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TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF THE LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN MONTANA
A STUDY OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

by

Susan Miller Lindbergh

B. A., Stanford University, 1964

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

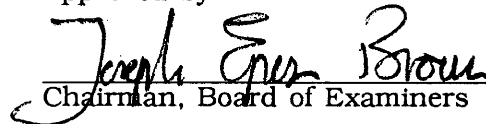
for the degree of

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Montana

1988

Approved by



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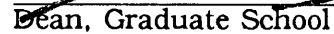

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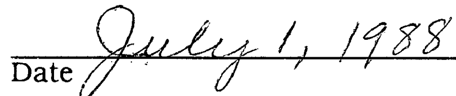

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TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF THE LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN MONTANA
A STUDY OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

VOLUME I

by

Susan Miller Lindbergh

University of Montana

1988

Lindbergh, Susan M., M.I.S., June 1988 Interdisciplinary Studies

Traditional Costumes of the Lao Hmong Refugees in Montana: A Study in Cultural Continuity and Change (132 pp., 152 color plates, 2 vols.)

Director: Joseph E. Brown

The focus of research for this study was an observation of the collections of traditional costumes belonging to eight Hmong refugee women from Laos who are all related by birth or marriage and who live, or have lived, in Montana, with an emphasis on exploring the meanings and values of those textiles for the women and their families during this period of transition. Library research on Hmong culture and textiles supplemented both weekly visits to Hmong homes in Missoula for six years (1982-1988), and a one week visit to Hmong families living in Milwaukee and Green Bay, Wisconsin during the summer of 1987. Numerous interviews were held in English and Hmong, with young Hmong family members translating for their elders and for the American researcher. Hundreds of photographs of family members, costume pieces and specific design details were taken to provide an accurate record of the many traditional garments in the eight collections. 152 color plates with explanatory comments comprise Volume II.

Traditional Hmong costumes, though rarely worn in Missoula, are frequently made, purchased and given to family members in conjunction with four major rites of passage: The New Year's celebration, marriage, death and birth. Traditional textiles are linked closely with rituals and religious beliefs surrounding the rites of passage and cannot be understood outside this context. Although the religious beliefs of a few of the family members are in a period of transition due to the influences of American culture and Christianity, the resulting confusion for some has not stopped the women from actively continuing with their textile traditions.

The costumes the women make for their families and exchange with each other show a dynamic eclecticism that reflects the cultural transitions the Hmong are experiencing. At the same time, the women continue to use old patterns handed down from both paternal and maternal lineages in styles that link them with their ancient cultural heritages. This ability of the women to embrace both ancient and new textile forms is a stabilizing influence and helps give their lives direction and meaning during a period of radical change.

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PREFACE

Since the Hmong refugees in the United States seldom wear traditional costumes in public, Americans rarely get to see the elaborately embroidered and appliquéd clothing which is kept in boxes and suitcases, under beds and in closets, and brought out for special occasions. General information on Hmong textile art in the United States is available, but little has been documented about specific individuals, their families, and the particular meanings of their needlework during this period of rapid change. In-depth observation of the bundles of traditional costumes belonging to one Hmong family in Missoula and their extended families who have moved to Green Bay and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and an inquiry into the values and meanings of those costumes for the individuals who own or who have made them, form the focus of research for this study. Although some family members sometimes make embroideries, called paj ntaub or "flower cloth" by the Hmong, to sell to Americans at craft fairs, that portion of their needlework has been largely excluded from this study so that the scope of the thesis can remain clearly on the bundles of personal costumes. The acculturated textiles will be worthy of a separate study. Numerous photographs of family members, costumes and needlework designs supplement the written documentation, providing a record of some of the specific patterns and styles of their paj ntaub.

Contact with the Hmong family began in March, 1982 when this student volunteered to tutor a twenty-year-old Hmong woman in English at her home. Visits continued once or twice a week until July, 1987 when she, her husband and family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Active research of the family's needlework began in March, 1986, involving many interviews, discussions and photography sessions. After their move to Milwaukee, a week was spent visiting them in order to photograph and

study the bundles of traditional costumes owned by two sisters and a sister-in-law who had preceded them in moves from Montana to Wisconsin. During the fall, winter and spring of 1987 and 1988, bundles of costumes belonging to other Hmong relatives in Missoula were studied and photographed, and numerous interviews were held. As this writer does not speak Hmong, it was necessary for English-speaking Hmong family members to translate during the interviews with their elders. Any mistakes or misunderstandings are solely the responsibility of the writer, who wishes she had learned to speak and understand Hmong before beginning this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The map of Southeast Asia (Appendix A) has been reproduced, with modifications, from a map that appears in Hmong Art: Tradition and Change, an exhibit catalog published by the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin in 1986. Thank you to Ia Vang and Kou Thao for allowing the use of their photographs which appear in Plates 136, 139-141, and 144-145.

I am particularly indebted to Mai Thao, Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Kou Thao and Ia Vang for many patient hours spent translating and explaining the meaning of traditional costumes in their families' lives. For sharing her books on Hmong culture, her ideas, much time, and for her encouragement, thanks to Susanne Bessac. I honor the women who generously shared their time, thoughts and bundles of costumes with me. Gratitude and love to: Mai Lee, Cher Moua Thao, Zong Chang, Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Mai Thao, Blia Xiong, Pa Nhia Vang and especially to Ia Vang, who opened my eyes to the unspoken meaning Hmong textiles can have, the day she showed me her mother's paj ntaub.

CHAPTER 1

General Background of the Lao Hmong Refugees in Missoula and Their Textiles

For the Hmong refugees from Laos who have settled in the United States, migration and change are nothing new. Ever since their ancestors were pushed out of the lowlands of central China into the surrounding mountains thousands of years ago, the Hmong have been on the move.[1] In China, the term Miao is used to describe several different dialect groups who share a common language, similar religious beliefs, and who wear related costumes.[2] The members of one of these groups call themselves the Hmong,[3] and it was some of the Hmong living in China who migrated out of south and southwest China into the mountains of Southeast Asia early in the nineteenth century, eventually settling in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma.[4] The Hmong in Missoula are their descendants.

The Hmong have earned the reputation for being fiercely independent. Although some have been absorbed into neighboring ethnic groups over the centuries,[5] many have managed to maintain their cultural integrity in spite of four thousand years of conflict and forced moves from one location to another.[6] Persecution by the Chinese triggered the migrations of the Hmong into Southeast Asia, where most inhabited the highest elevations and avoided other groups.[7] There they hunted and practiced slash and burn, or swidden agriculture and raised maize, dry-farm rice, vegetables, hemp, indigo and animals for their own use. They also raised opium, which they traded for silver, manufactured goods and other items they could not make or raise. When the soil became depleted, or a small group grew too large to be supported agriculturally in one location, or conflict arose with neighboring ethnic groups, the Hmong moved on to new mountaintops.[8]

With them they carried not only the physical evidence of their unique culture, including tools, weapons, baskets, musical instruments, ornate silver jewelry, and intricately embroidered costumes, but their rich oral and spiritual traditions as well. The material and spiritual aspects of Hmong culture cannot, in fact, be considered separately since the tangible goods of the Hmong, particularly their musical instruments and textiles, are linked closely with the rituals and religious beliefs surrounding birth, courtship, marriage and death, and cannot be understood outside of this context.

In China today there are many Miao, and in Southeast Asia, many Hmong, whose costumes are distinct from those of other ethnic minorities. The distinguishing features, although they have evolved over the centuries and show influences from other ethnic groups, are full, pleated skirts, highly refined silver jewelry, the extensive use of fine embroidery in rich colors, and the use of batik or wax-resist dyeing of fabric by some of the Hmong.[9] Despite these similarities, there is a wide variation in costume detail. In fact, many of the Hmong subgroups were named for costume features which distinguished them from other subgroups. Examples are the White Hmong, who traditionally wore white pleated skirts, the Green or Blue Hmong, who use blue indigo dye to batik designs onto fabric for pleated skirts and baby-carriers, and the Striped Hmong from Sam Neua province (a White Hmong subgroup), who wear striped arm bands on their jackets.

The Lao Hmong refugees in the United States fall into two main groups, according to the Hmong interviewed in Missoula: the White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) and the Green Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab.) (They do not use the term Blue Hmong, so throughout the rest of this paper, the term Green Hmong will be used to specify the group which has been called Blue, Green, or Blue/Green by other scholars.)[10] According to members of the families who own the collections of costumes included in this study, all Hmong were Green in the beginning, and that is why Green Hmong embroidery designs and cultural traditions are considered to be the oldest. Eventually, White Hmong subgroups evolved. Whatever common origin the Hmong had centuries ago in China, as they have split into new groups, their costumes have reflected these changes.

The women whose bundles of costumes form the nucleus of this study were born into two White Hmong subgroups: the Hmong Sam Neua, or "Striped" Hmong, and the Hmong Xieng Khouang, or "Black" Hmong. The terms "Striped" and "Black" Hmong are sometimes used by them when speaking to Americans, but they are not names which they prefer. "Black" Hmong, in fact, is a derogatory term, according to one husband, because it suggests a similarity to the Vietnamese who wear black costumes. They prefer to be known for their geographic homelands in the northern province of Sam Neua and the southern province of Xieng Khouang (see map of Southeast Asia, Appendix A). Only one of the women has married outside of the White Hmong tradition, into the Green Hmong tradition, and some of her current needlework reflects this recent change.

Several conditions other than intermarriage have encouraged textile variations over the years.[11] In spite of their use of traditional patterns, the Hmong admire and encourage the creative individuality of the needle artist.[12] Along with this has been the open practice of borrowing designs and materials from neighboring ethnic groups. Wealth has been a catalyst for costume changes, too. If a family were wealthy from the production of opium, they could afford to purchase silk fabric, thread, manufactured cotton, and, in recent history, synthetic cloth from travelling Chinese merchants and did not have to rely on the labor-intensive, handspun, handwoven hemp cloth made from cultivated plants. As trade cloth became available, the lengthy process of dyeing textiles with home-grown indigo and other natural dyes was practiced less often, and with the advent of chemical dyes, colors became brighter and more varied.

The geographic location of the villages determined many things: whether the climate was suitable for growing indigo, hemp or opium; whether or not the village was easily accessible to traders; and who the neighboring ethnic groups might be, which would influence the choice of designs and materials. Although many Miao in China use figurative designs in both their batik and embroidery,[13] the Hmong in Missoula use geometric designs exclusively in their traditional costumes. This reflects the geographic influence of the migration of their ancestors southward into Laos from Chinese provinces where the Hmong also use geometric patterns. There are striking

similarities between some of the Hmong Sam Neua designs being used in Missoula and those embroidery patterns from the Chiubei area in Yunnan province.[14]

Recent history has accelerated the evolutionary changes in Hmong costume. Although migrations of Hmong have occurred over the centuries, their intensity increased dramatically during the twentieth century when the Hmong became involved in the political and military maneuvers in Laos during World War II and the Vietnam war. Following the withdrawal of French colonial forces in Laos, the United States entered secretly, from 1960 until 1975, into the war which had developed between the Royal Lao government and the Pathet Lao communist revolutionary movement. Many Hmong living in Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang provinces were drawn into the conflict and chose to side with the rightist Royal Lao government, fighting under the Hmong military leadership of General Vang Pao. Unknown to the American public, the United States C.I.A. was secretly supplying General Vang Pao and his guerilla fighters with extensive military support and was providing humanitarian aid to fleeing refugees. Retaliatory enemy attacks on Hmong villages by the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese troops, particularly in Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua provinces, led to an exodus by the Hmong from the mountains into refugee camps at lower elevations.[15]

For many Hmong, this was the first time they had ever lived side-by-side with other Hmong sub-groups, with members of the closely related Mien(Yao) ethnic group, and with Laotians. Costume variations and completely new forms of embroidery and appliqué could be studied closely under these new conditions.

It was not until the defeat of the Royal Lao government in 1975 and the eventual flight of many of the Hmong across the Mekong River to safety in Thailand, that there was much time for making paj ntaub. In the Thai refugee camps, needlework was encouraged to fill the demand created by a vigorous marketing of hill-tribe embroideries. Close to starvation in the camps, women and girls of all ages, and even some men, were encouraged to embroider paj ntaub to earn money for extra food. Leisure time in the camps led to courtship and many marriages. Exposure to refugees from different Hmong subgroups resulted in many inter-marriages, and the learning of exciting, new textile designs. Wedding and New Year's costumes were

created for these special occasions, in spite of the poverty.

After months and years in refugee camps in Thailand, over 75,000 Hmong eventually resettled in the United States.[16] Of those, about eight hundred followed their war-time leader General Vang Pao to western Montana and Missoula.[17] For many young women, leisure time for making paj ntaub almost disappeared when they moved from Thailand to Montana and were forced to concentrate on learning survival skills in an alien culture.

Today in Missoula, while young men, women and children attend school and take on full-time jobs, the older generation stays at home to care for growing numbers of infants and toddlers. A grandmother spends most of her time caring for children, and, if her eyesight is good enough, making paj ntaub for her family's personal use, for gifts, and to sell. The prolific amount of embroidery done by the grandmothers for their families is rarely seen by Americans and seldom worn by the Hmong. To succeed at work, at school and in society, the Hmong dress in American style clothing. The only traditional textile with elaborate ornamentation one is likely to see on a daily basis in Missoula is the nyias or baby-carrier, which is still the preferred way to carry and comfort small Hmong children and babies.

In spite of their busy lives as students, full-time employees and mothers, some of the younger wives are finding time to make paj ntaub in Missoula. The amount of embroidery each one does varies considerably, depending not only on the time available, but on individual family background, aptitude for, and love of embroidery. The paj ntaub they make are usually for friends, husbands, children, parents and other relatives, but rarely for sale since they can make more money through a job in the American job market. A big impetus for the needlework they are doing is to have new, dazzling and stylish clothes for themselves and their children. In addition, several elaborate funeral garments for parents and other relatives have been made by young women in this study. Gifts for American friends are frequently made by young and old women alike. The collection of paj ntaub belonging to one young Hmong woman contained only one piece of embroidery she had done, a copy of a cross-stitch ecclesiastical vestment, a stole, that she had made as a teen-ager for her family's Catholic priest in Minneapolis.

The reverse-appliqué technique, far more difficult to master than embroidery, is practiced by the older women but rarely by the young. Consistent practice is necessary to learn how to cut and stitch the layers of fabric perfectly, and most young women no longer have the time or training to do it well. It is not surprising to find that it is the cross-stitch designs which are freely borrowed between subgroups, whereas the difficult reverse-appliqué patterns remain strong reminders of the home provinces in Laos from which the needleworkers who do them have come.

The Hmong, both young and old, love innovation and bright, new materials, and this love is stimulated by cross-country trips to visit relatives or to attend the New Year's celebrations in California where tens of thousands of Hmong are concentrated. There they encounter Hmong costumes they have never seen before, even in Laos or in Thailand. As soon as they return home from these trips, women start copying what they have seen and adding touches of their own. Today in the United States, those who can afford expensive braids, laces, sequins, beads and coins, purchase those items to decorate baby hats or the new-style dragon hats, aprons and turban bands. Imported velvets with glittering floral designs and rich brocades are being bought for New Year's costumes when women can save enough money for these luxuries.

In spite of their love for innovation and new materials, the Hmong have continued through the centuries to make costumes which are distinctly Hmong. The love of shiny fabrics is not a departure for the Hmong, but a continuation of a long-held admiration for glowing textiles. Many years ago, it is said, hemp cloth was laboriously polished and waxed to make it shine.[18] Satin, a frequent choice of fabric for Hmong clothing in Missoula, especially for White Hmong women's funeral jackets, is a contemporary reminder of the mention of the same fabric in the ancient, sacred funeral poem which is recited at the time of death to help lead the life-soul of the deceased to the land of the ancestors. In it, the "garment of satin" referred to is the placenta that the deceased wore at birth, his original "shirt," which he must retrieve where it was buried in the home of his birth, before he can continue to the land of the ancestors to be reborn into the next generation of his family.[19] In China, the Huangping Miao esteem a cotton cloth which is dyed either black or gold and then

smoked with cypress leaves, rubbed with hyacinth tubers, and seven or eight months later, beaten with a mallet until it shines.[20] A young women from Sam Neua remembers watching her paternal grandmother and aunt, in the refugee camp in Thailand, rub cotton fabric with a water-buffalo horn to make the fabric shine, before cutting the fabric to make a money vest.[21] The Hmong in Missoula are pleased to find manufactured brilliance at their finger tips and delight in creating meaningful costumes with these new materials.

Hmong textile traditions have become mixed as a result of war, exile from Laos, life in refugee camps, subgroup intermarriages and resettlement in the United States. In Missoula as well as other American cities, New Year's costumes show a blurring of lines between subgroups. Sometimes a mixture of costume pieces is worn all at once, such as a Green Hmong skirt with Hmong Xieng Khouang purses to match, and a new-style dragon hat, perhaps. In other cases, young women own complete, separate costumes in different traditions which they take turns wearing on consecutive days of the New Year's celebration. One young woman from Sam Neua included in this study prefers wearing Hmong Xieng Khouang costumes because they are more fashionable than those of her own tradition. According to her brother, the Hmong Xieng Khouang in Laos were generally wealthier and more urban, or at least lived closer to towns, than the poorer farmers from the northern mountains of Sam Neua province, and so it became a status symbol, after the groups mixed during the war, for the Hmong Sam Neua from the north to adopt Hmong Xieng Khouang costume details. The same brother also pointed out that Hmong are shy about being different from the majority, and many adopted Hmong Xieng Khouang dress so they would not be conspicuous after they were forced by the war to move out of Sam Neua down into Xieng Khouang province. In addition, there is prestige, for some, in wearing the costume of the family of the powerful war-time leader General Vang Pao, who is reputed to be from Xieng Khouang province.

In the face of all the changes the Hmong have experienced over the past fifteen or twenty years, including a large number of subgroup intermarriages, the blurring of lines between Hmong subgroup costumes is not surprising. What seems to be most important to the women included in this study is their sense of family love and

responsibility, which includes not only the families into which they have married, but their lasting and very real ties to the families into which they were born. Gifts of <u>paj ntaub</u> between family members reflect the importance of these family ties.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

1. Hugo Adolf Bernatzik, Akha and Miao: Problems of Applied Ethnography in Farther India , trans. Alois Nagler (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1970; original version, 1947), p.32; Eric Crystal, "Buffalo Heads and Sacred Threads: Hmong Culture of the Southeast Asian Highlands," in Textiles as Texts: Arts of Hmong Women from Laos, curators Amy Catlin and Dixie Swift (Los Angeles: Woman's Building, 1987), unpaginated; David C. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," Journal of the West China Border Research Society 9 (1937): 18.

2. Louisa Schein, "Costume and Commerce: Forms of Hmong/Miao Textile Craft," unpublished paper presented at the Slater Mill Historic Site, August 19, 1984, pp.2-3.

3. The Hmong find the use of the term Miao, in reference to themselves, highly offensive. According to one Hmong in Missoula, it is as bad as using the term "nigger".

4. Bernatzik, pp.30,40; Eric Crystal, "Buffalo Heads," unpaginated; Eric Crystal, "Hmong Traditions in the Crucible of Social Change," in Michigan Hmong Arts: Textiles in Transition, eds. Kurt C. Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1983), p.7.

5. Bernatzik, p.32.

6. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," p. 18; Crystal, "Buffalo Heads," unpaginated.

7. Bernatzik, p.40.

8. For a study of Hmong village life in Thailand, see William Robert Geddes, Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

9. The features listed here are presented in Schein's paper, pp.3-6.

10. The colors blue and green are sometimes translated into the same Hmong word, ntsuab. Ernest E. Heimbach, White Meo - English Dictionary, Southeast Asia Program Data Paper no. 75 (Ithica, New York: Cornell University, 1969), p. 484.

11. For a discussion of this topic, see Schein, pp.7-8.

12. Bernatzik. p.174.

13. Schein, p.6; Gail Rossi, "A Flourishing Art: China: Guizhou Women Continue to Embroider their Legends," Threads Magazine (February/March 1987), p.32; Lu Pu, Designs of Chinese Indigo Batik (New York: Lee Publishers Group, and Beijing: New World Press, 1981), p. 30, and many design reproductions throughout the book.

14. Cultural Palace of Nationalities, ed., Clothings and Ornaments of China's Miao People (Beijing: Nationality Press, 1985), pp. 179-181.

15. For information on U.S. involvement in the war in Laos and the effect of the war on Hmong village life, read: Don A. Schanche, Mister Pop (New York: David McKay, 1970); W.E. Garrett, "The Hmong of Laos: No Place to Run," National Geographic, 145 (January 1974), 78-111; Garrett, "Thailand, Refuge from Terror," National Geographic, 157 (May 1980), 633-661; Peter T. White and W.E. Garrett, "The

Mekong: River of Terror and Hope," National Geographic, 134 (December 1968), 737-787.

16. Ann Levin, "Hmong carry opium habits to their new life in America," Christian Science Monitor, Western ed., 30 December 1987, p.6, col.1.

17. The largest Hmong population in Missoula County, between 800 and 900 individuals, occurred around 1979. After the move of General Vang Pao to California, the Hmong population decreased. The scarcity of jobs in Missoula due to a depressed economy, better educational opportunities elsewhere, and the desire to join family members in other U.S. cities have contributed to the exodus of Hmong from Missoula, in spite of their love of the mountains and the opportunity to hunt and fish. In November, 1987, according to records kept by the Refugee Assistance Corporation, there were 242 Hmong in Missoula County.

18. Joanne Cubbs, "Hmong Art: Tradition and Change, " Hmong Art: Tradition and Change (Sheboygan, WI: John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1986), p.26.

19. Jacques Lemoine, "L'initiation du mort chez les Hmong, III. Les themes," L'Homme 12 (1972): 97.

20. Rossi, pp.31-32.

21. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 26 January, 1988.

CHAPTER 2

Eight Hmong Women and their Traditional Costumes

To understand the meaning of traditional costumes in the transitional lives of contemporary Hmong refugees in the United States, it is important to not only be aware of the historical background and general trends taking place today, as discussed in Chapter One, but to observe the uses of Hmong costumes in the context of the lives of specific individuals and their families. The following observations are based on a study of the collections of traditional clothing belonging to eight Hmong women who are all related by marriage or birth (see Kinship Chart, Appendix B). Five of the women are mothers with small children who speak English with varying degrees of ability, four of whom have graduated from high school in Missoula or Milwaukee. The other three are grandmothers who speak little or no English. All of the women were born into White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) families. The three grandmothers, all sisters-in-law, are of the "Striped" Hmong subgroup from Sam Neua province in northern Laos. Two of the young mothers are also of that subgroup, by birth. The three other younger women were born into the "Black" Hmong, or Hmong Xieng Khouang subgroup. Two of them are sisters from the village of Ban Pounglouang in south central Laos, and the third is their sister-in-law, from Xieng Khouang province.

In general, the older women have experienced fewer changes in religious traditions and subgroup affiliations than have the younger women. Each of the grandmothers mentioned above married into the same White Hmong subgroup as that of her birth, and each follows traditional Hmong religious customs, which combine a belief that natural phenomena such as rocks, rivers, mountains and trees have spiritual essences, with shamanism and ancestor worship. The five younger women, on the

other hand, who married either during or after the turmoil of war, exile and relocation to the United States, have experienced changes in religious and subgroup affiliations. One young mother, whose family became Catholic in Thailand, later married into a family who observes traditional Hmong religious customs. Two young women who practiced traditional Hmong religious customs in Laos have married into Catholic families in the United States. One woman and her husband, who followed traditional customs in Laos, have become Baptists since moving to Milwaukee and are forbidden to continue with traditional Hmong rituals. Only one of the younger mothers still practices the same religious customs of her childhood. While two of the younger women married within the White Hmong subgroups of their birth, two others married into different White Hmong subgroups, and the fifth married into a Green Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab) family.

How, if at all, do the traditional embroideries belonging to the younger women reflect these changes in church membership and subgroup affiliation? Membership in American churches does not seem to affect the type or quantity of paj ntaub in the collections, with the one exception already mentioned in Chapter One: a duplicate of an ecclesiastical vestment embroidered by a Hmong teen-ager for her family's Catholic priest. The same young woman who made that paj ntaub recently completed five traditional Hmong funeral garments for her paternal grandmother, her parents (who are Catholic), her mother-in-law and her father-in-law, who is a shaman. The two men, one a Catholic and one a Hmong shaman, received identical funeral coats, as did her mother and mother-in-law, in spite of their outward religious differences. According to the young woman, almost all Hmong still follow traditional marriage and funeral customs, so deeply are they a part of Hmong culture, with those who are members of American churches sometimes participating in Christian ceremonies as well. Textiles surrounding traditional Hmong rites of passage are still important to the women under observation in this study, but not as important, in some cases, to the men, an observation which will be discussed later.

Changes of subgroup affiliation or religion occur when a Hmong woman marries a man belonging to a different tradition than her own. In theory, and often in practice, a woman leaves her family at marriage and joins her husband's family, adopting any

changes in costume, ritual or belief that are characteristic of his family lineage. Although she keeps her own name, all children born into the marriage will assume the surname of the father. A profound change resulting from this union is that at death, the woman joins the ancestors of her husband's family and not those of her own father and mother. Eventually, she and the children will be reborn into a future generation of her husband's family.

