise during the course of research.

1.9 Expectations

Because of their unique and protracted refugee situation, it is anticipated that the Hmong at Wat Thamkrabok have developed a distinct identity which has allowed

them to exist and function in their current situation for a number of years. This project aims to yield a general understanding of this distinct identity and how it has developed, adapted, and adjusted in this challenging and prolonged setting.

1.10 Significance to knowledge

Understanding the cultural identity of the Hmong in Thamkrabok serves to further the discussion in the area of identity formation, adaptation, and adjustment for the Hmong specifically, and for other groups in more general terms.[12]

Additionally, the results of this project can be used to enhance existing support networks in third countries which are receiving or preparing to receive Hmong residents from Thamkrabok. Previous Hmong to resettle in third countries had not assimilated and adjusted to their Thai context so much as those in Thamkrabok have had to. Thus, in being able to provide updated information on the distinct cultural identity of the Hmong from Thamkrabok, support networks in the U.S. and other receiving countries will be better informed as to the needs and background of this particular Hmong population, as this group is different from previous groups of Hmong immigrants.

Furthermore, research results may also prove useful to Thai authorities in developing a deeper understanding of the ways in which the Hmong have already adapted to their situation in Thailand, as well as reasons why they continue to maintain certain aspects of their Hmong identity. This particular project may thus serve to further the discussion of minority groups in Thailand.

Another driving factor in conducting this research is to provide a general understanding of the distinct Hmong community at Wat Thamkrabok, and to allow residents to reflect on their experiences there. It is hoped that this project may serve as an important record of the way of life as it existed for the Hmong in Thamkrabok.

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[12] See the “Literature Review” section for a partial listing of previous studies on Hmong identity.

As with Ban Vinai,[13] the community at Thamkrabok will be closed and the structures destroyed upon the resettlement of the residents. Thus, when the relocation of residents to the U.S. is complete, there will likely be little or nothing physically remaining of the place that was home to thousands of Hmong for much of their lives. This research will therefore also serve as a small means of preserving an important part of Hmong history and way of life at Thamkrabok.

1.11 Thesis questions

Throughout this project, the following questions will remain paramount in achieving the objective of examining the distinct Hmong cultural identity in Thamkrabok:

- How is Hmong culture seen and understood both historically and traditionally?
- What is the Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok?
- What are the similarities between the cultural identity of the Thamkrabok community and other Hmong communities throughout the Diaspora?
- What are the differences between the cultural identity of the Thamkrabok community and other Hmong communities throughout the Diaspora?
- Why and how did certain aspects of Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok remain unchanged?
- Why and how did certain aspects of Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok undergo change and/or adaptations?

[13] Ban Vinai was a large Hmong refugee camp in Loei, Thailand which was closed in the mid-1990s.

1.12 Literature review

The primary objective of this review is to develop a working understanding of Hmong history and identity and how this identity has historically and specifically been adapted and adjusted in different situations over time, particularly as it has previously existed and transformed in different physical and social landscapes. To do this, the literature has been reviewed at three different levels:

1. On a general level which addresses minority issues in broad, global and national contexts;
2. On a general level which examines the Hmong experience and their culture as it has developed throughout history; and,
3. On a specific level exploring Hmong cultural identity and how it has transitioned previously in different contexts.

There has yet to be any type of social research conducted exploring the Hmong identity in Thamkrabok. Thus, this research has relied on similar Hmong identity studies conducted in different settings in developing the project.

To begin looking at ethnic identity in general terms, Castle's and Davidson's *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging* (2000) bring together a variety of contemporary viewpoints about the issues of migration and ethnicity in an ever-increasingly global landscape, focusing specifically on citizenship in the modern world. Aspects of interest highlighted in this selection include the notion of citizenship and how it is evolving within this global context. Nation-states struggle to find ways in which to fit into the fast-paced global environment, while still maintaining their sovereignty. According to the authors, as this adjustment to a globalized world works itself out, the notion of citizenship continues to change. Countless people now hold multiple citizenships, while countless others are unable to obtain citizenship in their country of residence. The latter is true for the Hmong of Thamkrabok, as well as other minority groups living in Thailand. Other resources which address this issue of citizenship and belonging include Kymlicka's *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (2000) and *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995).

In looking at the minority experience more specifically in Southeast Asia, Turton's edited collection *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States* (2000) and McKinnon's and Vienne's *Hill Tribes Today: Problems in Change* (1989) help to identify how minorities throughout the region have fared over time and in a variety of different political, social, and economic conditions. Of particular interest in the Turton selection is "Part II: Internal Histories and Comparisons" which contains several articles including Tapp's "Ritual Relations and Identity: the Hmong and Others" and Renard's "The Differential Integration of Hill People into the Thai State," both of which explore in some detail the experiences of minority hill tribes in the Thai state both generally and specifically. *Hill Tribes Today* is a collection of papers related to the experiences of various hill tribes in Thailand (including the resettlement of many minorities in Thailand), including the effects of various Thai development policies on minority hill tribe groups, and some discussion of assorted development projects which target hill tribe minorities.

Looking at the literature available regarding the Hmong experience throughout history and in general terms, there are several good resources which explore to the breadth, depth, and complexity of Hmong history. These include, but are not limited to, Cooper's *The Hmong: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles* (1991), Quincy's *Hmong: History of a People* (1988), Millett's *The Hmong of Southeast Asia* (2002), and Mottin's *History of the Hmong* (1980). Both Cooper's and Quincy's books stand out for their comprehensive discussion of the intricacies and complexities of the Hmong experience. While Cooper focuses on the culture and traditions, Quincy provides a more extended discussion of the historical understanding of the Hmong. Millett's selection is more of a brief introduction to the Hmong, and is a useful resource for those seeking this type of concise background.

There are many resources that more specifically address the adaptation of Hmong culture and identity and are useful in examining ways in which the Hmong have previously transitioned and adapted to new landscapes. The most recent is Tapp's 2004 edited collection, *The Hmong/Miao in Asia*. This collection is an excellent resource in that it focuses on research of Hmong culture and life in Asia, complementing much of the other available collections (including some of the titles

discussed below) which focus more on the Hmong cultural experience in the Diaspora rather than their Asian home. *The Hmong/Miao* is divided into two parts, the first discussing aspects of history, languages, and identity of the Hmong in Laos and China while the second explores many of the challenges confronted by the Hmong today in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Long's ethnographic study of Hmong refugees at Ban Vinai in Thailand, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp* (1993), is another good resource which provides a narrative of the long-term refugee experience. This narrative, set against the backdrop of larger international refugee policy, captures the realities of life and survival for the Hmong in the camp—ways in which they adapted and equipped themselves with coping mechanisms to enable not only their own personal survival, but also that of their distinct culture and identity.

The Hmong in Transition (1986), an edited collection by Hendricks, Downing, and Deinard, is an especially useful resource. It contains several articles which have been sub-divided into the following areas: Hmong culture and change, adapting to a new society, language and literacy, and health care issues. Of particular interest is the section regarding Hmong culture and change, which includes Dunnigan's article along with several others that expound on the maintenance of Hmong identity in different physical and social landscapes at different times.

Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women (1994) by Donnelly is based on her work with Hmong refugees from Laos in Seattle with much of the information gathered by interviewing refugees. She explains some general background of the Hmong culture and its social structure, but focuses primarily on the changing role of Hmong women in different social contexts. She addresses ways in which this particular group of Hmong refugees have both maintained and adjusted their cultural identity to allow them to best adapt to their new setting in the U.S. The book specifically addresses issues of handicraft production, courtship, bride wealth negotiations, and wedding ceremonies.

Trueba's *Cultural Conflict and Adaptation: the case of Hmong children in American society* (1990) is based on the author's work with a small group of Hmong

in La Playa, California. He looks at their resettlement experience and the adjustment process, particularly as it affected their cultural identity, examining the estrangement and conflict confronted by children in this small Hmong community.

A final resource which has proven useful in understanding Hmong cultural identity is Gary Yia Lee's article "Cultural Identity in Post-Modern Society: Reflections on 'What is a Hmong?'" (1987). This selection provides a thorough and concise overview of Hmong-ness in modern society. It covers aspects of Hmong culture and identity such as language, clan, lineage and family membership, rituals, and the like. The discussion goes on to examine ways in which these and other features of Hmong tradition and society continue to be shaped and re-shaped in modern times as the Diaspora expands and grows.

Thus, regarding Hmong culture and identity, there is currently an extensive knowledge base of existing information and research available including the changes and transformations this identity has undergone in different situations at different times. This study will further this knowledge base by adding to the diversity, color, and variation to be found in Hmong culture and identity as is seen in the distinct Hmong experience in Thamkrabok.

As mentioned previously, there has been very little written on the Hmong living in Thamkrabok. Much of the available information was published after the U.S. Department of State's December 2003 announcement to accept Hmong refugees from Thamkrabok for resettlement. There have been no substantial books or journal articles written about the Hmong of Thamkrabok or their unique situation, nor has any substantial research been conducted there.

1.13 Definition of key words

Refugee vs. **Resident** and **Community** vs. **Camp**

For the purposes of this discussion and research the terms "refugee" and "resident" are used interchangeably while "community" is used rather than "camp." Because of the unofficial and protracted situation for the Hmong in

Thamkrabok, terminology and semantics have been chosen to best reflect the ambiguity and uncertainty which has been an integral part of the Hmong experience at Thamkrabok.

Culture

Hein has clearly summarized a good working definition of culture which will be used for the purposes of this project.

> "Culture can be conceptualized as a tool kit or repertoire of formal activities like beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories and rituals of daily life... The Hmong cultural repertoire has three main areas: healing through spiritual-medical techniques, conducting life-cycle rituals, and producing arts and crafts."

Cultural identity

As a means of providing continuity with previous works which have been conducted regarding Hmong identity and culture, the following will be used as a definition of cultural identity for the purposes of this paper:

> "Cultural identity is the (feeling of) identity of a group or culture, or of an individual, as far as s/he is influenced by his/her belonging to a group or culture."[14]

More specifically, cultural identity provides a means for individuals to define who they are; it also shapes how individuals are viewed by other people outside of one's culture. Cultural identity is often formed using very broad strokes and includes one's interaction with a variety of different social dynamics such as family, gender, location, socio-economic status, and

[14] "Cultural Identity." Wikipedia.

ethnicity. While no single dynamic is able to shape one's cultural identity, taken together they begin to shape one's cultural identity.[15]

Ethnic group and **Ethnicity**

Hein has also succinctly outlined the following definitions of 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity,' which will be used as a general guideline when considering issues of ethnicity as they relate to this project:

> "An ethnic group is a self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others… [While] ethnicity [can be defined] as shared beliefs, norms, values, preferences, in-group memories, loyalties, and consciousness of kind. An ethnic group is a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients."

Hmong vs. **Miao**

There is much discussion both within and outside Hmong communities around the world with regard to the appropriate use of either 'Hmong' or 'Miao.' The use of the different terms to refer to the same minority group arises from the intersection of linguistics, history, and geography, among other factors. The Hmong who currently live in China refer to themselves as Miao (sometimes spelled Meo). Most Hmong outside of China, however, refer to themselves as 'Hmong' and many take offense if referred to as 'Miao.' This is for a variety of reasons; some claim that 'Miao' is a Chinese word for 'savage,' while most Hmong in Southeast Asia do not like the use of 'Miao' because it is often mispronounced and sounds like the Thai and Lao word for 'cat.' For a Hmong to be referred to as a cat or any type of animal for that matter is offensive.

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[15] Saskatchewan Education, *The Adaptive Dimension in Core Curriculum*, 1992.

Thus, out of respect for the Hmong outside of China, which would of course include the Hmong at Thamkrabok, throughout this paper, the term Hmong will be used at all times.[16]

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[16] Gary Yia Lee, "Cultural Identity in Post-Modern Society: Reflections on What is a Hmong?" *Hmong Studies Journal* (Vol. 1, No. 1: Fall 1996); and, Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 173-4.

CHAPTER II

AN OVERVIEW OF HMONG HISTORY AND CULTURE

This chapter looks in closer detail at the history of the Hmong and their culture in general terms. This is very much a survey and collection of available resources to provide readers with a solid understanding of the Hmong experience and culture. This understanding will be essential to best appreciate and understand the contemporary situation for the Hmong community at Thamkrabok within the larger historical and cultural Hmong contexts.

2.1 General background

Some claim the word 'Hmong' means 'human being' or 'free people' in the Hmong language and it is what the Hmong have called themselves wherever they have lived. Currently, the Hmong Diaspora is concentrated primarily in Asia, and as a result of conflict throughout Southeast Asia in the last 30 years, there are also growing populations in resettlement countries. There are some three million Hmong living in China, an estimated 200,000 in Vietnam, another 200,000 in Laos, and 100,000 in Thailand. Overseas, more than 100,000 have been resettled, primarily in the U.S., but there are also communities in Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, and French Guiana.[1] The number of overseas Hmong has grown substantially with the coming of age of a new generation born in resettled countries. Current estimates of the number of Hmong in the U.S. vary anywhere from 200,000 to 300,000. Quincy suggests that there are just over six million Hmong in the world, with most living in China and the rest throughout the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia (vi).

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[1] Robert Cooper, ed., *The Hmong: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), p. 19; and, Nicholas Tapp, *The Hmong in China: Context, Agency, and the Imaginary*, (Boston, Brill, 2001), p. 3.

The origins of the Hmong are unclear. However, recent anthropological studies of the Hmong in Laos and Thailand have led some researchers to classify the Hmong as "the most Caucasian population of Southeast Asia." Important factors used by anthropologists in examining the origins of the Hmong include their physical appearance, language, and legends. In the past, red or blond hair was not uncommon among the Hmong, and many also had blue eyes; it is significant to note just how much the Hmong did (and still do, in some cases) look Caucasian. These light haired, fair eyed Hmong provide a strong indication of the Caucasian roots of the Hmong, possibly from southern Russia or the Iranian plateau.[2]

The origin of the tonal Hmong language is also a mystery. Many Hmong understand that in their distant past, they did have a written language that was lost, although not entirely, as women would secretly include messages in their embroidery. However, the meaning of the symbols was lost long ago. It was not until the 1950s that the Hmong acquired a written form of their language using Arabic characters. Thus, the Hmong have traditionally relied on their oral and craft traditions to pass along their history, legends, beliefs, and culture. Hmong folk lore and legend tell of a long, arduous migration from a northern homeland into Siberia where they lived for an unknown length of time before migrating further south still into northeastern China. Throughout their history, as the Hmong have moved throughout Asia and more recently around the world, their ancient culture has moved with them.[3]

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[2] Lee, "Cultural Identity;" and, Sandra Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Times Editions, 2002), p. 32.

[3] Norma J. Livo and Dia Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam* (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1991), p. ix; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of a People*, (Washington: Eastern Washington University Press, 1998), pp. vi, 13-6; and, Renard, *The Hmong*, pp. 3-4.

2.2 History

2.2.1 Pre-Chinese annals

The available history for the Hmong can trace them back over 4,000 years. However, there is little detail remaining regarding the way of life for these ancient Hmong. What is available is often a haphazard collection of subjective observations and oral traditions which tell only some of the ancient Hmong. Until the Hmong are mentioned in Chinese annals, there is little known of the origins, history, traditions, or the way they lived. What does remain is a strong oral tradition with one origin myth talking about "a land of snow and ice, where days and nights each lasted six months." For those Hmong who have never seen snow or ice, this legend tells of 'rigid water' and 'fine white sand.' This has led some to speculate that the Hmong originated somewhere in Mongolia, Tibet, or Lapland.[4] Quincy contends that the Hmong lived in central Siberia before migrating to northern China (vi). Thus, the earliest history of the Hmong remains ambiguous.

2.2.2 The Hmong in China

Experts generally agree that the Hmong became a part of Chinese history no later than 1,200 B.C. and possibly as early as 3,000 B.C. which are the dates found in ancient Chinese annals. While the Hmong did certainly borrow from Chinese culture, they were adamantly against any form of assimilation. Rather, as they had done before and continue to do today, they preferred to accept and adapt certain aspects of the majority culture, while resisting others which may present any type of challenge to their identity. It was because of this resistance to assimilation that the Hmong

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[4] Cooper, *The Hmong,* p. 14; Gary Yia Lee, et. al, *The Hmong* (Bangkok: Artasia Press Co. Ltd, 1996), p. 5; and, Jane Mallinson, Nancy Donnelly, and Ly Hang, *H'mong Batik: A Textile Technique From Laos* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1988), p. 1.

experience in Chinese was very difficult at times. According to ancient Chinese history, the Hmong were the first enemies of the Chinese.[5]

Much of the Chinese hostility toward the Hmong was due in large part to the Hmong refusal to assimilate and embrace Chinese culture. Despite this, by the middle of the sixth century, the Chinese were forced to officially recognize the existence of an independent Hmong kingdom in southern China. This resistance to Chinese culture was so strong that by the end of the tenth century when defeat by the Chinese was at last imminent, the Hmong chose to simply abandon their kingdom rather than face enslavement and/or assimilation into the Chinese culture.[6] It was the fall of this Hmong kingdom which is viewed by the Hmong as a major turning point in their history.[7]

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, relations between the Hmong and Chinese continued to worsen as the Hmong pursued their rebellion against the Chinese and the Chinese continued with their suppression of the Hmong. It has been argued that it was during this time of harsh suppression that the Hmong first began their movement south across the Chinese frontier and into Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. The final insult for many Hmong came with the organized and resolute effort on the part of Chinese to Sinicize the Hmong absolutely. These efforts required the Hmong send their children to Chinese schools, prohibited traditional Hmong celebrations, and pressured Hmong women to be allowed to marry Chinese men.[8]

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[5] Quincy, *Hmong,* pp. vi, 24-7; and, Nicholas Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand: Opium People of the Golden Triangle* (Cambridge, MA: Anti-Slavery Society, 1986), p. 9.

[6] When all was said and done, however, the cost of suppressing the Hmong during this expansion would total over 70 million taels (approximately $500 million), which was more than double what it cost the Chinese to defeat all of Turkestan. The Hmong refusal to accept Chinese culture unconditionally was the factor which ultimately perplexed and also incensed Chinese authorities as the Chinese had come to equate their culture 'with civilization itself.' The "raw" Hmong, as they were called by the Chinese, refused to even use chopsticks, but rather used spoons as did the Europeans. Quincy, *Hmong,* pp. 2-3, 12.

[7] Lee, et. al, *The Hmong,* p. 6; and, Quincy, *Hmong,* pp. vi, 38-43.

[8] Cooper, *The Hmong,* p. 15; and, Quincy, *Hmong,* p. 50.

Map 1: Hmong Migration in Southeast Asia 1800 – 1950

2.2.3 The Hmong in Southeast Asia

The original movement of many Hmong into Laos was initiated with the help of Ton Ma, a Chinese opium merchant. As a means of expanding the opium production of the region, he sought to encourage the Hmong to consider moving to the mountains of Xieng Khouang province in Eastern Laos which were ideal for opium cultivation. To effectively encourage the movement of the Hmong from Southern China into Laos, he told of fertile, uninhabited mountains to which the Hmong willing agreed to move. This initial group of Hmong who moved into Eastern Laos traveled as Hmong have always traveled—carrying all of their possessions on

their backs, leading all of the livestock along with them, and walking along the peaks of the highland mountains until reaching their destination.[9]

In general, the Hmong who settled in Laos and Vietnam established and maintained amiable associations with their highland neighbors, with the occasional exception and disagreement and/or conflict. Regardless of their location in Southeast Asia, whether they are in Vietnam, Laos, or Thailand, Hmong villages were nearly always located above 3,000 feet, and sometimes as high as 5,000 feet. In living at such high altitudes atop rugged mountains, the Hmong were able to guarantee there would be little competition for available land.[10] Thus, the Hmong experience in Thailand began in the latter half of the nineteenth century when they made their way into other parts of upper Southeast Asia. During this time, they continued with their agriculturally based lifestyle, again living atop the mountains of northern Thailand at high elevations. Many of them remained in quiet village atop these mountains for generations, preserving their agricultural lifestyle and distinct culture and tradition apart from the lowland majority Thai populations.

In 1967, conflict erupted in four Northern provinces of Thailand between Hmong villagers and Thai police, with clashes between the two groups continuing on and off for several years. Despite only a very small number of Hmong actually being involved in the conflict, thousands of Hmong as well as other tribal minorities were relocated to camps in the lowlands of Thailand where the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) initiated an intensive 'accelerated integration' of these Hmong and other minorities into the majority Thai culture. Even today, these camps remain as large minority villages. In general, many Hmong villagers in Thailand have

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[9] Yang Dao, *The Hmong of Lao in the Vanguard of Development* (Vientiane: Siaosavath Publishers, 1975), p. 7; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 57; Mallinson, Donnelly, and Hang, *H'mong Batik*, pp. 2-3; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 4; Joachim Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*, "Volume 3: Profile of Austro-Thai Speaking Peoples," (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2003); and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 18.

