



Max Planck Institute for the Study of
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

MMG Working Paper 17-02 • ISSN 2192-2357

WEIDONG ZHANG (Winona State University, USA)
Bridging Hmong/Miao, extending *Miaojiang*:
divided space, translocal contacts, and the
imagination of Hmongland



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Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
Göttingen

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ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

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Abstract

Over the past several decades, the Hmong communities scattered around the world and their co-ethnic Miao ethnic group in China came into close contact. This paper explores the nature and dynamics of this encounter as well as the connections and ties that have been rediscovered and reestablished between the Hmong in diaspora and the Miao in China, two groups long separated by time and distance, and the impact and implications this entails. Based on three-month fieldwork in the Hmong/Miao communities across Southwest China and Southeast Asia, this paper examines the ever increasing movement of people and materials, as well as symbolic flows on the one hand, and connections and linkages between different localities on the other hand. It discusses how this new fast-changing development contributes to a new translocal imagination of Hmong community, re-territorialization of a new continuous Hmong space, a Hmongland encompassing Southwest provinces of China and northern part of Southeast Asian countries, and what it means to the Hmong / Miao people in the region. It further discusses how the emerging translocal imagination of the Hmong/Miao community will produce unique translocal subjects and how it interacts with the nation-states they belong to.

Keywords: Translocality, Hmong/Miao encounter, Hmong corridor, *Miaojiang*, Hmongland.

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Introduction

The Hmong/Miao is a people with “a history punctured by struggle and migration” (Yang, 1990, p.3). After discussing the migration history of the Miao in China over thousands of years, in his book, *Migrants of the Mountains*, Australian scholar William Geddes (1976) draws a comparison between the Miao in the East and the Jew in the West and marvels that, “the preservation by the Miao of their ethnic identity for such a long time despite their being split into many small groups surrounded by different alien peoples and scattered over a vast geographical area is an outstanding record paralleling in some ways that of the Jews but more remarkable because they lacked the unifying forces of literacy and a doctrinal religion and because the cultural features that preserved seem to be more numerous” (p. 10).

As one of the oldest aboriginal groups native to China, with a remarkable history of migration, the Miao is now the fifth largest ethnic group among 56 officially recognized nationalities (*minzu*) in China. According to Shi Chaojiang (2006), a Chinese Miao scholar, there have been five major waves of Miao migration in history. Due to wars, oppression, natural disasters, and the search for new space for survival, the Miao moved internally from the North to the South, from Central China to Southwest China. Now the majority of the Miao can be found in South Central and Southwest provinces of Hunan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan, with a total population close to 10 million, according to a 2010 national census.

The Miao is an extremely diverse group. Linguistically, it can be divided into three major dialect groups, to a large extent, mutually unintelligible, including Eastern Dialects (*Xiangxi* 湘西), Central Dialects (*Qiangdong* 黔东) and Western Dialects (*Chuanqiandian* 川黔滇). They can be further divided into 7 sub-dialect groups and 18 vernaculars (*Miaozu Jianshi*, 1985; Li, Zhang, & Zhou, 1996). However, the Hmong overseas, as Xiong and Yang (2010) state, is just a branch of the Miao, a subgroup that is the most widely dispersed among all Miao groups, with a population between 4 to 5 millions around the world, most of them still living in Southwest China. “The so-called Hmong in actuality comprise all those Miao who call themselves Hmong or Mong and whose speech is mutually intelligible to one another. In terms of linguistic affiliation, the Hmong are the Miao who speak the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (*Chuanqiandian* 川黔滇次方言) sub-dialect of the Sichuan-Guizhou-Yunnan (*Chuanqiandian* 川黔滇) dialect of the Miao language.”

As Geddes (1976) indicates, the date of the Hmong first arrival into Southeast Asia is uncertain, “most writers believe it to have been within comparatively recent

times – not much less than 200 years and probably not more than 400 years ago” (p.27). However, a Miao scholar from China, Shi Chaojiang (1995, 2006) believes that sporadic migration into mainland Southeast Asia dates back about 700 years to the early Ming dynasty, a time when the border was not fixed, under the traditional Chinese tributary system. “Until the nineteenth century, relations between China and Southeast Asia were conducted in accordance with what has come to be known as the ‘tribute system’” (Stuart-Fox, 2003, p.2). Nonetheless, in the last two hundred years, before the modern nation-states were fully established, groups of Miao moved further south, settled in the remote mountain hilltops in present-day Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma (Myanmar), in order to escape the Qing dynasty oppression and natural disasters, especially after several failed rebellions against the Manchu government in 1700s and 1800s. After the Vietnam War and the Secret War in Laos ended in 1975, some of the Hmong in Laos who supported American CIA operations during the war, out of fear of retaliation, were forced to move further away. About 130,000 Hmong crossed the Mekong River and fled Laos to refugee camps in Thailand. Later they again went on a long distance migration, this time from Asia to the West. Nowadays, they can be found in diaspora in many parts of the world, including the US, Australia, Argentina, Canada, Germany, France and French Guyana.

After living in spatially confined and geographically isolated localities for generations, many Hmong dispersed in diaspora overseas, especially in the West, started “tracing the path of the ancestors” (Yang, 2005) and family roots: to refugee camps in Thailand, to mountain villages in Laos and Vietnam, and finally to China, a land where their ancestors once lived. The Hmong in the West ignited a whole movement connecting various Hmong communities in the West, in Southeast Asia, and in Southwest China. This is a journey through space and back in time. It is where the Hmong from the diaspora and the Miao in China finally met. The Miao, once one of the subnational minority groups in China, is gradually taking on a supranational character.

What does this encounter mean to the Hmong in diaspora and the Miao in China? Schein (2004)’s transnationality study on “identity exchanges” between the Hmong and the Miao across the Pacific sheds lights on cultural production and consumption of videos and costumes as well as the movement of people, between these two co-ethnics, the Hmong in America and the Miao in China. She argues that, their transnational identification forged through cultural production and what she has called “identity exchanges” could be “for Hmong and Miao a means not only to recon-

nect but simultaneously to circumvent marginalization within their respective states.” However, I want to further explore the relationship between the Miao in China and the Hmong in diaspora, especially in Southeast Asia. With the Miao transforming from a subnational minority group in China into a supranational ethnic group, how does that change the nature of relations between Miao/ Hmong and the respective nation-states change? Is the role of nation-state fading to the background? How do the multiple displaced and multiple staged Hmong migration experiences change the dynamics of this connectivity between their ancestral land and various diasporas? Is an overarching common Hmong/Miao identity emerging and a global Hmong/Miao solidarity possible?

Following what Schein (2004) proposed as an “itinerant ethnography”— that is of “multi-sited and episodic,” and “follow cultural products and events around the global, and often to settle for their discursive traces in anecdote or written account” — I conducted a three-month fieldwork in Southwest China and Southeast Asia. Clifford (1997, p.19) criticizes anthropologists who “traditionally” sited themselves in villages, focusing on and emphasizing only the “localized” culture while failing to pay attention to the ways in which the villages were linked to the wider world beyond their borders. Therefore, an itinerant ethnography and a multi-sited approach are appropriate choices for studying what I will later discuss as translocality of Hmong/ Miao. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups together with local archival research were employed in this study.