How strictly do the women in this study reflect changes of subgroup affiliation in the costumes they make and wear? One grandmother made a White Hmong, Sam Neua-style "chicken hat" for her new granddaughter, even though the baby is officially a Green Hmong. The same grandmother has made numerous White Hmong, Sam Neua-style costumes for her other grandchildren, who belong to that tradition, whereas their mother, who was born into the Hmong Xieng Khouang tradition, has made them costumes from that tradition as well. The costumes this young woman has made for herself since her marriage, including her wedding garments, are of the Xieng Khouang tradition, and not the Sam Neua tradition of her husband. These examples, as well as others that will be discussed later, suggest that there is no strict rule dictating a total change of costume for a woman and her children when a marriage occurs between different subgroups.

Many times women choose to learn how to make costumes outside of the tradition in which they or their husbands were raised. The most frequent example of this is when women of the Sam Neua tradition make New Year's costumes in the popular and stylish Xieng Khouang tradition. There are no examples, within the families under observation, of the reverse: of a woman from Xieng Khouang making a Sam Neua-style costume, although Xieng Khouang women will often learn to do Sam Neua reverse-appliqué designs, such as the snail, because they sell well to Americans at craft fairs.[1] Women of both traditions enjoy experimenting with new-style hats, aprons and turban bands which are often highly embellished with sequins, beads, braid and other items, as well as embroidery or appliqué. The young White Hmong woman who married a Green Hmong, recently made traditional White Hmong, Sam Neua-style funeral garments and noob-ncoos, or "seed pillows" (embellished cotton squares which are placed under the head of the deceased) for her mother, paternal

uncle and his wife, and in addition, she made Green Hmong appliquéd noob-ncoos, which are larger and have a Green Hmong design, for her husband's grandmother, grandfather and great-aunt. These gifts of paj ntaub which this young woman is making show that she identifies both with her husband's heritage and with that of her birth.

Before continuing with further analysis of the bundles of traditional costumes, the individual women who own them will now be introduced.

IA VANG

Ia Vang and her story about a treasured bundle of paj ntaub were the original inspiration for this study of traditional Hmong textiles (Plate 1). From 1982 through 1988, what began as a student-tutor relationship grew into a deep friendship. During those years, Ia shared with this tutor glimpses of her former life in Laos.

Ia Vang was born in 1961 in the village of Ban Pounglouang in central Laos, not far from Pak Sane, which is on the Mekong river (see map of Southeast Asia, Appendix A). She was born into the same southern Hmong subgroup as those from Xieng Khouang province, referred to occasionally by the Hmong from Sam Neua as "Black" Hmong. Ia points out that she is a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) from the same subgroup as General Vang Pao. Her family, which included one younger sister and three older brothers, farmed in the high mountains, with the women doing most of the work after Ia's father, and later her brothers, left home to become guerilla soldiers. Ia's mother died just after childbirth in 1968 or 1969, and her father, a soldier, later disappeared during the war, presumably killed. One of her older brothers died in Laos of disease. Until her paternal grandmother's death in 1977, Ia, her younger sister and three older brothers lived with the grandmother, and it was from her that Ia learned many embroidery patterns.

When attacks by communist troops made it necessary for Ia, her sister, her brothers and their families to flee their village, they hid in the jungle for almost two years, each person carrying a knife and a bag of rice, and Ia carrying her younger sister some of the time. By day they hid, or travelled in small groups. Near

starvation, they ate jungle plants to stay alive. At night, small cooking fires could be lighted in the jungle without the smoke being sighted by enemy patrols.

When they realized they could survive no longer in Laos, Ia, her sister, an older brother, his two wives and Ia's six-year-old niece made their way to Pak Sane to swim across the Mekong river to Thailand. The current was swift, and night patrols with search lights combed the riverbank every fifteen minutes. Ia and her brother argued as they hid along the shore, waiting for the patrol boat to pass. Her brother adamantly insisted that she leave behind a parcel of belongings which Ia had carried with her for two years while hiding in the jungle. She defied him and tied it, wrapped in cloth and a plastic bag, to her back. With the help of homemade flotation devices and ropes tied to each other so they would not become separated in the black turbulence of the river, they silently slipped in and started swimming. Three exhausting hours later they pulled themselves out onto the opposite bank in Thailand. Ia felt for the bundle tied to her back, the same bundle she quietly unwrapped for her tutor several years later in Missoula. It contained some of her mother and grandmother's old hemp cloth garments and a collection of her mother's paj ntaub. The older brother and his six-year-old daughter died later from disease in refugee camps in Thailand. For her brother's funeral, Ia dressed him in an embellished funeral coat that her mother had made years earlier for Ia's father. Since they never found his body to confirm his death, the coat was saved by Ia's grandmother, and after her death, by Ia, who added it to her beloved bundle of her mother's embroideries.

In that bundle were the funeral coat, seven embroidered, appliquéd, and reverse-appliquéd "sailor-collars" from her mother's jackets (Plates 2-9), several reverse-appliquéd apron sashes and aprons made by her mother (Plates 10-13), a very old indigo-dyed leg-wrap belonging to her mother or grandmother, and an old, pleated, handspun, handwoven hemp cloth skirt. Ia remembers that both the indigo and hemp plants were grown on their farm, and her mother and grandmother did the spinning, dyeing and weaving.

Ia has used her mother's paj ntaub on several important occasions since her brother's funeral. One collar and sash were incorporated into a wedding costume

that she made in the refugee camp when she married her husband Kou Thao in 1979. Although her husband is a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) from Sam Neua province, Ia wore a White Hmong costume from her own Xieng Khouang tradition. Ia has used her mother's paj ntaub as models for patterns she has embroidered on her children's New Year's costumes. To her younger sister, who fled with her from Laos, and an older brother, Ia gave two of their mother's collars and two pairs of sashes as parting gifts, in a refugee camp in Thailand, when she and her husband had to leave her siblings behind and move to the United States. According to Ia's husband, Ia will be buried in several pieces of her mother's paj ntaub.

As Ia's life changes, so does her bundle of paj ntaub, which now includes New Year's costumes for her four children in both Hmong Xieng Khouang and Hmong Sam Neua traditions, made for them by Ia, her sister-in-law Blia Xiong, and her mother-in-law, Mai Lee. Although he does not wear them, there are costume pieces purchased for her husband Kou Thao and some made for him by Mai Lee. His vest with the reverse-appliqué snail design is covered with old silver coins from Laos. For herself, Ia has made some Xieng Khouang-style costumes in rich, sparkling fabrics. She also owns some Hmong Sam Neua style garments made for her by Mai Lee. Varied purchases from Thailand included in Ia's bundle of jewelry and textiles are of Lao and Hmong origin.

Ia Vang's paj ntaub and silver jewelry reflect the many threads which make up the fabric of her life. Without words, paj ntaub are able to record history, geography, aesthetics, economics, subgroup affiliation and family relationships. Hmong costumes help to celebrate the rites of passage from birth, to courtship, to marriage, into old age and death, which is a necessary step to reach the land of the ancestors and leads to eventual rebirth into a future generation.[2] There is a circular rhythm of life, death, and life again, with the family at the center, which gives identity and meaning to the individual. Ia, who observes traditional Hmong rituals, has used her mother's paj ntaub for the rites of passage which have touched her life. The heirloom embroideries have been a source of stability and comfort during a period of family deaths, separation from loved ones and change.

Another inheritance which gives her life direction and meaning is the rich oral tradition of her parents and grandparents. When Ia was a small child, her father and grandmother used to tell her stories at night, legends and myths which have been passed on from one generation to the next, containing the essence and heart of Hmong culture. In 1986 at an exhibit of Hmong pictorial embroideries at the Brunswick Gallery in Missoula, Ia was delighted to find an embroidered, familiar legend that she tells her children at bed time, one that her father used to tell her.

After graduating from Hellgate High School in Missoula and working full time while her mother-in-law baby-sat with the four children, Ia now stays at home with her one pre-schooler in Milwaukee while her mother-in-law works full-time in a factory, and her husband attends a technical college. In December of 1987, Ia was busily working on a New Year's costume for her six-year-old daughter for the Hmong celebration later that month in Milwaukee.

PA NHIA VANG

Pa Nhia Vang is Ia Vang's younger sister, who, like Ia, was born in Ban Pounglouang into a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) family who wore costumes of the Xieng Khouang tradition, and who practiced traditional Hmong religion. After Ia got married in Thailand and went to live with her husband's family, Pa Nhia stayed with her brother Cha Vang and his wife Blia Xiong in the refugee camp, and together they moved to Missoula in 1982. In 1984 they moved on to Milwaukee where Pa Nhia graduated from high school and married Seng Thao, a Catholic White Hmong of the "Striped" Sam Neua tradition. She lives in a large house owned by her father-in-law and mother-in-law with thirteen other members of her husband's extended family, including two small sons born in 1986 and 1987. She and her husband attend the Catholic church. Pa Nhia, who stays home to care for her two sons, likes to embroider highly embellished new-style dragon hats (Plate 14), apron sashes and apron panels (Plate 15). When Ia Vang left Thailand with her husband's family for the United States, she gave Pa Nhia some heirloom apron sashes and a sailor-collar which had belonged to their mother.[3]

BLIA XIONG

Blia Xiong was born in Xieng Khouang province in Laos into a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) family. She married Ia Vang's older brother Cha Vang in the late 1970's in Ban Pounglouang where they lived in the mountains and farmed. Her husband Cha was a guerilla soldier, and though seriously wounded during the war, recovered and escaped with Blia in 1979 across the Mekong river. Late in 1981 they and a small son arrived in Missoula from Thailand with Cha's younger sister Pa Nhia, and later moved on to Milwaukee in 1984.

Blia has six small children now, who keep her extremely busy while her husband attends school. She is an excellent mother with well-behaved children, but she longs to be able to go to school to learn more English and other skills. She rarely gets out of the house, and spends free moments making paj ntaub for her children, especially for her daughters. Blia is an expert at creating reverse-appliqué designs traditional to Xieng Khouang province, which she incorporates into sailor-collars (Plates 17 and 18), money purses, sashes, traditional "chicken hats" for her daughters and new-style "dragon hats." She has given several reverse-appliqué collars to Ia Vang, who, though she has learned how, finds it difficult to do that kind of paj ntaub well.

MAI LEE

Mai Lee is an energetic grandmother who has spent the last seven years taking care of her son's growing family of children, raising vegetables in the spring and summer, and making paj ntaub every spare moment of the day (Plate 19). It is a joy to watch her with her grandchildren.

She was born in 1929 into a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) farming family in Sam Neua province. Her mother, who taught her many embroidery designs, was originally from a Green Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab) family, but began wearing White Hmong Sam Neua costumes after her marriage. Mai Lee married Youa Kao Thao, a shaman, farmer, and later a soldier. After farming in the mountains of Sam Neua province, Mai Lee and her family moved to Long Chieng in Xieng Khouang province during the war where her husband died in 1972. She and her children then went to live with her mother and brothers in another part of Laos. Mai Lee and her three children

escaped from Laos in 1979 with her brother-in-law Kia Moua Thao and his wife Zong Chang by swimming across the Mekong river to Thailand. Mai Lee lives with her youngest daughter Nhua (born in 1969), her son Kou Thao (born in 1957), his wife Ia Vang and their four young children in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From the time of their arrival in the United States in 1980 until 1987, they all lived in Missoula. Her daughter Mai Thao left Montana for Wisconsin in 1985 at the time of her marriage.

In Missoula, Mai Lee took care of her grandchildren while Kou and Ia went to school and later got full-time jobs. Mai Lee briefly attended the Vo Tech and took some English-as-a-Second-Language classes and learned a little English, but most of the time she stayed home caring for the children and making paj ntaub for her family and to sell. Since moving to Milwaukee she has far less time to embroider since she works full-time at a factory as a seamstress. Mai Lee is enjoying her independence, her pay checks and the fact that she is not called upon to speak English at work.

Mai Lee does prolific (before her factory job) needlework, and with the help of eyeglasses, she still can do both reverse-appliqué and cross-stitch embroidery (Plates 20-22). She excels in making the reverse-appliqué snail design typical of Sam Neua province, and uses it often in her paj ntaub (Plates 23-26).

Although Mai Lee made many items to sell in Montana, much of her paj ntaub is in the form of traditional costumes for family members. Mai Lee's daughters own exquisite New Year's costumes made by her, particularly Mai Thao whose dowry includes an extensive number of varied costumes. Although much of Mai Lee's work is made in the Hmong Sam Neua tradition, she made a Green Hmong costume for her daughter years before she realized Mee Thao would marry a Green Hmong. Typical of Green Hmong sailor-collars, the cross-stitch design is worn upside down, concealed from view. If one should peek at the design under Mai Thao's collar, one would see a very old cross-stitch pattern, called voj daj or "circle of yellow", which Mai Lee says was taught to her by her mother, who learned it from Mai Lee's grandmother, who learned it from Mai Lee's great-grandmother (Plate 27). The geometric cross-stitch pattern on the apron that goes with the Green Hmong jacket is another old favorite of Mai Lee's (Plate 28). (When older Hmong women speak with pride about "original" designs, which add value to their work, they are speaking of designs that go back to

the beginning of time and not ones that they have made up, which is the meaning Americans usually give to the term "original"). Mai Lee has used the same designs on collars and sashes for herself, as well as other cross-stitch patterns (Plates 29-33). Not all of Mai Lee's costumes are covered with embroidery. For a photographic portrait, she recently posed in a plain, old-style Sam Neua costume with stripes but no embroidery on the sleeves, and no embroidery on the aprons (Plate 34). For her son, Mai Lee has made several garments, including some appropriate for New Year celebrations and others for his funeral. For her daughter-in-law she has made "Striped" Hmong clothing in the Sam Neua tradition. Mai Lee has made many colorful items for her grandchildren, particularly for the girls, the most highly embellished items being traditional "chicken hats" and new-style "dragon hats." Upon request, Mai Lee has made several traditional garments for an American friend, including women's garments and two baby hats: a "chicken hat" for a girl, and a "melon hat" for a boy, all in the Hmong Sam Neua Hmong tradition with snail designs.

Mai Lee was forced to leave her aging mother behind in Laos as the trip was too perilous. They communicated with each other through cassette tapes and photographs, and during the last few years of her mother's life, Mai Lee sent box loads of paj ntaub from Montana, which were eventually worn at her mother's funeral. Touching photographs of the funeral rites, sent by relatives, show her mother dressed in those costumes.

MAI THAO

Mai Thao was born into a White Hmong family of the "Striped" subgroup in Sam Neua province in 1964. She is the daughter of Mai Lee (Plate 35) and Youa Kao Thao, who died in 1972 in Laos. Her family farmed in Sam Neua province until they moved to Xieng Khouang province during the war, during which time both her father and her brother Kou Thao were guerilla soldiers. After her father's death, her family went to live with her maternal grandmother and uncles. She and her family fled Laos across the Mekong river to Thailand in 1979. After staying in Nong Khai and later Ban Vinai refugee camps, her family was sent to a camp near Bangkok for a short

while before moving to Missoula, Montana in 1980.

An excellent student, Mai Thao graduated from Hellgate High School before moving to Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1985 to marry her husband. She first met Zang Yang in Bangkok. He is a Catholic Green Hmong from the village of Mouei Sai, not far from the borders of Burma and Thailand in northwestern Laos. For a number of years he lived in Thailand, where he served with the Thai army. Mai Thao occasionally attends the Catholic church in Green Bay with her husband, and has tried to take some instruction in that religion in a class that is taught in Hmong, but her daughter, who was born in 1987, does not like to ever be left with anyone else, and so Mai Thao stays home most of the time while her husband works since she has no extended family near by to baby-sit.

Mai Thao is a skillful, creative needleworker who is doing a prolific amount of paj ntaub. She loves learning new techniques, inventing new geometric patterns, using different stitches and experimenting with color combinations. Most younger Hmong needleworkers whose traditional lives have been interrupted by war and exile from Laos, prefer doing cross-stitch , other forms of embroidery and regular appliqué rather than the more difficult reverse-appliqué, which is done by many of the older White Hmong women. Mai recently asked a Hmong Sam Neua woman living in Green Bay to teach her how to do the reverse-appliqué snail design, a typical one for women from Sam Neua province, and a favorite of her mother, Mai Lee.

Mai Thao has sewn New Year's costumes for herself, several embellished hats and a pillow for her baby daughter, an embroidered love message for her husband that she made while they were courting, with Hmong words and a floral design, which hangs framed on the living-room wall, and several exquisite funeral garments for her mother, a paternal uncle, his wife, her grandmother-in-law, her grandfather-in-law, and his sister.

Mai Thao is lonesome for her family. Her gifts of paj ntaub are a sign of the love, devotion and the filial responsibility she feels toward her mother, her uncle (who is her father's only living brother,) his wife, and her husband's grandparents, whom she has never met. Her artistic skills reflect both the training she has received from her talented mother, and an inherent love of color, pattern, and creating with her hands.

She recently made six noob ncoos or "seed pillows", which are needleworked squares placed under the head or on the body of the deceased at a Hmong burial (Plate 36). It is the Hmong custom for the daughter and son-in-law to present noob ncoos to the mother-in-law and father-in-law in a blessing ceremony which is intended to promote health and long life.[4] These gifts from Mee Thao and her husband are evidence of the continued observation of traditional customs by some young Hmong refugees.

CHER MOUA THAO

For those who frequent craft fairs or the Farmer's Market in Missoula, Cher Moua Thao is a familiar sight, as she sits behind a table selling either paj ntaub or fresh vegetables. A diligent gardener and needleworker, she also is the mother of three daughters, one of whom has five children and lives and works in Missoula. Like most Hmong grandmothers whose daughters or sons live nearby, Cher Moua spends much of her time baby-sitting.

She was born in Sam Neua province, the ninth child of Chia Sou Thao (her father) and Xai Moua. According to Cher, it is very good for the Moua and Thao surname groups to intermarry, which is what she did when she married Xai Lee Moua in Sam Neua. At the time she did not have to leave her family far behind since she and her husband were from nearby villages. After escaping from Laos to Thailand, her husband died there from sickness. Cher moved to Missoula unaware that her sister-in-law Mai Lee was about to escape from Laos, and would follow her to Missoula in 1980.

Cher is fortunate to have one sibling living nearby, her brother Kia Moua Thao, husband of Zong Chang whose bundle of traditional costumes is included in this study. Two of Cher's sisters live in the United States, her youngest sister still lives in Laos, and the other five siblings all have died. Four of her brothers and sisters are, or were, shamans. When one of them, Youa Kao Thao, married Mai Lee in Sam Neua, Cher was the maid-of-honor, and she and Mai Lee, whose bundle of paj ntaub is also included in this study, have been close friends ever since.

The embroideries that Cher does are a combination of items to sell, and traditional costumes for herself, her children, grandchildren and other relatives. An

unusual children's garment she has made combines two things: a Hmong Sam Neua apron with a purchased reverse-appliquéd Hmong Xieng Khouang money purse attached to the top, like an apron bib (Plate 37). She likes to experiment making new things, such as a unique, bright purple, green, white, royal blue and red tunic with reverse-appliqué snails and appliquéd birds that she wears to craft fairs (Plates 38 and 39). When she visits her daughter in Denver, she comes home with fresh ideas of things to make and sell.

Cher has made elaborate wedding and dowry costumes for her daughter in Denver, that include many finely stitched reverse-appliqué snails. For herself, Cher recently completed a Sam Neua costume with the same snail motif, while her eyesight and power of concentration are still keen (Plate 40). She thinks it will be the last one she will make and intends to wear it for her funeral. Last year she created another costume for herself with a cross stitch collar given to her by Mai Lee, who made it as a farewell gift when she moved to Milwaukee (Plates 41-43). The design on the collar, voj daj or "yellow circle", is old and familiar to Mai Lee, who learned it from her mother (Plate 31). Cher loves photographs of herself and her family dressed in these traditional costumes, which she has lent to relatives and friends to wear for photographic portraits.

ZONG CHANG

Zong Chang was born in Sam Neua province in the year 1916. Her parents were White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) of the "Striped" Hmong tradition, but they died when she was a baby, and she never knew her mother's name. She was raised by two older sisters, and they all went to live with an aunt and uncle after the death of their parents. They were a poor and hard-working family whose clothes were made out of hemp cloth. When she was about eight years old, Zong Chang learned how to prepare hemp fibers to make yarn. It was a long, difficult process involving cultivating the crop, harvesting it, boiling the plants, pounding the fibers and boiling them again. The outer "skin" of the stems had to come off. Eventually the fibers got soft, turned white, and were rolled around the hand into a large ball. The fibers were twisted or knotted together into a continuous filament, boiled, and spun on some sort

of spinning device to make them smooth. Cloth was then woven on a loom from the hemp, and dyed a very deep blue with indigo, a plant which they cultivated and prepared into dye. She wore, as a child, baggy pants with aprons over them, front and back, and not pleated skirts like some of the very old women did.

Her future husband's parents noticed Zong Chang's industriousness, and they chose her to marry their son Kia Moua Thao. They wanted a very hard-working wife for their son, to come live with them and help with the farm work. Their three oldest daughters had married and moved away, and the oldest son had died. Zong Chang was fourteen or fifteen when she married Kia Moua, and life was very difficult after her marriage, due to all the hard labor required of her. She worked in the fields from early in the morning until dark, and then returned to the house and had to pound rice to remove the hulls before dinner could be prepared. Her mother-in-law worked equally as hard, as she had a large family. Many nights Zong Chang did not finish her work until very late, and each morning she had to get up before dawn.

Zong Chang gave birth to nine children, four of whom are alive and living with their spouses in Des Moines, Iowa; Wausau, Wisconsin; Spokane, Washington; and Missoula, Montana. Zong Chang fled Laos with her husband and nephew Kou Thao and his family in 1979, and moved to Des Moines with her husband in 1981. In 1983 they moved to Missoula to live with their son Cha Thao, his wife Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy and, eventually, their three small daughters.

Zong Chang's husband is a shaman and is considered the head of his branch of the Thao family living in Missoula and Wisconsin. The younger men in his family seek his advice in making decisions. Kia Moua performs appropriate rituals for the spiritual and physical well-being of his family and others for the New Year, for problems of infertility, during pregnancy for the protection of the mother and fetus, after the birth of a baby to bestow blessings, during illness, and for other occasions. Those family members living far away call him on the telephone, and he performs healing rituals from a distance. Zong Chang assists Kia Moua in these shamanistic rituals. She is familiar with the special language used by the shaman while in trance, and she translates to the others what must be done and when during the rites, according to the wishes of the spirit (neeb) with whom Kia Moua is in

communication.

Zong Chang and her husband baby-sit for their three small granddaughters while Cha and Bounthavy work full-time. They all live together in the same small apartment. Zong Chang can no longer embroider because her eyesight is poor, but the things she has made for herself and her family show a love of happy, bright colors and pattern (Plates 44-49). Without a mother or grandmother to teach her how to make paj ntaub, Zong Chang says she learned by watching other women.

Zong Chang's bundle of costumes contains only one old piece from Laos: a collar she made many years ago in Sam Neua with a reverse-appliqué snail design in cotton and silk fabric with silk embroidery (Plate 45). Also in her bundle are two Hmong Sam Neua funeral costumes she has made for herself in Missoula, of shiny black and royal blue satin with floral print linings. The collars are bordered in red and made of bright cotton in what Zong Chang refers to as the "frog leg" design, and are unusual in that she has used a floral print, a touch not often seen in funeral collars in Missoula (Plates 46-49). Her choice was due to aesthetics and not convention: she used the flowered fabric " because it is pretty." The jackets are remarkable also for the wide panels of blue satin that alternate with black ones in addition to the royal blue arm stripes typical of Sam Neua jacket design. The total effect of her choice in fabrics, color and design for these funeral garments is one of great joy. For her husband, Zong Chang has made traditional black velvet wide-leg pants with a matching jacket with royal blue stripes at the cuffs. These he will wear under the long blue cotton funeral coat with the large, intricately embroidered sailor collar made for him by his niece Mee Thao.

Zong Chang would like to record the story of her life for her son and daughters so they will know how difficult her life in Laos was.

BOUNTHAVY KIATOUKAYSY (LO)

Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy was born in Vientiane, Laos, in 1967 into a White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) family of the "Striped" tradition. She refers to her Hmong subgroup as Hmong Sam Neua, as that is where her family is from. Her father was a policeman in Vientiane, the capitol of Laos, while her mother and all the children

lived part of the time in Vientiane, but most of the time in a Sam Neua village where they farmed with Bounthavy's paternal grandparents. Her father would come to visit every two or three months, and since he had access to medicine in the city, he brought it to Sam Neua so his children could be treated when sick. Most of them survived, and nine are now living in the United States. Her paternal grandparents had much wealth in Laos, in the form of silver, most of which was buried when they had to flee from Sam Neua. Today, only her grandmother, who lives in Milwaukee, knows where it can be found if the family ever should return to Laos to collect their wealth. Bounthavy's maternal grandmother still lives in Laos, in the countryside near Vientiane.

Bounthavy's family escaped from Laos by boat across the Mekong river to Thailand in 1976, and after living for two years in refugee camps, came to the United States in 1978. Her mother, father and seven siblings live in Minneapolis where they are Catholics, having joined the church while they were in Laos. In January, 1982, Bounthavy married a White Hmong from Sam Neua named Cha Thao, son of Kia Moua Thao and Zong Chang. They all share an apartment in Missoula with Cha and Bounthavy's three small daughters (Plate 50). The grandparents take care of the children during the day since Cha and Bounthavy work full-time. She graduated from Hellgate High School and works as a seamstress in a sporting goods factory. Bounthavy no longer follows the Catholic religion since she is married into a family that practices the traditional Hmong religion. Her father-in-law is a shaman.

Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy is an unusual name for a Hmong. Her father's family name is Lo. Bounthavy is a Lao name chosen by her father to remember Laos. Bounthavy's paternal great-grandfather was named Kiatou, and he was known for his great skill at neutering roosters, a task he performed for his village. "Kaysy" means "one who neuters a rooster," according to Bounthavy, and in order to remember their great-grandfather, she and all her sisters were given the surname Kiatoukaysy. Only her brothers were given the surname of their father, which is Lo, following the middle name of Kiatoukaysy, since their names will be carried on through their children, whereas women do not pass their names on to their offspring.

Bounthavy's bundle of paj ntaub contains only one item she has embroidered. It is a copy of an ecclesiastical vestment, a stole, made when she was a young teen-ager, for her family's American Catholic priest in Minneapolis. Repeated rows of three Christian crosses cover the entire band in cross-stitch, with a red, heart shaped design symbolizing a pile of rocks at the base of each cross (Plate 51). Recently, Bounthavy has made funeral garments for her paternal grandmother, her mother and father, and for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. After purchasing five appropriate funeral collars from a relative in Thailand (with designs familiar to Sam Neua province,) she had an aunt select material with her and help sew up three women's jackets in black satin with royal blue arm stripes, aprons to match, and two long white cotton men's coats with slits up the sides, to each of which she attached a collar. These she gave away in December, since she was able to hand-carry the garments to her parents and her grandmother when she returned to Minneapolis for her sister's wedding. Even though Bounthavy is too busy to embroider, she realizes the importance of the gifts of paj ntaub in her relationships with her family.

Bounthavy's collection of paj ntaub is bulging with both unique and familiar items which have been purchased in some cases, but more often made and given as gifts by her mother, her maternal and paternal grandmothers, her husband's father's brother's wife and her mother-in-law. A special heirloom sash made in Laos by her mother when her mother was twelve years old was given to Bounthavy at the time of her wedding (Plate 52), as well as an embroidered vest and two money purses embellished with silver coins brought from Laos, some of the few pieces of silver they managed to take with them when they escaped.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

1. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 26 January 1988.

2. See note 17, Chapter 1.

3. Only a few items from Pa Nhia's collection of paj ntaub were observed. The content of her entire collection is unknown.

4. Lue Vang and Judy Lewis, Grandmother's Path, Grandfather's Way: Hmong Preservation Project: Oral Lore, Generation to Generation (Rancho Cordova, CA: Folsom-Cordova Unified School District, Special Programs Office, San Francisco: Zellerbach Family Fund, 1984), p.137.

CHAPTER 3

Traditional Costumes and the Rites of Passage

Traditional garments are given, made or purchased by family members to be worn for important events during the lifetime of a Hmong, particularly for the rites of passage surrounding marriage, birth, death and the New Year's celebration. Many times paj ntaub are given in conjunction with journeys. Separated as the Hmong in Montana are from family members in distant states, visits by loved ones are special events prepared for months in advance by the sewing of costume pieces for children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, mothers, fathers, aunts or uncles. Paj ntaub are also given when families are split by moves to new locations. One grandmother, who moved to Milwaukee in 1987, gave as a going-away present a cross-stitch embellished sailor-collar to her sister-in-law left behind in Missoula, who recently incorporated it into a jacket for herself. In return, the sister-in-law gave an embroidered collar to her brother's wife to take with her when she moved to Milwaukee. The joy of making, giving and receiving traditional garments is a very important part of Hmong culture, even though they are rarely worn in the United States, and specific rituals surround the giving of some.[1]

What are the rare moments when traditional costumes are worn in the families under observation in this study? Although baby-carriers are used on a daily basis, the following are the only times that these family members dress in traditional costumes:

1) New Year. Only marriageable-age women and some young men dress in costumes, to participate in the ball-throwing ritual, a courtship activity practiced during the several days of the New Year's celebration.

2) Marriage. Only the brides and not the grooms, in this family, dress in traditional costumes for wedding ceremonies held in the United States. The young grooms prefer wearing American suits.

3) Funerals. The only two funerals since the family's arrival in the United States have been that of an elderly woman in Laos, who was dressed for her funeral in many layers of embroidered costumes, and that of the father-in-law of one of the women. He died in Montana and also wore Hmong costume, but the traditional rituals surrounding his funeral and burial had to be modified due to American health regulations. The women in Montana and Milwaukee are collecting items for their own eventual funerals, and for those of their husbands.

4) Photographs. Traditional costumes are worn for photographs more often than for any other reason. Family albums, portraits hung in bedrooms and living rooms, and snapshots sent with letters and cassette recordings to relatives in Laos, Thailand and distant U.S. cities are common in this family. Since the Hmong come from an oral tradition, not a written one, many of the older generation never learned to write, so photographs, telephone calls and cassette tapes bring family members closer, in spite of the vast distances separating them. Photographs taken in traditional costumes, usually of women, children, and young men of courtship-age but rarely of older men, are serious, formal and dignified (Plates 53-55). When one grandmother moved in 1987 to Milwaukee, her sister-in-law in Missoula made certain that a series of friendship photographs were taken of them together in Hmong Sam Neua costumes. The American friend who photographed them was asked to dress in a Hmong Sam Neua costume to be photographed with them, in a gesture of friendship (Plate 56). At the same photography session, the two sisters-in-law changed into new corduroy blazers and slacks for a formal American portrait as well, suggesting that they wish to identify with both American and Hmong traditions (Plate 57). Photographic portraits of family members in traditional dress, whether it is a child wearing his first New Year's costume, a bride at her marriage, or an elderly mother left behind in Laos, are tangible remembrances of loved ones who may never see each other again.

Contemporary Hmong are creating textiles for the same important passages of life that their ancestors did. The contents of the bundles studied fall roughly into four major groups; a bride's wedding and dowry garments; New Year's costumes; funeral garments; and children's garments. The boundaries between categories are not rigid, since there is frequent overlap. For example, a bride's wedding costume does not necessarily differ in style from her New Year's costumes, and her dowry may contain heirloom items made and worn by a mother or grandmother for occasions other than those for which the bride chooses to wear them; a baby hat made to celebrate the birth of a baby can be worn when the child is older for New Year's festivities; and some funeral garments may have been worn on previous occasions by oneself or by previous owners. Other garments surrounding funerals, the most sacred rituals in Hmong culture, are used exclusively at the time of death.

In general, traditional costumes are much more important to females in this family than they are to males. The baby boys do not have baby hats, whereas most of the girls have been given them by their mothers, grandmothers or a great aunt. Young men prefer wearing American suits at their weddings, whereas all the women wore traditional Hmong costumes. The women have a variety of New Year's costumes and continue to add to their collections, even though they seldom if ever wear them, whereas the men have far fewer items, and little variety. Even in Laos baggy Hmong pants, which to some were a sign of poverty, were shunned by certain young men who preferred Western-style trousers manufactured in factories in Vientiane.[2] One of the young men in Missoula did not even realize that his mother had made him traditional Hmong pants, a jacket and an elder's robe, which she quietly gave to her daughter-in-law to put in her family's collection of garments. He was well aware of the elaborately embellished Hmong Sam Neua money vest that he owns, however, which is covered with silver coins. For their funerals, older women have many items in their collections, whereas the older men have few. The making and purchasing of traditional costume pieces for gift exchanges among the women in this family is thriving.

The following four chapters will further explore the uses and meanings of traditional costumes for the eight women and their families as they pertain to the

New Year's celebration, marriage, death and birth. So that their personal textile collections may be seen within the broad perspective of Hmong culture, references will be made to some of the literature which surrounds these rites of passage and the costumes related to them.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. Vang and Lewis, pp. 130-131 and 136-137.

2. Personal conversation with Kou Thao, Missoula, 1986.

CHAPTER 4

Marriage and Wedding Costumes

An exploration of the rites of passage and how they are reflected in contemporary Hmong textiles will begin with marriage, since that is when a woman must leave her parents and become a member of her husband's family. It marks a fundamental change in her life, emphasized by the custom that forbids the bride to look back at her family and home when leaving them for the first time after completing the marriage rituals, since that act would bring severe misfortune on those she is leaving behind.[1] It is, however, only the first time that she may not look back. After later visits, she may turn her eyes toward her family as she leaves.[2]

Some of the ancient marriage verses recited at a White Hmong wedding ceremony show the reluctance of the bride to leave her family and her ancestral spirits, who have an honored place in the home, near the central support post.

> Ah! If I wore the trousers, I would remain
> to take in hand and look after the post spirits
> of Father and Mother.
> I only wear the miserable skirt. At any rate
> they will give me away in marriage.[3]

According to David C. Graham, the Ch'uan Miao of China were happy to marry off their daughters, "for it is the custom of marrying daughters into other homes that makes possible the securing of daughters-in-law to labor in the home and to give birth to descendants. Besides, the girl's parents receive engagement gifts and these are sometimes very valuable."[4] In Missoula this does not seem to be true, for daughters are a great solace, particularly to their widowed mothers who have seen so many family deaths during the war years, and there is grieving at yet another separation.

At the time of her marriage, a woman takes with her all the traditional costumes she has collected during her life time.[5] These items are part of her dowry, which is carefully itemized by her family, with copies of the list given to representatives of the bride's and groom's families. (See Appendix C for a copy of a dowry list made for the marriage between a Hmong Sam Neua bride and a Hmong Xieng Khouang groom who were wed in Minnesota in 1987.) When a twenty-one-year-old Hmong Sam Neua woman got married to a Green Hmong in 1985 and moved from Montana to Wisconsin, the monetary value of her traditional garments, silver jewelry and coins was added up and kept on record, as well as all her other assets. According to her brother, this considerable collection of costumes was worth over six thousand dollars, compared to her used automobile which was valued at three thousand dollars. It is the wife's property, and should the marriage fail, she would get back whatever was left of the wealth that she brought into the marriage. The bride suggested that part of her dowry could be used to help pay for a proper funeral at the time of her death. A groom must pay a bride price to the bride's family to compensate them for all their work and expense in raising her, and for taking her away from the family. The price, which is set by the bride's father or the male head of the family, varies considerably, depending not only on the bride's value, which reflects in part her dowry garments, but also the husband's ability to pay (see Appendix C). Should the marriage fail, the groom's family must be reimbursed.

The transition of the bride leaving the family of her birth and joining her husband's family is reflected in two separate costumes worn by the bride at her wedding. In the December, 1987 marriage in Minneapolis of the younger sister of one of the women included in this study, the marriage ceremony at the home of the bride, who was Catholic, lasted for twelve hours. Two male, marriage go-betweens and a helper from the Xieng Khouang tradition, chosen by the father of the bride to represent his family (even though they are from Sam Neua) because of their knowledge of the sacred songs and rituals, and three male go-betweens from Xieng Khouang province selected by the groom's family, negotiated, sang ritual songs, drank ritual rice wine and joined both families and all the guests in ceremonial feasting, all of which lasted from noon until midnight. When the bride first entered her parents'

home with the groom in a ceremonial manner, she was dressed in Hmong Xieng Khouang clothes, gifts from the groom's family representing their family tradition. Also dressed in traditional Hmong Xieng Khouang garments was her niam txais ntsuab, her principal attendant for the ceremony (comparable to an American maid-of-honor,) a sister of the groom. (In Hmong weddings, this person is a female from the groom's side of the family, usually a sister or a cousin.)[6] The groom chose his cousin to assist him during the ceremony, as a phijlaj, in a role somewhat similar to an American "best man." These two men dressed in Western-style suits. After a blessing ceremony, said to be borrowed from a Laotian custom,[7] which involved both Christian and Hmong prayers and the tying of strings by all the wedding guests on the wrists of the bride, groom and their two helpers, the bride changed into a more comfortable American dress for most of the rest of the ceremony. Late at night for the reading of the dowry list, for questions asked of the bride as part of the lengthy negotiations, and for the presentation of the ceremonial umbrella, which had been carried from the groom's home, closed, and wrapped with a narrow, striped turban band (siv ceeb,) the bride wore a Hmong Sam Neua costume made by her mother.

Hmong brides in the United States do not always strictly follow traditional ways. One of the Hmong Sam Neua women included in this study returned to Missoula for her wedding, after eloping to Wisconsin for a number of months with her Green Hmong husband. (When she first arrived in Wisconsin, the hu plig ritual was performed by her husband's family to welcome her into their lineage.) Although the marriage ceremony in Missoula a few months later followed a procedure similar to the wedding described above in Minneapolis, the bride entered her home dressed not in Green Hmong clothing, which is the dress of her husband's family, but in a Hmong Xieng Khouang costume. Furthermore, the clothing was not a gift from her husband's family, but was borrowed from her own collection of dowry garments. The explanations given were 1) that the groom's mother was no longer living and therefore unable to make a Green Hmong costume for her daughter-in-law, and 2) the bride wished to wear a costume that matched the one worn by her female attendant, or niam txais ntsuab. The bride could have worn a Green Hmong costume made for her by her mother several years earlier, but her attendant did not have a Green Hmong

costume to match. Later, the bride changed into comfortable American slacks and a blouse. At the end of the lengthy ceremony and feasting, the bride put on a Hmong Sam Neua costume made by her mother. This was worn for the presentation of the ceremonial umbrella. In Hmong tradition, the souls of the bride and groom, those of their unborn sons and daughters, and blessings for their future lives are ritually placed within the umbrella, which is later brought back to the groom's house, carefully and securely closed with a narrow striped turban band so the souls will not depart. When it is time for the umbrella to be opened and the souls to be released, a verse is sung by one of the groom's go-betweens, from which the following is an excerpt:

> I, Great Middleman, I untie and let fall the striped
> belt, so that the souls of the son and daughter-in-law
> of Father and Mother of the house from here
> can arise the one after the other.
> I open wide the Umbrella.
> Her nine rays stand out all equally.
> The souls of silver and of gold of Father and Mother
> arise. Start to laugh loudly and to say:
> Raise up sons; sons that stand erect lucky,
> Raise up daughters; daughters that stand erect
> virtuous...[8]

Traditional Hmong marriage rituals are sometimes held separately from other Hmong wedding feasts and parties in the United States. A large wedding reception for the daughter of one of the three grandmothers included in this study was held in a rented school building in Missoula in 1986. Printed wedding invitations were sent out, an electrical sound system was set up at a local school to amplify dance music played by Hmong bands, and the bride appeared in a full-length, white satin, American wedding gown, while the groom wore a Western-style suit. There was no wedding ceremony, Hmong or Christian. After a feast in the cafeteria, guests returned to the gymnasium, gifts were opened, and the bride, groom and other young adults danced enthusiastically to the blare of band music while parents, grandparents and young children happily watched, played, talked and enjoyed themselves. This was a party, not a solemn marriage. What the few American guests did not realize, was that earlier, the bride and groom had participated in a Hmong ceremony in the privacy of her mother's home, and the bride had dressed in elaborate and beautiful

Hmong wedding costumes.

The gift of wedding and dowry garments made or purchased by a mother or grandmother for the bride is a tradition which continues to be important to the women included in this study (Plates 58-63). Later, mothers-in- law in this family give costumes to the new daughters-in law (Plates 64 and 65). A paternal grandmother of one young Hmong Sam Neua bride left Milwaukee and moved in with her son in Minneapolis for several months before her granddaughter's wedding and made several complete costumes in both Hmong Sam Neua and Hmong Xieng Khouang traditions for the bride. Included in these dowry garments were money purses and a vest made by the grandmother, with old silver coins from Laos sewn to them, which had belonged to the bride's paternal grandfather who had died years before, and some old coins given to the bride by her father. Very little of the family's considerable wealth could be taken when the family escaped from Laos, and the bride treasures these remnants of her family's past, and the love with which they were given. If her mother is dead, a daughter highly values and might include in her wedding costume embroidery her mother has done, if she is fortunate enough to own some, as in the case of Ia Vang, who carried some with her as she fled her homeland.

Traditionally, if the bride marries into a different subgroup than her own, she will no longer wear the subgroup costume of her birth. In reality, this custom has little effect on the young women in this study, because they rarely, if ever, dress in Hmong costumes. When an older sister commented at the wedding to the bride that she would not be needing her Hmong Sam Neua costumes any longer, since she was marrying a Hmong Xieng Khouang, the young bride replied that although she would not be wearing them any longer, she still wanted to take them to California with her, but would be willing to send them back to Minnesota and share them with their youngest sister, who is thirteen, should she ever need them. Clearly, the bride wanted to keep with her those costumes made by her mother and paternal grandmother, which meant more to her than mere clothing to be worn.

Although outward American touches such as white satin gowns, men's suits and contemporary Western-style music are being introduced into Hmong wedding

festivities, they seem to parallel traditional Hmong practices rather than to supplant them. In Missoula, the Hmong have not intermarried with Americans, which is not surprising, since historically, the Hmong in Southeast Asia have rarely married outsiders.[9] Although they have been quick to adopt American customs and have deep friendships with Americans, the Hmong maintain a strong link with the heart of what it means to be Hmong. The myths and legends recited at weddings and funerals help to guide, instruct and identify the Hmong in a quickly changing world.

The sacred wedding verses include the origin myth pertaining to the first Hmong marriage, an incestuous relationship blessed by the supreme deity Saub,[10] who told the brother and sister Boy Nou and Girl Ndjoua, that since only they had survived the great flood, they could marry, allowing human life to continue on earth.[11] From this union sprang all the Hmong clans. According to family members, the Hmong have a strict taboo against incest within the same clan or xeem. No two Hmong with the same surname are allowed to marry, a practice strictly adhered to in Missoula and elsewhere.[12] (Occasionally two people from the same surname group marry inadvertantly, when one of them has been adopted into a new xeem and is unaware of the surname of his or her birth). The wearing of two separate Hmong costumes by the bride emphasises the separate origin of each marriage partner, and the need for ritual acceptance of the bride into the groom's lineage, an installation requiring the blessings of the ancestors.

Maintaining the complex oral and ritual traditions, however, is difficult, especially in the midst of an alien culture. Some of the younger men in the families being studied are unwilling to shoulder the immense responsibility, and would rather turn toward American religions, which seem less demanding and more acceptable to Americans. Others have no elders to teach them. One young man, whose life was severely disrupted by war at a young age, was unable to learn the family rituals after his father and older brothers were killed, and since these rituals are specific to each family and are passed down orally and through practice and observation, he has no way to learn. He and his wife are now members of a Protestant church which forbids the practice of Hmong rituals.[13] Some young men have made promises to continue with traditional practices as long as their elders are alive, but may join American

churches after their elders' deaths. If that happens, it is likely that many of the rituals and songs in this family will be forgotten.

While it is the men who are responsible for the sacred oral traditions in Hmong marriage ceremonies, it is the women who are responsible for maintaining the textile traditions, and they show a keen interest in doing so. The wedding and dowry costumes made, worn and kept by the women included in this study are rich and complex in meaning. In addition to the visual record of subgroup affiliation, geographic origin, wealth, family relationships, evolutionary change, the swings of fashion, artistic skill and craftsmanship, aesthetic balance and harmony, brilliant color, and the excitement of texture, fabric, pattern and design, the costumes are filled with emotional and spiritual implications as well. They link the woman starting into her new life with familiar bonds of love and devotion to her family, and they remind her of the ancient ways of her people and her sacred mythical heritage. Family allegiances and the power of ancestral ties, which are central to all Hmong ceremonies, still guide the behavior and thought of many Hmong, and the wedding costumes worn by the women in this family reflect those traditions.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

1. Frequently Hmong will elope, or a woman will go live with a man for a period of time, as husband and wife. It is not until they return and go through with the sacred marriage rituals that the custom of not looking back at the bride's family applies.

2. Personal conversations in Missoula with Kou Thao, May 1986, and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, January 1988.

3. Yves Bertrais, The Traditional Marriage Among the White Hmong of Thailand and Laos (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Hmong Center, 1978), Chapter 3, pp.17-18.

4. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," p.36.

5. It is not known whether in Laos this collection might contain any childhood garments. Since the women in this study could bring little, if anything, from Laos when they fled, their bundles of embroideries do not contain clothes from their childhoods.

6. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 26 January 1988.

7. Conversation with Mai Moua in Missoula, January, 1988.

8. Bertrais, Chapter 3, p.93.

9. Bernatzik, p.15.

10. This supreme spiritual being is referred to by some in female terms, by others in male terms, but also as a Mother-Father figure, combining both sexes.

11. Bertrais, Chapter 3, pp. 326-327.

12. Conversation with Kou Thao, Missoula, 1986.

13. Telephone conversation with Ia Vang, April, 1988.

CHAPTER 5

New Year's Costumes

A bride's dowry includes not only her wedding garments, but all of her New Year's costumes which she has worn since the age of about thirteen.[1] The younger women in this study, who have participated in numerous New Year's celebrations since fleeing Laos, own a variety of different costumes that reflect not only their subgroup affiliation, but other popular subgroup styles as well. It is customary for a young woman to wear new garments each New Year until she marries, and great effort and expense are put into these opulent costumes, which are purchased or made by grandmothers, mothers and the daughters who will be wearing them. (Some young men in Missoula, but fewer of them than the women, also dress in traditional costumes; the young men in the family under observation prefer wearing American clothes.) The resulting display of needlework, and silver and aluminum coins and jewelry, is dazzling.

For the first time since the arrival of Hmong refugees in Missoula, the ancient New Year's courtship ritual of ball-throwing between young men and women (except for a brief display of it on a stage) was cancelled in 1987 by Hmong leaders, due to the small number of marriageable participants. The Hmong population in Missoula once numbered between eight and nine hundred individuals, but has dwindled to two-hundred and forty-two, as of November, 1987.[2] For the particular benefit of Hmong children raised in the United States who are in danger of losing their cultural identity, and for other Hmong and American guests as well, a program containing various aspects of Hmong culture followed the annual New Year's feast during Thanksgiving week-end in 1987. Included, among other things, were a dress review of young Hmong dressed in a variety of subgroup costumes, traditional singing, and

ball-throwing on the stage by the costumed young people.

A few of the young men and women from Missoula later travelled with friends or family to Merced and Fresno, California in December, 1987 for the elaborate New Year's celebrations and participated in the ball-throwing ritual with thousands of other marriageable Hmong. During the several days of the festivities, tens of thousands of Hmong of all ages met at an open-air park in Fresno to join in the ball-throwing game, listen to singing, play carnival games, purchase items from T-shirts to silver jewelry to cassette recordings of traditional and popular Hmong music, eat, visit, photograph, record music, or just observe. Some, particularly those of courtship age, were in costume, representing a variety of subgroup variations (Plates 66-75). One man stood out from all the rest. He was dressed in elaborate women's garments, including a Green Hmong skirt and Xieng Khouang jacket, turban, money purses, sashes and necklace. He did not participate in the ball game, but wandered around wearing bright red lipstick and holding a festive umbrella. The Hmong were puzzled by his behaviour; one woman knew him to be married and the father of several children, and said he had never acted like that before. Many dressed like Americans, including a minority of somber-faced Hmong teen-agers, standing apart from the crowd, sporting punk hair-dos and clothes to match.

Those in costume were truly on display. Although there were a few Americans wandering through the crowd taking pictures, many more Hmong had video and still cameras to record the spectacular array of shimmering fabrics, ornate embroidery, and jingling silver and aluminum coins and necklaces. One seventeen-year-old Sam Neua woman from Missoula purchased, with her own earnings, an elaborate silver necklace from Thailand which cost her over eight-hundred dollars, and she wore that for the first time in Fresno with the intricately embroidered Sam Neua costume made for her by her mother. Shyness amid strangers, exhaustion, a bruised neck from wearing the heavy necklace, and a sore arm from having thrown a tennis ball continuously for many consecutive hours, however, kept her from joining her costumed older brother and male cousins on the final day before returning to Missoula, and she went to the festivities simply as an observer, wearing American slacks and a sweater. Courtship activities continued each evening during the holiday

at parties held by various Hmong groups throughout the Fresno area, and young Hmong men and women, no longer dressed in restricting layers of traditional costumes, celebrated and danced in comfortable American clothes to the accompaniment of popular Hmong rock bands, late into the night.

In northern Thailand during the 1930's, Hugo Bernatzik observed young ball-game participants who forfeited an article of clothing to their partner whenever they missed the ball thrown to them, occasionally to the point of near nudity, at which time they escaped from public laughter and embarrassment into their home, where they redressed in a new costume.[3] In Fresno, where tennis balls instead of the traditional cloth balls are thrown, and often with great speed, young couples substitute items other than clothing for forfeiture, including hairbrushes, watches, car keys, camera lens caps, and any other available items (Plate 74). Good players will frequently hold onto fists full of forfeit items in one hand, while they catch and throw the ball with the other. Players did not appear to use their coin-fringed money purses to hold forfeit items.

Traditional singing of love songs by either the man or woman is still done by some of the young as they throw the ball back and forth, alternating verses with their partner if the partner also knows how to sing traditional songs, but only a few know how to do it well. Good singers in Fresno were surrounded with numerous tape recorders and video cameras, often operated by older Hmong (Plate 75). The love verses, many of which are made up spontaneously and require an impromptu answer by the partner, are bitter-sweet reminders for the elderly of their youth, and of a unique Hmong custom in Laos that is disappearing in the United States.