[10] Quincy, *Hmong*, pp. 64-9; and, Nicholas Tapp, *Categories of Change and Continuity Among White Hmong of Northern Thailand* (School of Oriental and African Studies: University of London, 1985), pp. 30, 351.

been given farmland and appear more or less content to remain where they are. An interesting result of the involvement of some Hmong in the communist insurrection and suppression was the establishment of a new structural aspect in Hmong society—the permanent township.[11]

2.2.4 Opium and Hmong society

By the last half of the nineteenth century, China had become self-sufficient in its opium production. The Hmong at this time were living on some of the most suitable land for opium cultivation in China. It is possible that as the Chinese achieved self-sufficiency, the enterprising Hmong may have then sought to capitalize on their agricultural advantage in producing opium and first added it as a cash crop to their economic structure. This would have been especially simple to do in that the opium harvest falls at a different time than that of the other Hmong crops—rice and maize.[12]

Despite popular understanding to the contrary, the use of opium among the Hmong is not very common.[13] Of those who do smoke opium, it is most likely to be old men and women. Old men in particular are especially revered and respected as elders in the community and opium use is nearly always used as a pain reliever, which

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[11] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 17; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, pp. 77-9; Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Politics in Thailand: A Hmong Perspective," Paper presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies (Australian National University, 3-6 July 1987); Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 8; and, Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand*, pp. 19-20.

[12] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 18; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 8; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 19.

[13] While opium use is not common among the Hmong, the popular misunderstanding by the majority Thais is that the Hmong and opium are very closely connected, with the Hmong perceived as regular users and sellers of opium (and other drugs). This misperception has led to the Hmong being received in negative ways by the Thais, generally speaking. A recent example of this negative stereotype occurred in March 2005. There was a demonstration in Lamphang province in Northern Thailand protesting the proposed relocation of several Hmong families to the province to stay with extended family members already living in the province. The majority Thais were opposed to any more Hmong moving to the province for fear that this would lead to an increase in illegal activities, particularly illegal drug use and sales.

for these old men, is brought on after years of hard work and providing for their families. Unmarried men will rarely smoke at all. Opium is commonly used for medicinal purposes, but in very small amounts so as to provide relief of pain but not lead to any adverse affects. Also, when the Hmong smoke opium, it is most often raw or semi-cooked meaning that its narcotic content is especially low. Thus, in looking at the Hmong and opium use, care should be taken not to mistake all opium users as drug addicts.[14]

2.3 Culture

2.3.1 Identity

While they cannot be considered a strictly homogenous group, self-identity among the Hmong has always been strong. The variety which exists among the Hmong today is the result of their long history and way of life which has left them scattered over large parts of Southern China, Northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and several other countries after the resettlement of Hmong refugees. Given the existence of this Hmong Diaspora throughout the world and for much of their history, it is remarkable that Hmong identity and culture have remained as strong as they have. This continuity has been achieved largely through the isolation of the Hmong in the extreme highlands as well as their high tendency to marry only with other Hmong.[15]

While there do exist significant cultural and linguistic peculiarities among different groups of Hmong, the similarities far outweigh any difference in their importance. Rather than being a conscious decision, the maintenance of Hmong culture and identity is more a natural result of the Hmong kinship structure.

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[14] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 28; Yia Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 36-7; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 209.

[15] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 49; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 11.

Furthermore, at a very superficial level, Hmong handicrafts have also served to clearly and definitively identify the Hmong. Items such as like clothing and jewelry clearly signal that an individual is Hmong and will consequently behave and speak as a Hmong; forms of song and dance are also distinctively Hmong. In addition, the ability and knowledge of how to produce distinct Hmong clothing and jewelry along with how to construct Hmong homes and other culturally identifying factors are also equally important as physical indicators. Things which originally came from outside, majority cultures have been included in the Hmong identity on occasion and over time, but the Hmong incorporate these aspects into their identity in distinct ways, thereby making it their own; the Hmong identity is, at its very core and essence, one of cultural autonomy, independence, and self-reliance. This self-reliance is very evident, particularly among the Hmong who live in village environments. They are able to grow, make, and decorate their own clothing along with working wood, iron, and silver. Furthermore, they construct their own homes, tools, weapons, and jewelry, and are also able to weave their own baskets which serve to carry the harvest and store belongings.[16]

That being said, however, it is not likely that most Hmong today would choose to continue what Cooper refers to as "the splendid isolation of their past" (151). Many highland Hmong are under pressure to abandon opium cultivation and change their cultivation method as the traditional shifting cultivation of the Hmong is often blamed for deforestation. This seems to suggest that contemporary Hmong may, in fact, be moving toward a much more permanent way of life. In the face of this and many other substantial changes to their way of life, most Hmong are able to endure the initial shock and more or less adapt to a very materialistic way of life which is enormously different from their traditional way of life. What is much more difficult to endure, however, is the more difficult psychological adjustment to a new way of life which often does not include many of the things which had previously provided meaning and identity. For this reason, many Hmong tend to settle in existing Hmong

[16] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 52-3, 91; and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 25.

communities where people continue to think and behave similarly to what was known previously.[17]

2.3.2 Variety among the Hmong

As previously mentioned there is much variety which exists among the Hmong—adding to the breadth and depth of their distinct culture. There are many distinct Hmong dialects with rather significant differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. However, all of the different Hmong dialects are not so different that they are not understood by different groups of Hmong. In many instances, the Hmong language has been influenced to varying degrees by the vocabulary and language of lowland, majority groups. In addition to language, there are other aspects of the Hmong way of life which have been influenced by the majority. For example, many Hmong in Laos and Thailand no longer wear traditional Hmong clothing on a regular, daily basis. Rather, many have chosen the inexpensive sarong, commonplace blouse, and headscarf of the majority which are very different from their traditional Hmong garments.[18]

Two of the largest groups of Hmong today are the Green and White. In addition to differences in dress, the Green and White Hmong are also distinct from one another in that they speak different dialects of the Hmong language, which suggests that the two groups most likely came from different areas in Southern China. These differences do not impede interactions among different groups of Hmong today. In fact, Green and White households can live side by side for years, all the while maintaining their distinctive dialect, dress, house construction, and rituals.[19]

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[17] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 150-4; and, Tapp, *The Hmong*, p. 11.

[18] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 50-2; Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 24-7; Lee, "Cultural Identity;" and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

[19] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 50-2; Lee, "Cultural Identity;" and, Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand*, p. 13.

2.3.3 The household (tsev)

The most important social as well as economic element in Hmong society is the *tsev* (the house or household). While the Hmong are likely to move several times in their lifetimes, they always take with them the essence of *tsev neeg* or 'one house people' in the ancestral altar and also, symbolically, in the ash from the hearth of previous homes. In English, the *tsev* is best understood as 'home' rather than 'house,' as it includes much more than the physical space occupied by a family. The *tsev* often includes three generations of a single family living together in a single home. The size of the family is easily enlarged as needed to include relatives such as widowed aunts, uncles, divorced sisters, and the like who would otherwise be unable to constitute a viable *tsev* on their own. As children marry and move out to establish their own *tsev*, it is imperative that one son remain in the *tsev* for as long as at least one parent is still alive. This son is responsible for carrying out the appropriate funerary and rebirth rites for his father and mother as well as maintaining his father's ancestral altar.[20]

The actual location of the house is something that is traditionally chosen with much care. Ideally, the home should be constructed on a site that is complementary to the shape of the surrounding mountains. Today, many Hmong villages maintain the requisites of the ideal house, but few remember or understand its historical origins. The location of a Hmong home is often determined by the need for the family to be near their fields as well as a water source in addition to being near other Hmong as a security measure.[21] Prior to building a house, Hmong will often consult the spirits of

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[20] Cooper, *The Hmong,* pp. 20-6, 38-44; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong,* p. 9; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia,* p. 26-7; Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion,* p. 17.

[21] Some 300 years ago, the situation for constructing Hmong homes was very different than it is today. At that time, the Hmong living in Kweichow and Szechwan in Southern China lived in permanent villages which provided the motivation to construct elaborate houses to the extent as one's income would allow. Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 71; and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 15.

the ground before beginning construction.[22] After homes have been constructed, there are also certain situations which may necessitate a change in location. Things like unnatural disasters can sometimes lead a Hmong man to move his house (even if only a few feet) in order to placate the spirits of the ground. When constructing a home, it should never be directly in front or behind another home; this is because spirits travel in straight lines and when an ancestral spirit is called into a home, it is imperative that they not be confused or obstructed by another home. Additionally, the door of a Hmong home always points downhill. Within the actual home itself, all of the members of a nuclear family share a single room for sleeping. There are traditionally no doors in Hmong homes; there are two hearths for cooking. The secondary hearth is often more well-built than the primary hearth, but it is used almost solely for cooking food for pigs.[23]

2.3.4 Clans, leadership, and naming

Another essential component to the Hmong social structure is that of recognized relationships of authority within individual households. This is most clearly seen in the respect for elders by those who are younger as well as for husbands by wives. The oldest male in a household is considered the head and will normally make all decisions. In this decision making process, he may or may not discuss or consult with other family members.[24]

The Hmong are traditionally democratic in the organization of male leaders. The headman (*tus hau zos* in Hmong or *nai baan*/*pah luan* in Thai) is often either elected by a meeting of household heads or naturally rises up among the founders of a

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[22] This is often done by constructing a small pyramid out of cooked rice. If the pyramid has collapsed the next day, then the site is not suitable for construction. However, if the pyramid is still in tact the following day, the site is deemed to be acceptable for construction. Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 30.

[23] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 26-30; Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*; Mallinson, Donnelly, and Hang, *H'mong Batik*, p. 9; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 76.

[24] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 23; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 9; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 19.

village. A village headman remains in his position of leadership for an indefinite period. His function is primarily to deal with outsiders, especially majority, government officials, as well as to provide hospitality to visiting Hmong without local connections. The headman does have a legal role to play in that he brings together different *laus neeg* or 'notable elders' when necessary. In addition, the headman reports serious crimes such as murder or kidnapping to majority, non-Hmong authorities. He essentially represents the village, but has no authorization to make any decision that would affect the village or anyone outside of his own household. These types of decisions are made collectively by the *laus neeg* which means that every household in the village has a voice in the decision-making process.[25]

The importance of the clan in Hmong society serves several purposes. Legally, any disagreement between Hmong of two different clans would require the involvement of local members of both clans. While theft and violence are extremely rare in Hmong society, the most serious offences in which clan leaders will involve themselves on a local level include things such as conflicts over land or personal disputes like adultery. There is, however, no clan-level authority structure which governs all members of a single clan throughout the Diaspora, thus there are no clan leaders or elders. At a local level, leaders commonly emerge with substantial clan backing. Despite that the function of Hmong clans does not include any single authority figure; there have been situations where majority, political leaders have sought the support of Hmong clans via a connection with a single individual Hmong.[26]

Shared clan membership also does not guarantee unconditional support or assistance around the world among unknown Hmong. While Hmong will help other Hmong, any type of assistance given will be much less generous if there is no

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[25] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 46; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 28; Renard, *The Hmong*, pp. 12-3; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 167.

[26] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 40-1; Robert Cooper, *Resource Scarcity and the Hmong Response* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984), pp. 33-7; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, pp. 38-40; and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 18-20.

personal connection or affiliation with the local community. Thus assistance among family members or lineage relatives is likely to be much more substantial. Any assistance given to an unknown Hmong would likely be repaid as soon as possible. Given the present geographical distances between Hmong communities throughout the Diaspora, links between clans, families, and lineages have gradually become weakened. It is often rare for family members to be able to name their ancestors beyond four generations.[27]

Many of the Hmong from Laos and China use their clan name first, while Hmong from Thailand put the clan name last. Additionally, the clan name can also be preceded with *xeem* (Hmong for 'clan') or *se/ser* (Thai for 'clan'). Men receive a second name when they become fathers. Both the birth name and second name may be changed at any time to overcome or avert hardship. It is important for non-Hmong officials to be aware of these different naming systems to appropriately record or document Hmong for official purposes.

The following example shows how a Hmong man from the Yang clan with a birth name of Song and a second name of Jeu would be written.

- Yang Song Jeu (Hmong from Laos/China)
- Song Jeu Yang (Hmong from Thailand)
- Song Jeu ser Yang (Hmong from Thailand)

It is most common to refer to the Hmong by their first names; if asked, a Hmong person will commonly just give his/her first name. A clan name is usually provided only when specifically asked. For women, the naming process becomes somewhat ambiguous after they marry. She identifies with the ancestors of her new family and respects any distinctive clan practices of her new household. However,

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[27] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 35-40; and, Tapp, *Categories of Change and Continuity*, p. 32.

she also retains a connection with her clan and family of origin, as they also continue to maintain an important position in her life.[28]

2.3.5 Farming and animals

The Hmong are traditionally a farming people and are kept busy throughout the year as they often harvest three different crops—rice, opium, and maize.[29] After more than 100 years of the Hmong economy coming from these three crops, beginning in the 1970s, many have also added assorted cash crops or substituted them in place of opium.

As a means of farming in the often rugged jungle and forest terrain found in the mountainous highlands, the Hmong practice swidden or shifting cultivation which simply means that trees and large bushes are cut down and burned to clear fields. Seeds for different crops are then planted or broadcast onto the newly cleared land. The process of clearing a field is one which must begin as early as possible in the year in order to provide the most time for the trees and bushes which have been cut to thoroughly dry out beneath the heat of the summer sun in March and early April. The fields must be burned before the first rain which often comes sometime around the middle of April. The remaining charred stumps which remain in the field after the burning are often simply left there and crops are planted around them and except for the ash which remains after the burning, the fields are never fertilized or irrigated. When all of the usable land within a two hour walking radius of the village has been used, the Hmong will relocate to another area.[30]

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[28] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 37; Cooper, *Resource Scarcity*, pp. 33-7; and, Renard, *The Hmong*, pp. 16-7.

[29] Maize was included into the crop rotation of the Hmong because is complements the timing of swidden rice cultivation. Thus, with the addition of maize, the same number of people was then able to produce more food with two crops and two harvests that also served to provide an increased level of protection against famine. Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 17; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 7; and, Tapp, *Categories of Change and Continuity*, p. 31.

[30] Cooper, *Hmong*, pp. 67-72; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, pp. 8-9, 12; Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, pp. 16-7.

As the Hmong traditionally lead agrarian lifestyles, livestock and animals are an important part of their lives and livelihood. In general, farm animals are kept outside of the home. Hmong often raise pigs, chickens, cattle, and horses, with cattle being rare and horses rarer still. In instances where a family owns a much-valued horse, it will be kept in a stable near the home; chickens are kept in their coop during the night. All other animals including cattle, pigs, goats, and dogs are free to rove and scavenge around the village and surrounding forest. Dogs and chickens are sometimes allowed in the home as they will clean up food or excrement from small children. The cows are only rounded up infrequently, spending most of the time roaming freely in the forest.[31]

Women often care for the chickens and pigs. The family chickens are often only eaten on special occasions or as required by shamanic rituals. The women carry back banana leaves from the fields to use as pig food. These chopped up leaves are to be found in the always-simmering soup on the secondary hearth; thus, visitors should never comment on the savory aroma of this particular 'soup' as it is simply pig food. Pigs are kept for the most important religious and social ceremonies, most often New Year, weddings, funerals, rebirth rituals, and some of the more serious shamanic rituals.[32]

2.3.6 Food

Pigs and chickens are the primary source of protein in the Hmong diet, although they are not raised for this purpose—their function is primarily for use in sacrificial rituals. Depending on animal populations and the needs of particular ceremonies, it is possible at any time for the entire stock of pigs or chickens to be used for these ceremonies or rituals. Thus, after the ceremony, there would be little or

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[31] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 24, 76; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, pp. 59-60; Mallinson, Donnelly, and Hang, *H'mong Batik*, p. 5; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 79; and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

[32] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 76-7; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, pp. 85-7; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 38-9; and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

no meat added to the diet for many months. This practice accentuates the importance of shamanist beliefs and rituals in the Hmong lifestyle.[33]

Any animal that is killed is then shared with all of the family members. In addition to protein which is most often consumed during social and religious ceremonies, women (and sometimes men and children) also gather bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and other vegetables and greens which flourish in the forests, especially during the lush rainy season. For most of the Hmong, rice is and always has been the main staple in their diet, with maize serving only as a supplement.[34] The Hmong family traditionally will eat together at a low table which is located in front of the ancestral altar in the home. If there is a male guest, the men will often eat at the table first with the women waiting to eat until after the men and the guest have finished.[35]

2.3.7 Traditional Hmong beliefs

The Hmong Otherworld is similar in many ways to that of the Chinese. The Hmong *yeeb ceeb* corresponds with the Chinese *yin* or the dark spirit world, while the Hmong *yaj ceeb* corresponds with the Chinese *yang* or the bright world of people, material objects, and nature. The two worlds have been separated and only a shaman may go to the Otherworld and safely return.[36]

Ntxwj Nyug is one of the lords of the Hmong Otherworld who is believed to judge the souls of the dead and determine how the soul will be reincarnated—as either

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[33] Quincy, *Hmong*, pp. 10, 79.

[34] Maize is often roasted, steamed, or baked as a small cake made from maize paste. Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 75.

[35] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 17-27, 78; George M. Scott, Jr., "A New Year in a New Land: Religious Change Among the Lao Hmong Refugees in San Diego," *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, eds. Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney (Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 65-6.

[36] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 103; Hmong National Development, Inc., "Cultural Education Resources: Cultural Center;" Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 40; and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

an animal, vegetable, or human. *Nyuj Vaj Tuam Teem* is the lord responsible for issuing licenses for rebirth. He sits at an imposing writing desk atop a throne. Once someone's license for life has expired, only *Ntxwj Nyug* is able to consider a shaman's request for an extension.[37]

When a person dies, their soul must navigate the difficult mountains of the Otherworld to reach *Ntxwj Nyug* where they are judged. If they are deemed worthy, they will be sent back to the village of their ancestors where they will remain until they are reincarnated. As this journey is often difficult, they are equipped with assorted supplies during the funerary rites to prepare them for the trip including things like hemp slippers which allow them to safely travel across one particular mountain which is made of poisonous, hairy caterpillars.[38]

Saub is a caring lord associated with fertility and reproduction. He is believed to have supplied the first seeds to the world and caused the first hen to lay eggs. After the floods of Hmong legend, *Saub* told the only surviving people, who were brother and sister, to kill their child and divide it into 12 pieces. It was from these 12 pieces that the 12 original Hmong clans grew.[39]

The Hmong refer to spirits as *dab*, with the most important being the *dab nyeg* or household spirits and the *dab qus* or wild, forest spirits. It is commonly believed that these different types of spirits affect both the mental and physical health of individuals. The construction methods of the Hmong home is specifically designed to reflect the Hmong cosmology with the roof representing heaven, the dirt floor representing the world of nature, and living between the two (heaven and nature) is the world of man. Within the home, there are many different *dab nyeg* or household

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[37] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 104; Hmong National Development, Inc., "Cultural Education Resources;" and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 54-5.

[38] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 109; Hmong National Development, Inc., "Cultural Education Resources;" and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, pp. 152-3.

[39] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 104; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, pp. 165-6.

spirits which are believed to reside. The ancestral spirits live in the house and include some of the following:

- *dab ncej cuab* or the spirit of the main house post;
- *dab qhov cub* or the spirit of the main cooking hearth;
- *dab qhov txos* or the spirit of the ritual hearth;
- *dab nthab* or the spirit of the loft;
- *dab txhiaj meej* or the spirit of the front door lintel (this spirit is often respected with a red cloth pinned above the door which covers several silver coins);
- *dab roog* or the spirit of the marital bedroom; and,
- *dab xwm kab* or the spirit of wealth (this spirit is often represented by a piece of rice-paper dipped in the blood and feathers of sacrificed chickens and located on the wall just opposite the front door; all traditional households maintain this altar to the *dab xwm kab* as it is closely connected with the male patrilineage).[40]

2.3.8 Shamanism

Shamanism is believed to have first been practiced by tribal peoples in Siberia. These same peoples continued to practice shamanism after later migrating to China. The Hmong may very likely have become shamanistic during their time in Siberia very early in their history and were one of the tribes who continued with this practice after moving into China. In China, shamanism was embraced by many other tribal groups and was even incorporated into the state religion during the early dynasties.[41]

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[40] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 105-9; Lee, *The Hmong*, p. 14; Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 14-5; and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

[41] Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 65-7; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 41; and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 81.