The fieldwork started in Guizhou province, where the majority of the Miao in China live. I visited the Miao New Year celebration in Leishan, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, a place belonging to the Central Miao dialect region aiming to become the Miao cultural center in China (Figure 1). From there, I traveled west to Wenshan, Yunnan Province, an important site on the Miao migration route to Southeast Asia, located in the Western Miao dialect region. In Southeast Asia, I visited important Hmong communities in Chiang Mai and Patchaboon provinces in Northern Thailand; From Thailand, I crossed the border at Nong Khai into Laos, visited Hmong villages in Xieng Khouang, Luang Prabang, and Vientiane provinces. In Vietnam I visited the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in the capital city of Hanoi, as well as Hmong villages in Pha Long and Sapa in Lao Cai Province close to the China and Vietnam border. This research trip is a condensed journey, connecting me directly with a long (in both a spatial and temporal sense) Hmong migration history and migration experiences along the route.

Miaojiang, corridors, and Hmong mountains

The Miao have been living in Southern China, in West Hunan and the bordering area of Hunan and Guizhou since the Spring and Autumn period (774-476) and the Warring States period (475-221). Until the Yuan and Ming dynasties, this area formed a relatively stable and concentrated area inhabited by the Miao, an area surrounding the La'er Mountain, historically, called “*Miaojiang* (苗疆, or Miao territory or Miao frontier)” (Wu, 2003). In the Qing Dynasty, “*Miaojiang*” signifies two areas with a heavy Miao concentration: one West Hunan and Northeast Guizhou, the other Southeast Guizhou (Zhang & Wang 1981, 64). However, “*Miaojiang*” in a broader sense, means a large area in South and Southwest China where many minority groups live, including Miao (Li and Tan, 2009).

As early as the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1980) proposed an “ethnic corridor” concept to study ethnic formation, contacts, amalgamation, and changes among different ethnic groups by looking at historical and cultural deposits holistically and dynamically in those “historically ethnic regions.” Based on Fei’s idea, Li (1995) defines ethnic corridor as “routes that some ethnic groups follow certain natural environment, like river courses and mountain ranges for a long period of time, to move and migrate.” Along the same line, Yang Zhiqiang, a Miao anthropologist from Guizhou proposed a concept of an “ancient *Miaojiang* corridor,” an ancient trade route linking the Central Plain to Southwest borderland, to study the interaction between state power and local ethnic groups along the trade route. This trade route, from present-day Changde in Hunan and Kunming in Yunnan, was first opened in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368); it was heavily garrisoned in the Ming and Qing Dynasties which followed. Several scholars (Yang, Zhao, & Cao, 2012; Cao, 2012) link this road to nationalization of Southwest China. However, since the Miao continued migrating south from Guizhou, via Yunnan, to Southeast Asian countries, this migration route outside of China to Vietnam, northern Laos and Burma actually forms another ethnic corridor, I would call it a “Hmong corridor,” along which many Hmong communities still reside.

Over the past two decades a significant amount of study has been done on transnationality of the Hmong/Miao. However, transnationality is not really a new phenomenon for the Hmong/Miao and other ethnic groups living in the area. They have been living on both sides of the borders between China and other Southeast Asian countries for centuries, long before the national borders were demarcated and nation-states fully established near the end of the nineteenth century. The Hmong living

along the borders knew their relatives and kin were living on the other side of the border, sometimes even living in the same locality, separated by an invisible border. During times of peace, people on both sides crossed borders and visited each other regularly. During times of tension or conflict, people kept minimal ties or totally lost contact with each other — sometimes even fighting one another from different camps for different nation-states.

The situation of transnationality is however, compounded with a localized isolation in its own locality. The reality of Hmong modern geographic division goes beyond national borders, which as Lee (2015, p.21) argued, “impeded the conception of a kingdom as a contiguous, expansive territory.” She observes that, “in twentieth-century China and Southeast Asia, the Hmong lived above certain elevations, scattered between different ethnic groups that occupied the lowlands. These pockets of Hmong on mountaintops formed isolated islands amid lower-lying oceans of other ethnicities.” Mottin (1980) also finds that while Hmong live among various ethnic groups, “the different ethnic groups are to be found established at very different but precise heights, ...at the highest altitudes for the people of these regions, between 1,000 and 2,000 meters if it is possible, live the Hmong” (p.10).

Nevertheless, the area where the Hmong live stretches from Southwest China to Southeast Asian countries, and is physically located in the large geographical space what James Scott (2009) described as “Zomia,” the Southeast Asian mainland massif. Tomforde (2006) points out that, this area is perceived by Hmong as one continuous space, “the Hmong Mountains” (*Hmoob ntshuab roob*), a cognitive concept, which geographically includes the mountains of South China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma. At times it might also include other (partly lowland) regions of current Hmong settlement in, for example, Australia, France, North America and French Guyana (Tomforde, 2006, p.14-15). Tomforde further explains that the concept of the Hmong Mountains demonstrates that the Hmong spatially constitute their own life world in a manner that permits the maintenance of cultural identity in spite of their stateless, legally landless, and fluid society. In the same vein, Tapp and Cohn (2003, p.13) proposes the idea of a “Hmong world”, a culturally constituted realm of social practice. This is what Anderson (1991) defines as “imagined community,” a nation as a deterritorialized community that is socially constructed and detached from a specific physical locality.

In reality the Hmong live in a space divided by various national borders. The border between China and Vietnam and between China and Laos were not clearly demarcated, but flexible and murky, under the traditional imperial Chinese tribu-

tary system and the “*Tianxia*” (天下) system until 1885 and 1895, respectively, when China and France signed treaties for both borders. From 1886 to 1897, China and France delineated the land border between China and Vietnam, erecting over 300 boundary stone marks (Li & Qi, 2008). In a sense, rather than the Hmong crossing borders, Leepreecha (2013, p.1) argues that, “it is the political, social, and legal borders that have cut across the Hmong people and subjected them to be citizens of different modern nation-states. Even in the present time, these borders still, and continuously, play important roles that cross and divide the Hmong people into distinctive subgroups and fragments.” Shi Maoming (2004, p.79), a Miao scholar from Beijing holds a similar idea, stating “some border-crossing ethnic groups were actually made by ‘border demarcation’, and it is the state power thousands miles away that determined the fate of these groups.”

A modern nation-state keeps fixed borders to claim its sovereignty within. However, the border is a site where the state maintains power and where the international migrants challenge it. As Clifford (1994, p.304) argues, a border is a site of regulated and subversive crossing. The nation-state, as common territory and time, is traversed and, to varying degrees, subverted by Diasporic attachments (Clifford, 1994, p.307).

