



Frontiers of Social Change: Migration, Mobility and World-Making

A joint workshop between
The Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
and
Brigham Young University

July 26, 2016

9:00 - 9:10	Introduction, Welcome	
9:10 AM	Dr. Tam Ngo (Max Planck Institute)	<i>Remittance of Faith and Modernity</i>
9:50 AM	Dr. Jonathan DeVore (Yale University)	<i>Between Shame and a Shared World: Hierarchy, Heterodoxy, and Intersubjectivity in the Taste of Beans and Rice</i>
10:30 AM	Coffee Break (15 min)	
10:45 AM	Kathryn Erickson (Brigham Young University)	<i>It Takes an Association to Raise a Child: The Evolution of Hmong Problem Solving and Political Organization in France</i>
11:10 AM	Austin Gillett (Brigham Young University)	<i>Association-building and the Quest for Human Rights among Hmong Refugees in France</i>
11:35 AM	Madison Harmer (Brigham Young University)	<i>How Many Spirits Do People Have?: The Ontology of Hmong Personhood and the Metaphysics of Healing</i>
12:00 PM	Telisha Pantelakis (Brigham Young University)	<i>Health Syncretism Taking its Course: Intergenerational Differences in Health Beliefs and Practices among Hmong in France</i>
12:25 PM	Lunch	
1:40 PM	Janelle Clark (Brigham Young University)	<i>Instrumental Spirituality: On the Pragmatics of Ritual Qeej Playing</i>
2:05 PM	Madeline Young (Brigham Young University)	<i>Repertoires of Communication: How Hmong Speak through Instruments</i>
2:30 PM	Venice Jardine (Brigham Young University)	<i>To Bring the Old and Lead the Young: Intergenerational Differences in Hmong Perspectives on the Life Course</i>
2:55 PM	Coffee Break	
3:10 PM	Prof. Peter van der Veer (Director, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen) and Prof. Wu Da (Minzu University)	<i>Social Hierarchy among the Yi</i>
4:00 PM	End of Day 1	

July 27, 2016

9:00 AM	Introduction, Welcome	
9:10 AM	Dr. Jacob Hickman (Brigham Young University)	<i>The Making of a Hmong Millennium: Economies of Recognition in a Diasporic Religious Community</i>
9:50 AM	Eulalia Larsen (Brigham Young University)	<i>Reproduction or Resistance? Complicating the Agency of Hmong Women in France</i>
10:15 AM	Kara Manzanares (Brigham Young University)	<i>When is it Right to Beat Your Wife?: Moral Personhood across Generations of Hmong in France</i>
10:40 AM	Coffee Break	
10:55 AM	Jacob Peters (Brigham Young University)	<i>What's in a Name Change?: The Significance of Naming Conventions at the Conjunction of Social Change among Hmong in France</i>
11:20 AM	Kara Woods (Brigham Young University)	<i>In-Laws, Attraction, and Ethnicity: Understanding Marital Decision-Making in the Younger Generation of Hmong Women in France</i>
11:45 AM	Dr. Zhu Jili (Max Planck Institute and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences)	<i>A Comparison of Hmong and A Hmao: The study of the Western Miao of China</i>
12:25 PM	Lunch	
1:30 PM	End of Day 2	

Titles and Abstracts

Senior Scholar Presentations (in order of presentation):

Dr. Tam Ngo (Max Planck Institute)

Remittance of Faith and Modernity

Dr. Jonathan DeVore (Yale University)

Between Shame and a Shared World: Hierarchy, Heterodoxy, and Intersubjectivity in the Taste of Beans and Rice

Prof. Peter van der Veer (Director, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen) and Prof. Wu Da (Minzu University)

Social Hierarchy among the Yi

Dr. Jacob Hickman (Brigham Young University)

The Making of a Hmong Millennium: Economies of Recognition in a Diasporic Religious Community

Dr. Zhu Jili (Max Planck Institute and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences)

A Comparison of Hmong and A Hmao: The study of the Western Miao of China

Brigham Young University Ethnographic Field School Projects (in order of presentation):

Kathryn Erickson

It Takes an Association to Raise a Child: The Evolution of Hmong Problem Solving and Political Organization in France

Hmong associations throughout France and the larger Hmong Associations of France have allowed for Hmong to adapt to French society without assimilating, despite the French policies regarding laïcité. Hmong are integrated with the French culture and customs as demonstrated by their jobs, the languages they use, education, the structure of their homes and home life, and their legal and patriotic allegiance. However, they still practice Hmong rituals and culture albeit in a slightly altered form, due to their involvement with life in France. (Shaman rituals held on weekends, funeral attendance planned around work schedules, etc.) One important aspect of Hmong life which weaves itself into every ritual and pattern is the Hmong principle of *sib pab*, or the reciprocal action of helping each other. This moral obligation has helped Hmong to establish a network throughout France where

Hmong can help each other with anything from ritual practices to finding a good lawyer. *Sib pab* has allowed Hmong to integrate with the French without losing what makes them Hmong.