Shamanism is a highly specialized craft to which very few men and even fewer women are called. The shaman's tools, which are passed down along familial lines, include two primary items—the veil which covers the shaman's head and incense which is burned during the session.[42] Other tools include gongs, rattles, finger bells, and pieces of buffalo horn used for divination. Very learned shamans may also use herbs and plants during their healing sessions.[43]

The status of individual shamans can easily be determined by looking at the size of his altar and simply counting the number of lower jawbones of pigs which hang from the pillar of his home. Each jawbone represents a single sacrifice, thus the number of jawbones will specify the number of times a shaman's services have been requested since the last New Year (during the New Year celebration, the shaman will ritually burn the jawbones he has obtained during the last year).[44]

Upon meeting a shaman for the initial consultation, the shaman will often throw his divination horns to find out what type of illness is afflicting the affected individual. The horns are also used to determine whether or not the helper spirits of the shaman are powerful enough to handle to situation. If the horns indicate the affirmative, the shaman and afflicted person then wait three days. If the patient does not improve, this means that the shaman's helper spirits were not strong enough to effectively address the problem, and another shaman will then be consulted. [45]

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[42] The veil signifies that the shaman is no longer in the human world and is blind to those who are present during his journey to the Otherworld. Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, p. 7.

[43] Nusit Chindarsi, "Hmong Shamanism," *Highlanders of Thailand*, eds. John McKinnon and Wanat Bhruksasri (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 187-93; Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 111-24; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 57-8; Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, p. 7; and, Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*.

[44] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 125; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 68-9; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 146.

[45] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 121; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 62-3; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 158.

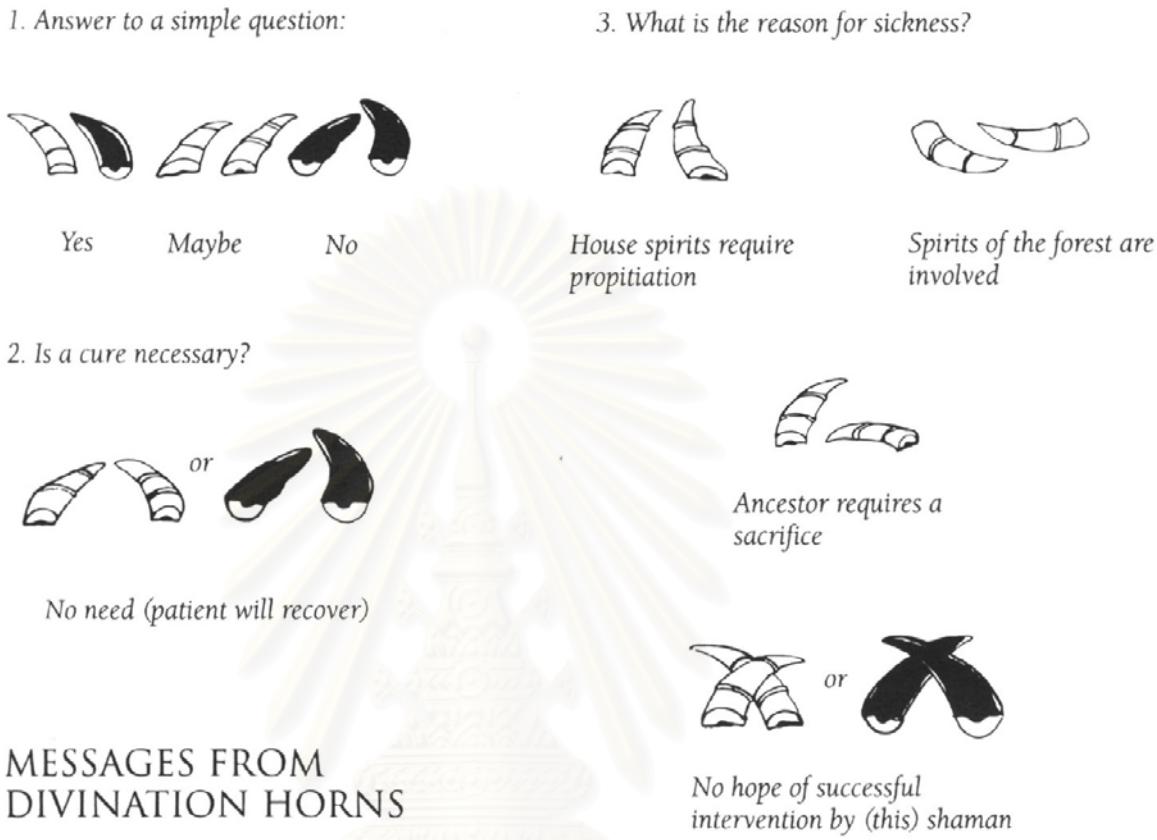

Chart 1: Messages from divination horns

If, however, the patient does improve slightly, then the shaman's diagnosis is deemed correct and he will be invited to begin the healing process. The most common method is for the shaman to request the return of the patient's *plig* or soul in exchange for the *plig* of an animal. In order to do this, the shaman must enter the Otherworld and make this request in person. This journey can last for two hours or more and when he returns, the shaman will be physically exhausted. Upon conclusion of the shaman's journey there are three common results.

1. An ancestor is trying to contact his/her family to inform them that they have not properly performed the post-death rituals. In this scenario, the shaman is no longer needed. The family will need to perform the neglected post-death rituals to satisfy the angry spirit and bring healing to the patient.

2. The lost soul of the patient is in the world, but has become intertwined with the soul of a fetus. In this situation, the shaman will need to conduct another special ritual.

3. Most often, the lost soul of the patient has wandered off and fallen into a hole. When this is the case, the shaman must then perform a second ritual to heal the patient.[46]

2.3.9 Religious rituals

The Hmong have learned many things from the majority cultures in which they have lived throughout their long history. Consequently, many Hmong customs and traditions have been changed through this contact with other societies, especially the Chinese. Despite this history of change and transition, two of the oldest Hmong *kevcai* or customs have never changed. These customs include feeding the ancestors (*laig dab*) and calling a soul (*hu plig*).[47]

The ritual of feeding the ancestors is traditionally conducted after the first rice is harvested while the calling of the soul ritual is performed for newborn infants, brides, and sick people. According to Hmong belief, there is one type of soul, the chicken soul, which is frightened particularly easily and is prone to playfulness and wandering around. This type of soul often leaves the body when one is sleeping to play with other souls.[48] The silver necklaces (*xauv*) worn by both children and adults serve to bind the *plig* or soul to its body (*tsev*—literally house, but here meaning the human body); the adults who wear the *xauv* are often those who have previously been

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[46] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 127-30; Hmong National Development, Inc., "Cultural Education Resources;" and, Lee, "Cultural Identity."

[47] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 115; and, Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand*, pp. 15.

[48] There different ideas about how many souls a Hmong person has, with the number ranging anywhere from two up to 32. In Hmong shamanic tradition, a person has three main souls. Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 147.

seriously ill. In the case of minor sickness or mental duress, a simple version of the *hu plig* ceremony is performed.[49]

The *hu plig* ceremony which is performed for newborn babies is necessary because at birth, the souls of an infant do not yet live in its body. After the child is three days old, the *hu plig* will be performed on the porch at the front of the house to call the soul into the body. It is during this ceremony that the baby is given its first name by the caller of the soul or the person conducting the ceremony.[50] When possible, a shaman should always be present during the *hu plig* ceremony, and all family and community members who are present during the *hu plig* ceremony will receive a special hemp thread around their wrist to serve as a protective bond to look after their souls. During New Year, a special *hu plig* is performed by each household wherein the souls of all of the family members living in the house along with the souls of their animals, crops are called to stay in the house and all of the farming and domestic tools are ritually blessed.[51]

2.3.10 Health care and traditional beliefs

Magic and massage also play a role in traditional Hmong culture. Knowledge of magic and massage is highly informal and not necessarily systematic, being passed down through generations over time. Hmong understanding of magic is often connected with assorted protective spells and the use of herbs to treat common ailments. Massage is most typically the light massage family members may give one another at the end of the day, often the husband massaging the wife or the father massaging a child.[52]

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[49] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 115-6.

[50] At any time, the name given during the *hu plig* may be changed to ward off sickness or adversity later in the child's life. Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 116.

[51] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 116-7; Lee, "Cultural Identity;" and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 90.

[52] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 112-3; and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 70-1.

Cooper suggests that the "comparative effectiveness of modern medicine compared to shamanism can and does cause considerable problems for the traditional [Hmong] belief system" (134). This, according to Cooper, is because one of the primary goals of the Hmong religion is that of providing medical care as in most instances, it is traditionally believed that a sick person (whether they be physically or mentally ill) needs to be reunited or restored to a damaged part of his/herself (134) as the Hmong believe that it is the wandering of souls that are the cause of most illnesses.[53]

Beyond the religious aspect of health and health care, the Hmong do interact regularly with modern medicine. While they do believe wayward souls cause many ailments, they also understand the need to treat organic disease with physical rather than spiritual solutions. Most Hmong today have successfully been able to negotiate the two very different approaches to health care in ways which best meet the needs of the sick.[54]

Some of the difficulties that have arisen between the Hmong and the majority with regard to health care, particularly in Western countries, tend to focus not so much on the need for the Hmong to use modern medicine, but rather on an un-informed majority approach which requires the Hmong to participate fully in modern health care practices. One good example of this type of conflict is regarding the use of birth control among the Hmong who have always placed a high value on large families. In addition, the Hmong practice of coining, wherein a coin is rubbed over the body to relieve muscle aches and tension, is often misinterpreted as bruising from abuse. Again, it is a simple matter of misunderstanding Hmong traditions in unfamiliar, foreign settings.[55] Quincy also contends that while shamanism continues

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[53] Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 58.

[54] Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 83; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, p. 91.

[55] For a further discussion of the Hmong and the challenges faced when traditional practices conflict with modern medical practices, please see Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*.

to flourish in Hmong communities around the world, it does so increasingly in cooperation with modern medicine (202).

2.3.11 Music, song, and dance

Music, song, and dance are three aspects of Hmong culture that are used in an especially Hmong way. Hmong songs are sung without the accompaniment of any music or dance. Music and dance, on the other hand, often do accompany one another when the *qeej* or Hmong mouth organ is played. While music and dance are limited to men, both men and women may sing, but never together. Many Hmong view it to be in poor taste for married women to sing in public as there is a strong connection between singing and courtship.[56]

There are many types of Hmong instruments. A simple flute is played simply for enjoyment while all other instruments have a specific purpose. These include the mouth organ (*qeej*), drum (*nruas*), and jew's harp (*ncas*). The *qeej* and *nruas* are both used to contact spirits of the dead and other spirits in the Otherworld. The *ncas* is used most often by young people to communicate feelings of love and affection.[57]

Hmong melodies and musical codes (excluding the drum) are very unique in that they are based on the Hmong language. Thus, in playing all of the aforementioned instruments, forms of this musical-linguistic code are used. It is believed that the Hmong god Siv Yig taught the Hmong about the importance of music and its role in Hmong culture and life. Siv Yig taught special musical codes for the dead (*qeej tuag*) and for the soul (*qeej plig*) along with hundreds of others which

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[56] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 81; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, pp. 38-9; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, pp. 176-7.

[57] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 82; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 44; and, Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, pp. 38-9.

tell legends of famous historical Hmong figures and other life situations like widowhood or becoming an orphan.[58]

The distinct continuous sound of Hmong music is achieved because musicians play while both inhaling and exhaling. Because the *qeej* is so closely associated with communicating with the Otherworld, musicians are always careful with when and where it is played. The *qeej* would never be played in the house, except during the official rituals during which it is required, namely the funeral and rebirth ritual (*tso plig*). While learning to play and then practicing the *qeej*, musicians usually go to the forest where, should the sound of the *qeej* attract a bad spirit, it is much less likely for any harm to come of the situation.[59]

The funeral drum (*nruas tuag*) is only played at a funeral and is destroyed immediately after the dead body has left for burial; thus, a new funeral drum must be made for each funeral. The ancestor drum (*nruas yug*) is very rare and old. Some Hmong claim that it is not possible to construct a new ancestor drum; rather, the old drums must continually be repaired.[60]

*2.3.12 New Year (***peb caug***)*

New Year is the only official Hmong holiday, which is celebrated every year when the rice harvest is completed, on thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month, usually sometime in December. In fact, *peb caug* literally translates as the number "thirty." The New Year celebrations last for at least three days, with the official start time being the first cock's crow on the first day of the waxing moon of the twelfth lunar month. This is the only holiday which is celebrated by everyone in the community. It

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[58] This music which tells of Hmong legend or life conditions is called *qeej noob nrws* or *qeej ntiv*. Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 82-4.

[59] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 85; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 40-3.

[60] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 88-9; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 28-9.

is a time for courting between young boys and girls with the girls dressed in their very best.[61]

Pov pob or 'the ball game' as it is commonly known as in English is a well-known component in any Hmong New Year celebration. Boys and girls stand opposite one another in two rows, pairing up on their own. A ball is then passed between couples; when the ball is dropped, whoever dropped the ball must remove an item of clothing or jewelry, while maintaining Hmong standards of modesty. In some instances the ball is dropped intentionally. Should either the boy or the girl wish to retrieve their discarded items, they must first sing a song. Boys and girls may change partners at any time; it is usually understood that if someone quickly retrieves their items and/or sings badly, a change of partner may be in order.[62]

In addition to courting games, ritual sacrifices are also performed during the celebration to appease the spirits of nature, and to honor house spirits and the spirits of ancestors and the souls of living family members as well as the souls of livestock. Shamans will burn the pig jaw bones they were given as payment for their services throughout the past year. It is seen as especially important to appease house spirits if it had been an especially difficult year in order to bring better luck in the coming year.[63]

As the Hmong Diaspora continues to grow around the world, celebrating the New Year has come to symbolize Hmong unity and serves as to represent Hmong culture regardless of their current living conditions or locations. Ways in which Hmong New Year celebrations are modified are good indicators of how they have incorporated and/or included different aspects of the majority culture into their own

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[61] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 66; Quincy, *Hmong*, pp. 98-9; and, Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 16.

[62] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 60; Hmong National Development, Inc., "Cultural Education Resources;" Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 44; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 92; and, Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 16.

[63] Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, p. 37; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 62; and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 99.

(i.e. modeling contests held during celebrations in the U.S.). It is also important to consider that as the most important and only official Hmong holiday of the year, New Year serves as a very important catalyst in bringing together immediate and extended family members under the banner of their pride and excitement in celebrating their distinct cultural identity and heritage.

2.3.13 Courtship and marriage

Hmong children are socialized into their culture at a very young age. In fact, they are ingrained with a sense of Hmong morality much earlier than their American or European counterparts who often remain outside of adult circles until their late teens. Hmong children, on the other hand are included from a very young age. For example, when asked about sex, Hmong adults commonly give very straightforward answers to older children. Hmong boys can participate in courting young girls when they are as young as 14 years old, while girls often begin when they are 16. In fact, many young Hmong boys and girls roam about freely in the evening without adult supervision.[64]

When young people begin to consider choosing partners, it is important to carefully consider someone who is from the appropriate clan at the appropriate time (meaning when the father is able to pay the bride price) and at the right age (which is usually 15-18 years of age). Hmong parents' opinions do play a role in the selection process, however, when compared with other Asian cultures, the Hmong are relatively free to choose their partners; they are also free to refuse a marriage proposal. While the Hmong rarely marry non-Hmong, there is no specific social order which would prohibit this choice in a partner and it does occasionally occur.[65]

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[64] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 58; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 91; and, Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand*, p. 16.

[65] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 55-6; Mallinson, Donnelly, and Hang, *H'mong Batik*, p. 13; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 168.

Pre-marital sexual relations between young people is not strictly forbidden, so long as it does not occur in the home as it is understood that to do so would enrage the household spirits much more than the parents. While pregnancy before marriage does not require the couple to marry, since the ability to conceive is highly valued, marriage often follows. The boy can avoid marriage by paying a 'fine' to the girl's father and in this case the child would be raised by the mother's family.[66]

Siblings most commonly marry in order of age, with the older children marrying first. However, in the situation where a younger sister wishes to marry before her older sister, it is common for the younger sister to make a formal request by offering a monetary gift to the older sister for permission to marry first. This 'sister game' illustrates how the exchange of money allows one to adjust a social norm while not disrespecting the norm in any way, but rather by simply working around it.[67]

When a young couple has decided to marry, negotiations then begin between the two families to prepare for marriage. During the period when the bride price is being worked out, there is never any direct contact between the two families. Rather, the boy's father will send a pair of representatives to the girl's father's home to discuss the prospect of marriage. If both families agree that marriage is possible, then negotiations for the bride price will commence. During these negotiations, it is imperative that no one loses face by insisting on an unreasonably high or low price.[68]

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[66] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 56-9; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 26-8. Livo claims that a girl who becomes pregnant before marriage is considered a disgrace to her family (8). It is unknown the extent to which this is true, as all other sources have indicated otherwise—that pregnancy outside of marriage often simply leads to marriage or the payment of a fine on the boy's part.

[67] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 56; and, Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand*, p. 18.

[68] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 60-1; Peter Kunstadter, "Hmong Marriage Pattern in Thailand in Relation to Social Change," *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tapp (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), pp. 275-419; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 27-9; and, Kao Vang, "Marriage Customs," *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, eds. Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, (Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 34-5.

It is only after the bride price has officially been passed from the father of the groom to the family of the bride that a marriage is finally recognized. The amount of the bride price is something that is decided upon only after much negotiation and consideration; the amount can vary greatly depending on any number of factors such as the wealth of the involved families and the personal attributes of the bride. Regardless, the bride price is always significant, often amounting to the entire silver earned from a year's opium harvest. The reason for this significance is that the bride's family is essentially being financially compensated for the loss of a productive family member. The bride price is traditionally paid in silver bars; an example of a good bride price in Thailand would be five silver bars (over US$600), but very few Hmong in Laos or China would be able to afford such a high price. In recent years with the shift away from opium cultivation to other cash-crops, bride prices have been reduced with the subsequent loss of income.[69]

The bride's family typically will provide a bride wealth (*phij cuab*) which stays with the bride; it is a wedding gift from her family and is not discussed with the family of the groom. The purpose of the bride wealth is to insure that the woman is not entirely dependent on her husband or his father and ensures the woman some independence and security, albeit quite limited.[70]

The actual wedding ceremony begins at the groom's home where chickens are sacrificed to the household spirits and ancestors. The groom and his family then proceed to the bride's household where more sacrifices are made, the bride price is paid, and the marriage feast begins. Throughout the celebration, the groom is careful to avoid becoming completely inebriated and so will often only touch his lips to the cups of rice wine which are then passed to a relative to drink on the groom's behalf. The following day, the bride will accompany the groom to his house where, after the

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[69] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 57-63; and, Tapp, *Categories of Change and Continuity*, pp. 389-90.

[70] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 58; Kunstadter, "Hmong Marriage Pattern in Thailand," pp. 275-419; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 274.

sacrifice of a pig, another day of celebration begins and often continues late into the night.[71]

A final ceremony is then conducted to induct the bride into the groom's family. Prior to conducting this ceremony, the bride is not an official member of her husband's family. This does not imply that the woman severs ties with her clan of origin or even than she changes her name, as she does not. In fact, she will continue to be known by her maiden name which includes that surname of her family's clan.[72]

2.3.14 Family, divorce, and widowhood

While there is no set time when a man would leave his family's household, it often happens when he is married, has one or two children, and is financially able to do so. Most young men spend their early years of marriage with their parent's before moving out to establish their own *tsev* or household. [73]

Hmong men are permitted to have as many wives as they are able to support, while women may have only one husband. Due to high bride prices, only the wealthiest men are able to have two or more wives while the vast majority is monogamous. While the first wife most often remains the primary wife, in instances

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[71] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 61-2, 95; Kao Vang, "Marriage Customs," *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, eds. Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney (Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 36-7; Kunstadter, "Hmong Marriage Pattern in Thailand," pp. 275-419; Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, p. 31; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, pp. 289, 305.

[72] Kunstadter, "Hmong Marriage Pattern in Thailand," pp. 275-419; and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 95; and, Gayle S. Potter and Alice Whiren, "Traditional Hmong Birth Customs: A Historical Study," *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, eds. Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney (Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project: University of Minnesota, 1982), pp. 49-50.