In Laos, love messages are also conveyed by lovers through musical instruments and by singing through leaves, in an imitation of sung poetry. It takes a well-trained ear to be able to tell what the music is saying, and young Hmong in Missoula who have not learned the technique can not decipher the love messages shaped by these sounds.[4] While listening to a cassette recording of flutes and other reed instruments from Laos, a mother in Missoula could translate word for word into English what the instruments were saying, but her daughter and a young friend who both speak Hmong fluently, could not understand the musical language. Often, in Laos,

courtship songs were discouraged after marriage. One of the young mothers included in this study used to sing messages to her boyfriend through tree leaves when they walked in the mountains between villages or to the farm, but she was too embarrassed to demonstrate the technique to a good American friend, a female companion. An older woman recounted, while driving back from the New Year's celebration in Fresno, that the year after she married in Sam Neua province, she tried to sing love songs once again, but her husband told her not to; now that they were married, there was no need to sing those songs which were intended, presumably, for courtship only.

The women in this study who courted their lovers and husbands in Laos watch as their sons and daughters participate in similar but modified rituals, in the context of modern America. Transition is evident in the costumes that the girls wear. Whereas their mothers dressed for New Year's in Sam Neua or Xieng Khouang costumes, depending on the subgroup into which they were born, the young women in this study each own costumes representative of at least two, if not three, different subgroups from which they select one to wear, depending on personal preference (Plates 76-85). Wealthy girls may wear a different costume each night of the New Year celebration to display their riches.[5] Frequently subgroup garments are mixed, creating a hybrid costume. For instance, often one will see a Green Hmong batiked and appliquéd skirt worn with a White Hmong Xieng Khouang jacket and matching money-purses, topped off with a new-style, "dragon hat." Many of these hybrid costumes were worn by the contestants in the "Miss Hmong" contest held in Fresno during December, 1987, an event which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.[6] At least one non-Hmong costume, besides American clothes, has been introduced into the New Year's celebration in recent years. Each of the young women in this study owns one length or more of embroidered or woven brocade silk fabric that is Laotian. The five-year-old daughter of one of the women practiced for weeks ahead of time and performed, in her mother's Lao costume, a Lao dance with several other tiny girls at one New Year's cultural program in Missoula (Plate 141). A maternal grandmother who still lives in Laos sent her granddaughter two lengths of this fabric as a wedding present, along with a hand-dyed, handwoven Hmong turban

cloth. The Hmong enjoy borrowing aspects of neighboring cultures and adding them to their own.

Older women of the family in this study do not scorn the costume changes being practiced by their daughters, granddaughters and younger sisters. They are, in fact, active participants in the transitions that are going on. They are willing to make costly purchases of costume pieces traditional to subgroups outside the family affiliation, and they love to experiment with new designs, techniques and materials when making costumes for their daughters and granddaughters.

The very first New Year's costume made by a Sam Neua grandmother for her Sam Neua granddaughter in Minneapolis was, at the request of the thirteen-year-old, a Hmong Xieng Khouang costume, because she wanted to be like her friends who lived near her. Instead of creating a typical Hmong Xieng Khouang collar design, which she did not have the training to do, the grandmother used a geometric cross-stitch pattern which she would later repeat on another collar for her granddaughter, this time on a Hmong Sam Neua jacket with striped sleeves. Cross-stitch designs are freguently borrowed back and forth between subgroups, according to the women. The father objected to his daughter's wish to wear Hmong Xieng Khouang clothes, wanting her to dress in the costume of his subgroup instead, but the daughter's wish prevailed. The final costume was a compromise, however, since the daughter, who wanted to wear silver coins, lacked Hmong Xieng Khouang money purses and wore her Hmong Sam Neua money vest instead. This young woman's first New Year's costume reflects the complex forces at work in the lives of Hmong refugee families, and is an example of how the costumes being made by Hmong women in the United States adapt and reflect changes brought on by those forces.

Several years later, when the same Sam Neua thirteen-year-old had grown up, married, moved to Montana, and borne three children of her own, she in turn spent one hundred dollars on a finely embroidered Green Hmong jacket and matching apron for her young thirteen-year-old sister back in Minneapolis, when she found out how desperately her little sister wanted a fancier Green Hmong costume than the one she already owned.[7] The young sister, filled with joy because of the gift, promised to name her older sister as the donor, in the future dowry document that would be

written up at the time of marriage. Another of the young Sam Neua Hmong women in this study adopted the Xieng Khouang costume as her favorite for New Year's festivities, even though the Hmong in Missoula, where she used to live, are predominantly "Striped" Hmong from Sam Neua. Her mother willingly sewed those portions of the costumes that she was able to, and purchased numerous pieces of intricate reverse-appliqué in the form of sashes, turban bands, money-purses and collars in the Xieng Khouang tradition, which were too difficult for her to make without years of training. The grandmothers all seem to be intrigued with the shimmering, highly embellished new-style dragon hats, and some enjoy making them for their daughters' or granddaughters' New Year's costumes, as do the young women themselves. The women in this study, young and old, in their ability to create and enjoy both ancient patterns and new styles, show great flexibility in meeting change. As the boundaries between Hmong subgroups begin to blur and some Hmong customs are altered in the United States, it is being recorded in the costumes the women are making, with needle and thread.

In the families under observation, young Sam Neua women like wearing Xieng Khouang style clothes, but the Xieng Khouang women do not show an interest in making or wearing Sam Neua costumes, even if they have married into that subgroup. Men, women and children in most Hmong Sam Neua families in Missoula have adopted the Xieng Khouang-style necklace as their principal form of jewelry (Plate 21). One family member suggested that in Laos, the Hmong Xieng Khouang from the south lived closer to urban centers, had more wealth, and were therefore admired by the Hmong Sam Neua who were from the poorer northern mountainous areas.[8] Fabrics used for Xieng Khouang-style women's jackets, aprons and pants in the United States include glitter-encrusted velvets (some of which are imported from France,) metallic woven floral patterns and shimmering, synthetic surfaces (Plates 77 and 78). The use of these expensive materials reflects wealth that often was denied to impoverished, hard-working farm families in Laos, and brings great pleasure to members of a culture who have always loved displaying their riches in the form of costume. In addition, some Hmong enjoy the political status that is earned by adopting the costume of powerful General Vang Pao's family, who lived in Xieng

Khouang province. Observers have noted that traditionally the Hmong have tended to adopt certain customs of the dominant group where they live. Since there were more Hmong in Xieng Khouang province than in any other area in Laos,[9] and it was the military headquarters during the war and many of the Sam Neua Hmong relocated there when they evacuated their villages in the north, it is not unusual that their clothing has been influenced by that association. In China among the Ch'uan Miao, David C. Graham expressed a fear that the elaborate embroidery worn for ceremonial occasions might vanish since the Miao were dressing more and more in plain costumes like their Chinese neighbors.[10] Yves Bertrais observed in Laos, where White Hmong outnumber Green Hmong, that many Green Hmong were dressing in White Hmong costumes, and suggested that it is natural for groups to adapt to the customs of the prevailing population.[11] Certainly in Missoula and other U.S. cities, the Hmong refugees dress like Americans.

The "Miss Hmong" and "Mr. Hmong" pageant held in Fresno as the culmination of the New Year's festivities is an example of the fusion of American and Hmong cultural practices.[12] A huge sports stadium was the site for the 1987 contest, which included a "Mr. Hmong" competition for the first time. Admission was ten dollars per person, with a one hundred dollar charge for those interested in being seated in a special section for the use of video cameras. Families in Missoula unable to travel to California watched, with interest, a video tape of the all-night event taken by one of their neighbors. First, a number of young Hmong women from all over the United States who were dressed in traditional costumes (which included many transitional touches such as new-style dragon hats and hybrid costumes of mixed subgroups) walked one by one around a stage, turning in all directions as their names were announced and they were briefly introduced. The contest appeared to be based on beauty (a combination of personal attractiveness and spectacularly embroidered costumes), poise, and an extemporaneously spoken answer to a written question picked out of a large, silvery chalice by each contestant. When the women were through, but before the winner was announced, young, unmarried men in costume repeated the procedure. Members of the audience cheered, clapped and went up to the stage to give money to those they favored. The Hmong family watching the video

in Missoula made continual side comments about the contestants, passing judgment on their looks, their costumes, their voices and choice of words, which had to be spoken in Hmong. All introductory remarks and questions were repeated by the Master of Ceremonies in Lao, but not in English. Many of the young girls, raised for so many years in the United States, had lost their ability to speak Hmong fluently, and some of them had affected accents which brought disapproval from one of the women watching in Missoula. Her husband mentioned that he has a very beautiful niece in Iowa who may enter the contest in 1988, but she will have to be trained in the Hmong language during the coming year, since she now speaks English most of the time.

The contestant who received the strongest approval from the Fresno audience, judging by the cheering and clapping, answered the following question: "What do you plan to do for the Hmong people if you should win the Miss Hmong contest?" She gave a lengthy, impassioned reply, shouting at times, weeping uncontrollably and gesturing. Some of the crowd roared with approval, and an elderly shaman and grandfather watching the video in Missoula beamed with amazement and pleasure. The girl said that even though she is a woman, she would join General Vang Pao's soldiers, go back to Laos and kill the communists in retaliation for the deaths of her father and brother who died during the war, and she would help liberate Laos so the Hmong could return to their homeland. Even if she would not be allowed to fight, she would go to Laos and carry food and supplies, or help in any way she could. She told the audience to look around them, they who think there are a lot of Hmong gathered in one location. Look around the stadium, she said, and notice that it is only half full. The Hmong have been split apart, sent to countries all over the world with many left behind in Laos. The Hmong are being treated like ants, and are being stepped upon. They must try to reunite in their homeland, she implored. A Missoula teen-ager in the stadium said that General Vang Pao, who was in the audience, wept during the girl's speech, and sent a messenger up to the stage to thank the young woman for her loyalty and to give her some money to show his admiration.[13] This sudden outbreak of pain, memory and passion in a setting that outwardly resembled the superficiality of a "Miss America" contest, was a reminder of the deep cultural

differences between the Hmong and Americans, and of the shared experiences which bind the Lao-Hmong together in spite of their internal political squabbles, surname-group differences and mixed geographic origins.

The New Year's costumes worn by the women in this study, with their broad variety of styles, fabrics, and innovative designs, reflect change in the Hmong experience. Costumes worn for New Year's show more flexibility and sense of adventure than Hmong costumes worn for any other occasion. When asked whether the blurring of lines between costume subgroups meant that the Hmong were beginning to identify with all Hmong rather than with their individual subgroups, a conclusion an outsider might draw, one young woman seemed confused by the question. Ties with her family, her husband's family, their places of origin and shared experiences within their lineages are still more important to her than any general sense of being Hmong. She feels tremendous loyalty to being from Sam Neua, even though in the United States as a teen-ager she chose to wear a variety of different costumes, and though as an adult she continues to collect them for herself and for her daughters.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER FIVE

1. Since little if anything could be carried from Laos, the dowry collections of the women included in this study contain no childhood garments. Whether or not Hmong dowry collections in Laos sometimes contain childhood costume items is unknown.

2. These statistics are according to the Refugee Assistance Corporation in Missoula. The depressed economy in Western Montana, leadership struggles between Hmong family groups, better educational and employment opportunities elsewhere, and the desire to reunite with family members living in other states have all contributed to an exodus of Hmong refugees from Missoula.

3. Bernatzik, p.96.

4. For a clear explanation of this form of Hmong oral expression, see Amy R. Catlin's report entitled "Speech Surrogate Systems of the Hmong: From Singing Voices to Talking Reeds," The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports: Papers of the 1981 Research Conference: University of Minnesota, edited by Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, 1982), pp.170-197.

5. Personal conversation with Mary Yang, February, 1987, Missoula.

6. A home video of this event was made by a Missoula resident and lent to different households for viewing. In addition to the Miss Hmong contest, a Mr. Hmong contest was also held in Fresno in December, 1987, and Missoula Hmong residents watched the video and made comments with great enthusiasm.

7. These Green Hmong garments were purchased in Missoula from a woman, who, although married to a White Hmong from Sam Neua, was born into a Green Hmong family and has relatives in a refugee camp in Thailand through whom she orders Green Hmong costumes.

8. Personal conversation with Kou Thao, May 1986, Missoula.

9. Bertrais, Chapter 1, p.2.

10. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," p.25. It would be interesting to know what was contained in the personal collections of costumes of the Ch'uan Miao that might never have been seen by Graham. What might they have valued and continued to embroider, like the Hmong in Missoula, even if the costumes were rarely, if ever, worn and seen by outsiders?

11. Bertrais, p.1-2.

12. Apparently, even in Laos the Hmong in General Vang Pao's area in Xieng Khouang province held a "Miss Hmong" contest. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, 14 February, 1988, Missoula.

13. Personal conversation with Thai Thao, Missoula, 14 February, 1988.

CHAPTER 6

Death and Funeral Costumes

For the Hmong, death is not final. Most believe that multiple souls, or plig,[1] reside within the body. The number of plig varies according to different beliefs, and can range from one to as many as thirty-two.[2] Many Hmong, including some of the refugees from Sam Neua residing in Missoula, agree that there are three principal souls that continue to exist after the body decays, and they perform several important functions such as: guarding the tomb; travelling as ghosts to appear in the dreams of those living on earth; going on the long journey to the spirit world of the ancestors; eventually becoming reincarnated into a future generation of the same family; and offering help to relatives on earth.[3] The central post of the Hmong home is a sacred link between that part of the family which dwells on earth, and those who live in "heaven," or the spirit world.[4] The ancestors and their family members living on earth form a close relationship of mutual responsibility, and when the Hmong move to a different location, as they often do, rituals are performed to inform the ancestors of the move, so they can migrate with the family to its new home.[5]

Informing the ancestors of a move benefits the family on earth as well as the ancestral souls. Whenever an elder of one of the young Sam Neua women included in this study moves to a new location, she calls to her deceased husband to let him know where she is moving. On one occasion back in Laos she forgot to do this, and, according to the interpretation of the granddaughter, her grandfather's soul caused his wife to became ill while she was walking to her new home. When she realized her mistake, she called him, apologized and told him to move with her, and she soon recovered.[6]

The most sacred passage of life for which traditional Hmong textiles are used is death, at which time one plig or soul must make the arduous journey back to the place of its birth, stopping along the way at every location that the deceased had previously lived, settling all debts. The funeral rites, through the help of the drum, the Hmong mouth organ called the qeej, the recitation of the sacred funeral poems by the funeral director, food offerings and the burning of incense and paper money, assist the soul back to the place where the placenta was placed at the time of birth. This "shirt" or placenta (the word tsho means both "shirt" and "placenta" in Hmong)[7] is retrieved from a sacred location in which it was buried inside the home. For girls it is under the matrimonial bed. For boys it is at the base of the center post of the home, which connects the spiritual and material worlds.[8] The soul must then continue its journey from there back to the earliest descendant of the family line, into China, and the origin of the ancestral spirits. It is difficult to return as the way has been forgotten, so the funeral poem, or qhuab ke, is recited to show the deceased the way back to the source of life. Qhuab ke means "to show the way".[9] So powerful are these ancient verses that they may not be recited outside of a funeral for fear of precipitating the death of someone listening. This is why, according to anthropologist Jacques Lemoine, the one who recites the funeral verses at Hmong funerals in Laos must do so privately to the deceased, in a very low voice.[10] The journey is fraught with danger, and offerings at the funeral help to feed and protect the soul along its way. The clothing worn by the deceased protects the person from cold or danger. The garments are also very important gifts from numerous family members who show their love and their responsibility for the happiness and well-being of the deceased by making and giving brilliant embroideries, often while the person is still alive. Many layers of costumes are worn by the corpse, depending on how many gifts have been received. Those departed souls who live in the land of the ancestors have the same needs as family members living on earth, according to David C. Graham who studied the Ch'uan Miao in China, and so the offerings of clothing, food and paper money provided at the funeral are essential. In exchange for continual memorial offerings over the years, the last three generations of ancestors will help provide prosperity and protection to their descendants on earth.[11]

It is through the sons that ancestors provide wealth for their descendants, not through the daughters. A funeral custom known to some members of the family in this study, and to other Missoula Hmong, requires the sons of the deceased to hold on to the edges of the large, outermost funeral collar (dab tsho) which supports the head as they carry the body to the burial site. It is very important that no one else lower the head of the body into the grave. The sons then position the head of their parent in a special way, tilted to the left, so that good fortune will come down through the sons and not the daughters, who have presumably married into other xeem (other surname groups) and will be provided for by their husbands' families. If there are no sons, then nephews or other males from the same xeem carry the edges of the funeral collar, because if someone from the wrong xeem carries the head and manages to tilt the head in the wrong direction, to the right, which would allow wealth to descend through the daughters' families, then the male family lineage could lose its prosperity for generations to come. If the head is placed in the middle, then the family fortune goes equally to sons and daughters.[12]

Not only is costume important at the funeral and during the journey of the soul back to its origin, but also at the very end of the path, after climbing up the sky ladder into heaven where the soul is met by the ancestors. According to Jacques Lemoine who has done an extensive study of the qhuab ke, one verse reveals the following to the travelling soul: Your Ancestors will hold out their skirt to receive you and you will jump into the skirt of your Ancestors. Your Ancestors will hold out their shirt to receive you and you without waiting will bound into the shirt of your Ancestors.[13] In China, David C. Graham observed the funeral of a Miao woman that included the following instructions to the deceased: "I am offering meat for you to eat.... You must give it to your female and male ancestors for three generations to eat. When you have eaten it, you should go and be near the clothing and belt of your grandmother and the clothing and belt of your husband's grandfather.... When you have eaten, you go and get near your husband's grandmother's clothing and get into your husband's grandfather's clothing."[14] The deceased had been carefully washed and sent off dressed in finely embellished clothes by her family on earth for the long journey, and she would later be received by her ancestral family who would

put their clothing on her, giving her a new identity.

The Hmong in the United States have found many obstacles in following their traditional religious beliefs. Because most live in urban apartment complexes, they do not own their homes or land. Appropriate burial grounds are lacking,[15] the sacred architecture of their traditional homes, which sheltered benevolent spirits in special locations, has often been replaced by trailers or low-income rental units,[16] and placentas, with no place to go, are left at the hospital in the American way. Because chanting, drumming, playing the qeej and burning incense for several days would disturb Americans in urban situations, and because of health regulations, the Hmong must use funeral homes where only limited traditional funeral practices can take place. Ancestral souls have come back in dreams to various family members living in the United States, suffering because ceremonial food and paper money never reached them, since the funeral rituals could not be performed correctly.[17]

Problems due to relocation exist not only for the Hmong refugees who have moved to the United States but for their ancestors who died in Laos as well. The soul of the grandfather of one young Sam Neua woman could not adjust to urban life in an American city. Although his soul had followed his wife to each new location as she fled Laos, moved to Thailand and eventually settled in the United States, he finally came to her in a dream and said he could no longer live there because of all the electricity and machines, and he must go back to Laos. In the dream she asked him how he would return, and he replied that he had a horse in the ocean on which he would ride back home. He never appeared to his wife in a dream again.[18]

Because many Hmong have become Protestants or Catholics, there sometimes is uncertainty about the type of religious service to hold and what to wear. Traditional Hmong believe in reincarnation, specifically that the soul of the deceased will be reborn back into the same family in a subsequent generation. According to one woman in this study, some Hmong in the United States are afraid to be dressed in Hmong clothes at their own funerals for fear they will come back as Hmong. Life in the U.S. is better for Americans than for the Hmong, they reason, so perhaps they should wear American clothes so that they can come back in some future life as more-privileged Americans.[19]

It is within this confusing framework that traditional funeral garments are still being made today, and they are in the bundles of the young and old Hmong women alike included in this study, whether they consider themselves Green Hmong, White Hmong, Baptist, Catholic or of traditional Hmong religious beliefs. The making and giving of funeral garments is one of the positive ways the women in this family have found to ease the apprehension brought on by drastic change. These embroidered textiles help to give their lives definition and meaning in the midst of transition.

Funeral clothes are prepared for in advance by a variety of female members of the family, either for themselves or to be given as gifts. The three older women included in this study each have made Hmong Sam Neua elder's jackets (tsho laus) with matching aprons for themselves which will be worn during their own funerals and burials (Plates 46-49, 30-32, and 40-41). If the jackets do not have conspicuously large sailor collars, which indicate they are to be used exclusively for funerals, they may be worn for other occasions. One of the grandmothers, who completed her last costume in 1988, wore a jacket and apron recently for a photographic portrait to hang on her living room wall. The embellished jacket collar (not a very large one) was one of two in a gift exchange between two sisters-in-law, and the jacket will be worn for her funeral. Women make these embroidered garments for themselves and their husbands while their eyesight, power of concentration and steady hands are good enough to do expert needlework, often years before they consider themselves old.

Daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers, mothers-in-law, granddaughters, aunts, nieces, sisters and sisters-in-law make funeral garments and give them as gifts (Plates 86-107). Unlike Americans who might feel old, depressed, and reminded of their mortality if given a funeral garment, the Hmong consider it an honor to receive collars (dab tsho), elder's jackets for women (tsho laus), aprons (sev), elder's robes for men (tsho laus) or "seed pillows" (noob ncoos) intended to be used at the time of one's death. The term funeral garment is not used by the Hmong, who consider it inauspicious to refer to death in this context. Rather, they are called "old person's clothes" or "elder's clothes". The gift of a seed pillow or old-person's shirt, in fact, is thought to promote good health and long life for the recipient, and a special ceremonial feast is sometimes offered to the donor in return. The following verse is

recited at the Green Hmong ceremony when a daughter and son-in-law present noob ncoos to the mother-in law and father-in-law:

> ...this year, your daughter and son-in-law bring these small pieces of cloth as a sign of blessing for you. May you receive good health and wealth, have long lives, and remain strong forever. ONE THOUSAND YEARS WITHOUT WEAKNESS, FOREVER WITHOUT SICKNESS, YOU WILL BE OUR ADVISORS, YOU WILL BE OUR ELDERS, YOU WILL LIVE UNTIL YOUR HAIR IS COMPLETELY WHITE.[20]

One young Hmong Sam Neua wife in Missoula who recently made "old people's shirts" for her paternal grandmother, her parents and her parents-in-law, said that her mother would be very surprised to receive the gift. When asked if that was because the mother considered herself too young for such a gift, the girl replied no, she just would not be expecting it and would be pleased at her daughter's thoughtfulness. The young woman's husband added that one might die at any time, that old age does not necessarily bring death. For the Hmong who have seen so much death of young and old alike, it is a comfort to receive old-people's shirts and seed pillows and know that they are given in love and with a keen sense of family responsibility.

Mention has already been made of Mai Lee, who embroidered numerous garments for her aging mother in Laos. Being able to create and send beautiful paj ntaub to her mother, whom she would never see again, must have helped Mai Lee deal with the pain of separation; and as a sign of her daughter's filial love, the embroideries must have comforted the failing old woman, left behind in Laos.

One of the grandmothers made funeral garments for her son and daughter-in-law which were given quietly and put away without acknowledgement or even a look at them, a very different response than the Green Hmong noob ncoos ceremony described above. As one young woman explained, Hmong are not as demonstrative about gift-giving as Americans are, and make little public display when gifts are received. Another family member suggested that elders in the United States are not sure of how their sons and daughters, many of whom have become outwardly Americanized, feel about traditional customs. The older women wish to give appropriate costumes for the rites of passage, but depending on the family, sometimes these gifts are not fully appreciated.

Funeral garments are also given after death occurs. One moving example of this was when Ia Vang's older brother died in the Thai refugee camp, as mentioned earlier, and she buried him in the elder's robe that her mother had carefully stitched and intended to give to Ia's father. As both parents had died in Laos and her father's body was never found, Ia carried the robe and other embroideries of her mother's with her, after her grandmother's death, clinging to these meaningful fragments of her family's life. To be able to wrap her brother in that robe must have given Ia strength, knowing that her mother, father and grandmother too were all somehow sharing in that gesture.

Garments that are given after a person dies are collected by a close relative of the deceased who helps organize the funeral. According to one of the young Hmong Sam Neua women in Missoula, if a woman dies, then her brother will approach all his nieces, nephews and other close relatives and ask them for appropriate funeral garments, if they have not already given any. If a man dies, then his sister does the asking. If no brothers or sisters are living, then a close relative of the same <u>xeem</u> (surname group) as the deceased takes care of the arrangements. Sometimes there are more clothes than the deceased can wear for the funeral. The same relative in charge of collecting gifts for the deceased is also in charge of distributing keepsake gifts, or <u>saib</u> <u>dab</u> <u>muag</u>, to family members. All extra clothing belonging to a dead mother is divided among her daughters and daughters-in-law, and all clothing that will not be worn by a father at his funeral is distributed between his sons and sons-in-law.[21]

In addition to gifts of funeral clothing, sons are expected to give a cow for the funeral feast, if they are wealthy, but if poor, whatever they can afford, such as a pig or chickens.[22] The offerings of embroidered garments and ceremonial food for the funeral are expected, if sons and daughters can afford them.[23] Since filial responsibility is one of the supreme Hmong virtues, and since the ancestors repay relatives on earth for their gifts by bringing them good health and prosperity, failure to help take care of the deceased by sons and daughters is rare.

These gifts, however, are not free from confusion in the rapidly changing world of Hmong refugees. The same father who was upset that his daughter would rather

wear a Hmong Xieng Khouang costume for her first New Year's celebration in the United States instead of a Hmong Sam Neua costume from her own tradition, told her ten years later that he appreciated her thoughtfulness, but would probably wear American clothes at his funeral instead of the Hmong Sam Neua "old person's coat" that his daughter just had made for him. As a Catholic, he embraces both Christian and traditional Hmong spiritual beliefs, but feels that an American suit would be more appropriate at his funeral. The daughter thought that her mother, who is also Catholic, would be dressed in Hmong clothes for her funeral.