Border in between: open and closed

When I was traveling in Southern China and Southeast Asian countries, one of the impressions I had is that the border was not always impervious. The Hmong people easily could move back and forth across the borders, especially fifty or sixty years ago. In Xieng Khuang province, Lao, I visited my informant Yang and the family of her parents. They took me to the border gate at Nong Het, between Vietnam and Laos, an area heavily populated by the Hmong. Yang’s mother, who was born in Vietnam, told us how she and her husband packed all of their belongings, goaded their cattle along the road, and crossed the pass from Vietnam to Laos, and settled in a village near the border. They moved back to Vietnam during the war and returned to Laos after the war. However, the border pass is now much more tightly controlled, and it is hard for people to travel without a permit, let alone move a whole family.

Similarly, I encountered many stories about Hmong crossing the borders between China and Vietnam in the 1950s and the 1960s, up to the 1970s. One Hmong scholar in Wenshan told me that during the 1950s his family moved to Vietnam to live with

his relatives because of food shortages in China during the years of the Great Leap Forward and the resulting famine. He was born in Vietnam and in the 1960s his whole family returned there. During the Sino-Vietnamese War in late the 1970s, some of the Hmong fled to China as refugees, and the Chinese government set up several farms in Yunnan for them to settle — temporarily. One of these refugees is a famous Hmong singer in China, who finally got her Chinese citizenship a few years ago. One of my Hmong colleagues from Thailand told me her family story: when her great grandfather and two other brothers moved out China, one went to Vietnam and the others moved on to Laos. Fortunately they finally found their relatives in Vietnam.

In the 1970s, the borders tightened again. The Miao in China generally had little knowledge of the Hmong living in other countries, other than the Miao/ Hmong people living along the borders. There were only a few anecdotal reports and very few translated articles about the Hmong living in other Southeast Asian countries at that time. The situation didn't change until the 1980s, when China saw an influx of Hmong overseas from America, France, Australia visiting China. Father Yves Bertrais, a Roman Catholic missionary, who, together with others, invented the Hmong RPA script (Roman Popular Alphabet), went to China in 1984. He brought 5 volumes of Hmong RPA books to the Southeast Asia Minority Institute at Yunnan University. The following year Yon Yia Yang, a Hmong refugee from Laos taught RPA to scholars and selected students from around Yunnan. One of them is Zhang Yuanqi (Chij Tsab), a Hmong cultural expert from Wenshan, Yunnan whom I interviewed. According to him, after Father Yves Bertrais returned to French Guyana where he lived with a small Hmong community, he regularly mailed *Liaj Luv Chaw Tsaws*, a Hmong publication of the Hmong Community Association of the Hmong of French Guyana, to Miao friends he met in Yunnan. It is from there, the Miao in China contributed articles introducing the Miao in China to the Hmong Diasporas outside of China. They also discovered that some of the Hmong had moved out of Asia and now lived on other continents. The Hmong magazine helped bridge the gap between the Miao in China and the Hmong in Diaspora, and is perceived as “a model magazine of Hmong unity, in the age before the Internet hit the mainstream” (Ellis, 2016).

With the normalization of relationships between China and Laos, China and Vietnam in late 1980s and 1990s, the movement of people, goods, capital, and ideas crossing borders reemerged and accelerated. The integration of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries further enabled people in those countries to travel within the member states without a visa. Even on the tightly controlled border between Vietnam and China, there are many border markets where people

living on both sides of border can do business and purchase various commodities from food, domesticated animals, agricultural products, daily necessities, to cultural products, like music videos and CDs. Those people living on the border all have a special permit, with which they can cross the border without a visa or passport.

More and more Hmong people can travel across the border for various reasons easily and frequently now. Ngo (2015, 2016) describes the fast growing global Christian network among the Hmong and the missionary encounter at the Chinese and Vietnamese border, where many Hmong converts from Vietnam cross the border to attend courses organized by overseas Hmong missionaries and the Chinese underground church in various border towns in China. In northern Thailand outside of Chiang Mai, Hmong Christian churches also operate an underground network, spreading the Gospel to Hmong communities in Laos and Vietnam. A growing number of Hmong students from Laos are receiving Chinese government scholarships and studying at Chinese universities. In Guizhou Province, I met several Hmong students studying at the Guizhou Nationality University, who came from different provinces in Laos. With increased Chinese investment into Laos, there are growing opportunities to develop business relations between Laos and China. Many Chinese-owned companies prefer to hire local Hmong to expand their business. In a village in Xieng Khouang province, Laos, I met a Hmong girl whose husband is a Hmong Chinese from Wenshan, Yunnan. The husband came to Laos with a large Chinese state-owned company, fell in love with this Hmong girl, and decided to settle in Laos, in part because they can have more babies in Laos than in China.

Similarly, the cross-border marriages between Vietnam and China are also increasing, with most Hmong girls from Vietnam marrying Hmong Chinese. In Maguan County, Yunnan province, every village on the border has several Hmong Vietnamese brides. Most of them do not have legal status due to a lengthy, costly, and complicated process to get all the notarized documents from both countries to prove their marital status. However, if they don't have the necessary paperwork, they are ineligible to receive welfare and healthcare benefits in China. Some of these brides are runaway women who were married in Vietnam before. One of my informants told me that his cousin married a Hmong girl from Vietnam, who disappeared later and married another man in a neighboring county; furthermore, many people from Vietnam, many of whom are Hmong, cross the border into China and travel on to other parts of China, working as migrant workers in Chinese cities on the East coast. Some of the first to arrive become recruiters who later bring others into China.

In any case, the idea of a nation-state as one important dimension of identification still seems to be relevant. I went on a trip to Pha Long, Muong Khuong district, in Lao Cai province, Vietnam, to attend the Flower Mountain Festival, a Hmong New Year celebration, with a local Hmong delegation from one bordering Hmong village in Hong He prefecture, Yunnan in China. Pha Long is only 5 kilometers from the Chinese border. That Hmong Chinese village is also a few kilometers away from the border. Both villages occupy the same locality. However, there is a heavily guarded border pass between them. We had to get off the bus on the Chinese side and walk through the gate, and get on the bus on the Vietnamese side. After a ceremonial hand-shaking greeting, the Hmong Chinese delegates went on to the Flower Mountain Festival grounds a few kilometers away where tens of thousands of people, most of them Hmong in their festive costumes gathered to “*hauv toj*” (Figure 2). At the opening ceremony, both the Vietnamese and Chinese languages, instead of Hmong were used when people from both sides gave a speech, with an interpreter translating the speeches from one to the other, even though the majority of the audience were Hmong and spoke Hmong. I was told that because it was supposed to be an official state-to-state diplomatic event.

On our return, the Hmong Chinese delegates spontaneously first sang a popular Hmong song in unison on the bus, “*Peb Lub Npe Hu Ua Hmoob*” (Hmong is our name). Later on, they continued with a Chinese national anthem. They pointed to a village down the mountain valley on the other side of the border in China, where Tao Shaowen (*Khuat Dlob*), a Hmong hero, who died in the Sino-Vietnamese conflicts in 1979, was born. Once they crossed the border into the Chinese side, they broke into cheers. I also heard stories about the Hmong serving in different armies on different sides of the border during the Sino-Vietnam conflicts in 1970s. They would shout out to each other in Hmong on the battlefield, trying to persuade each other to give up the fighting.