[73] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 25, 58. In addition to the bride price, the groom's father is also responsible for the costs of the wedding feast for all guests. Thus after the wedding, the groom is indebted to his father which is just one reasons why the groom and his new bride will live with the groom's family and assist them for an extended period of time .

where a second or third wife is especially intelligent or aggressive, it is possible for a minor wife to take over.[74]

In the event that a wife behaves badly, her husband has the right to divorce her and insist that the bride price be returned. Should a woman leave her husband without just cause, her family would be humiliated throughout the community in that they would need to return the bride price to the husband's family. For a woman to legitimately leave her husband, the only accepted cause is that of cruelty. In the event of divorce or separation, any children would stay with the husband's family as they belong to his clan. In a situation where a divorced woman separated from her husband for good reason, she would not normally have any difficulty remarrying.[75]

Hmong widows typically move with their children into the home of the dead husband's younger brother (never the elder brother). If the younger brother consents, the widow would marry him—this is what anthropologists refer to as 'levirate.' In actual practice, levirate is very rare.[76]

2.3.15 Funerals

When someone dies, all members of the deceased's lineage are invited to attend the funeral and everyone will make a special effort to attend, depending on time and distance. This is one reason why Hmong typically keep the body for up to 12 days, so that those family members who live farther away will have time to travel.[77]

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[74] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 26, 63; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, p. 37; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 13, 30; and, Vang, "Marriage Customs," p. 37.

[75] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 62; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, p. 30; and, Vang, "Marriage Customs," p. 38.

[76] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 63; and, Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 72-3.

[77] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 36; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 74-7; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 170.

The Hmong traditional funeral begins with three musket shots being fired outside the home. The body is then washed and new clothes are put on over the old. Before washing the body, a ritual is performed to prepare the body for its long and dangerous journey in the spirit world to the place of its ancestors. During this ritual, slips of 'spirit money' or bright colored paper are burned, a chicken is killed, and the deceased is given verbal instructions on how to get to his/her ancestors. The body will then lie as it is until the coffin is finishes; this can sometimes takes several days. A bottle of alcohol, a cooked chicken in a gourd, a boiled egg, a crossbow, a knife, and a paper umbrella are placed near the head of the body and hemp sandals are placed on the feet.[78]

Throughout the ceremony, young men assist their fathers to learn how to properly conduct the funerary rites. Therefore, there is often a fair amount of discussion which occurs while the rituals are performed as the young men receive this instruction. Despite this training, it is not important for certain people to perform certain tasks and so oftentimes, others are asked to help when needed. The Hmong funeral is also a time to strengthen and preserve the kinship structure and it plays an important role in the occasion. Before the body is actually buried, the deceased's outstanding debts are to be paid. It is also very important to select an appropriate area for burial as this helps to guarantee prosperity for male descendents. The women are responsible for watching the body and keeping flies and insects away.[79]

At the end of the ceremony in the home, a cow is sacrificed for the deceased. Before the cow is killed, divination horns are used to determine whether or not the deceased is ready to accept the cow. This is because when someone dies is it understood that *Ndu Nyong*, 'the savage one' or the king of demons who is responsible for causing sickness, misfortune, and death, has taken one of the

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[78] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 139-40; Lee, "Cultural Identity;" and, Quincy, *Hmong*, pp. 95-6. As stated Section 2.3.8 *Traditional Hmong beliefs*, the sandals are to allow the deceased safe passage over a mountain full of poisonous caterpillars on his/her way to ancestors in the Otherworld to await reincarnation.

[79] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 139-42; and, Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, pp. 171-3.

deceased's souls. Thus, the cow is sacrificed and its soul will take the place of the human soul which was taken by *Ndu Nyong* thereby allowing the deceased's other souls to live on through reincarnation.[80] [81]

After everyone has eaten the cow, the funeral procession will begin carrying the bier into the forest. Once the body is carried away, women are no longer a part of the process. As the body is carried out to the forest, the procession will stop many times and change directions to confuse any evil spirits who may be following them. Ultimately, the party will move toward the west as this is the direction of death. Since everything which is buried with the body must decay, no metal jewelry or synthetic materials are buried with the body. The grave itself is not actually dug until the funeral party reaches the site. When it is finished, the coffin is placed in first and then the body is placed in the coffin.[82] Food is often placed next to the grave until it is clear that the soul has begun its journey to its ancestors.[83]

Thirteen days after someone has died, a private ritual is performed privately with only the immediate family members present. During this ritual, the souls of the deceased are invited to return to the house one final time before being sent back to the grave. The soul which is invited is the one which stays in the grave, not the soul eligible for reincarnation. This particular ritual is a means of placating this soul so it will not be lonely at the grave. Once the ritual is complete, the soul returns to the grave.[84]

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[80] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 143.

[81] Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 80.

[82] There are two main types of graves, the Hmong style and the Chinese style. The Hmong style places the body vertical in relation to a mountain slope and places leaves over the grave, while in the Chinese style, the body is buried laterally in relation to the mountain slope and a small mound of stones is constructed on the grave. Robert Cooper, ed., *The Hmong: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), p. 145.

[83] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 143-5; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 97; Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 174; and, Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, p. 151.

[84] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 147; Schliesinger, *Ethnic Groups of Laos*; Tapp, *The Hmong in China*, p. 175.

The final funeral ritual is performed anytime within a year of death and serves to release the re-birth soul so that it will be free to be reborn. This particular ritual can be performed for more than one person at a time, and can also be performed for someone who has not returned home for a long time and is assumed to have died. This last ritual is a time for celebration as the deceased will be reborn; if things go well, s/he will be reborn as a Hmong and perhaps even as a member of the same clan. In traditional Hmong society it was believed that when a man died, he would be reborn as a woman, and when a woman died, she would be reborn as a man.[85]

In a situation where someone has died mysteriously or violently, they are buried as quickly as possible with minimal funerary ritual and rites. This is because the souls of those who die in this manner are thought to become hungry ghosts.[86]

2.3.16 Hmong crafts

1) Metal work

Hmong from Kweichow province, China are known for their accomplished work as silversmiths; this was true in historical times and continues to be true today. Metal work is a part of Hmong society and tradition that they have been able to preserve even after migrating into Southeast Asia and around the world. Simple metal work is most often done using the household fire. More intense projects will require the work of a smith, who is usually only a part-time craftsman. Every village will typically have one or two forges. Since the Hmong have historically had no knowledge of smelting iron or refining silver, they have always relied on lowlanders or tradesmen for materials such as metal and silver. Not only the smith, but also most adult Hmong men are able to make knives which are of such a high quality that they

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[85] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 147; and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 90.

[86] Cooper, *The Hmong*, p. 137; Dao, *The Hmong of Lao*, pp. 89-90.

continue to be preferred by the Hmong and others over other commercially available knives.[87]

Neck rings, bracelets, and other jewelry are also important metal crafts of the Hmong. The neck rings are made from solid silver which is molded and worked into a round bar in a horseshoe shape. There are also silver chains (*dlaim phaj paug*) and flat plates (*dlaim phaj xauv*) that hang from the neck rings, though these are usually only worn during the New Year festivities. It is during the ceremony to celebrate the first 30 days of life that a Hmong baby receives his/her first silver neck ring. Cooper claims that "more than anything else, the collection and wearing of neck rings serve to identify a Hmong" (93). Traditionally, all Hmong women except for the very poor wear their neck rings constantly.[88]

2) Paj ntaub (Hmong embroidery, appliqué, and batik)[89]

The Hmong art of *paj ntaub* includes appliqué, reverse appliqué which combines three to four layers of different colored fabrics, cross-stitches, chain stitches, batik, and embroidery. Traditionally, Hmong women made their own cloth—a process which began with the collecting of hemp in July and August. Embroidery and appliqué is an important and also relaxing part of every Hmong woman's day which requires distinct skills. Oftentimes, the time spent together working on embroidery and appliqué is often also a very social time during which news and stories are shared among the women.[90] Embroidery and appliqué entail a combination of stitches which are used to form intricate designs. The most common

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[87] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 92-3; Lee, et. al, *The Hmong*, pp. 46-7; Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, p. 9; and, Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 77.

[88] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 93-4; Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, p. 9; and, Mallinson, Donnelly, and Hang, *H'mong Batik*, pp. 29, 49-51.

[89] Pronounced 'pan dau' and translated literally as 'flower cloth.'

[90] It is not unheard of, however, for some men to also be involved in the production of *paj ntaub* in refugee situations where there is little else for them to do.

color used in the past was a deep indigo blue as this could be made easily from materials grown locally. However, with the increased accessibility to Thai and imported Indian materials, much brighter colors are now more common. While most of the fabric of the past was cotton, some synthetic blends bought from lowlanders are also used. Sometimes, a small area of the piece is a different color from the rest in order to allow the spirit of the *paj ntaub* to escape. To create a large *paj ntaub*, a skilled craftswoman would require about three to four months or more than six hundred hours in order to finish.[91]

There are five basic shapes which are common in the traditional Hmong *paj ntaub* patterns. These include an eight-pointed star, a snail shell, the outline of a ram's head, an elephant's footprint, and a heart. These designs are highly symbolic, thus adding much meaning to completed *paj ntaub* pieces.[92] Contemporary designs are no longer limited to these traditional designs, however, and the Hmong women are inventive in their uses of alternative designs and products which make their work not only functional, but also profitable. Prior to the 1960s, *paj ntaub* was primarily used to adorn traditional Hmong clothing, but you can now also find *paj ntaub* on pillow cases, skirts, purses, bedspreads, wall hanging, table cloths, bookmarks, bags, and the like. The story cloths, which are well-known outside of the Hmong community, often tell the stories of Hmong myths and legends, personal family histories, stories of animal and village life, and death and difficulties in life because of war. Many *paj ntaubs* created in refugee camps in Thailand are sold to relatives living in the U.S. and

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[91] Cooper, *The Hmong*, pp. 95-9; Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, pp. 11-2; and, Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, pp. 36-7.

[92] The snail is a symbol of family growth and interconnectedness with the center of the snail's shell representing the ancestors and the outer spirals representing the later generations. A double snail shell signifies the bringing together of two families in marriage as well as the spinning motion used in many Hmong chants. The elephant foot symbolizes wealth and power, while a centipede is know to embody medicinal qualities. Animal tracks are also important in that they represent the spiritual imprint of a person or animal that has passed. Triangles symbolize teeth, fish scales, dragon scales, a fence, and sometimes even a separator between good and evil spirits. A diamond inside of a square can mean a family altar or the imprint of a powerful, good spirit. A fish hook is a girl's hope of finding a partner. The eight-pointed star, sometimes called the 'left star,' is a symbol of good luck and known to protect from misfortune. The armor of a dragon signifies the mythical dragon which lives forever and is never ill. Norma J. Livo and Dia Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam*, (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1991), pp. 11-2.

provide a good source of income to Hmong families with little access to opportunity or resources for work.[93]

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[93] Livo and Cha, *Folk Stories of the Hmong*, pp. 11-2; Quincy, *Hmong*, p. 92; and, Millet, *The Hmong of Southeast Asia*, pp. 24-5.

CHAPTER III

CASE STUDY OF THE HMONG COMMUNITY AT WAT THAMKRABOK

The case study of the Hmong community at Wat Thamkrabok is based on both documentary research as well as field research by the author. The documentary research related to the Hmong at Wat Thamkrabok as well as general observations by the author after making initial trips to the community will be included here to provide a general understanding of the situation in Thamkrabok, addressing the specific context and realities of the case study. This chapter will explore the background and history of this particular community as well as the dynamics of the physical space, the people, education, health, and the economy. Information presented in this chapter has been gathered from the documentary data as well as discussions with residents, Thai authorities, employees with international organizations, monks at the temple, and on-site data collection through participant observation and informal interviews during the preliminary research phase.[1]

3.1 Background

The first Hmong began settling at Wat Thamkrabok in the late 1950s to receive treatment for opium addiction shortly after the temple was established in 1957. At this time, it was hoped that in detoxifying this small Hmong population, it would have subsequent, adverse affects on the lucrative opium trade in which some Hmong were involved.[2] According to some, the story of the Hmong in Thamkrabok

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[1] The formal field research component which also includes participant observation along with both formal and informal interviews with Hmong residents, Thai soldiers, employees with international organizations, and monks living in the Thamkrabok temple will be discussed in complete detail in Chapter 4.

[2] "A Short History of Thamkrabok."

goes back long before they actually began arriving in the late 1950s. Local legend contends that a woman climbed the mountains in the area and said that someday the mountain people would come to the area for shelter before they moved on. So this woman planted a tree and said that when the tree had been petrified into stone, the mountain people would come.[3] Oddly enough, there is an old tree stump on the temple grounds that has been petrified.

Photograph 1: Petrified tree stump found on the temple grounds (author's photo).

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[3] Matt McKinney, "From refuge to a home: Stories of life in a Hmong refugee camp," (*Star Tribune*, 29 February 2004). Monks at the temple are also familiar with this story. They indicate that the woman was the mother of the first addict to be treated by monks at the temple.

Photograph 2: Some of the earliest Hmong at Thamkrabok with the temple's abbot in 1957 (ISOC photo).

Prior to the early 1990s, of the small population of Hmong who had been living at the temple, some had sought treatment for drug addiction and had brought their families with them.[4] By 1990, the Hmong population at Thamkrabok was a mix of those receiving treatment (and their families) along with other families who had heard of the sanctuary available for Hmong at Thamkrabok. Many of the families living at Thamkrabok early on who were not receiving treatment for drug addiction had heard about the area from extended family members and friends.[5] By 1990, the Hmong population at Thamkrabok had grown to approximately 4,000, with the fear of repatriation under the CPA as the primary motivating factor for seeking asylum at the temple. At this time, the majority of Hmong in Thamkrabok were not part of the drug treatment program, but rather were refugees from Laos who were connecting and re-connecting with friends and extended family who had also made their way to Thamkrabok. Throughout the 1990s, this number continued to grow rapidly. At one

[4] "U.S. Pays Debt at Last to Vietnam War Allies," (Guardian Newspapers, 8 August 2004).

[5] This is just one of many examples of ways in which the Hmong remain closely connected and in regular communication with one another throughout the Diaspora.

point, some estimates suggest there were as many as 40,000 Hmong living there, some of whom later fled to Thai-Hmong villages in northern Thailand.[6]

Prior to resettlement which began in late June 2004, population estimates for the Hmong in Thamkrabok varied with anywhere from 15,000 to 20,000 Lao-Hmong. It is also estimated that an additional 20,000 have relocated to northern Thailand.[7] Of this population living in Thamkrabok, the majority are children who were born in the community. Thus, for the past 20 years, an entire generation of Hmong has come of age at Thamkrabok. As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4, these generation differences in life experiences (i.e. older adults fleeing unsafe conditions in post-war Laos and younger people being born and raised in Thailand) have played an important in the development of Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok.

In December 2003, the United States Department of State announced that it would be accepting any Hmong refugees who had registered with Thai government and passed a processing procedure for resettlement in the U.S. This resettlement process included two steps; the first was providing information about the program to residents and the second was the actual registration in the program for those Hmong who were interested. This registration process was conducted by the UNHCR and in total 15,828 Hmong registered and of these, 3,334 families or 15,323 individuals were eligible to resettle.[8] Residents began leaving in late June 2004 and it is anticipated that this resettlement process will take up to one year. When all eligible candidates have been successfully resettled, the Thai government plans to close the Hmong community in Thamkrabok; there are currently no official plans with how to handle

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[6] Temple officials indicate that in total they issued more than 80,000 identification cards for Hmong who, at one time or another, were living in Thamkrabok. These were not official identification cards, like those issued by the U.N. or Thai government, but rather, an informal way for temple officials to document and record the tens of thousands of Hmong which sought refuge there.

[7] Laura Xiong, Letter to the U.S. Department of State.

[8] Rungrawee C. Pinyorat, "Last of Hmong Refugees;" and, Thanongsak Tanarat, "Task Force 546 Mission Briefing," 20 April 2004.

the remaining tens of thousands of Hmong both in and just outside the temple who did not qualify or were not interested in resettlement.

For those who have been approved and are planning to resettle, the feeling is one of cautious anticipation for a better life and increased access to opportunities, especially education, for their children. For those who were not approved or have chosen not to resettle, there is a feeling of continued uncertainty, statelessness, and prolonged limbo.

3.2 First Impressions

The Hmong community at Thamkrabok is much like rural Hmong communities found in other areas of Southeast Asia including northern Thailand. However, as one U.S. official indicated, "this [the Hmong community at Thamkrabok] is one identifiable community; it is like a small village which you don't have elsewhere."[9] One can visit the community at Thamkrabok any day of the week and see young boys playing a game of soccer or small children playing with improvised toys in makeshift play areas. Despite the huge upheaval currently going on with the resettlement process, life continues for residents, much as it has for years—life that is "centered around family, community, and daily routines of work and recreation."[10] Despite restrictions on their movement and access to opportunity and resources, the Hmong of this community have managed to remain self-sufficient and have sustained themselves in a very difficult situation.

The status of Hmong residents in Thamkrabok is very unique in that it differs from other refugees, both Hmong and others, in Thailand.[11] Until the decision by the

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[9] "U.S. Pays Debt at Last to Vietnam War Allies," (Guardian Newspapers, 8 August 2004).

[10] Toosi, "A final wave of immigrants."

[11] Many of the Hmong refugees from Laos in Thamkrabok moved here from other camps and parts of Thailand, especially after these other camps were closed in the early nineties. Of this group, most have refugee identification cards from the UNHCR. Other Hmong refugees from Laos in

U.S. Department of State to accept members of this Hmong community for resettlement in December 2003, there was limited U.N., NGO, and other refugee agency presence in the community.[12] They have essentially existed in a state of limbo and statelessness for years now. The Thai government has no official refugee policy and subsequently does not offer any type of formal citizenship. One exception to this is instances where it can be proven that they assisted the Thai military; in this situation, their children do receive full Thai citizenship. The Lao government refuses to accept the majority of the population (which are under 18 years of age and have been born in Thailand) as Lao citizens because they were born abroad and are thus ineligible for repatriation to a homeland they have never known. And, until December 2003, no third country was willing to accept them.

3.3 The Place

> *"Seen from above, the Hmong village at Wat Tham Krabok [sic] looks almost romantic, set on a parched plain at the foot of limestone mountains that go hazy and blue in the evening light."*[13]

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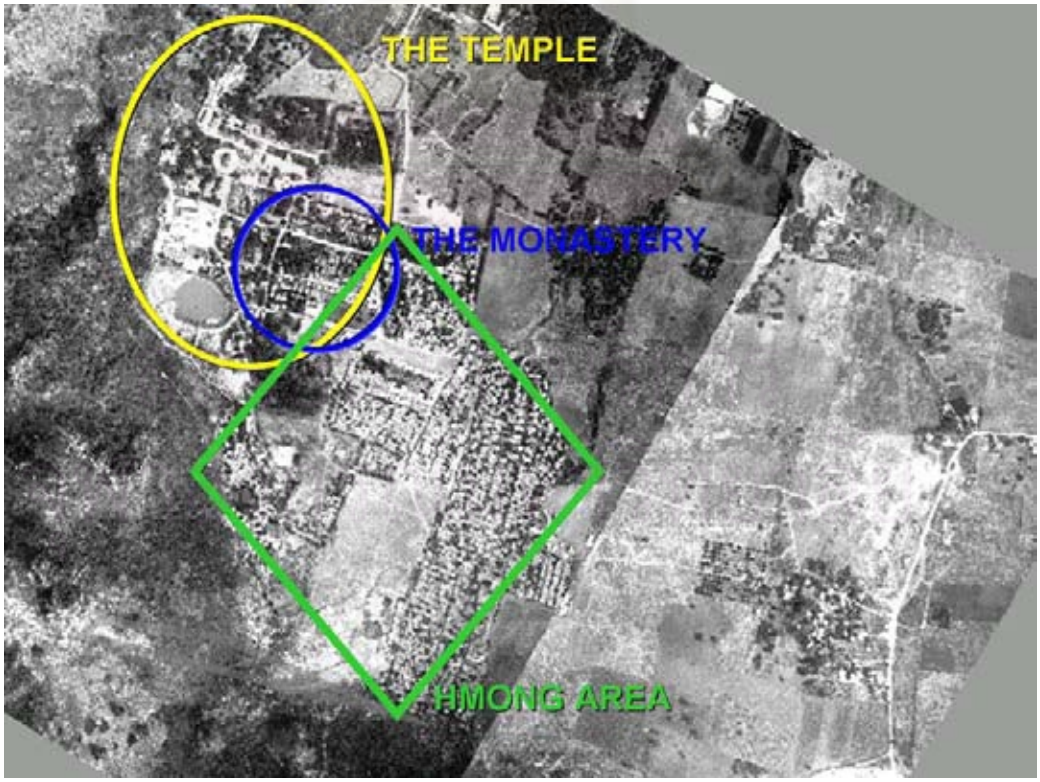
Thamkrabok came to the community on their own (after hearing from family and friends of the sanctuary available at the temple) beginning in the 1970s as the war was ending; this group also consists of refugees and their families who fled Laos because of their affiliation with the U.S. Both types (those who came on their own and those who came from other camps) were fleeing the same unsafe situation in Laos—they just came to Thamkrabok via different means—and thus, both qualify for resettlement to the U.S. as war refugees.