Austin Gillett

Association-building and the Quest for Human Rights among Hmong Refugees in France

Since WWII, rights of individuals have often been favored at the expense of group rights. Under the assumption that group rights are subsumed under individual rights (and weary of the dangers inherent in treating minorities as members of groups rather than individuals), the United Nations “deleted all references to the rights of ethnic and national minorities in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Kymlicka 1995, 3). Scholars have argued that to favor rights of individuals over rights of ethnic or national groups is to misunderstand the realities of interaction between church and state in France. I have found that Hmong in Aubigny-sur-Nere have learned to maximize their (individual and group) political clout as members of (around 70) Hmong political associations. By levying their group identity, they have satisfied French favoritism of individual rights while not neglecting their group rights. I argue that Hmong involvement in state politics has been most productive—producing maximum individual and group rights—as state politics mirrors Hmong social structure and historic modes of engagement with leadership. Further, this method of mirroring minority social structure suggests that individual rights and group rights are most effectively balanced in tandem: that maximizing group membership might be the most effective way to guarantee individual rights.

Madison Harmer

How Many Spirits Do People Have?: The Ontology of Hmong Personhood and the Metaphysics of Healing

While many researchers of medical anthropology have claimed that Hmong ontology is not dualistic, no one has set forth an alternative model that refutes dualism and describes Hmong ontology as it truly is. I examine Hmong medical practices in France and explanations of these practices to argue that Hmong ontology is not dualistic, but monistic. I present a model of Hmong ontology that incorporates the spirit as a natural part of the body, the way the heart or another organ is part of the body, and puts spirits in the same realm of existence as physical bodies. Drawing on Descola’s theory of nonwestern concepts of the continuity of substance, I claim that while the monistic nature of Hmong ontology encourages Hmong to seek shamanic intervention for certain illnesses, it does not present a fundamental obstacle to them accepting biomedical treatment. I argue that Hmong ontology is actually predisposed to accept biomedicine because it does not draw a theoretical line between different types of remedies and is open to accepting any treatment that works.

Telisha Pantelakis

Health Syncretism Taking its Course: Intergenerational Differences in Health Beliefs and Practices among Hmong in France

Since coming to France in the late 1970s, Hmong immigrants have integrated into their various communities, effectively stitching together their traditional beliefs with those of their newfound country. Some literature claims that this is acculturation, and is responsible for “restructuring” healthcare practice and beliefs among Hmong immigrants. Another claim is that traditional practices, such as shamanism, will ultimately be lost due to the lack of interest and communication of the younger generation with the older generation (Franzen-Castle & Smith, 2013). I argue that syncretism, not acculturation, is a more appropriate theory to describe the interaction between the generations regarding health beliefs and practices in France. I also claim that the different levels of syncretism found in both generations is not an illustration of eventual culture loss. It is rather an example of Hmong Life Course, which posits that individuals learn explicit cultural information later in their lives. Traditional Hmong healing practices, therefore, will not be lost over the course of time but simply passed on when the younger generation comes of age.

Janelle Clark

Instrumental Spirituality: On the Pragmatics of Ritual Qeej Playing

Living among the Hmong, it is quickly noticed the quiet prominence of the Hmong qeej. On the walls hang a qeej for show, or key chains from the rear view mirror jingle as a car drives through town. Why is the qeej so important to Hmong people? In this article, I argue the necessity of the qeej as the main form of communication with the spirits that is capable of leading them safely to the spirit kingdom once passed on from this life. Drawing upon interviews and observations of qeej masters, it is clear that the qeej is the most important aspect of funerals and has quickly become an important aspect of Hmong culture. To better explain, I will describe the process of qeej playing as well as the meaning behind each move performed to assist the spirit’s journey.