Although women make the garments, they are considered gifts from both the husband and wife. In fact, according to the young woman mentioned above, only if her husband had accompanied her to Minnesota to present the old-person's clothes to her parents and paternal grandmother, would there have been a special ceremonial feast thanking them for the gifts. Since her husband stayed home in Montana, the formalities did not take place. Gratitude was expressed, however, and her mother gave her a newly made Hmong Xieng Khouang costume of glitter-encrusted velvet in exchange.

The one type of garment owned by each of the eight Hmong women included in this study, and intended to be worn exclusively at the time of death, is a white pleated skirt. Although some White Hmong women wear white pleated skirts for other occasions, such as for New Year's, the women in this family, both from the Sam Neua and Xieng Khouang traditions, use the skirt as a funeral garment. Each of the young women was given a white pleated skirt at the time of her wedding, by a grandmother, mother or other close relative, except for Ia Vang who will wear the old hemp cloth skirt of her mother's that Ia carried in the bundle tied to her back as she swam across the Mekong.

The wedding and New Year's costumes worn by these women include baggy black pants with long aprons worn both in front and in back for modesty. Since at their funerals the women will be wearing skirts, the ends of which lap over in front, aprons need only be worn in the front to cover the closure. Instead of the customary two aprons per costume, then, there is only one apron per funeral jacket in the older women's bundles of textiles (Plates 87 and 88). Other than their white pleated skirts,

a few heirloom pieces belonging to Ia Vang, and the elder's garments made by Mai Lee for Ia Vang, the young married women have not yet acquired funeral clothes.

The complete funeral costume of the Hmong Sam Neua women in this family will include one or more white pleated skirts (tiab dawb), a variable number of "elder's shirts" (tsho laus) with embroidered sailor collars (dab tsho) and matching front aprons (sev sia), black or indigo-dyed, cotton or hemp puttees, or leg-wraps (nrhoob), special shoes made of cotton or other material that will easily disintegrate in the grave, a black turban (phuam), two long sashes (siv) tied in front, one green and one red, that hang down to the feet, one embroidered belt (qhuas sev) and a "seed pillow" (noob ncoos) or a elder's collar (dab tsho laus) under the head (Plate 36). The "seed" or noob refers to the lineage, according to Lue Vang and Judy Lewis.[24] One woman in this study explains that noob ncoos is a Green Hmong term for the paj ntaub square placed under the head or on top of the deceased, and dab tsho is the White Hmong term for the same thing. In her family, it is rare to have a separate noob ncoos placed under the head, since they use their large collars instead.[25]

The Hmong Sam Neua men will wear several black baggy pants (ris) with matching fitted jackets (tsho) of satin or velvet, edged in royal blue at the neck and with two or three royal blue stripes at the cuff. Around their waists they will wear two sashes (siv), one red and one green, shorter than the womens' and tied in front so that they hang down to about their knees, and an embroidered belt (qhuas sev) if they have one. Over this they will wear long cotton elder's coats (tsho laus) with slits up the sides, with large, elaborately embroidered sailor collars (dab tsho) (Plates 94, 97- 103). According to some family members, these coats should have medium-length sleeves and be white (Plate 98). According to others, the coats should be blue and have longer sleeves with embroidery at the cuff, such as the one received by a young Hmong Sam Neua man from his mother several years ago (Plate 100). A third version of an elder men's coat found in the family collections being studied is blue cotton with medium-length, unembroidered sleeves (Plate 97). One elder shaman has received two different types as gifts from his daughter-in-law and his brother's daughter, and will presumably wear both. These long funeral coats are said to be reminiscent of coats worn many years ago in China, and perhaps form a means of

identification for the soul when it travels to join its ancestors.[26] The Hmong questioned in Missoula are unfamiliar with this theory. On their heads the men will wear black turbans, smaller than those worn by the women, and on their feet, special shoes similar to the women's.

The Hmong, who love silver coins and jewelry and wear much silver on their wedding and New Year's costumes, never include silver or metal of any kind in their funeral garments. Any substance placed in the grave with the body which will not easily decompose would make it difficult for the soul or souls to exit the body properly. According to one of the men in the Thao family, that is why cotton should be used in funeral garments instead of nylon, since nylon does not disintegrate as easily as cotton. Leaving metal in a grave can cause considerable harm to living descendants, including illness, poverty or even death. According to one young husband from Sam Neua who used to live in Missoula, a family must check the dressed corpse very carefully, before placing it in the grave, for hidden pins, needles or other small pieces of metal which may have been secretly placed there by a member of another family or an enemy who wishes to bring misfortune to the descendants of the deceased.[27] In China, Graham observed the same practice among the Ch'uan Miao.[28] One of the young Sam Neua wives included in this study explained that the Hmong like having gold inlays in their teeth, but these must all be removed before a burial. She also said that Hmong prefer wooden coffins, in the United States, to metal ones, because it is thought that the body will decompose more easily and thereby allow the soul to depart and become reincarnated.[29]

For the same reason, shoes worn by the deceased are not ordinary dress or work shoes, but are made of cotton, hemp or woven grass, so they will not remain in the grave after the flesh disintegrates. The special shoes that will be worn by one of the grandmothers included in this study were ordered from her relatives in a Thai refugee camp. They are stitched of royal blue cotton with a black border and white soles, and the toes rise up in the shape of a cock's comb, the cock being the auspicious bird who helps to lead the deceased on the difficult journey to the spirit world of the ancestors[30] (Plate 108). A portion of the road leading there is covered with dangerous caterpillars, and the shoes are worn both for protection and to tread the insects to

death.[31] According to one of the young wives and her aunt, it is important to use these special shoes made for funerals, instead of merely wrapping the feet in fabric, as some Hmong do. Plain cloth could fall apart and might not afford adequate protection against the biting insects.

Another danger from which the deceased must be protected are evil Chinese spirits, according to a member of the Thao family. The three gun shots which are fired at a traditional Hmong funeral are to frighten away those spirits, but this custom can not be practiced in urban American settings. A young Missoula Hmong from the Thao family has listened to a cassette recording of an elder telling the ancient history of the Hmong in China, and their conflicts with the Chinese. In China, the graves of the Hmong were robbed and their elaborately embroidered garments were stolen. To discourage this from happening, the turban cloth, the outer tsho laus or jacket, the sashes and the funeral shoes are ritually torn, and the deceased is guided by a funeral verse to reveal the tears and tell the Chinese spirits who might come to rob the grave, that the elder's clothes are not worth stealing.[32] Women never observe the ritual tearing as it is done at the gravesite, and only men accompany the body to the grave to perform the necessary rituals there.[33] Ritual tearing of funeral garments is practiced by many different Hmong subgroups in Laos, according to a member of the Thao family, and it occurs at funerals in Missoula as well.[34]

When the young women in this study make tsho laus for their elders, they are not thinking about the ancient customs which originated in China so much as they are about their love for their birth families, from whom they have become separated after marriage, their responsibilities toward their husbands' families, and their desire to bring happiness to their elders. Two of the young women have made elder's robes for male relatives. Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy machine-sewed two of them for her father and father-in-law out of white cotton with blue lapels, wide rectangular sleeves, slits up the sides, and large, reverse-appliquéd collars with the snail motif, so typical of the Hmong Sam Neua (Plates 98, 101, and 103). She purchased the collars from relatives in Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand and asked for Sam Neua-style designs, not knowing what was available or exactly what would come. An aunt in

Missoula helped her select the fabric, and design, cut and sew the robes since Bounthavy was not familiar with those garments.

The other young woman, Mai Thao, created an elder's robe for her deceased father's only living brother, Kia Moua Thao. It is made of royal blue cotton, with wide rectangular sleeves and a geometric cross-stitch design on the collar, which is bordered with red cotton (Plates 94 and 97). When questioned about her choice of design for the collar, Mai said that she thinks it was originally a Green Hmong design but is now used also by the White Hmong. She is unaware of any specific name or meaning for the pattern, and chose it for its beauty.

The same two women have made elder's shirts (tsho laus) for their oldest female relatives as well. Bounthavy, with the help of her aunt, selected appropriate black and royal blue satin fabric and a cotton lining for three jackets for her paternal grandmother, her mother and her mother-in-law, and sewed and delivered them to Minneapolis in December, 1987 (Plates 102 and 106). The collars for her mother and mother-in-law are reverse-appliqué snail designs which match their husband's collars, but are a little smaller (Plate 104). The largest collar of all, which she stitched to her grandmother's jacket, has a geometric design done in the tuck-and-fold, appliqué technique, called chev[35] (Plate 107). The design imitates the trails in Laos made of deep steps cut into the mountainsides which are surrounded with flowers, according to the interpretation of some family members. All three collars were purchased through relatives in Ban Vinai.

The most prolific number of elder's garments have been made by twenty-four year old Mai Thao, who was originally a Hmong Sam Neua, but is now married to a Green Hmong and lives in Green Bay Wisconsin. Besides the blue elder's robe mentioned above for her uncle, she has made Hmong Sam Neua tsho laus and matching aprons for her mother and her aunt, and, according to Mai, six "seed pillows" (noob ncoos) for elder family members, both in a Green Hmong style for her husband's grandparents and great-aunt, and in a White Hmong style for her mother, paternal uncle and aunt. Mai describes the latter as being smaller than the Green Hmong embellished cotton squares, with a different design. Although none of the others were seen by this researcher, the pattern on the two noob ncoos she made for her White

Hmong aunt and uncle is very similar to the design on a Green Hmong noob ncoos which appeared in a Hmong textile exhibit in Wisconsin in 1985.[36] Making the six noob ncoos represents the first time Mai Thao has ever tried that particular technique of appliqué and that type of design, and it is probable that her marriage to a Green Hmong influenced her decision to make noob ncoos with the designs that she did.

The satin elder's jackets and aprons for her mother and aunt are remarkably beautiful and ornate (Plates 88-93, 95 and 96). Instead of putting simple royal blue stripes on the sleeves, like those found on many Hmong Sam Neua jackets, she has embroidered three colorful bands on each sleeve in addition to six royal blue satin stripes (Plates 90 and 95). On her aunt's jacket, Mai has added innovative design changes in the embroidered cuff bands, and has made them different on each sleeve, so there is a surprising break in the absolute symmetry so often seen in other Hmong funeral garments (Plates 91 and 92). In addition, Mai has embroidered bands of pattern down the lapels of both jackets, and has added colorful jacket linings that compliment her embroidery. The three large sailor collars she made for her mother, aunt and uncle (which are approximately 12"x16") are variations on the same geometric cross stitch design, but Mai has made them each unique by experimenting with color and scale modifications (Plates 93, 94, and 96). The two aprons that she designed to go with the jackets have elaborately embroidered central panels that match one band of embroidery on each jacket sleeve (Plates 89, 91 and 92). The total effect of the costumes she has made is dazzling. Since these two tsho laus are cut very large, and since they are so elaborate, it would not be surprising if each were chosen to be worn as the outer layer of clothing at the funerals of her mother and her aunt.[37] According to members of the family, a person selects what they would like to wear as an outer layer before they die, which is always the most beautiful of their collection, often with the largest collar. If no choice has been made ahead of time, those dressing the body can make the selection.[38]

The embroidered sailor collars (dab tsho) are the most noticeable part of the funeral costumes. In the collections of the three Sam Neua grandmothers included in this study, the collars vary widely in design, technique and size, anywhere from 5 1/2"x9" to 14"x17 1/2".[39] One unifying characteristic is that they usually have red

cotton borders. An exception is a collar on a jacket made by Cher Moua Thao for her sister-in-law Zong Chang. The cross stitch design on the collar, which was made by one of Cher's sisters, is called quab nyug,[40] and it is bordered with the hot pink synthetic fabric so esteemed by the Hmong for its sheen and brilliance.[41] Aesthetic considerations are important to all the women, in their selection of fabric. One of the grandmothers, Zong Chang, used bright green floral print cloth in two of her traditional "frog leg" appliqué collars, another unusual touch for elder's jackets (Plates 46 and 49). Also, the two jackets she made for herself have wide panels of royal blue satin, unlike any of the other jackets in the family. According to Zong Chang, she chose the floral print because it is pretty, even though such fabric is not ordinarily used for tsho laus.

In choosing a collar design, aesthetics are again the most important thing, according to the women. The designs and techniques represented in the women's tsho laus collars include reverse-appliquéd snails, tuck-and-fold appliqué (chev) "crooked trail on the mountain" with appliquéd "flowers" (Plate 107), appliquéd "frog legs" (Plates 46 and 49), and a variety of geometric cross stitch designs. When a room full of Hmong Sam Neua women were all asked to look at some funeral collars and tell the names of the designs, even though the women were all from the same geographic location in Laos, and some were from the same family, they sometimes came up with different interpretations (Plates 109-111). The designs, however, were never meaningless. They all have names related either to natural objects: flowers, mountains, snails, worms, frogs legs, water buffalo horns, and a river, or man-made things: the central post, the main door, a Hmong house, a Hmong village, steps in the side of a mountain, crooked trail, trenches dug around a house to divert rain water on a steep mountainside, jerky from a castrated male pig, crops of food, etc..

The women recognize certain collar designs used by the Hmong Sam Neua as being older than others. Two women in Missoula have just completed funeral collars using one of the oldest designs from Sam Neua with which they are familiar. It is a simple appliqué with embroidery that, according to one of the women, depicts the front door of the Hmong home, with a series of rain trenches surrounding it, which protect it from the monsoon rains (Plate 111). The next oldest design, according to

them, was a tuck-and-fold appliquéd chev design, showing the stepped mountainsides in Laos surrounded by flowers, or possibly the center post of the Hmong home and flowers, depending on different interpretations (Plate 107). Much more recent, historically, are the reverse-appliqué snail designs (Plate 104). Some of the women prefer using older, more traditional designs on funeral collars than the snail motif, but funeral collars with reverse-appliqué snails, like the four purchased by Bounthavy for her parents and parents-in-law, are being made in the refugee camps.

A word of caution must be added about the symbolic meanings in Hmong needlework designs. Literature on Hmong textiles suggests that symbolism is particularly rich in motifs used on baby hats and baby-carriers, and on funeral embroideries.[42] According to Lue Vang, a Hmong living in California, "there is a very real danger that Westerners are creating symbolism where none exists or none is remembered."[43] It must also be reiterated that symbolism varies in the hearts and minds of individual Hmong and that there has always been a great deal of borrowing of designs between subgroups as well as between other ethnic groups. This has led to a watering down of the original meaning and the adding on of new diverse symbols.[44]

When an elder and shaman in Missoula was asked of what importance the elder's clothes were to the souls of the deceased, he replied that the embroidered clothes are of significance only to the living family members. The fine garments are meant to display wealth, and also to show how respectful the sons, daughters and other relatives are to the deceased. The daughter-in-law who asked this question, thinking that perhaps an older woman in the family would have a different answer than a man, asked an aunt who is well-versed in Hmong culture. The aunt gave the same answer as the shaman, that the finely embroidered funeral clothes are for the benefit of the living, and have no importance to the dead.[45]

Another aunt agreed that although years ago funeral clothes may have had meaning for the plig of the deceased and accompanied it to the spirit world, most Hmong she knows no longer hold this opinion. She believes that whatever one happens to be wearing at the moment of death is what one wears on the journey to the land of the ancestors, because deceased family members who have appeared to

the living in dreams have been wearing what they had on the moment death occurred. When family members were questioned about the purpose of the large sailor collars on the elder's shirts and robes, with their intricate embroidery, appliqué, and red cotton borders, the answer was clear and simple. The large collars are to help support the head when carrying the corpse to the grave from the house. Since Hmong funerals traditionally went on for a number of days, and often the temperature was warm, the body would begin to decompose, and large carrying cloths were necessary to hold the body together. This same answer was given by non-family members of the Hmong community in Missoula, as well. It was, in fact, the only answer given.

This kind of answer can be disappointing to Americans who have read the rich lore on traditional Hmong textiles, who may be dissatisfied with a spiritual vacuum in their own secular American society, and who want there to be meaningful symbolism for the refugees here in the United States, just as there might have been in Laos, Thailand or China. This transitional period is complicated for the Hmong, and family members offering insight into this study over the past two years agree that there are a wide variety of beliefs, and that these beliefs are changing. For the women included in this study, the making, giving and receiving of funeral garments enriches their lives in subtle ways which are usually not articulated. Their stitches originate from complex levels of understanding that are like the many thicknesses of cloth and intricate designs that adorn the body at a Hmong funeral and allow only portions of the top layer to be seen clearly, while glimpses of hidden color and pattern hint at rich and varied levels below. Without living with the families, and without being able to communicate in Hmong, it is not possible to plumb the depths of their thoughts and unspoken words. Even then the deepest layers, those that come from some ancient Hmong consciousness and ancestral past, are difficult to share with outsiders as they are experienced by the women from within on an unconscious and nonverbal level. The embroideries, however, that they are continuing to make and that they give to each other, speak with eloquence.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

1. According to Ernest E. Heimbach's White Meo-English Dictionary, "Both ntsuj and plig are used to refer to the soul or spirit and there is no apparent distinction." p. 250. Throughout this paper, the term plig will be used.

2. For several discussions about the Hmong belief in multiple souls, see Bernatzik, p. 220; Graham, "Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," p.58: Heimbach, p. 203: Lemoine, "L'initiation du mort chez les Hmong. II. Les themes," p. 98; Thomas Amis Lyman, "Green Miao (Meo) Spirit Ceremonies," Ethnologica (n.f.) 4(1968):6; and Schanche, p.15.

3. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy after she discussed the subject with her father-in-law Kia Moua Thao, Missoula, 27 April, 1988.

4. The central post is frequently represented in Hmong paj ntaub. At a craft fair at the University of Montana in Missoula in May, 1986, Mai Moua, a White Hmong who is married to a Green Hmong woman, discussed the significance of the design on a cross stitch paj ntaub his wife was sewing, that showed a Hmong home with the central post at the center. The cloth was going to be sent to Laos by a Hmong woman in Missoula, to be used as a funeral cloth for an elderly Green Hmong aunt.

5. Bernatzik, p.221.

6. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 2 May, 1988.

7. Heimbach, p. 367.

8. Lemoine, "L'initiation du mort chez les Hmong. I. Le chemin," p. 126.

9. Heimbach, p. 272.

10. Lemoine, pp.107-108.

11. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao", p. 45.

12. Personal conversations with Cha Thao, Missoula, October, 1987, and with Thia Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 6 May, 1988.

13. Lemoine, "L'initiation du mort chez les Hmong: I. Le chemin", p.131. The following quote in French was paraphrased into English by myself. "Tes Ancetres tendront leur jupe pour te recevoir/ Toi tu sauteras dans la jupe de tes Ancetres/ Tes Ancetres tendront leur chemise pour te recevoir/ Et toi sans attendre tu bondiras dans la chemise de tes Ancetres."

14. Graham, "The Ceremonies of the Ch'uan Miao," Journal of the West China Border Research Society 9 (1937): 103.

15. Personal conversation with Cha Thao, Missoula, 23 April, 1988.

16. A Missoula Hmong was discouraged by his landlord from burning incense, an important part of his ritual practice. For more discussion on this and the adjustment by the Hmong to life in Montana, see the article by Ken Briggs, "One More Mountain: Hmong Immigrants in the West", Northern Lights, May/June 1987, pp.24-26.

17. Personal conversation with Cher Moua Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 2 May, 1988.

18. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 2 May, 1988.

19. Personal conversation with Cha Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 1987.

20. Lue Vang and Judy Lewis, p. 137.

21. Personal conversation with Cher Moua Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 2 May, 1988.

22. The killing of the cow at a Hmong funeral varies according to the specific rituals practiced by individual families. The Thao xeem is divided into two main groups: Thao pos and Thao tshwm tshav. The Thao tshwm tshav, which is the branch of Thaos included in this study, kill the cow after the deceased has been taken out of the home, whereas the Thao pos kill it while the deceased is still inside. The basis for this can be found in an old legend about a poor brother who had a rich sister. When he died, he had nothing. His sister brought a cow to his funeral, but she was late and did not arrive until her brother's body had already been removed from the house. Since the body could not be taken back into the house, the ceremony for killing the cow had to take place outside. (Personal conversation with Cher Moua Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, 2 May, 1988.)

23. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 27 April, 1988.

24. Vang and Lewis, p. 140.

25. Personal conversation with May Yang and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 6 May, 1988.

26. John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Hmong Art: Tradition and Change (Sheboygan, Wisconsin: John Michael Kohler Arts Center, exhibit catalog, 1986), p. 85.

27. Personal conversation with Kou Thao, May, 1986.

28. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao", p. 45.

29. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, April, 1988.

30. Lemoine, "L'initiation du mort chez les Hmong: I. Le chemin," pp. 121-122.

31. Graham, "Customs of the Ch'uan Miao", p. 111, and Lemoine, "Le chemin", p. 129.

32. Conversation with Cha Thao and Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 6 May, 1988.

33. Interview with Kou Thao, Missoula, 24 May, 1988.

34. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy and Kia Moua Thao, Missoula, 14 May, 1988, and with Susanne Bessac, 2 May, 1988, who was told that ritual tearing of the funeral garments occurred at a funeral for a Moua family member in Missoula.

35. This collar is one of the largest observed in either Missoula or Wisconsin, and measures 14"x17 1/2".

36. John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Hmong Art: Tradition and Change, p.89.

37. According to Lewis and Lewis (p. 128), the outer garment is the most elaborate at Hmong funerals in northern Thailand.

38. Telephone conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Kia Moua Thao and Zong Chang, 7 May, 1988.

39. A large funeral collar that was made in Thailand in a refugee camp and purchased in Missoula by the author in May, 1988, measures 17"x24".

40. This Hmong term does not translate into English, according to several family members.

41. This hot pink fabric is frequently used for New Year's collars, money purses, vests, sashes, embellished hats and baby carriers, but rarely on funeral clothes. A similar fabric was available in Laos at least as early as the 1960's, as Ia Vang's mother incorporated it in some of the paj ntaub Ia brought with her from Laos.

42. Crystal, "Buffalo Heads and Sacred Threads", (unpaginated); Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell,eds. Michigan Hmong Arts: Textiles in Transition (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1983), p. 39; John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Hmong Art: Tradition and Change, p. 89.

43. Vang and Lewis, p. 128.

44. White, pp.15-17.

45. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy in Missoula, April 27, 1988.

CHAPTER 7

Birth and Children's Costumes

Out of death springs life, for the Hmong. According to Hugo Bernatzik, the most important function of the ancestral souls is to keep the family line going, not only by protecting those on earth from sickness and helping with crops and animals, but by influencing the rebirth of souls into new generations of children.[1] The Hmong consider children to be special, "the most precious possession a person can have," according to Bernatzik,[2] and large families are still highly valued even in the United States where there is no longer a need to have many children to help with survival in a mountainous, agricultural society. However, often it is the husbands of the women in this study who want lots of children, and their wives who have initiated an interest in birth control. In Laos, before the introduction of modern medicine, the survival rate for children was very low, and further losses came from the ravages of war and starvation. The traditional Hmong belief is that spiritual protection must be given to a baby, whose multiple souls are apt to leave, and the very young must be guarded during a period of extreme vulnerability.[3] Baby hats and baby-carriers (called nyas by the Green Hmong and nyias by the White Hmong)[4] with intricate traditional designs in brilliant colors are given to the newborn by mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and occasionally great-grandmothers. According to various scholars, the designs and colors used on these textiles both invite benevolent spirits and placate, warn away or confuse evil spirits. Highland people in Southeast Asia are reputed to be particularly afraid of evil spirits attacking from behind, and there is a belief that the designs on the nyias protect the baby from the rear.[5] One of the young women in this study said that fear of these spirits is why the mother walks ahead with the baby strapped to her back, and her husband walks behind, for added protection.[6] The bright red

pompons attached to both hats and carriers are thought of as "flowers", and some say they help to confuse the evil spirits by camouflaging the baby as a beautiful flower[7], but the women interviewed in this study are unaware of this interpretation.

The beauty of the nyias and hats can be a sign to the baby of the family's love and devotion, encouraging the baby's souls to stay, for if he or she is unloved or mistreated, one or more of the souls might decide to leave in the hope of being reborn into a better family situation.[8] It is a Hmong custom to summon the household deities and ancestral spirits through rituals performed by a shaman during a woman's pregnancy, so that she might receive a soul into her body, where it is stored until "it enters into the unborn child."[9] A fetus is sensitive to how the parents feel about her before birth. The modern repercussions of this belief are serious if a young couple with many children, beset with financial worries, should consider having an abortion. Though they decide against it, the baby's soul residing in the fetus is well aware of the parents' momentary desire to reject her. Special rituals must be performed to reduce the threat on the baby's life generated by these thoughts, so that the baby will choose to stay with these parents and grow up to be healthy.[10] The hu plig ceremony, which is performed when a baby is three days old, encourages the soul to stay.

The parents of the children included in this study use a combination of modern medical practices, prayer, and traditional Hmong healing techniques. The family who has become Baptist is not allowed by their church to use shamanism to heal their children, so they rely on prayer for spiritual healing and American medicine for their physical needs. (According to a sister-in-law, they are just as healthy as her own children.) The Catholic church is more lenient, and those family members who have become Catholic are more apt to combine Catholicism with traditional Hmong practices, such as the hu plig ceremony, than their relatives who have become Protestants. Family members, in this study, who follow traditional Hmong customs protect the souls of their new-born in a special ceremony and feast in which cotton strings, which have been ritually blessed, are placed around the wrist of the baby by each guest, as he or she repeats a blessing to the child while the knot is tied.[11] Children in this study who have been sick and have participated in a healing ritual

will frequently be seen with strings tied around wrists and the neck, which help keep their vulnerable souls from wandering. Their families supplement traditional healing techniques with visits to American doctors, which does not necessarily conflict with tradition, since American medicine treats the body, and the shaman is concerned with the welfare of the soul.