[12] Kao Ly Illean Her and John Borden, "Conditions at the Wat Thamkrabok Camp in Thailand," (Report on St. Paul, Minnesota Delegation Visit to Thamkrabok: 9 March 2004).

[13] Matt McKinney, "From refuge to a home: Stories of life in a Hmong refugee camp," (*Star Tribune*, 29 February 2004).

Photograph 3: View from the hills surrounding Thamkrabok (author's photo).



Photograph 4: Satellite photograph of the Thamkrabok community (ISOC photo).

Photograph 5: Aerial photograph of the Thamkrabok community (ISOC photo).

The Hmong community at Thamkrabok is located at the foot of limestone mountains which are regularly blasted for raw materials used in cement production at nearby factories. The community itself is located on a part of the temple's over 133 acres of land, 97 of which are occupied by Hmong residents. The Buddhist temple grounds are a short distance from the Hmong community and the two are physically connected in that they share the same large temple grounds. Within the camp as well as in the surrounding hills, there are some small fields which can be rented and are most often used in the cultivation of corn.

A newer, manmade addition to the physical landscape is the barbed wire which encircles much of the perimeter. The introduction of this fence to the community is an issue which evokes a variety of emotions and responses, depending on the perspective of the person sharing his or her thoughts. When the Thai military special task force assumed responsibility for the administration of the community, they coordinated the set-up of this fencing as a means of deterring the movement of illegal drugs in and out of the area. Many residents see the fence as a symbolic reminder of the restrictions on their movement and access to opportunity as long-term refugees. The physical presence of the fence does little to actually limit the

movements of people or animals, often being used to dry clothing, during play time for children, and maneuvered around or through as needed should one need to pass.

Nearly all of the roads in the community are well-packed dirt and best navigated on motorbike, wooden cart, or by foot, with walking being the most commonly used form of transportation. Generally speaking, environmental conditions in the camp at Wat Thamkrabok are comparable with other small, rural communities in Thailand. There are some environmental conditions which could be improved. Drainage of waste water is not always sufficient as there is standing, polluted water located throughout the community, sometimes with children playing in it. Also, on rare occasions, there is an odor from trash which has not been properly disposed of and/or collected. It is important to bear in mind that any type of improvement in these situations requires funding and available personnel to implement environmental development, neither or which are available. Thus, given the limitations due to funding, personnel, and other factors, it can be generally understood that the environmental conditions at Thamkrabok, while not ideal, are adequate and present no threat to the lives and well-being of the residents.

Much of the housing is constructed of bamboo, wood, and corrugated metal and steel with earthen, dirt floors. They appear to have been constructed in an unplanned and sometimes haphazard fashion; however, they are adequate in that they provide necessary shelter for residents. There is no plumbing system so residents have access to communal wells which are shared among families and located throughout the community. Also sharing living space throughout the community are an assortment of dogs, chickens, roosters, and ducks which roam about, in and out of homes and throughout the camp.

3.4 The people

When the Thai military arrived in April 2003, they set about documenting the demographics of residents and issuing official Thamkrabok identity cards (these same cards were required during the registration process for resettlement). At this time

there were 1,796 households with a total population of 15,282 persons.[14] Of this population, there were four distinctive types of residents which included the following:

1. Those who had previously assisted the Thai government and/or military (approximately 1,000 people, all of whose children are Thai citizens);
2. Those who were official members of northern hill tribes (52 people, all of whom were sent back to their respective provinces of origin in the north as they are not officially allowed to live outside of their area of residence);
3. Those who are Hmong refugees from Lao (approximately 13,000 people; this is the population which served as the focus of this project);[15] and,
4. Those who are Thai-Hmong business people with special interests in capitalizing on the profit to be made within the small economy in the community (approximately 1,300).

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[14] This population does not include any Hmong who may be receiving treatment for drug addiction at the temple. All of the residents included in the community studied at Thamkrabok for this project were legitimate refugees (as determined by the United Nations and both the U.S. and Thai governments.

[15] This group includes refugees who were previously living elsewhere in Thailand after fleeing post-war Laos (coming on their own and from other refugee camps) who chose not to repatriate to Laos under the CPA program in the 1990s.

Photograph 6: Hmong soldiers who assisted the Thai military (ISOC photo).

Photograph 7: Hmong in Thamkrabok who were members of northern hill tribes and later returned to their provinces of origin in Northern Thailand (ISOC photo).

Photograph 8: A Thai-Hmong business man who operated an internet café in the community (ISOC photo).

This population includes all types of Hmong (white, green, black, etc.). In every day life, it is difficult to tell the difference between the groups, as these differences are most commonly discerned through the traditional dress and specific dialect.

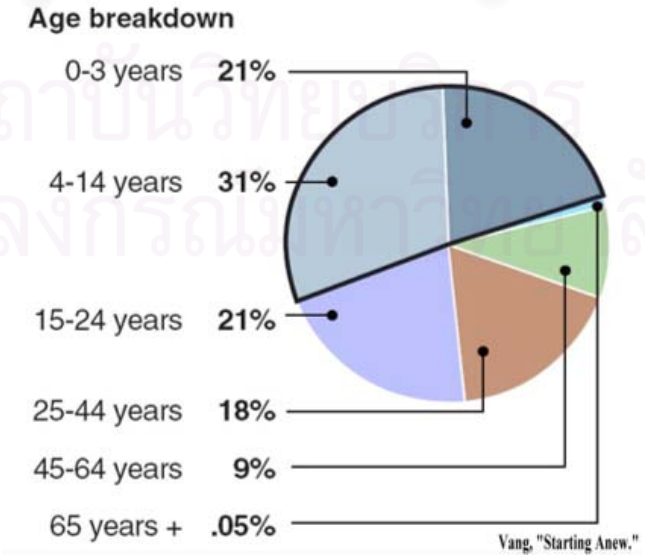

Chart 2: Age breakdown of residents at Thamkrabok

One of the most notable features about the Hmong population in Thamkrabok is that an overwhelming majority are young people. An entire generation of children has been born and come of age in the Wat Thamkrabok camp; more than 50% of the population is under the age of 15.[16] Toosi claims that more than 60% of residents are 18 or younger, with most either being born in the camp or coming in as small toddlers. For them, they know nothing other than life at Thamkrabok.[17]

Hmong social hierarchy and clan and lineage relations have been maintained in the community. Members in the community are known to one another; visitors are introduced based on who they are related to and how. In addition, community leaders are carefully introduced to ensure that they are properly acknowledged and recognized for their importance.

Gender roles can also been seen in the social environment through the interactions between residents as well as the different roles and activities in which they regularly engage. Women and men interact with one another within the same extended family, while men tend to also interact with men from other families. Children up the age of about 12 years interact with their caregivers (who are commonly various family members) and playmates. Once they reach the teenage years, they appear to begin the socialization process which prepares them for their future gender roles. Teenage girls who are unable to study spend much of their time in assisting with the care of younger siblings and helping older female relatives with maintaining the household (i.e. food preparation, laundry, cleaning, and the like). This is not to say that teenage boys do not also help with these tasks, because they do; however, their involvement is commonly less than their female counterparts.

Adult men and women have been much more fully socialized with their roles clearly defined. As with Hmong in other non-agrarian settings, the women find

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[16] Hlee Vang and Keith Uhlig, "Starting Anew," (*Gannett Wisconsin Newspapers*, 29 August 2004).

[17] Toosi, "A final wave of immigrants;" and, Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 34.

themselves in more domestic roles.[18] Women spend much of their time caring for children, maintaining their own households, as well as assisting other extended family members with their households and children when needed. Thus, they tend to remain close to home in order to care for children, leaving on occasion to go shopping for food and other necessary items in the open-air community markets. Women are also heavily involved in producing Hmong handicrafts, particularly the *paj ntaub* or intricate embroidery style which is unique to the Hmong. Some women with special skill sets are also more actively involved in the community. For example, one woman was respected and well-known in the community because she taught in the school and could speak both Thai and English with a high level of fluency.

Within this gender structure, Hmong men are burdened with the need to support their large families in a very difficult situation which severely limits their work opportunities outside of the camp. In some cases, they are allowed to leave the camp to work nearby doing primarily manual labor jobs. This work includes tasks such as working on nearby farms doing ploughing, gathering crops, and packaging as well as working in nearby rock quarries.[19] This type of work is never steady and all of the Hmong workers are dependent on their employers for transportation.[20] Most of the men who leave the camp for work are younger. In addition to work found outside the community, men are also involved in handicrafts, most notably metallurgy and blacksmith work, but also increasing numbers in embroidery. Silversmiths are abundant in the camp, producing the intricate headdresses and jewelry worn by women during weddings, Hmong New Year, and other celebrations and ceremonies. Additionally, male community and neighborhood leaders play integral roles in

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[18] Hmong populations that are still able to maintain more traditional agrarian lifestyles often experience more equality with regard to gender roles. This is because it is necessary for both men and women to work side by side in the fields as well as in all other areas of their lives in order to sustain their families and livelihood. It has been suggested that with the shift to non-agrarian situations, particularly with refugees, the Hmong women have found themselves in less equitable situations.

[19] Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 30.

[20] They can be seen coming and going from the camp throughout the day, packed into the back of old pickup trucks.

maintaining the Hmong community at Thamkrabok. These leaders meet regularly with Thai officials and remain in or near their homes so that they are readily available to meet with residents when necessary.

It is often the Hmong men who interact with Thai officials when necessary. In fact, some of the Thai authorities working in the camp are Hmong themselves with a long history of friendship and connection with many of the residents of Wat Thamkrabok; some of these friendships and connections go back 30 years or more, long before these particular officials were posted at Thamkrabok.

While the Hmong residents comprise the overwhelming majority of people in the camp and its immediate area, there are also a small number of Thai nationals who are regularly present. This group of Thais can be broken down into two easily identifiable groups: 1) soldiers and government officials, and 2) vendors in stalls, markets, and shops. The Thai soldiers and officials are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the camp. They handle the coming and going of Hmong residents throughout the day at the main gate, which is one of three checkpoints which have been established around the perimeter of the camp. They are also responsible for the control and maintenance of security within the community, as well as providing assorted life development training. As a part of the security aspect of this administration, Thai authorities carefully process all visitors to the community. While all of the officials who manage the security and regular patrol of the camp are men, there is also a woman who works with the administration and intake of outside visitors. The Thai military presence includes 176 men from the Praputthabat Task Force 546 and 42 local Thai officials.[21]

There are some large, open-air markets in the camp; of the two largest market areas, one is located just inside the main gate but outside of the community itself (this is where many of the Thai vendors set up their stalls), and the other is a series of stores and stalls along a main road running through the camp. In the market which

[21] Tanarat, “Task Force 546 Mission Briefing.”

lies just inside the main gate but outside of the main community, nearly all of the vendors are Thai, while you will find more Hmong residents managing shops in the market along the main road just inside the community. Many of the vendors just inside the main gate sell Thai foods, fruits, and vegetables along with an assortment of toiletry items and clothing. In the market along the main road, these same items are sold along with medicines and fabric, among other things. In addition to vendors in the markets, there are some small restaurants located along the main road in the market area which are run by Thai merchants and serve Thai food. In addition to these open-air market stalls, there are also an assortment of other businesses and services available. These include a barbershop, electrical repair shops, and even an internet café.

Photograph 9: Residents shop at one of the markets in the community (ISOC photo).

Many Hmong residents are quick to differentiate between Hmong and Thai merchants. This differentiation is important as the Thais are characterized as making a profit from the already marginalized and financially limited Hmong and taking this profit outside of the community. Hmong vendors, on the other hand, keep their profits within the Hmong community as they often go to support immediate and extended family members, some of whom live in Thamkrabok and some outside.

3.5 Education

Educational opportunities available to residents can be divided into three different levels: 1) Thai school (located just outside the camp); 2) Hmong school (located in the camp); and, 3) informal schooling (at home). The Hmong Education School, which is located within the community and funded by the nearby temple, was built four years ago by the Hmong at the urging of residents who saw a need to fill a growing opportunity gap in the education the children in the community had access to. This school is three stories high and was built with stone taken from quarries in the nearby mountains.[22] There are approximately 850 students who attend and uniforms are not required. When the U.S. State Department announced that it would be accepting residents for resettlement, the Hmong school also began English classes for more than 1,000 adult students. Once the resettlement process was well underway and most residents had left, coupled with problems associated with the tuberculosis outbreak in late January 2005, this school was closed.[23] According to a report from a St. Paul, Minnesota delegation which visited the community in 2004, children 6-18 years of age have an average of 2½ years of education. Among adults surveyed, approximately 63% had no formal education, 22% had between one and five years, and 15% had between six and 16 years.[24]

Class differentiation has immediate effects on the next generation of residents in that it determines what children are able to afford to attend the local Thai school. Only about 1,300 children (less than 25% of the total number of children in the camp) are able to attend the Thai school.[25] Thus, as in other refugee situations around the world, the children suffer in that their access to education is very limited, and in the

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[22] McKinney, "From refuge to a home;" and, Tanarat, "Task Force 546 Mission Briefing."

[23] See Section 3.6 *Health* for a further note on the tuberculosis outbreak in Thamkrabok.

[24] Toosi, "A final wave of immigrants." It should also be noted that the St. Paul delegation's report was limited in that its sampling was pre-selected and not random.

[25] Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 34; and, Vang and Uhlig, "Starting Anew."

case of those living in Thamkrabok, dependent on their family's ability to pay the school fees. The option to study in the local Thai school for residents in Thamkrabok is only available to families which are able to afford the school fees and cost of uniforms.

3.6 Health

The vast majority of residents are in good health. That being said, however, there are instances of malnutrition, tuberculosis,[26] dysentery, and other diseases which are a result of the living conditions and environment within the community. These health problems may be due to a combination of factors including limited international and Thai government presence in the community prior to 2003 to assist in the supply of adequate food stuffs and water.[27] The Thais have established a local clinic which provides basic medical services. There is also access to outside health institutions for more serious cases. Given residents' limited movements and access to resources, they are dependent on Thai vendors in the purchase of food and water. Open ditches are common, often quite dirty, and run throughout the camp.

3.7 Economy

As a result of limited access to work opportunities, approximately 40% of residents are unemployed.[28] Another 40% work as day laborers—they must check

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[26] On January 23, 2005, an outbreak of tuberculosis was identified. While cases of TB had occurred in the community before, this particular outbreak was troublesome for a number of reasons. Firstly, it meant all resettlement was halted until the disease could be properly controlled and all residents who had been affected were identified and treated, meaning a thorough re-screening of all remaining residents. Secondly, and more importantly, a small number of those affected were multi-drug resistant (MDR) meaning they did not respond to normal drug therapies and required special treatment. Treatment for MDR cases of TB takes up to two years, while standard treatment is often six months or less. Thus, the 17 residents who have tested positive for MDR TB, along with their families, will not be eligible to resettle until they have successfully been treated; authorities are continuing the work of planning for their care and treatment over the next two years, especially after all other residents have been resettled and the camp effectively closed.

[27] Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 35.

[28] This group of unemployed residents depends on their families (both immediate and extended) for their basic needs like food and shelter. They do contribute to the community in other

out every morning and return in the evening; up to 1,000 persons per day are able to leave for this type of work. Of the remaining 20%, 10% run small businesses in coordination with local Thai or Hmong-Thai business persons and another 10% spend their time producing traditional Hmong embroidery and other handicrafts such as jewelry and metal work.[29]

There is also a small and very vital economy within the community which has helped immensely in sustaining this population. Residents of the camp receive much of their income from relatives living abroad. The open-air market in the community as well as the market near the entrance provides a venue for Hmong residents to sell their needlework, which is one of the most common crafts produced in the community, along with jewelry crafted by hand from silver, copper, and yellow gold. Much of the craftsperson's time is spent embroidering and sewing traditional Hmong clothing and story cloths. Some use actual sewing machines while most work by hand. Men are commonly busy in blacksmith shops (most of which are located in a central area in the community); the primary product is large knives which sell for about 400 baht to Thais in the area.

As the men are limited in the amount and type of work opportunities they may pursue, it is not uncommon for the women to bring in substantial incomes from the sale of their crafts and needlework. Items such as traditional costumes for New Year festivals and traditional ceremonies, knives for ceremonial as well as functional purposes, and traditional instruments all generate considerable income in overseas markets. In addition to some sales to the local Thai community, these cottage industries provide a large part of the informal economy in large part because of the village post office. The director of the post office indicates that every day residents send out about 40 knives, 60 dresses, and ten pieces of silver jewelry for relatives to

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ways such as providing child care, doing odd jobs around the home including cleaning and maintenance, and gathering firewood and wild vegetables from the surrounding hills, among other things.

[29] Tanarat, "Task Force 546 Mission Briefing."

sell abroad.[30] For many residents, the post provides the only connection they have with the world outside of Thamkrabok. Thus, the position of postal director is not one to be taken lightly as he is responsible for ensuring that letters and packages coming from abroad are delivered to the appropriate homes in the community. Even more importantly, he is also responsible for ensuring that all monies received from the U.S. are converted into Thai baht and given to the appropriate craftsperson. The postal director has also been elected as head of the informal Hmong government which operates within the community and serves to effectively handle disputes and punishment for criminal offenses internally within the community. Residents have indicated that problems of crime are dealt with internally by the Hmong themselves, with this elected leader serving as the primary mediator.[31]

Both the formal and informal economies which have developed in the community play an important role in the class differentiation which is apparent among residents. It is most clear when assessing the upper class Hmong as they are small in number and easily discernable because they are the only residents with motorcycles and, in some cases, vehicles. These vehicles are often pickup trucks or other 4-wheel drive vehicles appropriate for the unpaved roads in the community. These vehicles and other luxury items are purchased by the wealthier residents using money received from relatives living and working in the U.S. As the Hmong are limited in their work opportunities to lower-paid, manual labor positions in nearby cement factories and peanut fields, this type of work does not create the necessary income to purchase costly luxury items. Thus, it is widely known and understood that all of the wealthier residents receive their income from relatives in other countries.

With the exception of this very small upper-class, the vast majority of residents are of a similar class—they are much poorer and do not enjoy any luxuries, except for cellular phones. These mobile phones are older models and often shared among many members of the same family and extended family. Outgoing calls are

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[30] McKinney, “From refuge to a home.”

[31] Her and Borden, “Conditions at the Wat Thamkrabok Camp.”

limited, as the phones are used primarily to maintain contact with relatives and friends in the U.S. with the relatives calling in from abroad rather than Thamkrabok residents calling out. Housing, furnishings, and the like are adequate in that they meet the immediate needs of the residents and their well-being, but no more.

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CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will explore in detail the results data gathered on-site in the community via participant observation and interviews with residents. These results are then examined to begin looking at ways in which this data can be used to apply to the resolution of conflicted identifications and the formation of new identifications for residents. These results will then be discussed in detail in the concluding chapter, Chapter 5, paying particular attention to implications these results may have for the Hmong community at Thamkrabok, other interested groups (i.e. Thai authorities, international organizations, and the like), and for further research.

During the initial stages of field research, the researcher spent time continuing to foster close relationships with family members of Hmong friends from the U.S. who are currently living in the community. Through these relationships, the researcher informally discussed issues of culture and identity with these family members as well as extended family members, co-workers, neighbors, and others in the community that the researcher came to know well during the field research component of the project. These respondents varied in aged from 17 years to 76 years in age and included both men and women. In the process of building relationships with community members, the researcher also conducted participant observation of the physical environment as well as inter-personal actions among the Hmong and between the Hmong and the Thais (both Thai authorities and merchants) in the community.

After establishing these close relationships with residents via regular contact with community members, 15 residents were interviewed in-depth regarding issues of culture and identity in Thamkrabok; in addition to community residents, one monk at the Thamkrabok temple who has been involved with residents for more than 20 years as well as one Thai soldier who has been administering the camp since the military arrival in April 2003 were also interviewed in-depth. All of these in-depth interviews explored in greater detail some of the intricacies of cultural identity which were not readily clear after informal interviews and participant observation.

4.1 Continuity and change in Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok

Using the Hmong cultural background information outlined in Chapter 3 as a guide, the following data was gathered during the field research phase.

4.1.1 Physical environment

The location of homes in the community is somewhat haphazard. As there is a limited area available for a rather large population, homes are generally constructed wherever there is suitable land and enough area available. Neighborhoods in the community are denser in that homes are closer together than in rural Hmong villages elsewhere in Thailand. This is simply because of limitations on area available for home construction. Respondents indicated their homes ranged in size anywhere from two by six meters (housing 6 family members) up to eight by 16 meters.

While the location of the homes is determined by where land is available, the homes are constructed in accordance with traditional Hmong beliefs as much as possible. Thus, most homes are built with the main entrance facing downhill. Great care is taken to ensure that doors of different houses are not aligned, however, because of limited space it is not practical to avoid constructing homes that are not directly in front or behind one another.