Madeline Young

Repertoires of Communication: How Hmong Speak through Instruments

Music has communicative properties throughout the world. Instrumental music in the West often paints a picture in one’s mind, and each listener can take away something different from what is heard. Hmong traditional instrumental music, like most other music, has communicative abilities, but is very different in the way it relays meaning. Hmong have the ability to communicate actual words through their instruments and others can understand what they are saying. The Hmong language is tonal, an aiding factor in translating words

into musical notes, which allows communication of words through music to become a reality. I aim to explain how Hmong are able to understand what words are being said through instrumental music. I also explore the ability of Hmong to say whatever words they desire or if they are constrained to a specific set of words.

Venice Jardine

To Bring the Old and Lead the Young: Intergenerational Differences in Hmong Perspectives on the Life Course

In contrast to the notion of Ethnic Identity Development (EID) commonly accepted within the realm of Psychology, I argue that the Life Course Theory presents a more comprehensive and less ethnocentric view of the way cultural knowledge is both transferred to and accepted by younger generations, as is evident in the Hmong community of Aubigny-sur-Nere. The inevitability of cultural change within the Hmong community of France, since they were first accepted as refugees in the 1970s, seems to hang over the heads of the older generations as they strive to keep the traditions and values of their culture alive. Despite the pressing influence of the host culture, I theorize that it is precisely this pressure which serves as a catalyst in motivating younger generations to learn about and participate in Hmong cultural practices through both formal and informal training. This training, however, takes place much later in the life course than EID theory assumes, showing that EID is an oversimplified explanation of both culture and identity.

Eulalia Larsen

Reproduction or Resistance? Complicating the Agency of Hmong Women in France

The traditionally patriarchal organization of Hmong culture evokes questions of Hmong women's agency. Many pieces of scholarship point to instances of resistance, both to cultural expectations and traditional family roles, as manifestations of agency. I argue that Hmong women manifest their agency in many other ways besides resistance. In participant observation and interviews, I've found that Hmong women's' life experiences have been much more complex than simply instances of either submission or resistance.

Kara Manzanares

When is it Right to Beat Your Wife?: Moral Personhood across Generations of Hmong in France

I aim to contribute to an ongoing transnational and intergenerational comparative analysis of Hmong moral discourse and moral personhood and the potential change therein affected by the phenomenon of diaspora. In order to expand my pool of data for a comparative

analysis of Hmong moral discourse, I am using the same moral vignettes and questions used by Jacob Hickman in his dissertation. One of these vignettes serves to illicit commentary on the morality of beating one's wife. I have found consistently, that the fault or sin in the given scenario is placed on the woman. My discourse analysis illuminates the rationale and cultural logics through which some Hmong arrive at this stance.

Jacob Peters

What's in a Name Change?: The Significance of Naming Conventions at the Conjunction of Social Change among Hmong in France

In this paper I inquire about the Hmong cultural models and metaphysics of personhood the underpin naming conventions and rituals. There are three primary naming events in that Hmong practice, each tied to their spiritual and cultural identity. After birth, the personhood of the infant is sealed in a 'soul calling' ceremony where the name of the person is also ritually instantiated. In cases of recurring sickness or unrest one's name may be changed to satisfy one's spirit. Thirdly, a man's name is commonly changed once he has had children, become more mature and has become socially recognized as "old" (*tim npe laus*). I provide several examples of name changing narratives in order to determine how Hmong naming traditions are changing or remaining the same in France, and how this relates to a Hmong metaphysics of personhood.

Kara Woods

In-Laws, Attraction, and Ethnicity: Understanding Marital Decision-Making in the Younger Generation of Hmong Women in France

My intent in this paper is to describe the decision making process for Hmong women when they choose to marry endogamous or exogamous. The primary concern in starting the decision to get married is initial attraction, but it is followed by concern over the partner's respect to their parents and traditions as well as the relationship the woman is going to have with his parents. The relationship between her and her in-laws and him and his in-laws. This data in particular focuses on a French Hmong family of seven daughters and one son. The two oldest married Hmong men, the next three married French men, and the youngest two daughters are not married but living with French boyfriends. In this family that considers themselves to have grown progressively more French since their arrival 40 years ago, French and Hmong sons-in-law are treated with near equal preference. This is in part due to the French sons-in-law participation Hmong marriage traditions have been adjusted to retain the sense of asking the family for the girl to enter his household and family. In the following of this modified tradition the groom shows his respect for the bride's family and traditions and a good relationship can follow. However, if the girl feels there is going to be significant problems with her spouse's parents and herself, she will greatly consider ending the relationship, showing a Hmong emphasis on in-laws that is not generally a deal-breaking consideration for French.