The borders of a nation-state are not fading away, even though Hmong people can cross it with much more ease now. As Peter van der Veer (1995, p.11) argues in his introduction to the book, *Nation and Migration*, bordered territory symbolizes the fixity, stability, and sovereignty of the nation-state, so that the borders have become sites for international warfare, refugees, and immigration policies. Those who see themselves as a nation often seek a spatial, territorial expression of their nationhood. For the Miao in China and the Hmong in diaspora, the nation-states they belong to still provide a confined space to condition their identification.

Paj Tawg Lag: locality of departure and return

Not far from the China and Vietnam border is a site of departure and connection. *Paj Tawg Lag* is a poetic Hmong name for Wenshan, a Zhuang and Miao autonomous prefecture in Southeast Yunnan province, bordering Ha Giang province, Vietnam in the South.

Paj Tawg Lag literally means “a place where flowers bloom.” According to Hou Jian (n.d.), a local Hmong expert from Wenshan, this name is derived from an old Han Chinese name for Wenshan, which is “Kāihuà fǔ” (开化府), which he believes was pronounced incorrectly by the Hmong people as “kāihuā fǔ” (开花府), with a different tone, and *Paj Tawg Lag* is the Hmongization of this name.

According to Wang Wanrong (2010), a Miao scholar in Wenshan, the Miao in this area were migrated mostly from a bordering area between Sichun, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, between early Ming Dynasty and to late Qing Dynasty: first they came for guarding the border, later they migrated here because of economic, political and military oppression and persecution. About the mid-Qing dynasty, some Miao in Wenshan started migrating south. Another Miao scholar Hou Jian (n.d.) points out that, *Paj Tawg Lag* is an important landmark on the Hmong migration route, the last stop inside China in the collective memories of the many Hmong people in diaspora. He describes the following:

About 200 years ago, ethnic Miao leaders, Tao Xinchun and Tao Sanchun led poor Miao people in an uprising against the Qing dynasty government in the neighboring Guizhou Province. After the government crushed this rebellion, large groups of Miao people were forced to move south, from Sichuan and Guizhou provinces to Yunnan. They settled here in *Paj Tawg Lag* for some time, before moving further south, into Ha Giang and Lao Cai in northern Vietnam. Later they moved even further down, crossed the Fansipan in Sapa which is called “the Roof of Indochina,” the highest mountain in Southeast Asia, through Lai Chau and Diên Biên Phu, and finally reached Laos.

The Vietnamese studies of Hmong migration history in Vietnam confirm this migration. According to the Vietnamese studies, there were three waves of Hmong migration into Vietnam. The first wave occurred about 300 years ago, when Hmong groups from Guizhou migrated to Yunnan, then to the districts of Dong Van, Meo Vac, Ha Giang, in Vietnam. The second wave happened about 200 years ago, with a large number of Hmong people moving in two main directions: one continued to Dong Van, Bao Lac (Cao Bang), Bac Me, Xin Man and Hoang Su Phi (Ha Giang); the other to Si Ma Cai area, Muong Khuong (Lao Cai), Phong Tho (Lai Chau). A third

wave occurred about 150 years ago, the Hmong migrating to Si Ma Cai (Lao Cai), Phong Tho (Lai Chau); from here, they continued northwestward to Tua Chua, Tuan Giao (Lai Chau), Thuan Chau, Song Ma (Son La), and finally to the mountains Tay Thanh Hoa. At that time, a group of Hmong in Xieng Khuang (Laos) had migrated to the mountains of Thanh Hoa - Nghe An, and resided in Ky Son district of Nghe An (Vũ Quốc Khánh, 2004; Vương Duy Quang, 2005; Cư Hòa Văn & Hoàng Nam, 1994).

Hmong migration routes are recorded orally, and passed from generation to generation. According to Hmong custom, death for a Hmong means leaving this world to join the ranks of the ancestors to await a time to be reborn (Quincy, 1988, p.90). So at the funeral, a shaman will chant “*Qhuab Ke* or *Krua Ke*” (指路经), a “spiritual road map” that is intended to guide the deceased’s soul back, step-by-step, to the land of its ancestors, which is China. This is an important part of Hmong funeral ritual. And *Paj Tawg Lag* is often mentioned as their last stop on their migration route out of China (Yang, n.d.).

In the 1980s, there was a sudden influx of the Hmong from the West into China which peaked in 1990s. It occurred just a few years after Hmong refugees moved to America, France and other Western countries from Laos. Living in a totally foreign land among alien people, as Hmong Australian scholar Gary Yia Lee (2005b) points out, the Hmong experienced a “multi-pronged, transnational revival of their cultural heritage in response to urgent cultural needs after their post-war relocation in foreign cultures.” One bright spot on the horizon culturally is the interest shown by young Hmong adults in preserving the history of their lineages, even back to their roots in China (cf. Dunnigan & Olney, 1985, p.123).

This is the time when the Miao in China and the Hmong in diaspora encountered each other. Many Hmong intellectuals, including Dr. Yang Dao and Dr. Kou Yang, led this journey back to China. Hou Jian (n.d.) told a story about a Hmong delegation from Minnesota that visited Wenshan in 1991. The first thing they asked is where *Paj Tawg Lag* was. When the Hmong from diaspora visit China, they look for not only *Paj Tawg Lag*, but also for information and history about Chiyou, or Txiv Yawg, a legendary figure in Chinese history and alleged ancestor of the Hmong people (Zhang, n.d). He was defeated at the epic battle of Zhuolu about 5,000 years ago by armies of the Yellow emperor and Yan Emperor, the alleged ancestors of the Han people. Additionally, the delegates from Minnesota tried to find the clans they belong to.

Clan solidarity in Hmong culture is strong. As Lee (1986, p.57) describes clan names in Hmong, “when two Hmong meet for the first time, their immediate concern is to establish their clan identities so that they can relate to each other. It is easy to discover one’s clan through one’s surname. If they belong to the same clan, the next question will be which sub-clan they originate from. This is done by inquiring whether they perform similar rituals in relation to funerals, the door ceremony, and ox ceremony, and whether the graves of their dead are of the same construction. If these common factors are established, membership to a sub-clan is confirmed. A further step may be to try to determine whether the two Hmong persons descend from the same ancestor. If this were true they would belong to the same lineage and would be known as “cluster of brothers” (*ib cuab kwv tij*). Even though it’s been four or five generations since their families migrated out of China, Many Hmong visiting China can still rediscover and reconnect with their clans and reestablish kinships.”

A Hmong American I interviewed in Maguan at the Hmong Flower Festival celebration described his journey to me: “My parents’ silence regarding their lives in Laos and Thailand echoed the trauma which still afflicts their hearts. They wanted to forget the past and move on. And we did. Yet for me, I always wanted to know more. I craved an understanding of our history, where we came from, what life was like for them in Laos and in the refugee camps and my ancestors in ancestral land.”