Within the homes, the layout is similar to that of traditional Hmong homes, with the exception of the two cooking hearths. As livestock is not cared for regularly, it is very rare to find a second cooking hearth. Additionally, because of limited area, most homes are rather small with normally just one or two bedrooms.

All residents build their home by themselves, often with the help of family members and neighbors in the community. Many indicated that their homes were adequate in that they provide necessary shelter, however, the homes are often viewed as very to somewhat small given the number of immediate and extended family members living together. Because of the rather small size of homes and the relatively large family sizes, in many households, all of the family members sleep in the same room or area. In homes which are a bit larger, adults and children may have separate sleeping areas.

Glass windows are very rare and some homes do not have any windows at all. All of the homes do have doors, with most having two doors—one for regular use and the other, much smaller door used when moving bodies of deceased family members out of the house. There is no yard or designated area outside the homes in which residents can relax or children can play. Homes which are located near the road tend to have a bit more of any area outside the home. Some residents indicated that they had problems in their homes with mice and mosquitoes.

Photograph 10: One of the larger homes in the community (ISOC photo).

4.1.2 Leadership and lineage

There are 11 different clans represented in Thamkrabok.[1] The most important leadership within the community as recognized by the Thai authorities is structured around different neighborhoods rather than lineage and/or clan affiliations. Thus, each of the four different neighborhoods in the community has its own Hmong leader who is in regular communication with authorities, meeting weekly with Thai officials as well as representatives from international organizations (the International Organization for Migration and the Center for Disease Control) and the U.S. Embassy. The role of these neighborhood leaders is vital in that they provide an important link with authority structures which handle the day-to-day administration of the community. These leaders are then responsible for sharing any information from the authorities with the residents in their neighborhood.

In addition to these four neighborhood leaders, there are also other, smaller leaders who oversee sub-groups within the neighborhoods; most of these smaller

[1] These clans include the Her (which is the largest clan in the community), the Fang, the Lor, the Thao, the Lee, the Xiong, the Yang, the Chang, the Vang, the Moua, and the Fa clans.

leaders manage between 400 and 500 residents. These large and small neighborhood leaders are further supplemented with clan, lineage, and family leaders. All of these different types of leaders are recognized for their important role on a cultural level as well as administrative level.

The role of these community leaders, as understood by residents is to help protect the community and residents. There is an individual who acts as the overall community leader, with other clan and neighborhood leaders falling under this leader's position. Residents feel that appropriate leadership within the community, as it has been conducted by current and former leaders, is very important. It is imperative for leaders to understand residents' needs and concerns as well as all that occurs at the regular weekly meeting with Thai and foreign authorities. Leaders are responsible for maintaining good ties with all officials as well as respecting these same officials and residents.

In addition to these more formal roles, community leaders must also be patient and objective in their dealing with internal disputes in the community (internal meaning issues which are handled strictly by the Hmong with no outside involvement). On this internal level, leaders may get involved in a variety of disputes which include issues such as disagreements between husbands and wives, problems within families, and problems between clans to name a few. In these situations, the leader is presented with any evidence and also takes time to speak with all involved parties. He then decides who is right and who is wrong and residents accept his decision and act accordingly to settle their disputes. Leaders also are actively involved in the community and help to train and assist residents in knowing how to best live with one another in their somewhat confined and often difficult situation.

The roles of the leaders in Thamkrabok have changed somewhat over time, particularly after the Thai military took over administration of the community in 2003. At this time, the role of community leaders who had previously had amiable relationships with temple officials became imperative and very important—they now needed to interact and negotiate regularly and effectively with ISOC (Internal Security Operations Center) and government officials. These Hmong leaders have full authority within the community. Outside the community within the majority Thai

context, they are officially recognized by Thai officials and act as representatives for the community on all matters which involve dealings with the Thai majority, also having the authority to make requests and present grievances; in this situation, any solutions are often the result of compromise with the Thai officials. When compromising with Thai authorities, Hmong leaders are directly involved in the negotiation process; these processes have historically been negotiations in the truest sense of the word with both sides (Hmong and Thai) giving and taking in order to achieve an acceptable solution.

Photograph 11: An ISOC official presents a community leader with a gift during New Year celebrations (ISOC photo).

4.1.3 Courtship and marriage

While the Hmong living in Thamkrabok are conservative, generally speaking, the younger generation, who have and are coming of age in the community, has much less conservative and exhibit very Thai-influenced tendencies. Despite these differing world views and identities, the Hmong of Thamkrabok, like Hmong throughout the Diaspora tend to marry other Hmong.

Young people in the community begin to court in their late teens and often marry and begin families upon finding a suitable partner. The courting process occurs in a variety of ways. The general custom for dating in the community is for the man to initiate the flirting and courtship process by first going to the woman's home. Thus, it is often the man who will go to meet the woman in the evenings, often simply to flirt and spend time together as more than friends. If the young couple decides that they like one another, they are generally able to meet at any time and in any place. Oftentimes, courting teenagers enjoy spending time together in the late evening (between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.) in the market; sometimes the young couple will get together at the woman's home, other times they may watch a video or movie together. The reason that most young couples get together in the late evening is because they are typically not free during the day and it is customary for couples to meet in the evenings. The New Year ball game continues to play a role in the courtship process. The game is enjoyed by all, but it takes on more meaning for eligible young people who are playing for courtship purposes.

Weddings continue to be an important celebration in the Hmong community at Thamkrabok and generally follow the traditional Hmong ceremony. Residents indicated that in arranging for a wedding, it is imperative for both the man and the woman to be prepared to be husband and wife and ready to make a serious lifelong commitment.

According to one resident, in some situations a man may be interested in marrying a woman, but she is not yet interested in marrying him. In this instance, it is possible for the two to marry as it is believed if the man and woman enter into a life together, she will learn to like him over time. Some couples marry under these circumstances; however, most commonly in a situation where the woman is yet to be convinced, the man will visit the woman every night until she experiences a change of heart and agrees to marry him.

When the woman finds a man she is content with and ready to marry, her family will begin negotiations for the wedding. The families for the bride and groom must meet to discuss the bride price, the date for the ceremony, and the whether the ceremony will be large or small. Typically, representatives from one family (usually

two elder family members) will be sent to the other family to negotiate the bride price and other costs; this process is very low-key and kept quiet.[2] During this meeting, if the families agree to allow their children to marry, the two negotiators will return to their respective family and inform them of the upcoming marriage. After agreeing to the marriage, the two families must then negotiate a bride price and cost of the wedding.

Due to the difficult economic realities within the community, weddings are rarely lavish affairs except for instances where a couple or family receives significant support from overseas relatives. For the typical wedding, it is necessary to have between 30,000 and 40,000 baht in order to marry as this will cover the costs of everything including the sacrificial pig, liquor and drinks, food, and other expenses. In instances where the man is wealthy or the woman is of a higher status, 40,000 baht would not be sufficient to cover the wedding costs; rather, a more lavish and upper class wedding would cost 100,000 baht or more. The bride price in Thamkrabok varies depending on the wealth and status of the couple, however, a standard price is about seven bars of silver.

The ceremony itself is commonly held at the woman's home and all of the relatives from the two families along with neighbors will come to celebrate together. Different types of weddings last for different periods of time—many for two days and one night, while the more lavish ceremonies continue for three days and two nights. An important component in the wedding ceremony is the sacrifice of the pig, thus the family must be able to provide and properly prepare and sacrifice the pig. For the typical wedding celebration one pig is enough; for somewhat larger weddings, two may be necessary, depending on what is negotiated between the families along with

[2] Some residents indicated that the man's family sends representatives to the woman's family to ask for permission to marry, while others indicated the woman's family sends a representative to the man's family to seek permission.

the cost of drinks, food, and other expenses. It is most often the shaman who conducts the actual wedding ceremony.[3]

Polygamy is practiced within the community, but its occurrence is quite rare due to the limited economic means for the majority of residents. Those residents who do have more than one wife are members of the elite within the community, as to have more than one wife requires the ability to financially support more than one wife and more children.

4.1.4 Music, song, and dance

The *qeej* (Hmong reed instrument) is visible throughout the community. Residents can often be heard practicing and/or playing the *qeej* in the late afternoon. It is primarily the men who practice and play this instrument. They play in different locations—sometimes just outside their homes and at other times in the hills surrounding the community.

Photograph 12: Residents play assorted sizes of the large reed flute during New Year celebrations (ISOC photo).

[3] One respondent recalled an especially lavish and highly extraordinary wedding ceremony in which 27 cows were sacrificed.

Photograph 13: Residents play assorted sizes of the large reed flute during New Year celebrations (ISOC photo).

Traditional Hmong lore, music, song, and dance continue to play an important role in the lives of residents, however, this is less and less true for the younger generation. It appears to be most important for older residents as a means of preserving their distinct cultural identity despite their difficult situation and in the midst of witnessing the coming of age of a new generation which is much further removed from this type of cultural identification.

According to respondents, many traditional Hmong songs are historical legends and stories of love, hope, and peace for Hmong people everyone. While performing traditional Hmong dance, dancers will wear traditional Hmong clothing and when performing these types of dances, it is important to do so in the traditional way. Dances are often about traditional themes in Hmong life such as rice farming. Today, some women know how to dance, however, it is becoming less and less common for residents to sing or dance as had been done traditionally in the Hmong culture because there are no longer residents who are able to teach them the traditional Hmong style. Additionally, many of the traditional music, song, and dance revolve around themes of the physical environment and an agricultural lifestyle. In the Thamkrabok setting where residents are no longer able to farm, these types of song and dance have lost the meaning which they had previously, particularly for younger residents who have never known the traditional, agricultural Hmong way of life. Older residents are aware of different types of traditional Hmong song and dance, while many younger respondents and residents knew nothing of traditional song and

dance apart from what they had seen and heard performed at the New Year celebrations. Many teenagers simply sing and dance in the modern way.

4.1.5 Crafts

Both metal and jewelry work is an important part of the way of life and economy in the community, as the sale of these items serves as a primary means of generating income for many residents.[4] Thus, traditional Hmong crafts have been transformed from works of art and representations of Hmong culture and style to a very necessary means for survival.

Residents who produce metal products often make knives and hoes; jewelry smiths typically make neck rings, rings, necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. Most jewelry products are made from silver and yellow gold; however, artificial metals are used occasionally. All metal and jewelry products are produced in the same way Hmong have traditional made them over the centuries. Jewelry items all contain distinct Hmong designs.

The importance of jewelry items on the local economy in the community is especially important as the vast majority of these items are sent to relatives abroad to be sold in foreign markets with remittances returned to residents here in Thamkrabok. Sales from metal crafts as well as *paj ndau* (traditional Hmong embroidery) provide the primary means of income for many residents in addition to any gift monies they receive directly from relatives. Most embroidery crafts are sent abroad to be sold; however, nearly all residents will keep some traditional Hmong dress to be worn during New Year celebration.

Much of the time residents spent in embroidery and needlework is related to producing traditional, Hmong clothing and designs for the New Year celebration and weddings. A single traditional woman's suit will sell abroad for US$350 and a man's

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[4] As with other aspects of traditional Hmong culture, many of the younger residents are not involved in either metal and jewelry work or embroidery and appliqué.

for US$250. If the cost of the silver headdresses and adornments is also included, the total cost for a single, traditional suit is approximately US$850 for women and US$600 for men (prices here reflect foreign market sales).

For metal work and jewelry production a complete selection of traditional Hmong products are available as well as specialty items which are designed with the non-Hmong consumer in mind. Some of these specialty items include jewelry items such as butterfly broaches which are popular among foreign customers. Raw materials for the production of these items are procured in the local Thai market at reasonable costs. This allows jewelry smiths and metal workers to produce their intricate Hmong designs and products at relatively low cost when compared with the foreign markets in which the vast majority of their items are sold. For example, a simple copper bracelet which is sold for 150 baht (approximately US$4) in the Thai market can be sold abroad for more than 1,000 baht (approximately US$25).

Photograph 14: A typical multi-generational, mixed gender family team at work on embroidery outside their home (author's photo).

Photograph 15: Another group hard at work on their embroidery (ISOC photo).

Photograph 16: One resident at work on an intricate embroidery pattern (author's photo).

Photograph 17: One resident displays the traditional Hmong hat she has been working on (author's photo).

Photograph 18: Residents work on assembling silver chains to be used in jewelry production (author's photo).

Photograph 19: Residents work on assembling silver chains to be used in jewelry production (ISOC photo).

Photograph 20: Ornate silver work is hung to dry in the sun after being cleaned and polished (ISOC photo).

Photograph 21: A black smith at work in the main smithing area of the community (ISOC photo).

4.1.6 Religion

Traditional Hmong religion continues to play an important part in the lives of many residents. In addition to the many residents who follow these traditional beliefs, there are residents who are Buddhist as well as Christian. Various ceremonies associated with traditional Hmong religious practices are the most visible representations of this belief system. The shaman plays an important role in the community. Rituals propitiating the spirits are held regularly to feed the ancestors, call a soul, at the birth of a new baby, at the construction of a new home, as well as for New Year, wedding, and funeral ceremonies.

Because of the variety of religious practices which are followed by residents, respondents indicated that every individual's understanding of traditional Hmong religious beliefs depended on the extent to which s/he followed these beliefs.

While the shaman is a respected member of the community, he is most important for residents who believe in his healing powers. For those who do believe, the primary role of the shaman is to heal illnesses; he is consulted to handle situations in which residents are ill or experiencing difficulties. Many residents consult shamans from their respective clans to achieve success in the healing rituals.

As in accordance with traditional Hmong belief, the shaman will enter into a trance, often for two hours or more, and travel to the Otherworld to determine the cause of the malady. Upon the shaman's return from the Otherworld and his trance, he then shares with the family and other residents who have gathered for the ceremony what the problem is and how to resolve it.

Homes within the community have traditional altars as well as items paying homage and honor to spirits. Protection from evil spirits is also an important of the Hmong belief system. Perhaps the most visible are the pieces of paper above many homes protecting the residents from harmful spirits. Additionally, different types of jewelry are also worn for their protective qualities. For example, yellow gold bracelets can and often are worn at all times to protect their wearers from harmful spirits. Copper bracelets also serve this same purpose; however, copper bracelets should not be dropped in water or worn while swimming as this can attract harmful spirits.

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Photograph 22: A shaman and a shamaness performing a ritual (ISOC photo) .

Photograph 23: A shaman and a shamaness performing a ritual (ISOC photo) .

Residents also shared about the ritual often conducted by shamans (the 'putting in the spirit' ritual) which is used in instances where a soul is having difficult and seeks to find a blessing. Typically in this ceremony, a chicken or a pig is sacrificed so that its soul may take the place of the missing soul—thus the name

'putting in the spirit.' In order to effectively ask for a blessing, silver and gold must be offered in addition to the animal.

Traditional, herbal Hmong medicine is commonly used to treat illnesses. This is at times used in conjunction with modern, chemical medicines which are readily purchased at pharmacies within and just outside the community.

For residents who do not believe in the healing powers of the shaman, they will often visit the hospital or clinic to receive diagnosis and treatment from modern doctors; any medicine prescribed by the doctor is then used in the healing process.

The role of the shaman is one that continues to change over time for Hmong throughout the Diaspora. While the shaman continues to remain a respected member of the community, as more and more Hmong (particularly those is more urban settings) are exposed and use modern medicines more and more, the role of the shaman as healer continues to undergo change and adaptation. The shaman, as the leader and/or key player in the three fundamental Hmong cultural ceremonies (weddings, funerals, and New Year) continues to be an important part of the cultural identity because of this ritualistic importance. They are simply relied on less and less for their ability to contact the other world to determine causes of illnesses and in prescribing traditional remedies for these same ailments.

4.1.7 Funerals

Except for some minor adjustments, funeral ceremonies are generally conducted in accordance with Hmong tradition. For safety reasons within the camp, there are no musket shots at the beginning of the ceremony. Additionally, the majority of those in attendance are other residents within the Thamkrabok community; however, in situations where relatives are able to come from other parts of Thailand or elsewhere, they are permitted to attend the ceremony.

When a resident passes away, the deceased's family proceeds with the funeral preparation and ceremony. The washing and preparation of the body is conducted in traditional Hmong style including preparing the necessary items to accompany the soul on its journey to the Otherworld. Throughout the ceremony, young men assist their fathers, and the entire ceremony is also a community event.

At the conclusion of the ceremony when a cow would normally be sacrificed, this is often substituted with a pig in the community because of the high cost of purchasing cows for sacrificial purposes. This was not always the case, however. In the past, there were instances where several cows were sacrificed for a single funeral and food and drinks were purchased for hundreds. This was highly unusual and occurred in families that had received substantial financial assistance from relatives abroad. It most instances a single pig is sacrificed.

Residents understand that the role of the shaman or leader of the actual funeral ceremony is responsible for leading the soul of the deceased to the Otherworld. In beginning the ceremony, the shaman is consulted to determine the time of day during which the pig will be sacrificed to begin the process. Later in the ritual another pig or a cow will also be sacrificed. Funerals generally last anywhere from three to seven days in the community, with the actual burial occurring on the final day. The body of the deceased is place in a grave, the land for which had been reserved previously by the family. The casket is made of wood on the last day of the ritual—this process is usually completed by noon on the final day. The body is then taken to the shaman for a final blessing. Occasionally, several animals are killed with the number based on how many children are in the immediate family—this can be up to ten animals in families with many children.

Land used for burial is located in the hills surrounding the camp. The procession, consisting of men, carries the casket to the burial site. Graves in this community follow the Hmong style with a mound of stones marking graves of the deceased, as opposed to the Chinese style tombstone which is used in some Hmong communities elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Photograph 24: Family members and neighbors gather around the body of a recently deceased resident (ISOC photo).

Photograph 25: Children help in caring for the body of a recently deceased resident, keeping flies and other insects away (ISOC photo).

Photograph 26: Women and children watch over the body as it lies in the home prior to burial (ISOC photo).

Photograph 27: One of the funeral drums used in Thamkrabok (ISOC photo).

Photograph 28: The funeral procession begins. The casket is on the right being watched by the female family members; the men are on the left playing the funerary music (you can see the man playing the qeej along with the funeral drum and other qeejs to the left).

Photograph 29: A gravesite in the hills surrounding the community (author's photo).

4.1.8 New Year

Being the most important holiday for the Hmong, New Year in Thamkrabok is much like Hmong New Year celebrations elsewhere in Thailand. Ornate and elaborate traditional clothing which residents have spent months creating are worn with pride. The New Year is typically celebrated in December or January.

Residents from each of the neighborhoods in the community take part in a parade through the camp displaying their traditional dress, elaborate silver jewelry, headdresses and other finery. There are musical performances on traditional Hmong instruments for all of the residents and officials working the camp—all of whom gather to celebrate together. The celebrations last anywhere from seven to ten days depending on the amount of activities and how many people are around to celebrate. This is a time of year that all residents anticipate and look forward to. It is a time of celebration—every one will wear new clothes and spend the days enjoying one another's company through various rituals, games, and activities.

During the first three days of the New Year, residents cannot buy anything because it is believed that if you buy something during this time it means that you will not be able to keep money in the upcoming year. Because of this restriction on using money, residents do not buy any food during this time which means they must prepare things ahead of time.

The first day of New Year begins around 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. depending on when the cock crows. The shaman will conduct the sacrifice of a chicken to call the ancestors to come and eat with the residents. The shaman will then burn silver or yellow gold for the ancestors. Everyone can then enjoy eating and celebrating together. On the second day, all of the young women dress in their ornate, elaborate, and beautiful traditional Hmong dress. They then parade in front of the community leaders as part of a pageant of sorts.

The ball game usually gets started on the fourth day. During the ball game, the men line up on one side and the women on the other. Depending on whether or not the woman is seriously interested, the game can be either simply for fun or for the more serious purpose of courtship. The ball game is played and has become not only a time for young couples to conduct their courting rituals, but also a time for Thai authorities and staff from international organizations in the community to share in the festivities of the holiday. Participation of outsiders in the ball game is strictly for celebratory purposes, while the more serious business of courtship is carried out in more official rounds of the game.

Photograph 30: The New Year parade begins (ISOC photo). This photo illustrates the traditional Hmong clothing for both men and women. You can also see that the drums used here are modern snare drums as opposed to the handmade Hmong drums used in the past.

Photograph 31: The parade continues (ISOC photo).

Photograph 32: Girls and young women in traditional dress from one neighborhood (ISOC photo).

Photograph 33: Boys and young men in traditional dress (ISOC photo).

Photograph 34: Girls in traditional dress (ISOC photo).

Photograph 35: Girl in traditional dress (ISOC photo).