At times there may be something wrong with the soul which has been summoned into the fetus, and the family will try to reject it. A relative of one of the Missoula Hmong Sam Neua women lost several newborn babies when she lived in Laos. A day or two after birth, each newborn would die. Finally, her husband got very upset, and at the burial of the last baby, he angrily picked up the little body by the feet and roughly threw it head-first into the grave, to show his displeasure. Later, in Thailand after they escaped from Laos, the cousin gave birth to a healthy baby, and now in the United States where they live, they have five sound children and have not lost any more.[12]

The Hmong Sam Neua father of a Missoula refugee likes to tell a story to his many children about a husband and wife who had an argument. In anger, the husband said to his pregnant wife that if he died, he would come back as her newborn child and give her lots of trouble. The husband did, in fact, die before the baby was born, and after the birth, the new child was, to be sure, awful to his mother.[13]

As an infant, that difficult baby probably spent much time strapped to his mother's back in a <u>nyias</u>, in an attempt to stop the fussing. Traditionally, the function of a <u>nyias</u> is to carry the baby next to the body while one is walking or working, leaving the hands free. In Laos, any member of the extended family, a grandparent, parent, sibling, aunt or visiting friend might be seen carrying a baby. Family members worked long hours while they farmed crops and raised animals in the high mountains, so babies were often carried while one fed animals, planted, weeded or harvested crops, gathered wood, milled rice or corn, wove cloth, sewed clothing, or cooked meals.

In Missoula the <u>nyias</u> is still used to carry the baby close to the body, but now it is the grandmother or grandfather, in an urban setting, who stays home to baby-sit

while the mother and father work or attend classes and the older siblings also go to school. The primary mode of travel has changed from walking, in Laos, to riding in an automobile in Missoula, so car seats often replace the nyias for travel.

The most frequent use of the nyias in the home is to put tired and crying babies to sleep. Whenever a child is fretful, she is quickly hoisted onto the back in a nyias and swayed or rocked to sleep, and then put down for a nap. If the baby is sick or teething, she is frequently left on the mother's back for comfort and reassurance. The nyias allows great intimacy between mother and child, since no part of the carrier comes between the two bodies (Plates 113 and 114). As it is constructed completely out of cloth and thread, there is no rigid wood or metal framework to hold the bodies apart.

The remembered security of riding in a nyias as an infant is alluded to in the Hmong funeral poem. In the qhuab ke, mention is made of two couples, impostors, who try to tempt the soul of the deceased into their homes, as he journeys on the difficult path to find his ancestral spirits. The pretenders do this by displaying a baby-carrier, calling to the soul as their son, and offering to embrace him and carry him in the nyias. The poem instructs the deceased not to pay attention to the house above, where one couple lives, or the house below, belonging to the other couple, but to head only for the middle house where his true ancestors dwell.[14]

One can only imagine what the nyias referred to in the qhuab ke looks like, but if it is like those found in Laos, Thailand and the United States, it is simple in shape, made in a flat construction that is given strength from the multiple layers of backing, borders, and ground cloth, with intricately stitched appliqué and embroidery on the surface. The shape is like that of a bibbed apron, with a small rectangle sewn along the top edge of a large rectangle (Plates 115 and 116). Two very long, sturdy straps, which are stitched securely to the back, project out from each side along the top and are used to lift the baby up on to the back. The straps are put under the baby's arms to hoist her up in a sweeping motion, and are then used to secure the baby to the back, sealing the two bodies together by coming over the shoulders and criss-crossing across the mother's chest, then going to the back and crossing under the baby's bottom, then coming to the front and tying securely around the waist (Plates

117-122). This procedure is reversed if the baby is strapped to the front. A newborn is always carried in front so that the mother can support the baby's head and be in closer touch (Plates 123 and 124).

Additional protection is needed if it is cold outside. A small blanket is then tied over both the nyias and the baby at one's neck and waist, protecting the child from wind, rain or snow (Plate 125). In Laos, instead of a blanket a nyias kiab (baby-carrier cover) is sometimes used. Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy owns one that was given to her by her paternal grandmother, who made it for her great-granddaughters. Bounthavy was told that even though it probably would not be used in the United States, her grandmother wanted her to have it as a remembrance of the old ways in Laos. Sewn of satin, cotton-blend and knit fabrics, it is shaped just like a nyias but is much larger and lacks intricate embellishment (Plates 126 and 127).

A list of the vocabulary used by Green Hmong to describe a nyias suggests what parts of the baby-carrier the Hmong consider to be important.[15] The heavily embellished center sections of the top and bottom rectangles are referred to respectively as the "heart" of the "mouth" and the "heart" of the "body", suggesting that the nyias can be compared to a living being. The term caab cab refers to the "wax" used in the batik work in the center of the main part of the nyias, and ntaub tswv nkaus, or "cloth-line-crooked," describes the strips of appliquéd fabric on top of the batik.

It is the Green Hmong nyias with a batik "heart-body-baby-carrier" (plawv cev nyas) that is most often used by the White Hmong in Missoula (Plate 116). (Some of the fabric being produced today is a simulated batik, made by a cheaper and less time-consuming silk-screen process than the true wax-resist, indigo dye, batik method, and this appears on some of the nyias in Missoula.) Since there are no Green Hmong left in Missoula who make these baby-carriers, they are purchased out of shipments of paj ntaub sent from relatives in Thailand for about forty or fifty dollars.

The elaborate designs embroidered, appliquéd or batiked onto the two rectangular panels of the nyias distinguish it, and according to some of the literature on Hmong textiles, the designs are rich with meaning. The following list of meanings suggested

by scholars is not an attempt to cover the subject in depth, but merely an introduction to the wide and complex possibilities of further study in this area. Stitched on top of the foundation of batiked cotton (which used to be hemp cloth, but rarely is today) are lines of appliqué, frequently red, which form a pattern of zig-zag Xs which vary according to the pattern of the batik beneath. The color red (and hot pink, which is now often substituted for red in traditional Hmong textiles) is considered by some to be a color of danger or aggression to evil spirits. As Joanne Cubbs points out, red is used by Hmong shamans in a variety of ways "to confront the spirit world."[16] When a person has been cured, a red X is sometimes stitched to the back of his or her shirt to warn away the evil spirits.[17] These X shapes are similar to those incorporated into the lines of red appliqué on a nyias, and could serve the same purpose. One of the Thao husbands, when he heard about that theory, thought it to be a believable explanation for why the red Xs were originally placed on baby-carriers. The shapes of the these zig-zag lines have sometimes been given the name "toad legs," which might be simply a descriptive term to some, or perhaps a reference to a complex mythological Toad figure who is related to the power of thunder and the ultimate source, as suggested by Susanne Bessac.[18] Eric Crystal, who has worked with the Hmong refugees in Merced, offers the following suggestion:

> Batik motifs and applique work overlaying the batik panels recall narrow bamboo bridges, dead end paths and complex intersections. Such designs are applied as foils to a potentially errant life-soul. Patterns include those known as "pig pen" and "peacock eye." Pig pens recall that valuable livestock such as swine must be protected from harm at night by being locked in pens. So also the baby carrier - batik design and applique work - functions to enclose, to trap, to foil and confuse a baby's life-soul lest it wander from the infant causing illness and threatening death.[19]

Often the wide borders of the nyias are red (or hot pink), as borders on funeral collars frequently are, and perhaps in both cases they afford spiritual protection during periods of transition when the soul is thought to be particularly vulnerable, during the journey from death to rebirth.

It used to be hard to find a nyias with a White Hmong design in Missoula, but occasionally one could be purchased at a craft fair or in a private home (Plate 115). Even in households where White Hmong grandmothers sew incredible amounts of intricate, traditional costumes for their families, they did not appear to be making

baby carriers. Recently, however, at a Missoula craft fair there were five White Hmong, reverse-appliqué snail shell nyias for sale, all made by two local women, one of whom is Cher Moua Thao who made three during the winter and spring of 1988. Only one of the women included in this study, Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, owns a White Hmong baby carrier, which was purchased in Minneapolis and given to her by her mother (Plate 113). Bounthavy also uses a Green Hmong batiked nyias for her children, which was given to her by her paternal grandmother. The predominant design on the White Hmong nyias in Missoula, including Bounthavy's, is a reverse-appliqué snail motif. Her nyias has a striking, bold pattern of red and blue snails, with yellow, green, black and white appliquéd triangles and borders.

Symbolic meanings have been attributed by scholars to the designs found on White Hmong baby carriers, and the following examples suggest a broad range of possibilities. The borders of continuous triangles that appear around the outside of many paj ntaub, and which surround each embellished section on the White Hmong nyias, have been said to represent the following things: 1) mountains, like the mountains which encircle and protect Hmong villages, 2) the triangles of silver and gold paper that adorn the household alter, 3) the spine of a dragon, a sign of good fortune and beauty,[20] and 4) teeth, fish scales, or a fence, all forms of protection against evil spirits.[21] The snail shell "represents the extended family," according to Wendy Porter-Francis, who interviewed members of the San Diego Hmong community and read works of anthropologists and volunteers working with the Hmong for her interpretations.[22] "The center of the coil symbolizes the ancestors; the outer spirals, successive generations. The double snail shell represents the union of two families. It symbolizes the spinning motion used in many spiritual chants." Eric Crystal, who interviewed Hmong women in 1983, was told that the snail motif represents a small water snail that "is always and without fail found in pairs," and he suggests that the double snail, frequently found on Hmong Sam Neua New Year's and wedding costumes as well as on the nyias, is an appropriate fertility symbol.[23] Susanne Bessac, who has done extensive research into Hmong mythology and the ancient influences of Chinese culture on Hmong embroideries, proposes that "...the spiral refers to the ultimate source, before ying separated from yang - the Taoist concept of

hun-tun...."[24]

The above examples of suggested symbolism in both White and Green Hmong nyias are just a sampling to show the diversity of explanations and the need for being receptive to a variety of understandings on many levels, as well as for being cautious about drawing conclusions. Often refugees will repeat what they think Americans want to hear, or what they have heard from other Hmong or Americans, to satisfy questions about symbolism. Lue Vang's warning about "...Westerners creating symbolism where none exists or none is remembered," must also be heeded.[25] The women in this study rarely discuss the meanings of the designs on the nyias that they use every day. This does not necessarily signify that no meaning exists in their minds. It could be that the questions which are frequently fired at the Hmong about "meaning" and "symbolism" in textiles do not fit into their unique cultural perspective, and that our attempts to analyze and categorize are not compatible with their world view. The layers of meaning are articulated not in words, but in tiny stitches, brilliant color, and intricate patterns that are handed down from the ancestors and etched into memory. To isolate and label one symbol at a time is to remove it from the rich and complex fabric of its existence.

The customs surrounding a Green Hmong nyias show that it has far more value and meaning than being just an aesthetic and efficient way to carry a baby. In Laos, the nyias can be a gift from a mother to her daughter soon after the birth of a grandchild. Later the Baby Carrier Feast is given by the daughter and son-in-law at which there is a ceremonial exchange around the ritual table. The son-in-law gives thanks for the nyias, and the father-in law gives thanks for the feast and bestows an honorary name on the son-in-law, along with the following blessing: "May you have good health, wealth, life long enough to be an elder and advisor to the others, to sit at their table and eat good meat and resolve their disputes, and to live until your hair is completely white."[26] None of the women interviewed for this study participated in such a feast, although all were given baby carriers by their mothers, grandmothers, or, if their mother's are dead, by an older sister or an aunt. The women believe that The Baby Carrier Feast is only a Green Hmong, not a White Hmong, custom. Sometimes a nyias is given by the bride's mother at the time of the marriage, along

with the dowry, in the hope that it will bless the union of the bride and groom with conception, and that it will encourage them to have many children.[27]

Whereas the nyias, which is in constant use, is never kept in the bundles of traditional costumes by the women in this study, baby hats and other garments for young children are carefully folded and stored for special occasions. The most elaborate of these made by the women in this study are hats for young girls. Mai Lee has made several "chicken hats" for her daughters, her grandchildren, for her brother-in-law's grandchild and for an American friend who requested to buy one (Plates 128 and 129). The reverse-appliqué snails identify them as being from the Hmong Sam Neua tradition. They are highly embellished with beads, coins, embroidery, ribbon and sequins. The outstanding feature is a curved protuberance on the front, worn out over the forehead, that symbolizes a rooster's comb. A very small plastic head band covered with padded fabric creates the rounded structure, and it is embellished with a protective rainbow trim along the curved edge, plus sequins, coins and beads.

Blia Xiong has made several for her daughters in which the reverse-appliqué sections are in the Hmong Xieng Khouang tradition, with white cotton appliquéd in a geometric design over bright green fabric and bound with a buttonhole stitch (Plates 130 and 132). In addition to the rounded rooster's comb in front, there are two small, triangular ear flaps on each hat. Blia has used fancy, black material with glittering metallic floral designs woven into it, like that used in her stylish New Year's costumes, and some lace, but no coins or beads for embellishment.

The "chicken hat" made by Mai Lee for her American friend has a feature that none of the other hats have - an embroidered, three-dimensional stuffed fetish in the shape of a child clinging to a mother's back (Plate 129). Mai Lee says that this has much power. When other older women were shown the hat and fetish, they recognized it as having "power", whereas the younger women had never seen such a fetish before.

One day when several grandmothers were in the room where Mai Lee was working on the "chicken hat", they were asked why the imagery of the chicken was used on baby hats. A long, animated discussion followed in Hmong. The translated answer was that there was no particular reason, that it had always been done that way.

Literature on the Hmong indicates that the chicken holds an important place in Hmong beliefs and customs. It is the rooster who leads the deceased to the land of the ancestors, as revealed in the qhuab ke. According to Ernest E. Heimbach, one of the three principal souls that dwells in each person is the plig qaib, or "chicken soul." It is this soul which is reincarnated, and also the soul most likely to leave the body, causing illness or death. To retrieve it, the sacrifice of a chicken is necessary.[28]

The vulnerable soul of the newborn needs immediate protection. In his study of the Hmong in northern Thailand, Bernatzik includes the following observation by the Catholic priest, Savina:

> In the case of some tribes the nearest relatives come on the third day to greet the child and to give it a chicken and a cap. Coins, the teeth and claws of animals, and the like are often hung on these caps. The chickens are eaten immediately, and their blood is sprinkled on a piece of paper which is then pasted on the wall opposite the entrance door. Chicken feathers are pasted around this paper in honor of the tutelary divinity Xa Xiong.[29]

The sacrifice of the chicken is made, according to Bernatzik, "to the pair of spirits who introduced the soul of the deceased ancestor into the newborn child...," and a special ritual is performed to enlist the help of the ancestors in protecting the child from evil spirits.[30]

The children in this family wear their hats for New Year's, occasionally, but most often for photographs. They love the sound, feel and shimmer of jingling coins and beads, and the sight of brilliant colors and designs. Whenever they wear the hats they toss their heads, listen to the sounds and laugh. None of the baby boys have hats in this family, but they like to put on their sister's hats and explore the sounds and sensations.

When Mai Lee was asked to make a boy's hat for her American friend, she at first said it would be more difficult than a girl's hat, presumably because she does not usually make them. The hat she made is a "melon hat", shaped like half a melon, with eight wedges of reverse-appliqué snails all meeting at the pompon at the top. The coins and beads that she added hang down to the middle of the hat, whereas the row of coins on the girl's hats form a fringe around the bottom. According to Mai Lee, one can tell whether a baby is a boy or girl by looking at both the style (chicken hat or melon hat) and the placement of the coins. Boys' hats in the Sam Neua tradition never have a ring of coins around the bottom. So that the melon hat she

made would have power to protect the baby, Mai Lee added a mother-child fetish just like the one on the chicken hat described above. A boy's melon hat was purchased from Cher Moua Thao in 1987 that was divided into eight wedges and embellished with coins, like Mai Lee's, but the appliquéd design, which was different, was bound with a buttonhole stitch[31] (Plate 134).

The youngest women in this study, who find it too difficult to do reverse-appliqué, do not make chicken hats but they enjoy creating new-style "dragon hats" for themselves and their daughters. These hats are appearing all over the United States where there are Hmong communities, in innovative combinations of sharp, zig-zag points, brilliant day-glo pink and green synthetic fabric, reverse-appliqué and cross stitch embroidery, lace, braid, ribbon, sequins, beads and other adornment. None of the women in this study have added coins. There is a sense of adventure, with inventive combinations of materials, textures and patterns in these hats. At least one of the grandmothers, Mai Lee, is making them for her daughters and granddaughters.

A creative adaptation of traditional Hmong baby hats, designed for a harsh climate, are knitted children's caps made by a Missoula Hmong woman by the name of Pang Lo.[32] Like traditional appliquéd and embroidered baby hats made by the Hmong, the style varies according to the sex of the child, and they are embellished, like traditional hats, with pompons (Plate 135). This style hat, which is being marketed primarily to Americans but has been seen recently on a Hmong baby at the New Year's celebration in Fresno, California, is an example of how the Hmong adapt new materials and techniques through the vision of their own cultural perspective.

As they get older, children are given costumes to wear for New Year's celebrations, for photographs, or just to own, that supplement the baby carriers and hats they may have received at birth. When Lisa Thao was two years old, her mother Ia Vang made her a Hmong Xieng Khouang costume, incorporating a reverse-appliqué collar given to her by an aunt in Thailand (Plates 137 and 138). Later, Lisa's grandmother Mai Lee made her a Hmong Sam Neua costume with striped sleeves, since that is the White Hmong subgroup into which Lisa was born. She is seven now, and her mother and grandmother continue to make her both kinds of costumes (Plates 139 and 140). In addition, Lisa also wears a Lao costume, sarong style, for the New Year's celebration

when she participates in dance performances with other small girls (Plate 141).

Usually, the oldest child gets new costumes which are passed down to the younger siblings, but sometimes, as in the case of Bounthavy's oldest daughters who received gifts from their great-grandmother when she came to visit, siblings will receive new costumes at the same time (plate 142). The garments worn by both boys and girls are miniature versions of those worn by adults. The boys wear black baggy pants, embroidered vests, money belts, money purses, hot pink and kelly green shiny sashes that are tied in front and silver or aluminum necklaces (Plate 144). The girls also wear baggy pants, money purses, money belts, pink and green sashes and necklaces, and often costume pieces are interchangeable between the sexes, such as the pants, money vests, purses, and necklaces. The green and hot pink sashes worn by both sexes are distinguished by the way in which they are tied. Only women and girls wear turbans and other head wraps (except at funerals when deceased men also wear turbans), jackets with sailor collars, aprons and Green Hmong skirts. Mai Lee has made small money purses, trousers, vests, jackets with striped arm bands, aprons and hats for her grandchildren (Plates 144 and 145). The sailor collars on the girls' jackets are geometric cross stitch designs, not reverse appliqué snails which she often puts on collars for young women and adults. Bounthavy's grandmother also makes cross stitch designs for very little girls, but often gives reverse-appliqué collars for older girls when they reach their teenage years, and has made one for Bounthavy's tiny daughters for them to wear when they get older (Plates 146-148). Blia Xiong has stitched tiny collars with reverse-appliqué in the Hmong Xieng Khouang tradition for all her daughters, which match the reverse-appliqué on their chicken hats. She also has made embellished dragon hats for her three oldest girls, some with reverse-appliqué and one with a cross stitch pattern (Plates 149-151). Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, who works full-time, does not have time to embroider for her three girls, but her grandmother has made Hmong Sam Neua jackets, money purses, pants and aprons for the two oldest ones, and Bounthavy and her husband have purchased a Green Hmong skirt and small aluminum necklace for the oldest. Her children dress up for photographs, but not yet for the New Year's celebration. Mai Thao has made several hats for her infant daughter, none of which are chicken hats,

and a small pillow with her baby's name embroidered into the design.

The women enjoy making, purchasing, giving and receiving textiles for children, with much more emphasis on traditional clothes for girls than there is for boys. The generation of children born in the United States is still too young to be doing extensive needlework, but the oldest girl who is seven has not shown much interest in learning how to make paj ntaub, according to her mother, since her life in America is filled with other diversions such as school, television, and playing with friends. She and her cousins, although they feel uncomfortable when dressed in full Hmong costume, love to wear the brilliant hats made for them by their mothers, grandmothers, and a great aunt. Whether their appreciation for the beauty of the costumes will lead the young girls to learn how to embroider them remains to be seen.

Though the meanings of ancient symbols found on these costumes may change and evolve, and though the women in this family do not often articulate in words what those meanings might be, they delight in the brilliance of color and design that tells them so much about themselves. In a profound and wordless way, a perfectly spiraled snail shell on a baby's hat can reveal ones link with the natural world, ones geographic homeland, ones family identity, ones ancestral origin, the artistry and love of ones mother, balance, harmony, beauty and the continuing cycle of life. For each of the women in this study, the significance of paj ntaub designs varies. Combining modern fabrics with ancient patterns of the ancestors, the nyias, baby hats and tiny costumes are used to enwrap and adorn a new generation. Perhaps some of that generation will learn enough to pass the skills on to their daughters. The Hmong have always shown a genius for surviving change and maintaining a sense of cultural identity. It is hoped that although today's babies will grow up speaking English as well as Hmong and may not remember some of their cultural heritage, the ancestral spirits will continue to cradle and protect them and their children for many generations to come.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Bernatzik, p. 223.

2. Bernatzik, p. 116.

3. Cubbs, p. 23.

4. Although most of the baby carriers used by the Hmong in Missoula and in this family are Green Hmong baby carriers, the White Hmong spelling, nyas, will be used throughout this paper.

5. Monni Adams, "Dress and Design in Highland Southeast Asia: The Hmong and the Yao," Textile Museum Journal, vol. IV, No. 1, Dec. 1974, p. 59.

6. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 7 May, 1988.

7. Cubbs, p. 23.

8. Conversation with Ia Vang, Missoula, May, 1986.

9. Lyman, p. 16.

10. Personal conversation with an anonymous Hmong woman, Missoula, 1986.

11. See Bernatzik, p. 81, for a description of a similar ritual that he observed in northern Thailand. He also mentions that "...for protection against sickness, strings are tied around the children's wrists, and metal rings can also be used for this." p. 257.

12. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 23 April, 1988.

13. Personal conversation with Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 23 April, 1988.

14. Lemoine, "L'Initiation du mort chez les Hmong: I. Le chemin," p. 131.

15. The vocabulary list for Hmong baby-carriers appears on page 133 of Vang and Lewis.

16. Cubbs, p. 22.

17. Cubbs, p. 23, and Paul and Elaine Lewis, p. 111. (Color photo of a shirt with a red X.)

18. Conversation with Susanne Bessac, Missoula, May, 1987, and lecture by Susanne Bessac in Missoula, 10 May, 1988.

19. Crystal, "Buffalo Heads and Sacred Threads," unpaginated.

20. Numbers 1,2, and 3 are all listed in Vang and Lewis, p. 128.

21. Wendy Porter-Francis, "A Flourishing Art: U.S.A.: Hmong Women Show How to Stitch a Pa Ndau, Their Flowery Cloth," Threads Magazine, Feb./Mar., 1987, p. 36.

22. Porter-Francis, p. 36.

23. Crystal, "Buffalo Heads and Sacred Threads," unpaginated.

24. Written communication from Susanne Bessac on 16 May, 1988.

25. Vang and Lewis, p. 128.

26. Vang and Lewis, p. 130.

27. Cubbs, p. 21.

28. Heimbach, p. 203.

29. Bernatzik, p. 79.

30. Bernatzik, pp. 80-81.

31. The hat was made by a niece in Milwaukee.

32. According to Mary Yang, hats similar to these were being knitted in Laos during the 1960's.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

During this period of transition for eight Lao Hmong refugee women who are related to each other by marriage or by birth, and who live or have lived in Missoula, Montana, traditional costumes both reflect the changes the women are experiencing, and form a stabilizing link with their past.

Migration is deeply rooted in Hmong history, and Hmong textiles have historically reflected transition. The collections of the eight women show a dynamic eclecticism, as well as an observance of traditional patterns and styles. There is respect for both innovation and "originality", in the Hmong sense of the word: of or pertaining to the origin of time, or one's ancestral origin. Young and old enjoy experimenting with new fabrics, materials and embroidery designs, and yet the women in this study continue to also use patterns handed down from their mothers and grandmothers, or from their husbands' lineages. The ability of the women to embrace both the new and the old enables them to feel comfortable with change and yet to still be linked in a fundamental way with their heritages.

The garments the women make or purchase for themselves and their immediate families, or for gift exchanges with other relatives, center around four major rites of passage: the New Year's celebration; marriage; death; and birth. That these costumes are rarely worn in the United States, except for photographic portraits, does not deter the women from adding prolific numbers of garments to their collections.

There are deep cultural implications for the use of traditional Hmong costumes. As Hmong beliefs are influenced by American culture and Christianity, some of the Hmong choose not to use traditional costumes for the rites of passage. In the families of the women included in this study, it is the men who have decided not to

wear Hmong costumes for weddings, and in one instance, for a funeral. The women in this study continue to make and purchase traditional costumes, no matter what their religious affiliation. There are far more costumes being made for women and girls in these families, than for men and boys.