With the newly established connection in China, the Hmong from the United States started to purchase traditional cultural products and bring them back to the US to enrich their cultural inventory. One of the important commodities is the traditional Hmong costume. Gradually, Wenshan, or *Paj Tawg Lag*, became the Hmong costume center. There are two special Hmong markets with many shops designing, making, and selling Hmong costumes. The market here actually leads the fashion trend of the Hmong costumes. Hmong costumes made and sold here can be found in the Miao communities all over China and in the Hmong communities all over the world.

At one Hmong shop, I interviewed a Hmong girl from California. She pointed the colorful Hmong costumes out to me, “I would really like to own some Hmong clothes from China. They speak to me in a powerful way. Weaving, batik work, wax dye, cross-stitching, natural color dyes, textile work ... all were amazingly mastered and passed down without written down ... colors flow naturally on the clothes that resemble the natural colors of nature... Simple and full of life on the clothes.” She thought those costumes constituted “authentic Hmong fashion,” even though the style of Hmong costumes in Wenshan changes every year.

Ambiguity of *Suav Teb*: homeland or ancestral land

Safran (1991) emphasizes the vital importance of homeland in defining one of the essential characteristics of diaspora. For him, members of a diaspora retained a collective memory of “their original homeland”; they idealized their “ancestral home,” were committed to the restoration of “the original homeland” and continued in various ways to “relate to that homeland.” However, for Hmong in diaspora, the ideas of homeland, ancestor land, or a Hmongland are contested, or as Lee (2009, p.3) points out, there is an “absence of a clearly defined territorial homeland.”

Davidson (1993, p.85) argues that the Hmong people are Chinese — not Han Chinese, but Chinese in the sense that China is their homeland. Schein (2004) also claims that, “to my knowledge, everywhere the Hmong reside they refer to China as homeland.” However, from my fieldwork, although almost all of them acknowledged China as their ancestral land, not necessarily all of them see China as their homeland. The degree of attachment of Hmong from diaspora to the land and people varies. Lee (2015) points out, “there is no consensus about where the homeland is located, and at the same time, “lately some Hmong Americans, while continuing to recognize their origins in China, have been promoting Laos as the homeland.” It is worth exploring the notions of homeland and ancestral land in diaspora studies, especially taking into account of the history of displacement and the migration experience of a subnational minority group, their attachment to the land, its people, and the nation-state of origin as a whole.

Quite often, the Hmong are perceived as a stateless nation. For example, Davidson (1993, p.174) identifies four themes that are apparent in Hmong history. One of them is stateless, alongside with migration, ethnic identity, and survival. His argument is that the Hmong in America or their ancestors have lived in four countries during the past several hundred years: China, Laos, Thailand, and the United States. In each of these countries the Hmong have been a minority, a marginal people. That makes them stateless. In the same vein, Lee (1986, p.55) put a long tradition of being stateless as one of the Hmong ways of life which distinguishes the Hmong from others. However, being a minority in a society does not necessarily make a group stateless: Much depends on the political power they exercise and the political rights they enjoy. For example, the Manchu was the minority group who ruled China during the Qing dynasty; nevertheless, they were certainly not stateless. According to the preamble of the constitution of the People’s Republic of China, “The People’s Republic of China is a unitary multi-national state built up jointly by the people of all its nationali-

ties. Socialist relations of equality, unity and mutual assistance have been established among them and will continue to be strengthened.” China, therefore, should not be understood as a country solely of Han Chinese, so none nationality or *minzu* in China, majority or minority, should be considered as stateless.

There exists a dilemma in the relationship between the Hmong in diaspora and China as a state. The emotion of this dilemma was captured when I interviewed a Hmong American visiting Leishan, China from California. “We are not recognized in China as Oversea Chinese, even though we consider this place as our homeland. This is the place where our ancestors lived. You see, for Han Chinese, wherever they were born, in Southeast Asia, in Europe, or in America, they can still be considered as ‘Overseas Chinese’. But what about us?”

I brought this question to a Hmong Official working at a local All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, a semi-government organization that “safeguards the lawful rights and interests of returned Overseas Chinese, their relatives and Chinese living abroad, and shows concern and care for the just rights and interests of Chinese living overseas.” I was told that this issue was much more complicated than it seems. Recognize Overseas Chinese is a thorny issue that affects China’s relations with the host countries. China signed agreements and renounced dual nationality and multiple citizenships for overseas Chinese in 1950s. During the Sino-Vietnamese conflicts in 1970s and 1980s, a certain amount of Hmong fled to China from Vietnam as refugees. They stayed in refugee camps in Yunnan, but only very few of them finally got their Chinese citizenship. So what they are doing now is to welcome any Hmong from abroad, as long as they come and seek help. Some scholars propose a concept of “ethnic minority overseas Chinese”, to determine their overseas Chinese status according to their “records, origins, objective identification, time of migration, and subjective identification,” however, “this identification should be based upon their acknowledgements of political, national and cultural identification with the countries they belong to first” (Li 2003, 6).

Tu (1994) refutes the essentialistic Chineseness that “defining a Chinese as belonging to the Han race, being born in China proper, speaking Mandarin, and observing the ‘patriotic’ code of ethics may seem innocuous, but this oversimplified conception conceals as much as it reveals. Indeed, it can easily produce unintended and unfortunate consequences” (p. vii). What complicates the whole idea of China being the homeland is how China is referred to and perceived by the Hmong overseas. On the one hand, in Hmong language, China is referred as “*Suav Teb*”, literally means the land of “*Suav*”, Han Chinese. Researches found that “*Suav*” is a term derived from

“Xia dynasty.” So for Hmong/Miao, the *Suav* is the other, “*Suav Teb*” is the land of the other. To some extent, the Hmong is self-distancing them from that land. On the other hand, according to Tapp (2003, p.14), the Hmong in Thailand were in effect still imaginary habitants of a ritual and political world their grandparents or great-grandparents had left decades previously. They persist in referring to their motherland of China as the realm of the ‘great dynasties’ (*Tuam Tshoj*, 大朝), rather than those of the ‘lesser dynasties’ (*Xov Tshoj*, 小朝), the lands outside China particularly in Southeast Asia. He argues that, “it seems to me that it must have been their strong sense of still belonging to a far wider, Chinese community...”

Yang (2003, p.295) acknowledges the attachment of the Hmong to China, “although the Hmong in America came from Laos, and knew very little about China, they continue to be very attached to China. Many Hmong Americans continue to guide the souls of their loved ones to return to China, the land of their ancestors... Many Hmong individuals have gone to study and visit China.” Vang (2010, p.6) argues that people of Hmong ethnicity today define their homeland differently, “For some of the elders, the true homeland is the People’s Republic of China, the country where their ancestors originally migrated. For the adult emigrants, that place is Laos. But for immigrant children, home may simply be Detroit, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, or Providence. To still others who were born and spent their childhood in refugee camps, home may mean Thailand.” Because of the unique, multi-staged migration experience of Hmong people, Schein (2004) suggests a double homeland in both Laos and China. The disparity and ambiguity of Hmong homeland and ancestor land illustrates the conflicting condition of a minority group, being minority both in homeland and hostland, and being multiply displaced over time. Above and beyond homeland and ancestor land, they long for a Hmongland, or a Hmong Tedchaws, a space where Hmong live freely and a place they call home.