Photograph 36: Residents, ISOC and IOM officials engage in a friendly (and not serious) round of the ball game (ISOC photo).

4.1.9 Food and water

Food is prepared in the home; oftentimes a lot of water is used to dilute food to make IT last longer and feed everyone in the household. Some common dishes include a clear soup with vegetable, pumpkin or squash prepared with salt, another type of clear soup with pork, vegetables, and salt (when there is enough money available to purchase meat). Generally, pork and other meats are only purchased when there is a festival or important ritual to be conducted. Each home will have an area which is used solely for food preparation, often outside.

Some families do not have anything to eat and thus must ask for food from relatives and fellow clan members in the community. Much of the food that residents eat is not of good quality because they are unable to afford better quality food since they must buy only what they can afford to feed everyone in the family.

Respondents indicated that it costs approximately 120 baht (US$3) per day to feed most families. If families have many children or are caring for several extended

family members, their costs can be significantly higher. Residents are completely dependent on Thai vendors to provide all of their food stuffs. For those families who are very poor and unable to purchase or gather food, they go to the temple to ask for food—oftentimes on a daily basis.

Wild-growing herbs and some vegetables can be gathered in the foothills surrounding the community. Many families make regular trips to gather vegetables and herbs along with wood to be used in making fires to cook the food. All of the family members help in this gathering process, from the old down to the very young. In addition to gathering vegetables which grow naturally, there are also small plots of land available for rent on the periphery of the community and the surrounding hills in which residents can plant some of their own vegetables.

Water is available, but must be purchased. Thus, it is highly valued and used sparingly. There are two small reservoirs in the community which hold water for drinking. Currently one is still in use while the other (which is not over 30 years old) is no longer used for drinking.

Photograph 37: Two young girls return from an afternoon of collecting vegetables and brush for burning in the hills (author's photo).

Photograph 38: Garden plots which have been rented on the outskirts on the community (author's photo).

Photograph 39: Garden plots which have been rented on the outskirts on the community (author's photo).

Photograph 40: The older reservoir in the community which is no longer used (author's photo).

4.1.10 Health and hygiene

Respondents indicated that most residents in the community enjoy good health; residents bathe and brush their teeth regularly. There are instances where residents do get sick. In most cases, family members are able to care for sick people using traditional herbal treatments. Since most families are large with many children, adults have the knowledge and ability to care for sick people. Most of this knowledge is learned informally from older family members.

There were some initial adaptation concerns for residents with regard to more modern medicine. One respondent indicated that the vaccination program which was initiated shortly after the Thai authorities began managing the community was not well received by some residents. He indicated that not all residents were aware of what a vaccination was and why it was necessary. This type of difficulty raised the issue of the need for more effective public awareness campaigns in cooperation with Hmong community leaders, which was done for the vaccination program as well as in response to other issues which arose in the community.

There is a doctor who visits the community regularly. Residents visit this doctor during his visits for their minor ailments. One of the problems raised by respondents was their understanding that if someone experiences a more serious medical problem, there is no vehicle to transport them to the hospital.

Photograph 41: Residents meet with nurses during a weekly visit (ISOC photo).

Photograph 42: A young resident receives a polio vaccination (ISOC photo).

4.1.11 Livelihood, employment, and income

This is one aspect of life and culture for Hmong residents in Thamkrabok which is rather distinctive and unique. Because traditionally, Hmong livelihood has been very dependent on agriculture and this is not an available option for Thamkrabok residents, residents have adapted is a very interesting way—developing their own cottage industry, of sorts. Because of limited access to employment and related opportunities, many residents rely heavily on monies received from relatives abroad for their livelihoods. These monies are sometimes given freely, but it is more often profits received from the sale of Hmong handicrafts in the U.S. These handicrafts are made by residents, sent to relatives abroad for sale in the more lucrative foreign markets, and any profits are then returned to residents. Handicrafts which do well in foreign markets include assorted jewelry and metal crafts as well as embroidery.

Because monies received from sales of handicrafts abroad account for much of the income received by families in the community, one very distinctive feature of the production of embroidery in the community is that there are several men whose primary employment is the production of *paj ntaub* and other traditional Hmong embroidered items. While it is not unheard of for men to take part in embroidery, it is

interesting to note the large numbers of men who do so in the Thamkrabok community. If they would not take part in this traditionally woman's craft, most would find themselves unemployed and unable to provide for their families. In taking part in the production of embroidered crafts, men are able to become more active in providing for their families, thus maintaining important gender roles which have developed making the male household head the primary income maker.[5]

Other forms of income come from part-time and often irregular work as day laborers in the local Thai community. This is something that is closely monitored by Thai authorities to ensure that residents are paid for the work they do and also to best monitor who is coming into and leaving the community on a regular basis. Due to the need for residents to present their government-issued Thamkrabok identification card upon exiting the community, permission must be obtained before going out. Generally, residents leave around 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. for work, but only for jobs in which the employer will send someone to pick up residents for work. Currently, day labor is limited and many employers are reluctant or unable to send transportation to pickup residents. Much of the available work involves tasks such as gathering vegetables, peanuts, and working in the rice fields.

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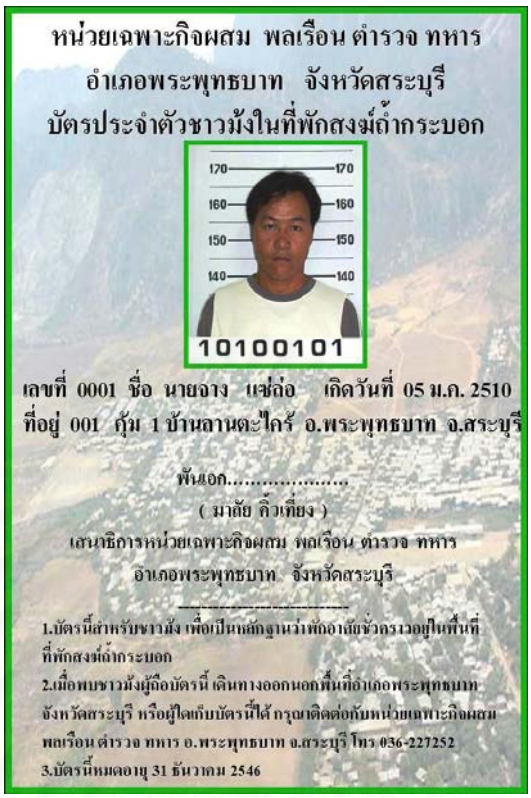
[5] As this is a relatively new phenomenon, it unclear to what extent the involvement of men in a traditionally woman's activity affects the personal identity of these Hmong men. Further studies and follow-up would need to be conducted in order to determine any affects.



Photograph 43: A sample government-issued Thamkrabok identification card which must be left when leaving the community (ISOC photo).

Photograph 44: Residents wait with ISOC officials to be picked up in the morning for day labor work (ISOC photo).

Photograph 45: Residents line up to leave their identification cards with officials before leaving for work in the morning (ISOC photo).

According to residents, most people do not have much to do when it comes to regular employment. In the past, there was more regular day labor available. Now there is less work available and residents are not able to go out and work anytime, anywhere. This makes life especially difficult because many people have large families which they must support. One respondent indicated that previously he was able to make between 7,000 and 8,000 baht per month. But now work is very difficult to get, food is often in short supply, and sometimes he is unable to buy rice. As there is little work available outside of the community, residents must wait for money from relatives in the U.S.

Another respondent indicated that if residents could have some sort of foundation in their lives which would afford them just enough room to live and food to eat, life would be much better for them. But since this is not the case, many residents find themselves without enough food to feed their families, sometimes on a daily basis. Another respondent indicated that one of the biggest problems living in the community is that due to limited work opportunities, families do not have enough money to purchase food and other essential items.

Respondents suggested that Thai salespeople operating in the camp were able to make profits and support their families. But for the Hmong residents, there is no regular source of income; money commonly comes from either relatives in the U.S. or hired labor. Monies which come from the U.S. take a long time to receive. The entire

process can take up to one year; this includes the time it takes to actually make the jewelry, embroidery, or traditional clothing, the time it takes to send them to the U.S. to sell them, and then the time it takes to return profits to the residents. When they do receive money from the U.S., they often receive fairly substantial amounts; however, it is not enough to sustain them for another year. Respondents indicated that they need money available for use every day, and this is not always the case.

4.1.12 Interactions with Thai society

An interesting addition to the Hmong calendar is the inclusion of Thai New Year or Songkran. While Songkran is commonly celebrated by other Hmong living in more urban settings throughout Thailand, it is not so common in the more isolated rural Hmong villages in the mountainous north. Within the Thamkrabok community itself, the well-known water fights do not occur due to the high cost of water for residents already on a very limited income. However, at the temple and surrounding area local Thais do celebrate and residents occasionally take part in these celebrations. This is also a time for the Thai officials and authorities to pay their respects to Hmong leaders in the community during the traditional Thai water blessing ceremony.

Photograph 46: Thai ISOC officials pay their respects to Hmong leaders during Songkran (ISOC photo).

Another intersection can be seen in many homes within the community. Many homes display pictures of their majesties the king and queen of Thailand, and some also have pictures of the revered King Rama V as well. Residents respond differently when asked why they display these pictures. All respondents agreed that the Hmong in Thamkrabok respect the Thai royal family. Beyond respecting the king and the monarchy, some also see themselves as subjects of the king, while others do not. One interesting example of this occurred recently when one of the shamans in the community was preparing to repatriate to the U.S. He made a special point of giving a letter of appreciation to Thai ISOC officials before leaving in which he articulated his deep gratitude and thanks to the king of Thailand for his supreme benevolence in caring for all people in Thailand, including the Hmong of Thamkrabok.

Other interactions include leaving to work as day laborers as well as attending the local Thai school. Children who attend the local school play an important part in the local academic community. With the relocation of residents to the U.S., the local school saw it's attendance drop from more than 1,300 to just a few hundred as the majority of students were Hmong residents at Thamkrabok. This shift meant the reassignment of many of the Thai teachers to other schools in the area and elsewhere.

Another vital interaction between residents and Thai society is through the local economy and particularly in the purchase and sale of goods at the community markets. Some Thai vendors who sell items in the markets at Thamkrabok followed the Hmong from Ban Vinai in Loei province. Again, with the relocation of residents abroad, these vendors returned to their hometowns in Loei as they were solely dependent on the Hmong for their incomes in Thamkrabok. Other local vendors from the nearby area have also needed to seek their incomes elsewhere as the market in Thamkrabok has shrunk to a fraction of its original size as residents continue to relocate leaving significant gaps in the local economy.

Nearly all residents indicated that one of the most obvious cultural changes seen in the community is with regard to clothing and style of dress. Residents are nearly always seen wearing inexpensive 'modern' Thai dress. For women this is often a simple *patung* (sarong) with a blouse or t-shirt; for men this is simply pants or long shorts with a shirt; and for children and teens, pants or long shorts with t-shirts.

4.2 Causes and significance of changes in Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok

4.2.1 Resolving conflicted identifications

In general, the Hmong of Thamkrabok have done well in resolving their conflicted identifications. In instances where they were unable to continue particular traditions and customs, these aspects were adapted to fit their situation in the community with little distress and adverse affect on their cultural identification. Many of these changes were the direct result of the physical environment in the community coupled with limited employment opportunities and the distinct economy that developed. The following table outlines many of these changes, as discussed in detail previously.

Table 1: Summary of Continuity and Change in Hmong Cultural Identity at Thamkrabok

Cultural Component	Continuity	Change	Cause
Homes	• Face downhill • Building materials • Two doors (one normal, one smaller)	• Doors sometimes aligned • Built closer together • Sometimes single sleeping quarters for all family members • Single cooking hearth	• Limited space • No need for second cooking hearth
Leadership-Lineage	• Clan and family leaders • Village leader • Role to protect community and interact with majority	• Neighborhood leaders and sub-leaders most important	• Community administratively divided into four neighborhoods
Courtship	• Meet in evenings • Ball game used • Man initiates	• No kidnapping	• Not possible in confined space.
Weddings	• Maintain importance • Generally follow traditional negotiations & ceremony	• Rarely lavish ceremony • Lower bride price • Sacrifice 1-2 pigs only	• Financial limitations
Music, song, & dance	• Traditional instruments still played (*qeej*, drums, flutes, etc.)	• Song and dance very limited, especially among young	• Association between songs and agricultural lifestyle not applicable • Very few teachers qualified to instruct young
Crafts	• Jewelry making, metal work, and embroidery still important	• Men highly involved in embroidery • Crafts have become an	• Very limited work opportunities • Close connections with

		essential cottage industry	family abroad to facilitate sale of products
Religion	• Shaman conducts cultural rituals (wedding, funeral, New Year) • Shaman does do some healing rituals • Religion continues to be ritually significant • All residents participate in rituals	• Many residents do not believe in shaman's healing powers • Many young do not understand meaning of rituals	• Availability of modern medicine (preferred by some) • Young not instructed in meaning
Funerals	• Maintain importance • Generally follow traditional ceremony • Shaman leads • Burial practices and location	• No musket shots • Relatives from outside community do not usually attend • Pig sacrificed in place of cow	• Safety regulations prohibit use of firearms • Somewhat isolated location (away from other relatives) • Financial limitations in purchasing a cow
New Year	• Maintains importance • Generally follows traditional ceremony • Wear traditional dress • Begins with shaman's sacrifice of chicken and calling ancestors • Ball game important	• Parade through community • Ball game participants vary, not always serious	• Changes similar to adaptations throughout Diaspora • Different areas & groups of Hmong incorporate different distinct activities (i.e. parade)
Food & Water	• Meat not a big part of diet	• Low quality vegetables make up majority of diet in addition to rice • Limited variety in food	• No longer farmers • Financial limitations necessitate need to purchase all food
Health & Hygiene	• Maintain importance • Traditional/herbal medicines used regularly	• Modern medicine more common	• Modern medicine more readily available in semi-urban setting (similar to Hmong experience in other urban, developed areas)
Livelihood	• Crafts important	• Sale of handicrafts biggest income generator • No farming	• No land available • Very limited employment opportunities • Close connections with family abroad to facilitate sale of products

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As this table illustrates, there are several ways which the Hmong community at Thamkrabok has been able to successfully address areas of contention. The four primary cultural mechanisms used to adapt and adjust include:

1. Leadership;
2. Language;

3. Religion; and,

4. Family.

Leaders in the community have served an important role in this resolution process both in ways they have aligned with one another (within the community as well as within the Diaspora) to present a united front; this has served them well in their dealings with both Thai and U.S. majority populations regarding the situation for residents in Thamkrabok. The leadership structure in the community also played an integral role in allowing residents to effectively work together with Thai officials in addressing issues and negotiating solutions.[6] Thus, the leaders have played a very important role in serving as mediators in negotiations with the majority, particularly in this distinct setting in which the Hmong have been living as refugees for such a prolonged time, for much of which they were seen as illegal immigrants by many in the majority context.

The use of the Hmong language is another aspect of Hmong culture which has always been a stronghold of their culture and proven especially vital in maintaining their identity and culture. In the Thamkrabok context, all residents continue to preserve their distinct language in the succeeding generations. Despite that many of the younger generation find themselves more and more open to the majority population, their continued fluency in their mother tongue serves as a strong identifying element of their cultural identity. Additionally, the use of Thai language has played an important role in residents' adapting to their setting. Those leaders and residents who interact and negotiate regularly with the Thai majority, along with conducting daily business in the markets for essentials like food, must have a fluency

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[6] The necessity and ability for Hmong leaders to successfully work with majority Thai representatives is something that is generally different from Hmong leadership roles in the U.S. and other third countries. In very general terms, this may be due to the limited access to resources and stereotyped image of minority groups like the Hmong in Thailand. Because of their lesser role in Thai society, the Hmong have a tendency to act as a group (in large numbers) and most of their interactions are internal with other Hmong, especially in rural settings. This appears to be the case for many Hmong in Northern Thailand as well as the Hmong of Thamkrabok. Hmong in the U.S. on the other hand are treated more equally by the majority and have access to resources (again, in very general terms) and thus are able to more effectively interact with the majority population on an individual basis rather than depending on clan and/or village leaders to act on their behalf.

in Thai language which allows them to carry out these tasks effectively. Thus, the Hmong language continues to be taught and reinforced in its daily use in the homes, while Thai is used on a limited basis as a means of conducting necessary business and interactions with the majority.

Religious practices in the community also serve to help residents maintain their distinctive identity and culture. While not all residents are strict adherents to the traditional Hmong belief systems, the rituals and ceremonies which come from this belief system continue to play an integral role in the lives of all residents. This is especially true for the three most important ceremonies and festival in the lives of the Hmong—New Year, weddings, and funerals. Not all residents necessarily understand the significance or meaning behind the intricacies of these rituals, but they do recognize their importance in the life of the Hmong in the community.

Finally, the association of families and kinships networks also play a key role in assisting residents come to terms with conflicted identifications. As suggested by Dunnigan, the importance of the family as a unified association is providing the most effective social arrangement for adapting to changing environments appears to have served the Hmong of Thamkrabok well. Despite living in a very difficult and challenging situation for a very prolonged period of time, the importance and cohesiveness of the family has stayed very much in tact. The family as a unit as well as larger kinship and clan structures have served to not only preserve the cultural identity of residents, but also to ensure there survival in a difficult situation.

One aspect of Hmong identity (as suggested by Dunnigan) which did not appear to play such a key role in resolving conflicted identifications and preserving their identity was that of maintaining feelings of nostalgia and attachment to Laos. While many older residents consider Laos their home, the majority accept that it is unlikely they will ever return to live there long-term.[7] This is most likely due in large

[7] Respondents indicated that of the residents who do continue to hold out and long for a return to a non-communist Laos, most are older residents who served as soldiers during the war; many shamans fall into this category.

part to their very prolonged stay in Thamkrabok and other refugee centers throughout Thailand. As is it more than 30 years that many of the adults have been living in uncertainty and all of the younger residents have known nothing else, Laos is no longer where they place their hope. Rather, if they had a choice, Thailand would be their place of residence as this is the only place the young have known and it is the place where the older adults have made their home for as long as 30 years. But given the choice between an uncertain future in Thailand where there is no official refugee policy to guarantee their livelihood or freedom and resettlement to the U.S. and other third countries where they are given these types of guarantees and assurances, the overwhelming majority of residents chose to go to the third country. There is no longer a strong or even nostalgic attachment to Laos; after years of hopelessness and disappointment, residents seek a place where they will be given access to opportunity and a life, most importantly for their children.

4.2.2 Forming a new identification

The process of forming new identifications is one which appears to have been developed in large part because of economic and financial needs coupled with limitations due to the physical environment and setting. To maintain the male head-of-household and primary income-generator role, many men have learned the traditionally female-dominated craft of embroidery and appliqué as a means of providing for their large families in a living situation which does not enable them access to other opportunities for gainful employment

In the case of young adults, teenagers, and children, the formation of a new identity is much more pronounced. Many young residents, if given the option, would gladly choose to remain in Thailand as they have become very Thai in many ways. They speak the Thai language well, listen to Thai popular and traditional music on the radio, watch Thai television, and enjoy many of the same things as a typical young Thai person. They have formed a new and distinctive identification which places them in a third culture of sorts—they are not Thai and yet many are unaware of what

makes them distinctively Hmong as well.[8] That being said, they all do speak Hmong and are aware of general practices and traditions, however, this awareness and understanding is much less that their more traditional parent's generation.

Alliances with Thai officials have been established as a means of resolving conflicted identifications moreso than playing a part in forming a new identification. The existence and prevalence of feelings of attachment for Thailand have, on the other hand, played an important role in the development of a new identification, most especially for the children, teenagers, and young adults who have come of age and are growing up in the community. A big part of this new identification is associated with levels of Thai language proficiency. Most of the younger residents either learned Thai formally in school or picked it up informally from local media and their Thai-speaking peers in the community. For many of the adults and older residents, their Thai language instruction is most often picked up informal and their level of fluency is less than that of the younger residents. Many of the adults with degrees of fluency in Thai have developed this skill to best provide and care for their family as dealing with and understanding the administrative structure of the community as well as procuring items for daily survival (such as food) require, at the very least, a minimal level of Thai language.

Another way in which some residents have formed a new identification is with regard to religion. While it has already been stated that traditional Hmong beliefs serve as a unifying factor in helping to resolve conflicted identifications through the importance of rituals and other religiously based ceremonies, there is variety to be found in the religious belief systems which residents claim to follow. In addition to preserving their cultural identity through traditional ceremonies and rituals, there are some in the community which adhere to Thai Buddhism and have easy and regular access to its associated ceremonies and instruction at the neighboring temple. Thus,

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[8] Renard refers to this third generation culture at *generation 1.5*, as "they re part of neither the first generation of their parents nor the second generation of children born in a second country," in this case Thailand (39).

in speaking with Buddhist residents, it becomes clear that many have adapted their cultural identity to enable themselves to be Hmong and also Buddhist.