The collections of costumes owned by the women show a blurring of lines between subgroups. Borrowing between subgroups in this family occurs most often when the Hmong Sam Neua women choose to make, purchase and give Hmong Xieng Khouang and Green Hmong costumes. There is little evidence of the Hmong Xieng Khouang women appropriating the dress of the Hmong Sam Neua. This is probably due to the desire of the Hmong Sam Neua to fit in with the majority after they fled their northern villages and moved to Xieng Khouang province during the war. It is also more prestigious to wear the costume of General Vang Pao's people, who were considered to be wealthier by those from Sam Neua, and more powerful. On another level, the expensive, glittering fabrics manufactured with metallic floral designs and silver and gold threads appeal to the Hmong, who love to display their wealth while wearing costumes. Although some of the women in this study may wear costumes from a variety of different subgroups, they still feel a strong allegiance to the lineages and subgroups of both their birth families, and of their husbands' families.

All the women in this study were born and raised in Laos, and in moving to the United States, they continued with textile traditions embraced by their families for centuries. Whether or not any of their daughters or granddaughters raised in the United States, who will never experience the daily use of traditional costumes, will have the desire, knowledge and skills to continue the textile tradition remains to be seen.

There has been some literature written about the symbolic meanings in the patterns of Hmong paj ntaub, particularly for textiles relating to birth and death. Although it is not the purpose of this study to try to interpret those meanings in depth, since the women do not frequently discuss them, it is a subject worthy of sensitive consideration.

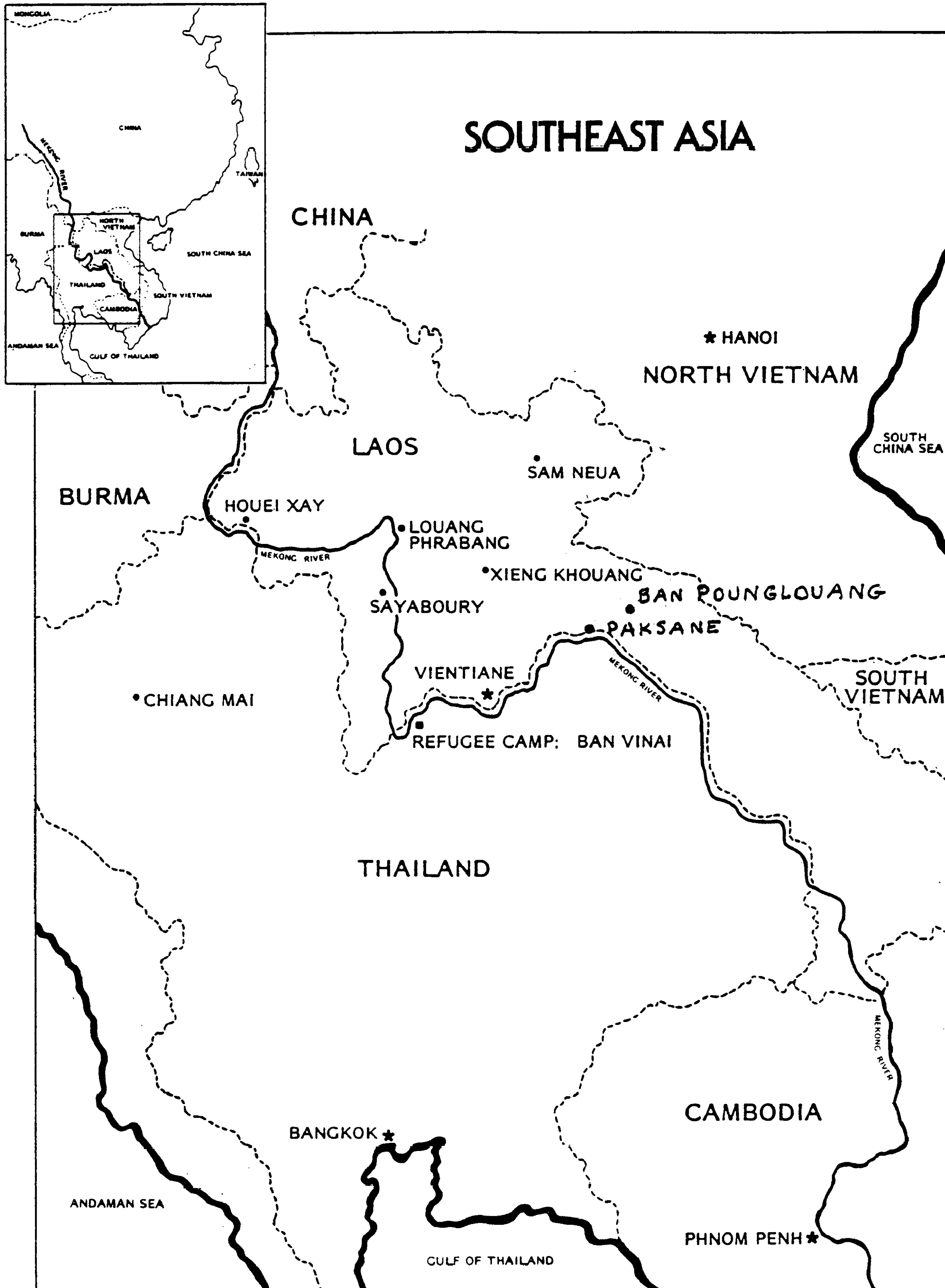
The names the women give to their designs are everyday features of Hmong life in Laos. As the Hmong migrated to new locations through the centuries, they could not

carry their animals, crops, trails, mountains, houses and central posts on their backs, but the women could include them within the designs of their embroideries. Even when the women fled Laos and could take few, if any, of the old paj ntaub across the Mekong, the designs were not lost. As soon as they reached Thai refugee camps, the women began recording those deep, ancestral memories in thread and fabric once again. Thus, the mountains, crops, animals, flowers, paths, homes and central posts, and all the levels of understanding surrounding them, were encoded in the intricate patterns of the embroideries and carried on to their new homes.

One ancient design which appears over and over again is a cross representing the central post of a Hmong home, the link with the spirit world of the ancestors and the male lineage. This cross appears in an infinite number of variations in the paj ntaub of all the subgroups observed during this study. Out from this sacred center, all Hmong life radiates. The rooms, doors, flowers, fields, animals, crops and mountains surround the cross in every direction. Even experimental new designs the women create to sell often focus on the central post. Recently an aunt of one of the young Hmong Sam Neua women created a new, geometric reverse-appliqué of a cross enclosed inside a ring of surrounding peaks, in absolute symmetry (Plate 152). She explained that the cross is the center post, the man's post and never the woman's, and that encircling it were mountains and valleys in all four directions. Her friend sitting beside her said that it is a Hmong home, a Hmong village, and it is in a valley. It is here in Montana, she said. It is Missoula.

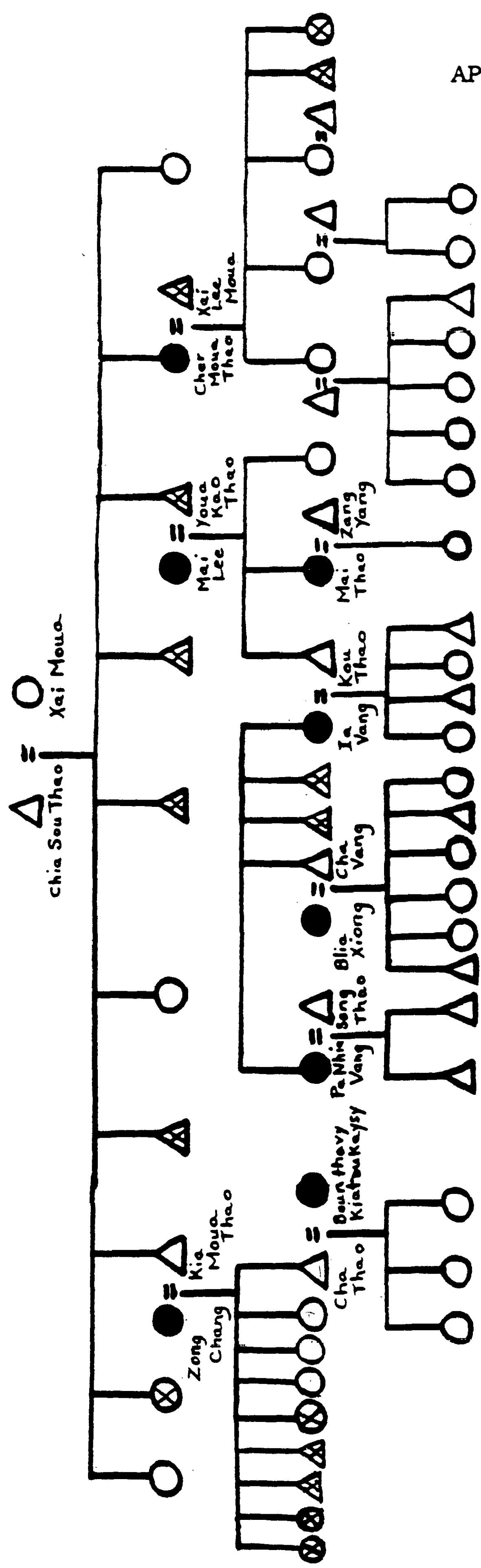
The powerful icon of the cross, though used in a new way and in a new country by the aunt from Sam Neua, carries with it the ancient meaning once stitched by her ancestors in China as they left home after home, central post after central post, and moved on to new locations in China, then to Laos, next to Thailand, and now to the United States, with a temporary resting place in Montana. The ability of the Hmong women to carry their center with them, through the vision of their embroideries, helps to give them definition in a world of flux and change.

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

Kinship Chart of the Eight Hmong Women



△ = ○ = Marriage

○ = Female

△ = Male

(deceased △) or ⊗ = Deceased

● = One of the eight women whose costumes are included in this study.

APPENDIX C

Dowry List and Bride Price for a Hmong Sam Neua Bride: Minnesota, 1987

Dowry List

Gifts to the Bride from Mother and Father

three Hmong Sam Neua costumes
three Hmong Xieng Khouang costumes
one black headdress with embroidered ends (phuam paj)
one black headdress with embroidered ends and red fringe (hmob liab hau)
one Sam Neua vest with silver coins (tsho khuam)
two Xieng Khouang-style money purses (hnab)
one Green Hmong pleated skirt
one Laotian sarong, or skirt length of fabric
five-hundred dollars cash
two silver ingots (choj) from Laos
one gold Catholic cross

Gifts from Paternal Grandmother

one Hmong Sam Neua costume
one White Hmong pleated skirt
one suitcase (phij xab) for the costumes

Gifts from Maternal Grandmother in Laos

one handwoven, hand dyed turban cloth (txog phuam txoom suab)

Plus gifts and money from many other relatives and friends

Bride Price

Bride-Price Set by the Bride's Father: $1,800

Some of the money received was distributed to the bride's grandmothers ($100 each), an uncle who will be in charge of helping to solve any marriage disputes that should arise ($100), his son, who will take over this duty should the uncle die ($10), a cousin ($10) and a sister ($10).

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TRADITIONAL COSTUMES OF THE LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN MONTANA
A STUDY OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

VOLUME II

by

Susan Miller Lindbergh
University of Montana

1988

7-28-88

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PLATES

PLATE

1. Ia Vang with youngest child in 1986.
2. Embroidered sailor collar made by Lor Thao (Ia Vang's mother) in Ban Pounglouang, Laos, before 1965. Synthetic border and background. 5 3/4" x 5 1/2". Owned by Ia Vang.
3. Cross-stitch collar made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton, with hot pink synthetic border. Owned by Ia Vang. 27 stitches per inch.
4. Detail of collar in Plate 2. Buttonhole stitch, straight stitch and cross-stitch.

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PLATE

5. Reverse-appliquéd and embroidered collar, Xieng Khouang tradition. Made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton, silk and synthetic fabrics. 7" x 5 1/4". Owned by Cha Vang.
6. Tuck-and-fold appliqué and embroidered collar, Xieng Khouang tradition. Made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton. 4 3/4" x 5 1/8". Owned by Pa Nhia Vang.
7. Detail of reverse-appliquéd and embroidered collar, Xieng Khouang tradition. Made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton, silk and synthetic fabrics. 5" x 5 1/4". Owned by Ia Vang.
8. Reverse-appliquéd and embroidered collar detail, Xieng Khouang tradition. Made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton and silk. Entire collar is 5 1/4" x 6 1/4". Owned by Ia Vang.

PLATE

9. Cross-stitch collar detail, Xieng Khouang tradition. Made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. 27 crosses per inch. Collar is 5 1/4" x 6". Owned by Ia Vang and worn by her on her wedding day.

10. Detail of two reverse-appliquéd and embroidered apron sashes made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Concentric circles are cotton on synthetic fabric, with silk and synthetic thread embroidery. Sash width is 3". Owned by Ia Vang.

11. Detail of a reverse-appliquéd and embroidered apron sash made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Concentric circles with a cross in center are cotton on synthetic ground. Width is 3". Owned by Cha Vang.

12. Detail of reverse-appliqué apron sash with embroidery made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Xieng Khouang tradition. Sash width is 3". Owned by Ia Vang and worn by her on her wedding day.

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PLATE

13. Detail of reverse-appliqué apron sash with embroidery made by Lor Thao in Laos before 1965. Xieng Khouang tradition. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. Width is 2 1/2". Owned by Pa Nhia Vang.
14. Pa Nhia Vang wearing a "dragon" hat. Cross-stitch embroidery, lace, rick-rack, sequins, beads and synthetic fabric. Made by Pa Nhia Vang in Milwaukee in 1986. 9" x 14 3/4".
15. Detail of a cross-stitch apron panel (uncompleted) being made by Pa Nhia Vang in Milwaukee in 1987. 6 3/8" wide.
16. Blia Xiong carrying her son Jon in a Green Hmong nyias.

PLATE

17. Three reverse-appliqué women's collars with embroidery made by Blia Xiong for her own collection between 1980-1987. Xieng Khouang tradition. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. Notice metallic floral designs machine-woven into the black part of each collar. Each collar is 5" x 7".

18. Three reverse-appliqué children's collars made by Blia Xiong for her three daughters. Cotton on synthetic background. 1985-1987, Milwaukee. Each collar is 4" x 5 3/8".

19. Mai Lee sewing <u>paj ntaub</u> at home in Missoula.

20. Mai Lee wearing Hmong Sam Neua turban with embroidered turban band embellished with pearls and fake coins. Silver earrings are from Thailand.

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PLATE

21. Mai Lee wearing a Hmong Sam Neua costume she has made, with reverse-appliqué snails, coins, and embroidered sashes. The silver necklace was purchased from Thailand, and so were the Xieng Khouang-style money purses. The necklace style was originally from the Xieng Khouang area, but is now also popular with the Hmong Sam Neua, many of whom moved to Xieng Khouang province during the war. The snail-embellished aprons worn front and back hide the black baggy pants, and make it appear like she is wearing a long skirt.
22. Close-up view of layers of cross-stitch and reverse-appliqué paj ntaub on Mai Lee's Sam Neua costume. Hundreds of beads, coins and a necklace add richness to both sight and sound.
23. Reverse-appliqué collar with snail design in the Sam Neua tradition. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. Made by Mai Lee in Missoula in the 1980's for her collection of jackets. 8 1/2" x 6".
24. Reverse-appliqué collar detail, with snail design. Sam Neua tradition. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. 6" x 3". Made by Mai Lee in the 1980's for Ia Vang's family.

PLATE

25. Detail of reverse-appliqué apron sash with snail design, made by Mai Lee for her collection. Sam Neua tradition. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. Sash width is 3".

26. Reverse-appliqué collar with snails, made by Mai Lee for Ia Vang in Missoula in 1980's. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. 7" x 5 1/4".

27. Cross-stitch collar on Green Hmong costume made for Mai Thao by Mai Lee in Missoula in 1983. Collar is worn with design concealed. This old pattern, voj daj or "yellow circle", was passed down to Mai Lee by her mother, grandmother and great grandmother.

28. Detail showing cross-stitch embroidery on Green Hmong apron made by Mai Lee for Mai Thao in Missoula in 1983.

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PLATE

29. Detail showing cross-stitch designs on apron sash made by Mai Lee in Missoula for her own collection. The two designs are the same as those on the Green Hmong costume pieces in Plates 27 and 28. 3" wide.

30. Cross-stitch collar on a Hmong Sam Neua jacket made by Mai Lee. This is the same pattern used by Mai Thao for the collars on the elder's shirts she gave to Mai Lee, Zong Chang and Kia Moua Thao (Plates 93, 94 and 96). 8" x 5 1/2".

31. Cross-stitch collar with red cotton border on a Hmong Sam Neua jacket made by Mai Lee in Missoula in the 1980's for her collection. Name of the design, according to Cher Moua, is voj daj or "circle of yellow". 7 1/4" x 5 1/4".

32. Cross-stitch collar on a Hmong Sam Neua jacket made by Mai Lee in Missoula in the 1980's. Cotton with a hot pink synthetic border. 8" x 5 1/2".

PLATE

33. Cross-stitch collar made by Mai Lee for her own collection in Missoula in the 1980's. Hot pink synthetic border. 7 5/8" x 5 1/2".

34. Mai Lee in an old-style Hmong Sam Neua costume with striped sleeves and no embroidery on sleeves or apron. Missoula, 1987. Made by Mai Lee.

35. Mai Thao, Mai Lee and Pa Der, from left to right. Green Bay, WI, 1987.

36. noob ncoos or "seed pillow", made by Mai Thao for her uncle Kia Moua Thao in Greenbay, WI, 1987. Cotton appliqué. 18 1/2" x 17 1/2".

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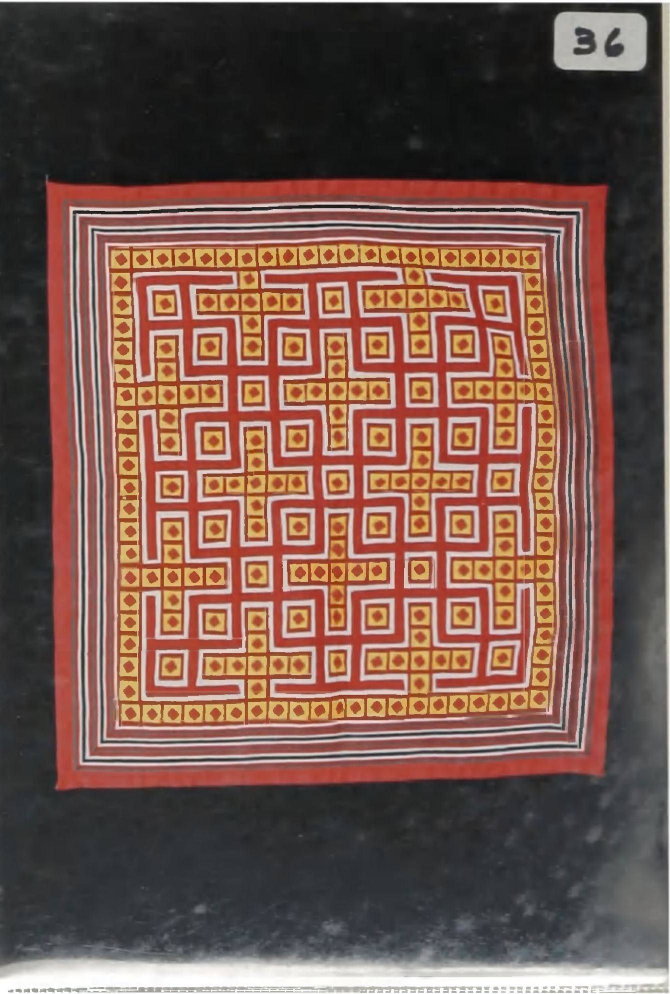
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PLATE

37. Child's apron, made by Cher Moua Thao, with a purchased Xieng Khouang-style money purse attached to the top like a bib. Missoula, 1987.
38. Cher Moua Thao wearing a tunic she designed and sewed in 1987, with appliquéd birds and hearts and traditional reverse-appliqué. Missoula, 1988.
39. Back view of Cher Moua Thao's tunic, with elaborite reverse-appliqué snail design.
40. Cher Moua Thao wearing a Hmong Sam Neua costume she recently completed, with reverse-appliqué snails. The pink and green sashes are tied around the waist with precision.

PLATE

41. Cher Moua Thao wearing Hmong Sam Neua costume she made (except for purchased Xieng Khouang money purses). Linda Thao wearing boy's melon hat made by Mai Lee, Missoula, 1987.
42. Detail of Cher Moua, showing how turban is tightly wrapped and gradually built out from the head. Separate band with snail design, beads and silver coins from Laos is pinned around the outside. Silver earrings are from Laos.
43. Detail of layers of cross stitch, reverse-appliqué sashes, belts, money purses and fake coins on Cher Moua's costume. Missoula, 1987.
44. Portrait of Zong Chang wearing Hmong Sam Neua costume, Missoula, 1988.

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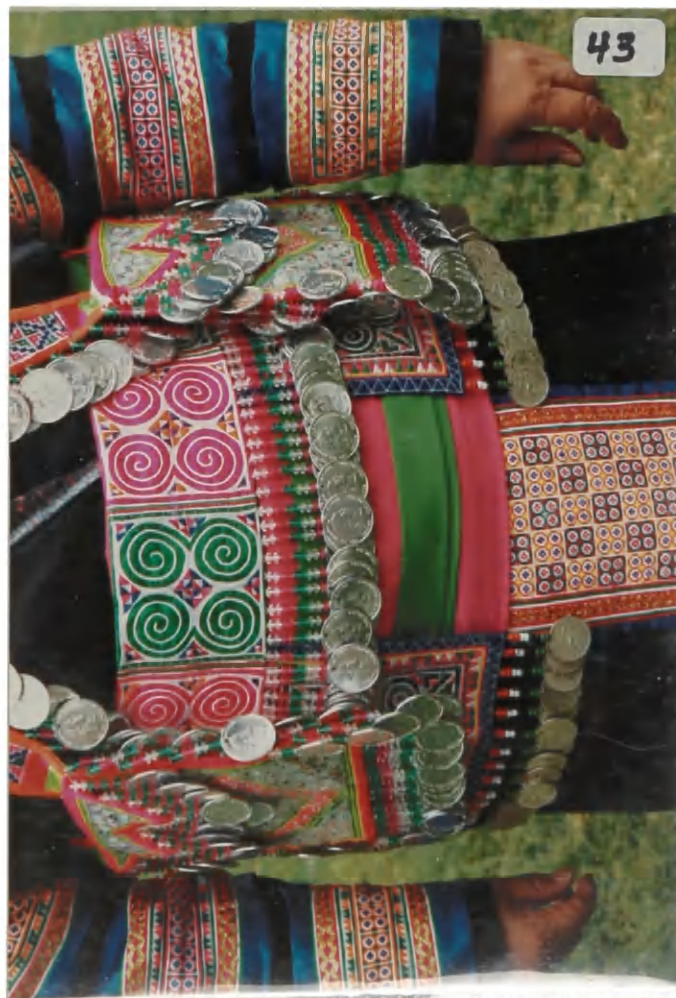
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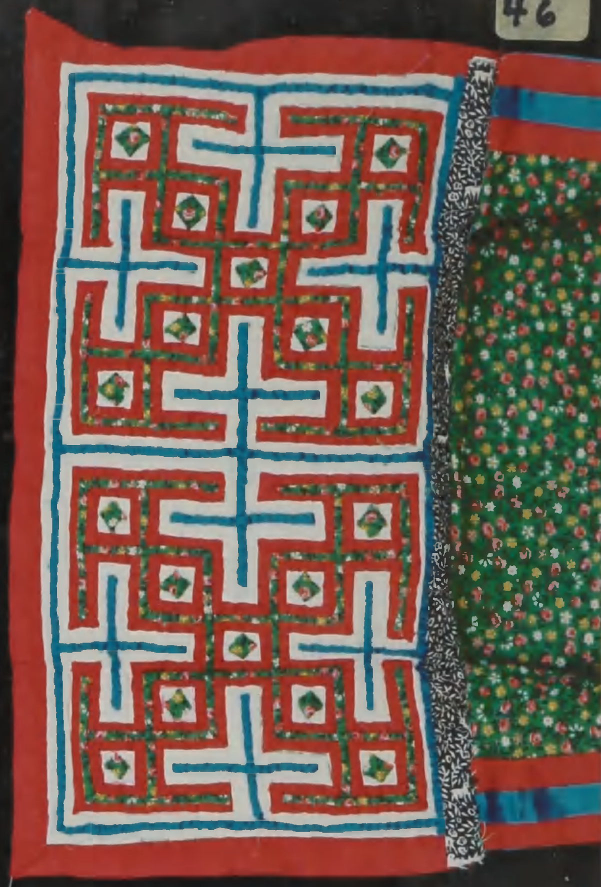
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PLATE

45. Collar with reverse-appliqué snails made in Sam Neua many years ago by Zong Chang. Cotton and silk, with red cotton border, and silk embroidery. 11 1/2" x 6 1/4".

46. Sam Neua Elder's collar (dab tsho laus) with "frog leg" design in cotton appliqué, with floral print and red cotton border. Blue cross in the middle forms the center post of a Hmong home. Made by Zong Chang for herself in Missoula in 1982. 11" x 6".

47. Sam Neua elder's jacket (tsho laus) with black and royal blue satin, with wide blue panel down back. Made by Zong Chang for herself in Missoula in 1982.