Khek Noi: Hmollywood and transnational production of Hmong movies

Khek Noi is a village and *tambon* (subdistrict) of Khao Kho District, in Phetchabun Province, Northern Thailand, with a population over 11,000 residents. Between 1965-1984, this remote mountainous area was the battlefield of the Thai Communist Party and the Royal Thai Army. Now, it is home to the largest Hmong community

in Thailand and a “Hmong Hollywood”, or “Hmollywood” (Baird 2015, p.10), the Hmong movie/ video production hub of the world.

I was introduced to a Hmong movie production team in Khek Noi by a Hmong Chinese woman living in Wenshan, China, who owns a Hmong video and costume shop, and traveled there two years ago.

This mountainous village is nestled in the rolling hills of Northern Thailand. Today it is connected to the outside world by highway 12, just in front of the village. When I got off the bus on the main road that afternoon, I was picked up by one of the film crewmembers at the village gate (Figure 3). He drove me through its labyrinth of narrow and bustling streets, until we came to a modest one-story brick house on the edge of the village facing the rugged mountains and valleys. There I met Xab Thoj, a multitalented Hmong super-star: an actor, singer, as well as movie producer and editor, scriptwriter and director. He introduced me to his film crew, most of whom eat, work, and live together in his house in a collective way like a family; many are in fact his extended family members.

Xab Thoj used to be a farmer, as were most of his crewmembers and moviemakers based in this village. He has been in the movie industry for about 18 years and has made more than 20 Hmong movies.

At that time of the year (January), his was the only film production team working in the village (figure 4). I was told that production picks up later and that during the busiest season, more than 10 film production teams could work in the villages at the same time.

Behind all the Hmong movies produced here, there is a streamlined transnational network that links the production, distribution, and consumption of Hmong movies throughout the Hmong communities around the world. Almost all the Hmong movies are funded (or in their own words, “sponsored”) by Hmong Americans, who usually own video shops or a video distribution system in Hmong American communities. Once funding is secured, they fly to Thailand, pick up stories, meet with potential producers, and assemble a production team here in Khek Noi with talents from Thailand and Laos. When the movie is done, the production team will send a master copy to the sponsor back in the US who then mass-produces the movie in videotape and DVD, distributing them to vendors in many Hmong communities around the country. Two annual sales seasons are very important for Hmong movies in the US market: One is around the July 4th celebration; the other is Hmong New Year celebration in November and December. The movie production teams are very conscious about the timeline for releasing each new Hmong movie.

Khek Noi has emerged as a “Hmong Hollywood”, because of its relative low cost of production, easy access to the talents who are mostly from Thailand and Laos. Also the natural settings are beautiful and fit to make movies that are set in Asia. Another important reason is that the Hmong enjoy comparatively more freedom here in making their own movies, especially those movies about the Hmong experiences during the time of the “Secret Wars in Laos”.

The budget for each movie varies, ranging from \$20,000 to \$40,000 for a comedy or drama, to \$60,000 or more for a war movie. This all depends not only on the cost, but also expected sales in the cultural market in the U.S. The last few years witnessed a gradual decline in Hmong movie sales because of easy access to entertainments on the Internet, which impacts the Hmong movie industry in general, and Hmong movie production in Khek Noi in particular.

I interviewed a Hmong American movie sponsor, Mr. Vue from Fresno, California, who also maintains a house in the village. He came back to Thailand to make movie for the first time in 1999, after working at a local TV station in California for a few years. He first went to the Hmong community of Tham Krabok temple in Saraburi Province. It took him about one month to film a story, and two months for editing. It turned out to be a success and people liked it. He made his way to the village the year after, and made more movies. However, right now he temporarily quit making movies, because of what he described as “a sluggish Hmong movie market.” In the past, one movie can be sold and made into 3,000 to 4,000 DVD copies selling for \$5 a piece. Now that the Hmong movie market is shrinking, sales have dropped from one-third to one-half, to 2,000 to 3,000. Many Hmong movie investors can barely break even and can no longer afford to invest in movies. “The internet kills Hmong movies,” he sighed, “and the Hmong movies are not well protected from copyright infringement in the market. Some people just purchase a DVD and make copies themselves for sale.”

However, making Hmong movies is not just about business. Like Mr. Vue said, the Hmong movie is the best media for Hmong to learn the Hmong language and culture through Hmong stories. Through making movies, he wants to “make our people be aware of Hmong culture and see how our people live our lives. Hopefully that will bring them back to Hmong traditional culture.” Xab Thoj also sees his movie making as a way to tell Hmong stories to the Hmong people. Throughout the whole process of Hmong movie-making, there is a well-developed system of flow of capital, people, ideas and cultural products. They are widely distributed and consumed by the Hmong communities around the world. On my research trip, I found these mov-

ies in a video shop in Wenshan, at vendor stands at border markets between China and Vietnam and in small video shops along the dirt road in the villages in Thailand and Laos (figure 5), I also saw them being sold at the Hmong New Year celebration in La Crosse, Wisconsin. A translocal Hmong community detached from a physical space is imagined, according to Anderson's description (1991), imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group through consuming Hmong movies and other cultural products.

Negotiating Hmong/Miao identity

As one of the sub-group of what we called the Miao in China, the Hmong in diaspora came into contact with the Miao in China in 1980s. They discovered that some Miao groups didn't speak the same language as they do, and they celebrated various cultures, and customs that differ greatly with theirs. They started to question the validity of the classification of the Miao in China (Lee, 2005a). While some among the Miao people in China call themselves Hmong in the western dialect region, others identify themselves as Hmub, Xong(Qo-Xiong), and A-Hmao in other dialects. Some see the name "Miao" as a lumping term, "Concrete evidence has yet to establish a common origin, history and culture of all four groups under the term, Miao" (Yang, 2008), and "that the earliest embryonic form of Miao (Miao nationality) as a modern ethnic group was first imagined and constructed by the 'Other'" (Yang, 2009, p.22). Scholars like Lemoine (2005, p.1) even calls for rejection of this name, Miao, "the (H)mong of China have been trapped into the Miao nationality in the wake of the communist takeover in 1949." As a matter of fact, although largely mutually unintelligible, according to Shi (2004, p.91), so called cognates, words that have a common etymological origin, account for about 30 to 40%, among all of the Miao dialects.

Naming and classification play an important role in the identity and identification of any ethnic group. For the name of Miao, as Tapp (2004), Yang (2007) and others note is something "Hmong outside China fiercely resent and have yet to come to terms with", because in Southeast Asia, they were once referred as "Meo", a disparaging term that relates to animals (Davidson, 1993, p.11). They see "Miao" and "Meo" as similar terms so they repudiate the Miao designation as well. Enwall (1992) claims that Miao is a derogatory term and many non-Chinese Hmong would like the term Hmong used for those living in China and outside of China. He did however,

mention that the Miao in China have voiced no concern for changing their self-designation.