The extent of residents' involvement in the local trade and economy has also served to integrate them further into the local context, thereby leading to the formation of a new identification to allow this involvement. This type of economic involvement an aspect of their new cultural identity which applies to a small minority of the population—mainly those who receive significant support from relatives overseas and/or are involved in local trade (most commonly selling items in the community markets).

The role of the media in the formation of this new identification is also an important factor. This would include both the local, Thai media as well as the more international media and news received from family members living throughout the Diaspora. The impact of the local Thai media, especially television and radio, is especially noticeable in the younger residents. Perhaps because of the higher levels of fluency and literacy in the Thai language, they are very familiar with popular and traditional Thai songs as well as regular television programming. This type of media exposure seems to further integrate the young and those most fluent in the Thai language into the majority context. Additionally, with the international media exposure and access to reports from other Hmong around the world, residents in Thamkrabok are aware, and very acutely so in some instances, if the efforts of family and advocates abroad in bettering the situation for residents. This type of exposure and encouragement also plays an important function in affecting the outlook and desires of residents, particularly with regard to their expectations and hopes for the future—hopes for freedom and peace.

Since possession and ownership of resources is nearly solely under the control of Thais, this does not play a significant role in the formation of new identifications. In some cases, it could be suggested that this exclusive access to ownership and resources and the opportunities they provide may serve to unite residents against owners and salespeople. In speaking with most residents, it becomes quite clear rather quickly that Hmong residents are united in their dislike (in varying degrees) of Thai salespeople who make their livings and in some cases rather excessive profits at

the expense of residents. While this is not true for all residents, all respondents during the course of this study articulated this type of concern. Thus, their lack of involvement in the local economy appears to bond residents together in their ‘us versus them’ (minority versus majority) outlook.

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CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In examining the cultural identity for the Hmong residents at Thamkrabok, it is clear in both big and small ways that residents have had to rework and adjust their cultural identity as a means of adapting to their complex and prolonged situation in Thamkrabok, while simultaneously coming together collectively on certain points to maintain this same identity. As stated previously in Chapter 4, it appears that this adaptation has occurred on two different levels. For the adults and older population, the reworking of their cultural identity has happened in subtle ways and is often associated with adapting assorted rituals and traditions in order to continue celebrating these rituals and their culture with the limited access to resources and opportunity in Thamkrabok. For young adults and children, their cultural identity has been shaped and formed in distinct and interesting ways with many of these young people developing a type of third culture for themselves, placing them outside of both traditional Hmong and popular Thai culture but still with a small place in each. Language and religious rituals serve as a very strong connector for these young people to their Hmong identity while location and media access place them in the midst of their Thai identification.

In general, it appears to be that the Hmong in Thamkrabok has developed two distinctive cultural identities—one which the adults have created as a means of adapting to their complex situation in the community while still preserving their traditions, and the other which the young people have created for themselves which is a type of third culture that requires their fluency in Hmong language and a basic understanding of Hmong ritual and tradition combined with the voluntary acceptance and immersion in the Thai context. Many of these young people are able to articulate that they know little of their own culture and much of the more popular Thai culture, being able to sing any number of popular and traditional Thai songs while unable to sing very few if any traditional Hmong songs.

The other area of significance which seems to serve as a mitigating factor in the cultural identity for adults is that if the economy and livelihoods for residents. Because of very limited employment opportunities and the fact that many residents are dependent on monies received from the sales of their handicrafts overseas, men have become more and more involved in the production of crafts. With regard to jewelry and metal crafts, this was previously dominated by men. However, the introduction of men into the production of traditional embroidery products to the extent that they are involved in the community is something new and worthy of note.

Regarding embroidery and appliqué, the Hmong of Thamkrabok have developed what may be considered by some to be their most distinctive cultural quality—that is, it is not uncommon for men to take very active and regular roles in the production of assorted embroidery and needlework. This is simply because there are a very limited number of jobs available for a very large population. Additionally, as most of the income generated in the community comes from the resale of these types of craft items, by becoming more actively involved in embroidery and related crafts, men are able to subsequently take a more active role in the generation of income to support their families. This is not to say that Hmong men elsewhere do not participate in embroidery, however, it is very common and widespread in Thamkrabok due to residents' distinct situation. It would be interesting to follow-up with these male craftsmen after their resettlement to the U.S. to see what happens with their skills. Will they continue to spend much of their time in embroidery? Or will they pursue more mainstream work in the U.S. job market?

Additionally, the affect of the Hmong community at Thamkrabok on the local Thai economy as well as the lives and livelihoods of individual Thai vendors is also interesting. With the resettlement near completion, many vendors who have been involved at the community for many years have had to pursue their livelihoods elsewhere, with many unsure just how to do this best given their long-term interaction and dependence on Hmong residents. For the residents themselves, many fear they will not have any marketable job skills when they arrive in the U.S. as a result of the long-term restrictions on their movement and access to employment here in Thailand; some residents who have already resettled have indicated that it is difficult to find

employment in the U.S. for this reason. Also, teachers in the local Thai school have been reassigned after the majority of their students who were Hmong residents were resettled.

5.1Application of results and analysis

5.1.1 Hmong experience at Thamkrabok

One objective of this project is to provide a meaningful understanding of the cultural identity for Hmong residents at Thamkrabok to better understand their situation as a means of preserving an important part of their history as well as attempting to understand how many of the complexities which affect this particular community directly play themselves out in the lives of residents on a daily basis and how these factors affect the cultural identity and its formation and development in the community over time.

Data gathered during the research phase, when used in conjunction with documentary research is able to provide a valuable chronicle of the development of a distinct Hmong community that will soon no longer exist as a cohesive, functioning community, but will rather, be dispersed throughout the Diaspora. Understanding this distinctive Hmong experience in Thamkrabok may prove to be useful as residents who have relocated to third countries begin to adapt and adjust to their new surroundings. A general appreciation for their previous situation and setting may prove to be invaluable in best enabling this next and more permanent transition and adjustment to be as positive and smooth as possible.

It is perhaps the residents themselves who address their situation and the implication it has had on their lives and culture best. One respondent indicated that all residents need to adjust in order to better understand where they are; if they are able to do this in their current situation, they will also be able to do it in other

situations as well. Another respondent is less hopeful and simply cannot envision living in Thamkrabok for much longer as life is very hard.[1] Another respondent indicated that before coming to Thamkrabok, she had lived comfortably at a refugee center in Chonburi. In Thamkrabok, she and her family must use much more money. That being said, however, she is satisfied with her situation as she and her family chose to come to Thamkrabok on their own rather than being forced to do so. Another respondent compared his experience at Thamkrabok with his experience in Vinai which is where he stayed prior to moving to the community in Thamkrabok. He indicated that the two situations were similar in many ways. However, one way in that was markedly different in Thamkrabok was that there was no service providing food at little or no cost.

5.1.2 Development of a distinct cottage industry

The economic adaptation of the Hmong at Thamkrabok appears to be one of the most significant changes which, in turn, affects many other aspects of adjustment and leads to the cultural adaptation. Due to the effective and regular communication between residents and family members in the U.S., coupled with the communities creative, entrepreneurial spirit, residents were able to successfully develop and engage in a unique cottage industry whereby they send their traditional Hmong handicrafts to relatives abroad for sale in foreign markets, with all profits being returned to residents to provide for their daily sustenance.

The primary motivation in developing this industry was due a host of factors. Firstly, residents are illegal and thus unable to find regular work in the area. Secondly, because of the physical landscape, they are unable to engage in any type of farming or agriculture which has historically and traditionally provided their food stores. Thirdly, due to their prolonged and unrecognized (until recent years) refugee situation, there were no international organizations assisting in providing food rations

[1] This particular resident was very poor, living in a small home and supporting a large family on little or no regular income.

and other essential items for survival as had been the case in all previous refugee camps and centers in Thailand. Thus, residents found themselves without access to any gainful means of employment to provide for their family's most basic need for daily food. Because of their close connections throughout the Diaspora, they were able to address this need for income by initiating a unique sales scheme and launching their own cottage industry of sorts.

This was well coordinated with family members throughout the U.S. and possible because of the presence of a post office in Thamkrabok itself. The business of managing the post and overseeing the conversion of currency for all incomes received was handled by the highest ranking and most respected community leader. Without regular access to the post and the ability of converting currency, the industry would not have survived or thrived as it did. Additionally, the full participation and trust of family members in the U.S. was also essential in ensuring that goods were sold for the highest possible price in the U.S. market, with all profits returned directly to residents in Thamkrabok.

Due to the integrated and successful coordination and participation of the Hmong throughout the process, both in Thailand and the U.S. the industry not only took often, but thrived and in the end turned into the primary source of income for residents. Without this income, the survival and situation for Hmong refugees from Laos in Thamkrabok would have invariably been much different.

As a result of this successful and very necessary cottage industry, the cultural identity for residents underwent some it's more significant changes—most notably in the pervasive involvement of men in the production of traditionally female handicrafts like embroidery and needlework. Their participation increased production while also allowing men to retain their status and primary providers for their families (although now much more often in tandem with female family members as well).

Given the success and effectiveness of this distinct cottage industry, there may be implications and/or applications which could be used in similar situations. For example, tens of thousands of Karen refugees from Myanmar live in refugee camps along the Myanmar – Thai border. Currently, many of these Karen refugees do

produce traditional handicrafts, but the primary market is local and thus very small given their location and the limited access afforded to potential customers living outside the camp. While duplicating the Hmong example exactly would not be entirely appropriate for the Karen, it certainly could have some applications for the Karen. They may find more a marketplace for their products if they were able to connect with family members, foundations, or other organizations in Thailand as well as abroad in order to arrange and set up some type of sales scheme similar to that of the Hmong in Thamkrabok.

In addition to the Karen and other refugees in Thailand, this type of industry may also be further developed among other ethnic minorities living elsewhere as a means of improving their sometimes difficult living conditions. Small groups of minorities are common sights at larger markets in big cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai selling their traditional wares while wearing their traditional dress. However, if the entrepreneurial spirit of the Hmong in Thamkrabok could also be developed in these other minority groups as a means of improving their economic situation while also increasing awareness within the majority context and around the world about the rich cultural heritage and traditional handicrafts of these minority groups, it is conceivable that the cottage industry model of the Hmong in Thamkrabok could be expanded and applied to other ethnic minority groups elsewhere with distinct traditional handicrafts. This model encourages the production of quality, traditional handicraft items at low costs which have high value in both local and foreign markets when marketed appropriately and sold through trusted channels and connections in the majority and foreign contexts.

5.1.3 Importance of ritual maintenance in successful cultural identity adaptation

As mentioned in Chapter 4, leadership, language, religion, and family all play integral roles in shaping and maintaining Hmong cultural identity. These four important factors see themselves manifested in the cultural identity at Thamkrabok in the three most important cultural rituals:

1. New Year;

2. Weddings; and,

3. Funerals.

It is through the perpetuation of these rituals that the young are trained and the essence of a distinct Hmong cultural identity is continued and preserved. The very act of conducted New Year, wedding, and funeral rituals necessitates the involvement of all community members of all ages, thereby continuing the practices themselves while also simultaneously training the younger generation in the protocols and traditions to allow for their continuation in future generations.

The cultural identity and its continuity and change is dependent on the maintenance of these three specific rituals (New Year, weddings, and funerals) in conjunction with the four mechanisms (leadership, language, religion, and family) which encourage and allow for the successful continuation of these rituals. Thus, it is at the intersection of these three rituals and four mechanisms that the distinct Hmong cultural identity at Thamkrabok emerges. Changes and adaptations to the rituals occurred in large part due to limitations because of the physical landscape; but for the most part, they were maintained as they had been, both historically and traditionally, in the Thamkrabok setting because of leadership, language, religion, and family.

The other biggest change which was the development of the unique cottage industry in the community was also a reaction to limited financial resources and the subsequent economic adaptation to survive naturally evolved into the cottage industry because of residents' creativity and entrepreneurial spirit and coordination locally and throughout the Diaspora.

5.1.4 Implications of Thamkrabok identity as community is resettled

One respondent indicated that due to the prolonged restrictions on his movement and access to opportunity for so long, he often wonders when he will be free like other people. He asks, "Who will do anything to help them [residents of Thamkrabok]? Where is their freedom? Where is their peace?" Many residents share this sentiment and place much or all of their hope that these issues will be

addressed in positive ways after their resettlement to the U.S. For most, there is little or nothing for them in Thamkrabok and they are simply waiting to go to the U.S. to begin their lives anew. However, despite these feelings of frustration, disappointment, and hopelessness, residents have effectively maintained and adjusted their cultural identity to this often difficult context.

With this understanding of the distinct identities of Thamkrabok residents, resettlement and the resettlement process may be impacted and affected in positive ways making it most effective. Because the adults and older population have maintained much of their traditional Hmong identity, they may relate well to their Hmong counterparts in the U.S. and other third countries with this shared traditional identity. However, with the younger adults and children from Thamkrabok who have adopted much more of the Thai-ness, they may have difficulty in relating to their Hmong peers in the U.S. given their different youth cultures. For the young in Thamkrabok, aspects of their identity which fall outside of traditional Hmong culture was readily understood and accepted by all others around them, Hmong and Thai alike. However, in third countries, and particularly in situations where young people do not live near other former Thamkrabok residents, this understanding and acceptance of the Thai-ness of their third culture may prove to be more problematic. Their young age does allow them to adapt more easily, however.

For both young and old Hmong residents from Thamkrabok, language will certainly prove to be an important issue in the resettlement process, as the overwhelming majority of residents do not speak English. However, because a part of the cultural identity for all residents at Thamkrabok is that of maintaining the Hmong language, this has and will likely continue to provide a stabilizing and unifying quality to their identification as it is further modified in the new third country setting.

That being said, because of their age, the young will most likely have the least difficulty in learning the language of their new country. In fact, the 17-year-old son of one of the respondents in this project was able to speak English with near fluency after just two and half months in the U.S.; prior to resettlement, this young man spoke no English at all. The older population is less likely to be this ambitious; many of the very elderly are relocating to continue to be with their families, but have no real

motivation or need to master the language of their country of resettlement. In the course of conducting this project, many of the most elderly residents indicated they intended to spend much of their time within the Hmong communities and their individual households after resettlement, negating the need for any high level of English-language proficiency.

It will perhaps be the middle-aged residents who will experience the most difficulty in adapting. As they are older, learning a new language will prove more difficult that for the younger population. However, it is the middle-agers and parents, particularly the male heads-of-households who will be burdened with the need to obtain viable employment to support their large families. Obtaining this type of viable employment requires a basic level of English language proficiency for the most basic of positions and for the more lucrative and growth-oriented positions, a good command of English is a necessity. Thus, this group is faced with a host of challenges in providing for their large families in a new setting where they do not know the language or customs. It is anticipated that the already-established Hmong communities in third countries along with extended family members who resettled much earlier will be able to provide the essential support to allow this group to best adapt and adjust to their new setting.

Thus, it will be very important on many levels to best understand the cultural identity for Hmong residents from Thamkrabok as a means of enhancing and improving their transition process to settings in Western third cultures.

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5.2 Limitations of the project

While it did produce interesting results, as with any project, this project did have its limitations. One of the biggest limitations was that of time. Because of time constraints and timing in general, the researcher was able to conduct 15 in-depth interviews; if there had been more time the project would undoubtedly have produced even more interesting results if more residents could have been interviewed. To do this more extensive interviewing would have required a significantly longer time

frame to allow the researcher to gain the acceptance and trust of more residents. Another limitation was that research was initiated as residents were relocating and many were not available to the researcher, for either formal or informal contact.

Another limitation in conducting this research was language. While many residents did speak Thai language conversationally and even fluently in many cases, especially among younger residents, it did limit the number of respondents the researcher was able to speak with directly. In situations where a resident wished to share their experience with the researcher in the Hmong language, a Thai-speaking family member was always available and willing to translate. However, if the formal and informal field interviews could have been conducted in the Hmong language, it may have yielded deeper and broader results.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

The timing for this project is well placed it that, having yielded the anticipated result of identifying a distinct Hmong identity for residents at Wat Thamkrabok, there is the opportunity for follow-up research. After relocation to the U.S., it may be possible to use the data from this project to understand and assist in newly resettled residents' adjustment to a new situation in the U.S. It is likely that Hmong from Wat Thamkrabok will have an immigrant experience which is different from the first wave of Hmong immigrants to the U.S. in late-70s and 1980s. Hmong enclaves have already been established in the U.S., thus one could explore how this second wave of immigrants fits into these already established enclaves. How is the transition process of this second wave different? Are there similarities between the transitions of the two waves? Why or why not? Are there points of contention? There may be areas in which Hmong from Thamkrabok digress from their U.S. counterparts in that the U.S. Hmong have already adapted, adjusted, and assimilated in unique ways to their U.S. environment, while Wat Thamkrabok Hmong are confronting the same transitional issues, but it different ways. The second wave is coming from years, and in many cases an entire lifetime, of operating within the distinct situation and identity they carved out for themselves in the Thai, Thamkrabok context. In addition, from the

Thai perspective, it may also prove interesting to follow-up with Thai merchants, teachers, shopkeepers and others who were dependent in large part on the economy and contributions of Hmong residents to examine how the resettlement has affected the local economy and in what ways.

5.4 Concluding remarks

It is interesting to note how residents prefer to accept and adapt certain aspects of the majority Thai culture while resisting others which more deeply challenge the more core elements of their identity. Obvious examples would be the nearly total adoption of the inexpensive, Thai dress while the adoption of the majority religion and language is done in much smaller numbers and for specific and/or personal reasons.

In addition to exploring aspects of Hmong culture and identity in Thamkrabok, the role of the local economy and the importance of the role of residents' and their contribution to that local economy is also one of the more interesting themes and features which resulted from the project. While not particularly large in size, the Hmong in Thamkrabok have played a very important role in the local Thai community, despite their unique, stateless status and protracted refugee situation. With the resettlement of residents, many Thais working in local schools as well as the markets in the community needed to seek opportunities for work elsewhere as their previous work depended in large part on contributions from Hmong residents.

Thus, in conclusion, despite some of the limitations and challenges in conducting this particular project, it has yielded interesting and useful results. The hypothesis stated that:

> Hmong refugees from Laos living in Wat Thamkrabok have adapted and adjusted their cultural identity over time which has enabled them to preserve their identity, despite living in a challenging and unstable situation.

It appears that the hypothesis was correct, however, in a somewhat different manner than the researcher originally anticipated. It was expected that a general

cultural identity would be identified to apply to the entire population. However, after conducting the field research component of the project, it became clear that there were two distinct, and yet still quit general, identities which had developed in the community—one for the adults and older population and another for the young adults and children. While distinct from one another, these identifications are also distinct from other Hmong populations elsewhere due to the unique and complex situation in which these identities have developed. Thus, Hmong residents from Thamkrabok have adapted and adjusted their cultural identity in two distinct ways, both of which have enable them to preserve their identity and sense of belonging despite living in a challenging and unstable situation. Renard summarizes these thoughts well when he asserts that:

> *"All Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok, whatever their age and generation, have been exposed to modern urban life during their long sojourn in Thailand… This makes them different from the first groups of Hmong refugees who were resettled in the United States… [And] while camp life has been filled with challenges and pressures, many Hmong have been able not only to survive, but also to begin the process of rebuilding their lives."*[2]

And it has been through this rebuilding process that residents have distinctively adapted and adjusted their cultural identity to address and manage the challenges of their situation.

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[2] Renard, *The Hmong*, p. 24.

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APPENDIX

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Sample Questionnaire

General Background Information

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Place of birth (city and province)
4. Location of residency(ies) before Thamkrabok
5. Clan
6. Religion
7. Marital status
8. Number of wives
9. Number of children
10. Number of people in household
11. First language
12. Second language
13. Third language

Focused Questions

1. Can you tell me about the Hmong leadership in Thamkrabok?
2. Please tell me about courting and marriage.
3. Please tell me about Hmong handicrafts in Thamkrabok.
4. Please tell me about Hmong religious practices, ceremonies, and/or rituals in Thamkrabok.
5. Please describe the Hmong New Year and how it is typically celebrated in Thamkrabok.
6. Please tell me about health, health care, and hygiene in Thamkrabok.
7. Please tell me about work opportunities and the economy in Thamkrabok.

How has living in Thamkrabok affected your way of life? Do you do anything differently here than you did before? If some things are different, why?

BIOGRAPHY

Heidi Jo Bleser was born in Wisconsin, USA, in 1977. She graduated from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles with a B.A. in General Studies in 1999. Then, she joined the Southeast Asian Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University in 2003.

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