The Hmong outside of China prefer “Hmong”, an autonym that they use to identify themselves. Some, including Dr. Yang Dao, who is the first Hmong from Southeast Asia to hold a doctorate degree, believe Hmong means “freeman” (Garrett, 1974; Mottin, 1980; Chan, 1994). Later Dr. Yang Dao revised it as defining Hmong as “human being” (Yang and Blake, 1993). Heimbach (1969) believes the word Hmong does not have any specific meaning at all. As Schein (1986) explains, the term Miao “was considered the only appropriate term to embrace the various subgroups that had been found to be linguistically similar enough to be considered co ethnics, thus, unlike any previous era in Chinese history, the name ‘Miao’ is now widely used for self identification by members of that nationality and there is significant evidence that negative connotations have indeed been dispelled” (p. 77).

Zhang Xiao (2005), a Miao scholar from Guizhou, China, discusses the name Miao. According to phonologists, Miao is a Han record of the same Miao autonym. Many Miao scholars in China support this view. According to a Hmong American researcher, Tzexa Lee, who was trained in anthropology and linguistics, and has been working on Miao/Hmong language proto-reconstruction for many years. He found that Hmong and Miao are actually the same word with different pronunciations. Based on his proto-reconstruction, Miao comes from *Hmiau*. The “u” sound has a tendency of being assimilated by a nasal sound (in linguistic theory). The Han can only say *Miau*, and “h” was dropped, because they do not have the aspirated nasal. Neither does an English speaking person. That’s why some Americans or westerners may say “hoh-Monng” for Hmong. He points out how the name *Hmiau* changes over the time:

Hmiau —» Miau (Han Chinese) —» Meo (Vietnamese and Lao);
 Hmiau —» Hmau (Hua Miao) —» Hmu (Qiandongnan Miao) —» Hmon
 (Western Miao) —» Mon (US Green Hmong);
 Hmiau —» Hiau —» Xiong (Xiangxi Miao)

Now the Hmong in diaspora and the Miao from China are engaging in what Schein (2004) called “identity exchange” and “identity production”. She observes that, “the Hmong visitors usually identify themselves as Miao with their hosts. When Miao from China visit the Hmong in America, they also identify themselves as Hmong” (Schein 1998). The general consensus is that Hmong is generally used in English for

Miao and Miao is used in Chinese for Hmong in diaspora. Sometimes these two names co-exist. I once saw a restaurant in Xijiang, Qiandongnan, Guizhou, with both Miao in Chinese and Hmong in English in its name (Figure 6). Furthermore, according to Julian (2003), Schein (2002, 2004) and Lee (1996), the Hmong diaspora in the West tends to reconstruct its identity by erasing cultural and linguistic differences between them and all the Miao in China. As Barth (1969) states, what is more critical is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses”(p.15). This is a process of identity negotiation.

Furthermore, the Hmong /Miao people are actively engaged in defining their own identity, Hmong-ness, or Miao-ness, the meaning of being a Hmong or a Miao. *Peb Lub Npe Hu Ua Hmoob* (Our Name is Hmong), a song written and composed by two Miao scholars in Wenshan, became very popular not just in the Miao communities in China, but in diaspora Hmong communities as well. It touches the heart of every Miao/ Hmong.

Peb Lub Npe Hu Ua Hmoob (Our Name is Hmong)

Vim li cas peb yuav hais peb suab lus? (Why do we use our own language?)

Vim li cas peb yuav hnav peb zam tsoos? (Why do we wear our traditional clothing?)

Tsis vim tsav niaj tus dab tsi, (If you ask for the reason,)

Tsuas vim peb lub npe hu ua Hmoob. (It is because our name is Hmong.)

Vim li cas peb yuav kawm peb ntaub ntawv? (Why do we learn our own language?)

Vim li cas peb yuav nthuav peb txuj ci? (Why do we promote our own culture?)

Tsis vim tsav niaj tus dab tsi, (If you ask for the reason,)

Tsuas vim peb lub npe hu ua Hmoob. (It is because our name is Hmong.)

Vim li cas peb yuav taug peb kab ke? (Why must we follow our cultural heritage?)

Vim li cas peb yuav ua peb kos tshoob? (Why must we practice our wedding traditions?)

Tsis vim tsav niaj tus dab tsi, (If you ask for the reason,)

Tsuas vim peb lub npe hu ua Hmoob. (It is because our name is Hmong.)

Peb muaj peb li ntshav, (We have our own blood,)

Peb muaj peb li nqaij, (We have our own flesh,)

Peb muaj peb li siab, (We have our own hearts,)

Peb muaj peb li hmoov, (We have our own fate,)
Peb yog saum ntiaj teb no ib haiv neeg, (We are a people on earth,)
Luag muaj pes tsawg xyoo yus los muaj pes tsawg xyoo. (With a history as long as others.)

Peb nquag ua qoob loo, (We are hardworking agriculturalists,)
Peb li tswv yim coob, (We have lots of ideas,)
Peb muaj kev txawj ntse, (We have own knowledge,)
Peb li siab ntsws zoo, (We are kindhearted,)
Peb poj Hmoob txawm nyob rau qab ntuj khwb, (We Hmong live all over the world,)
Sab hnub tuaj nyob txog sab hnub poob. (From the East to the West.)

Peb tsis ntshai leej twg, (We are not afraid of anyone,)
Peb tsis ua qhev ntxoog, (We don't want to be slaves,)
Peb tsis khib leej twg, (We are not envious of others,)
Peb tsis txeeb teev ntoo, (We don't fight to become officials.)
Peb nrog txhua yam haiv neeg ntaus phooj ywg, (We make friends with all people,)
Tso dag zog muab peb neej nyoog txhim kho zoo. (We work hard to improve our lives.)

Txawm tias mus txog lub teb chaws twg peb yog Hmoob, (No matter how much we have traveled, we are Hmong,)
Txawm tias dhau lawm pes tsawg niaj xyoos peb yog Hmoob, (No matter how many years have passed, we are Hmong,)
Peb tsis txawj hnov qab peb lub npe --- (We will not forget our own name---)
Hmoob! Hmoob!! Hmoob!!! (Hmong! Hmong!! Hmong!!!)

This song, like a statement of an identity, proclaims to all Miao/ Hmong members, as well as to the world: We have our own language, culture and customs, as well as long history that parallels theirs; We went through many adversaries, but still are resilient, brave and hardworking; We love freedom and peace; We are Miao/Hmong. One of the authors of this song, Zhang Yuanqi, told me he wrote the lyrics of this song in Hmong as a poem in 1987 which was read at a New Year celebration broadcast on Wenshan radio. Tao Yonghua, a Hmong musician, composed the music for it the following year. Since its debut at the 1988 New Year Celebration, it became so popular that it was performed at many important Hmong / Miao events, from the Western

Miao dialect area, to Central and East Miao dialect areas where the Miao there don't identify themselves as "Hmong". Some of the ethnic minority groups, Like Tujia ethnic group, love this song so much that they even replace the name of Hmong with their name, and sing at their cultural events. The song is also well-liked by Hmong communities in diaspora. Some call this song the "Hmong national anthem."

Conclusion: towards a translocal Hmong/Miao and re-territorialized Hmongland?

After generations of separation and moving apart, the Hmong in diaspora and their co-ethnic, the Miao in China rediscovered and reunited with each other. In a way these two groups are gradually converging. As Lee (2005b) notices, a more acute level of shared national consciousness has been developing. A globalized identity has been forged based on the bringing together, and the adoption, of Hmong cultural items and the practices of the various countries of residence. That speaks to what Appadurai (1991) terms as global ethnoscape, "which can no longer be easily localized but instead has become increasingly connected to a global distribution of persons, groups, relations and imaginations characterized by motion and interactivity" (p.192).

While people celebrate transnationality of Hmong/ Miao, I would argue that transnationality is not a new phenomenon; rather, translocality is, because the Hmong people have been living across the national borders in different countries and maintaining some contacts for a long time. Nevertheless, they lived in a particular isolated bounded locality. Sometimes this locality may be transnational, an area lying cross the border. In the last few decades, however, the Hmong/ Miao people started to look beyond the imminent vicinity and the local territorialized community, and became translocal, because of the intensified connectivity that is happening in the Hmong / Miao communities around the world.

Transnationality or transnationalism and translocality are closely related. Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013) traces the relationship between transnationalism and translocality by reviewing recent research on translocality, finding that translocality "serves to overcome some of the conceptual weaknesses of the former," including its limited focus on the nation-state. Bromber (2013, p.69) elaborates that translocality "is more encompassing than transnationalism because it transcends the nation-state

as analytical framework, and thus, accounts for an historical depth.” She argues that translocality means spatial mobility, whereas transnationalism means the physical, political, social and cultural spaces and localities that are shaped by it.

Translocality starts first at the local, rather than at the national level. It rises above and goes beyond the local. Translocality implies a transcendence of local boundedness of a territorialized community, while at the same time emphasizing the locality where the connectedness originates. In a sense, transnationality can be seen as just one layer of this big picture of translocality. Translocality enables us to see the mobility, connectivity, and interconnectedness from the below, beyond the local, but not limited to the nation-state level. For this Hmong/Miao case, it is not only between the Hmong in diaspora and the Miao in China, but also among various sub-groups of Miao in China, and among various sub-groups in Hmong in different countries. In his study of Miao/Hmong transnationalism, Miao scholar Shi Maoming (2004, p.117) observes migration of the Miao. Historically the Miao moved from the geographical center of China to its periphery, first to Southwest China, then from Guizhou to Yunnan. From Yunnan, some of them moved out of China, to Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma, and finally to other parts of the world. This engendered a marginalization not only in a geographical sense, but also in terms of their culture and economic life. Now, a reverse trend is emerging as more Hmong overseas connect with the Miao in China in solidarity and unity, while at the same time traveling back to China.

Aparurai (1996) identifies five dimensions of global “scapes” flowing across cultural boundaries, including ethnoscaples, financaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, and ideoscaples. These “are the building blocks of...imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (p. 329). With the growing movement of people, as well as material and symbolic flows, a translocal imagination of Hmong community with a sense of interconnected, multi-layered, multidimensional Hmong/Miao community is emerging. It re-territorializes a Hmong space which reintegrates the traditionally fragmented Hmong communities dispersed in inaccessible mountainous locations in separated nation-states into a continuous space of a Hmong *Tebchaws*, a Hmongland, or an extended and nonpolitical new *Miaojiang*. It constitutes a physical Hmong corridor which extended the traditional Miao territory in China all the ways to northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma, with its nodal points, like *Paaj Tawg Laag*, Sapa, Khek Noi, and Vientiane, from southwest China to Southeast Asia. At the same time, with the increasing movement of goods, people, capi-

tal, and ideas and cultural symbols along this new corridor, and re-establishment of the long lost and forgotten Miao/Hmong kinship system, re-territorialization of an imagined translocal Miao/Hmong community becomes possible. This also produces new translocal Hmong subjectivity with a cultural self-consciousness of who they are and the attachments to the land they belong.

There are still obstacles in the process. One of them is lack of a unified Hmong/Miao writing system. There are several Miao writing systems in China, including four Latin based writing systems invented in the 1950s, for Eastern, Central, Western dialects, and Northeast Yunnan (*Diandongbei*) respectively, as well as a century-old script created by Christian Methodist missionary, Sam Pollard, for use with A-Hmao. Outside of China, there are several scripts as well, including the most widely used RPA, as well as various Hmong scripts in Vietnam, Laos (Pahawh Hmong Alphabet) and Thailand. The question then arises as to how the Hmong and Miao from different parts of the world can communicate in their own language? Especially how can the Miao speaking the same Hmong dialect communicate with each other in the same writing system? Is it possible to unify the writing systems first? A unified writing system would enable the Hmong from around the world meet on common Hmong/Miao websites, such as tojsiab.com, based in Thailand, or 3-hmong.com based in China, or hmongtvnetwork.com based in St Paul, Minnesota.

On the other hand, the concept of the nation-state and its territory is far from obsolete. It provides another space for people to negotiate. As Chiyou, or *Txiv Yawg* in Hmong, the legendary ancestral leader of the Hmong/Miao, is now revered alongside with Yellow emperor and Yan emperor as three common ancestors of Chinese nation. How that and an extended *Miaojing* will change the dynamics of translocal Hmong / Miao identification with the land and the people of China as well as with other nation-states in the region remains to be seen.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted during my sabbatical year 2014-2015 with the support from the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany, where I was a research fellow. I want to express my deep sense of gratitude to its director, Prof. Dr. Peter van der Veer, as well as many colleagues there in Göttingen, Kanlaya Chularattakorn, Jie Kang, Tam Ngo, Thi Vuong, and Jili Zhu for this support. I am also indebted to many scholars and officials as well as so many Hmong/Miao friends I met and interviewed during my research trip that I am not able to name them all here: In China, Shi Maoming in Beijing, Zhang Xiao, Zhang Hanmei, Yang Yaokui in Guizhou, Xiong Yuyou and Gu Wenfeng in Kunming, Wang Wanrong, Yang Chaoshan, Zhang Yuanqi, Hou Jian, Tao Yonghua, Yang Chaosheng in Wenshan; In Thailand, Prasith Leepreecha and Rainrai Yang in Chiang Mai, Prayath Nanthasin in Bangkok, Xab Thoj in Khek Noi; Alounyang Yongye and Kong Thor in Vientiane, Laos; Nguyen Thi Thu in Vietnam, as well as Tzexa Lee in Fresno, CA and Xai S. Lor in St Paul, MN; I also want to thank Erik Floan and Lilian Ramos for their help with edits.



Figure 1: Xijiang Miao Villiage, in Guizhou

Figure 2: The Flower Mountain Festival, Pha Long, Vietnam



Figure 3: Khek Noi, a village in Phetchabun Province, Northern Thailand, Hmong movie production hub of the world

Figure 4: Xa Toj and his Hmong movie production team



Figure 5: A roadside video shop selling Hmong movies, in Xieng Khouang Province, Laos

Figure 6: A Hmong Restaurant in Xijiang, which belongs to the Central Miao dialect

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