48. Sam Neua elder's jacket made by Zong Chang for herself in Missoula in 1982. Black and blue satin, with wide blue panels down the sides, green floral print lining, and "frog leg" appliquéd collar.

PLATE

49. Detail of elder's collar on elder's jacket shown in Plate 48. Cotton appliqué "frog leg" pattern, with red cotton border and green floral print used as background. Made by Zong Chang for herself. 9" x 5 1/2".

50. Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy and her three daughters, Missoula, 1987.

51. Copy of an ecclesiastical stole made for a Catholic priest by Bountavy Kiatoukaysy in Minneapolis in the early 1980's. Cotton background and borders with rows of Christian crosses and piles of rocks at the base of each one, depicted in cross-stitch. Total stole is 58" long by 3 3/4" wide.

52. Detail of heirloom reverse-appliqué sash with snail design, made in Laos by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy's mother when she was twelve years old, and given to Bounthavy as a wedding gift. Cotton. Entire sash is 92" long and 2 1/2" wide, with snails embellishing the ends only, as shown in photograph.

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PLATE

53. Zong Chang wearing Hmong Sam Neua costume for formal portrait, Missoula, 1988.
54. Kia Moua Thao wearing Hmong Sam Neua costume for formal portrait, Missoula, 1988. Necklace and money purses were purchased, and are in the Xieng Khouang tradition. Plate 61 shows a detail of the embellished sash, with long yarn fringes.
55. Formal portrait of Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy and her husband Cha Thao in Hmong Sam Neua costumes, Missoula, 1988.
56. Formal friendship portrait of Cher Moua Thao, Susan Lindbergh and Mai Lee, wearing Hmong Sam Neua costumes. Missoula, 1987. Except for the purchased Xieng Khouang money purses, the costume in the center was made by Cher Moua for her daughter.

PLATE

57. Mai Lee and Cher Moua Thao wearing American clothes for a friendship portrait. Missoula, 1987.
58. Hmong Sam Neua wedding jacket made for Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy by her paternal grandmother, Lo Mee Lee, in Minneapolis in 1981. Reverse-appliqué snails, black satin, and hot pink synthetic edging. Lining is made from cotton print fabric with candy canes, as wedding took place close to Christmas. Collar on jacket is 8 3/4" x 5 1/2".
59. Two Hmong Sam Neua money purses with flaps (top) belong to Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy and were made by Lo Mee Lee in Minneapolis in 1981. Four money purses without flaps (bottom) were purchased by Zong Chang for her son Cha Thao.
60. Reverse-appliqué snails on Hmong Sam Neua jacket collar, made by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy's mother Sao Vang in Minneapolis and given to Bounthavy in 1987 when she visited for the first time in five years. 7 1/2" x 5 1/4".

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PLATE

61. Old-style Hmong Sam Neua sash with long yarn fringes and reverse-appliqué with embroidery. Made by Lo Mee Lee in Minneapolis for her granddaughter Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy. Length of sash is 85". The two embroidered ends are each 5" x 2 1/2".

62. Reverse-appliqué snail collar on a jacket made by Lo Mee Lee for her granddaughter Bounthavy. Cotton snails, with chain and satin stitch embroidery. 9" x 5 3/4".

63. Money sashes to be worn around the neck, hanging down on the chest, with reverse-appliqué snails, embroidery, beads and fake coins. Cotton and synthetic fabrics. Each sash is 26 3/4" long by 2 3/4" wide. Made by Lo Mee Lee for Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy in Minneapolis in 1981.

64. Hmong Sam Neau jacket made for Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy by her mother-in-law Zong Chang in Missoula, 1983. Black and blue satin, with cotton print lining covered with tiny deer.

PLATE

65. Detail of collar from jacket in Plate 64. Cotton reverse-appliqué snails with satin stitch embroidery. 9 1/4" x 6 1/2". Made by Zong Chang for Bounthavy.

66. Three young Sam Neua men dressed for New Year's celebration in Fresno, December, 1987. Each costume includes velvet or satin black baggy pants with long-sleeved jacket with blue trim and blue stripes at the cuff, reverse-appliqué snail money vest, money belts (under vest) and hot pink and kelly green synthetic sashes, tied in front.

67. Mother and daughter in Hmong Sam Neua costumes, with striped sleeves, at Fresno, Dec. 1987. Money purses are from the Xieng Khouang tradition.

68. Several Hmong Sam Neua women line up to throw balls at the New Year's celebration in Fresno, 1987.

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PLATE

69-73. A variety of different costumes at the New Year's celebration in Fresno in Dec. 1987. Notice the variations of headdress, apron patterns, fabrics, silver, and other costume details.

PLATE

73. Two women with intricately embroidered apron panels in Fresno, Dec. 1987. Woman on left is wearing White Hmong skirt, and woman on right, a Green Hmong skirt.

74. Young women in White Hmong Xieng Khouang costumes joke with young Hmong Sam Neua man during the ball throwing ritual in Fresno, 1987. Girl in foreground holds forfeit items in her left hand.

75. A good singer in Fresno, surrounded by older Hmong with tape recorders, sings as she throws the ball to her partner. She is wearing a Green Hmong skirt.

76. Detail of Green Hmong skirt showing appliqué on top of batik. Left side of photograph shows an unpleated section, and right side shows the cloth pulled up by numerous strings into pleats. When the skirt is worn at the New Year, the strings are removed, but are replaced before the skirt is packed away again for storage. Collection of Mai Thao; purchased for her by her mother in 1983.

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PLATE

77. Hmong Xieng Khouang costume which combines many glittering fabrics, made by Blia Xiong. This style of necklace is worn by men, women, and children in both Hmong Sam Neua and Hmong Xieng Khouang families in this study.

78. Detail of embellished turban band, worn with Hmong Xieng Khouang costume as in Plate 77. Old-style turban bands are made of black and white striped material (Plate 138). New-style turban bands sometimes cover the plain striped material with satin appliquéd triangles, sequins and lace until the cloth underneath no longer shows. Given to Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy by her mother in 1987. Purchased from a relative in Thailand.

79. New-style "dragon" hat made by Mai Thao, Greenbay, Wisconsin in 1986. Cross-stitch embroidery, lace, silver and gold braid, and pink synthetic fabric. 12 1/2" x 8".

80. New-style hat made by Mai Thao in Greenbay, 1986. Embroidery, sequins, beads and metallic braid. 11" x 10".

PLATE

81. New-style hat designed and made by Mau Thao in Greenbay, 1986. Unfinished. Appliquéd triangles, cross-stitch embroidery, lace, and synthetic pink and green fabric. 11" x 10".

82. Headdress owned by Mai Thao and worn by Nhua Thao, which was purchased from a shipment from Thailand in Missoula in 1984. It combines Hmong Xieng Khouang reverse-appliqué, red pompons, beads and fake money.

83. Old-style headdress from Sam Neua, given to Mai Thao by a cousin who sent it from Laos. It consists of a length of handwoven black cotton which is embroidered on both ends. Some of the Hmong Sam Neua wear this style, and others wear turbans like those of Mai Lee, Cher Moua Thao and Zong Chang (Plates 20, 42 and 44).

84. Detail of an apron panel embroidered by Mai Lee in Missoula in the 1980's.

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PLATE

85. Detail of an apron panel made by Mai Lee for her son's family. Cross stitch and satin stitch on cotton backing on a black satin apron. According to Mai Lee, this is the "snake" design.

86. Elder's jacket made for Zong Chang by Cher Moua Thao, Missoula, 1987. Cross-stitched collar was made by Cher Moua's sister, Nhia Thao, using a design called quab nyug, and is bordered with hot pink synthetic fabric. Three cross-stitch embroidered bands on each sleeve were made by Cher Moua.

87. Elder's apron made by Cher Moua Thao for Zong Chang to match elder's jacket in Plate 86. Cotton cross-stitch design in the central panel on a black satin apron, with green and red sashes. Missoula, 1987.

88. Elder's apron made by Mai Thao for Zong Chang in Green Bay in 1987.

PLATE

89. Detail of embroidered apron panel shown in Plate 88. Straight stitches in a white cotton backing, with blue borders on a black satin apron.

90. Elder's jacket (tsho laus) made for Zong Chang by Mai Thao in Green Bay in 1987. Satin, cotton and cotton blend fabrics. Three embroidered bands on each sleeve, including bands of cross-stitch snails in the middle. Wide embroidered lapels, large cross-stitch collar, and paisley print cotton lining.

91. Detail of embroidered cuff of tsho laus in Plate 90, made by Mai Thao for Zong Chang. Notice change in the geometric pattern at the seam.

92. Detail of the cuff on the other sleeve of tsho laus pictured in Plate 90, showing a different change in the pattern than the one in Plate 91.

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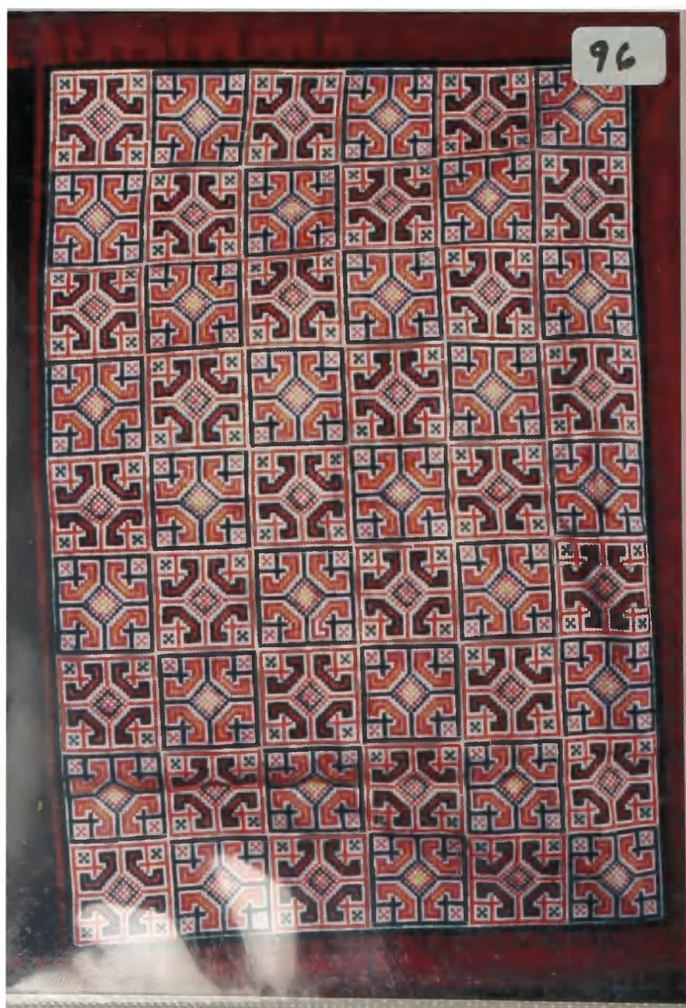
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PLATE

93. Collar of the tsho laus made by Mai Thao for Zong Chang (Plate 90) showing the geometric cross-stitch design and red cotton border. 16" x 12". Plates 93, 94, and 96 show variations of the same design, and were all made by Mai Thao.

94. Cross-stitch collar on tsho laus made by Mai Thao for Kia Moua Thao. Compare to Plates 93 and 96. 16" x 12".

95. Detail of sleeve and lapel of tsho laus made by Mai Thao for her mother Mai Lee in 1987. Notice cross-stitch snails on lapel and cross-stitch patterns on the sleeve, which include the "circle of yellow" (daj voj), an old pattern handed down from Mai Lee's mother and maternal grandmother, who was a Green Hmong. This is the same pattern that Mai Lee used on the Green Hmong jacket she made for her daughter's New Year's costume. Mai Lee also gave a collar to Cher Moua with this same design in 1987.

96. Detail showing collar on tsho laus made by Mai Thao for her mother Mai Lee in 1987. Red cotton border. 16 1/2" x 12 1/4".

PLATE

97. Detail showing back of tsho laus made by Mai Thao for her uncle Kia Moua Thao in 1987. Cotton fabric. Robe is 46 1/2" long, 30" wide, with 14" sleeves that are 10" wide. Slits up each side are 22" high.

98. Tsho laus made by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy (with the help of her aunt May Yang) for her father-in-law Kia Moua Thao. Missoula, 1987. White cotton with blue cotton lapels, and a reverse-appliqué snail collar purchased from Thailand. Robe is 56" long, 30" wide, with sleeves 9 1/2" long and 12" wide. Lapels are 37" long and 3" wide.

99. Detail of cross-stitch pattern on a tsho laus made by Mai Lee for her son Kou Thao in Missoula, around 1986. This design is used frequently by Mai Lee when making collars, sashes, and money purses, and was used by her daughter Mai Thao for some of the embellishments on a tsho laus she made for Mai Lee (Plate 95).

100. Back of tsho laus made by Mai Lee for Kou Thao. Long sleeves have embroidered cuffs which match the collar. Large collar, edged with red cotton, covers entire back when worn.

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PLATE

101. Collar on Hmong Sam Neua tsho laus given to father-in-law Kia Moua Thao by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy, Missoula, 1987. Cotton reverse-appliqué snails on a synthetic ground, with red cotton border. Purchased from Thailand. 12" x 8 5/8".

102. Hmong Sam Neua tsho laus made by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy for her mother in 1987 in Missoula. Black and blue satin, black cotton lining, and reverse-appliqué snail collar with lapels of red cotton and blue satin stripes.

103. Detail of Hmong Sam Neua elder's collar given by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy to her father Lo Va Chang in 1987. Purchased from Thailand. Yellow cotton snails on synthetic royal blue background. 12" x 8 5/8".

104. Detail showing Hmong Sam Neua elder's collar given by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy to her mother in 1987. Purchased from Thailand. White cotton snails on black satin with red cotton border. 11" x 8".

PLATE

105. Elder's collar in the collection of Zong Chang. Cross-stitch, other kinds of stitches and appliqué on cotton with red cotton border. According to members of the family, this is an old design from Sam Neua. 13 1/2" x 8 1/4". Needleworker unknown.

106. Hmong Sam Neua tsho laus made by Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy (with the help of May Yang) for her paternal grandmother, Lo Mee Lee in Missoula in 1987. Black and blue satin with blue cotton lining and a cotton collar (see detail of collar, Plate 112).

107. Detail of embroidered apron panel made for Mai Lee by her daughter Mai Thao in 1987.

108. Funeral shoes of blue cotton with black edges, stitched with white cotton thread. Toes rise up in the shape of a cock's comb. 11" long, 4 1/2" wide, 5" high at toe.

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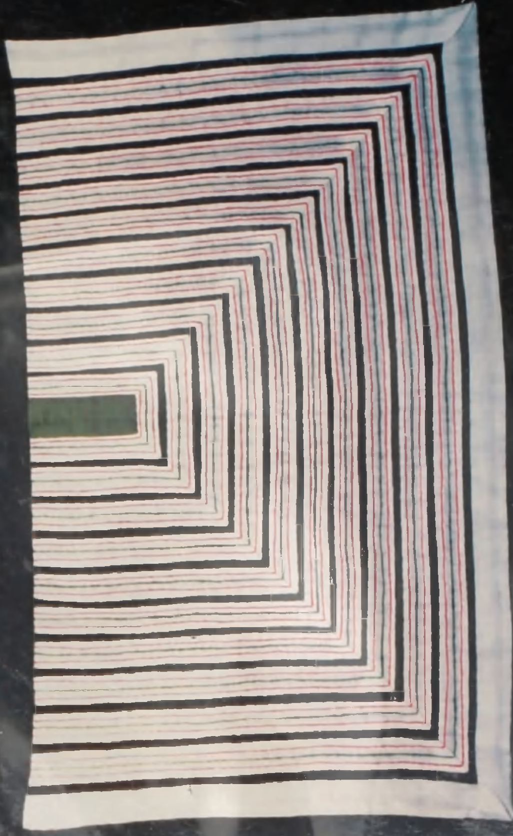
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PLATE

109. Elder's collar purchased from craft fair in Missoula, 1987. Cotton appliqué with red cotton border, done in the chev technique (tuck and fold). 20" x 13 1/2". quab nyug design. According to Heimbach's dictionary, quab means young, castrated pig. "nyug" or "nyuj" means a cow or bull. Se Xiong, whose relative in Thailand made this collar, says the two small blue squares with yellow diamonds in them are called plawv, meaning "center" or "heart". Owned by Susan Lindbergh.
110. Cotton elder's collar made by Se Xiong in Missoula, 1987. Tuck-and-fold appliqué (chev) and embroidery, with red cotton border. "Buffalo horns" and the central post and flowers are all incorporated into the design. 10 3/4" x 7 1/2". Owned by Susan Lindbergh.
111. Elder's collar made by May Yang in Missoula, 1987. According to May, a very old design from Sam Neua, depicting the door of a Hmong home, surrounded by rain trenches dug around the uphill end and sides of a house which divert the monsoon rains away from the front door. Cotton. 13 7/8" x 9 3/8". Owned by Susan Lindbergh.
112. Detail showing the collar of the tsho laus in Plate 106. Tuck-and-fold appliqué, appliqué and embroidery in cotton with red cotton border. Chev style, depicting a trail that goes up a mountain, flowers (paj), the "worm" (cua nab) design, and the heart or center (plawv).

PLATE

113. Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy carrying her youngest daughter in a White Hmong Sam Neua nyias. Gift from her mother.

114. Sleeping child in a Green Hmong batiked and appliquéd nyias at the New Year's celebration in Fresno, 1987. Both the baby hat and the top of the nyias are covered with silver coins.

115. White Hmong nyias with reverse-appliqué snail design, surrounded by tiny appliquéd black and white triangles. Cotton. Purchased in Missoula in 1986 by Susan Lindbergh. 16 1/2" x 25 1/2". Long, continuous carrying strap projects out 81 1/2" from each side.

116. Green Hmong nyias with strips of cloth appliquéd over the "heart" of the "body". The "heart" of the "mouth" is covered with an appliquéd design and pompons. Cotton, with hot pink synthetic borders. Owned by Ia Vang.

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PLATE

117. Ia Vang demonstrates how to lift a child onto her back and secure him in a _nyias_ (Plates 117-122).

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PLATE

121. Ia Vang securing her son Wa Xai into a nyias.

122. Ia carrying Wa Xai in a nyias.

123. Mother carrying a one-week-old infant in front with a Green Hmong nyias (Plates 123 and 124).

124.

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PLATE

125. Zong Chang carrying her granddaughter in a nyias with a blanket tied over the top for protection against the cold.

126. A nyias kiab, or baby-carrier cover to be worn over the nyias to protect the baby from the weather or insects. Royal blue double-knit and dark brown satin are worn facing out. 43 1/2" high x 29 1/2" wide. Long straps are 75" long, and short straps are 22" long. Made by Lo Mee Lee as a gift for her granddaughter Bounthavy.

127. Inside of the nyias kiab, worn next to the baby, has a deep red rectangle in the middle of dark brown satin. Straps are made of striped cotton.

128. Janie Thao wearing a "chicken" hat made for her by her great aunt, Mai Lee. Reverse-appliqué snail design, with coins along the bottom edge, which show it is a girl's hat, as does the protuberance over the forehead in the shape of a rooster's comb. Coins, sequins, beads, braid, ribbon and embroidery.

PLATE

129. Kao Blia Thao wearing a "chicken" hat made by Mai Lee in Missoula in 1987. Small embroidered and stuffed fetish of a mother and child on top provides power for spiritual protection. Owned by Susan Lindbergh.

130. Two Hmong Xieng Khouang girls wearing "chicken" hats made by their mother, Blia Xiong in Milwaukee, 1987. Reverse-appliqué designs embellish the front.

131. Side view of girls wearing Hmong Xieng Khouang "chicken" hats, showing reverse-appliquéd ear flaps and rooster comb over the forehead. Black fabric on hat on right has glittering metallic flowers woven into it. Hats made by Blia Xiong.

132. Close-up of Mai Lee adding embroidery next to the reverse-appliqué snails on a section of a boy's melon hat.

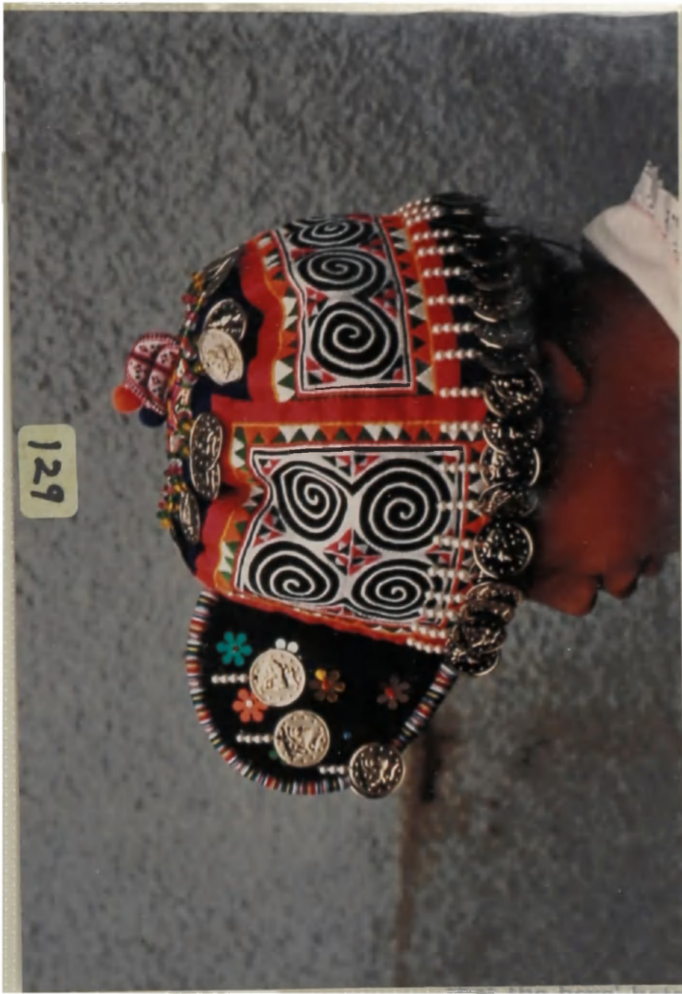
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PLATE

133. Mai Lee carrying grandson who is wearing a melon hat she made in Missoula in 1987, with reverse-appliqué snails and a small fetish of a mother and child for spiritual protection. Later, she added coins and beads on top of the design. Cotton hat, with a wool pompon.

134. Boy's melon hat made by Cher Moua Thao's niece in Milwaukee in the 1980's. Buttonhole stitch secures the appliqué to the underneath layer. Cotton, with fake coins and glass beads.

135. Wool knitted hats made by Pang Lo, Missoula, 1986. Notice that the boys' hats differ from the girls' hats, just as traditional Hmong children's hats show differentiation between the sexes, according to family members in this study. Pompons around the bottom of the knitted girls' hats can be compared to the row of coins around the bottom of the girl's "chicken" hat pictured in Plate 136.

136. Linda Thao wearing a Hmong Sam Neua costume made by her grandmother, Mai Lee. Missoula, 1986.

PLATE

137. Lisa Thao, age two, wearing for the first time a Hmong Xieng Khouang costume made by her mother Ia Vang in Missoula, 1983. This is a miniature version of an adult costume and consists of a black jacket with turned-up blue cuffs and blue lapels, long black pants, two black aprons worn front and back, a green sash tied in front and a red (or bright pink) sash tied behind. The tiny collar on her jacket is a reverse-appliqué in the Xieng Khouang tradition (see Plate 18). Absent from Lisa's costume are elaborate money purses.

138. Detail of Lisa Thao's first costume (Xieng Khouang) showing striped turban band. This is the type of sash used in some weddings to securely close the ritual umbrella carrying the souls of the bride and groom, the souls of their future children, and wishes for good health and fortune.

139. Lisa Thao, age five, wearing a Hmong Sam Neua costume made by her grandmother Mai Lee, except for the headdress, which was purchased. Missoula, 1986.

140. Lisa Thao in a new-style Hmong Xieng Khouang costume with embellished "dragon" hat and fancy lace sashes. Missoula, 1986. Costume made by Ia Vang.

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PLATE

141. Lisa Thao, Missoula, 1986, in Lao costume used for dance performances. Purchased from Thailand.
142. Janie and Kao Blia Thao in Hmong Sam Neua costumes made by their paternal great-grandmother, Lo Mee Lee, and in hats made by their great aunt Mai Lee.
143. Kao Blia Thao wearing unusual money sashes around her neck, made by her paternal great-grandmother Lo Mee Lee in Milwaukee, 1981, and given to Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy as part of her dowry garments.
144. Sou Thao in Hmong Sam Neua costume made by his grandmother Mai Lee. Missoula, 1986.

PLATE

145. These three Hmong Sam Neua costumes made by Mai Lee, and worn by her grandchildren, are miniature versions of adult costumes, except that women wear turbans or headdresses, like the one on the right, and not "chicken" hats like the one in the middle. Men, women and children in this family wear necklaces like the one on the left, which is of Hmong Xieng Khouang origin. The Hmong Sam Neua prefer this style to the style they used to wear in Laos before the war.

146. Cross-stitch collar made by Lo Vee Mee in Milwaukee for her great-granddaughter in Missoula, 1987. 4" x 3 1/2". Cotton, with synthetic pink border. In the collection of Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy.

147. Same as above, except there is a slight change in color so that each sister has an individual collar.

148. Reverse-appliqué snail collar made by Lo Vee Mee in 1987 for her granddaughter, to be worn when she becomes older. In the collection of Bounthavy Kiatoukaysy.

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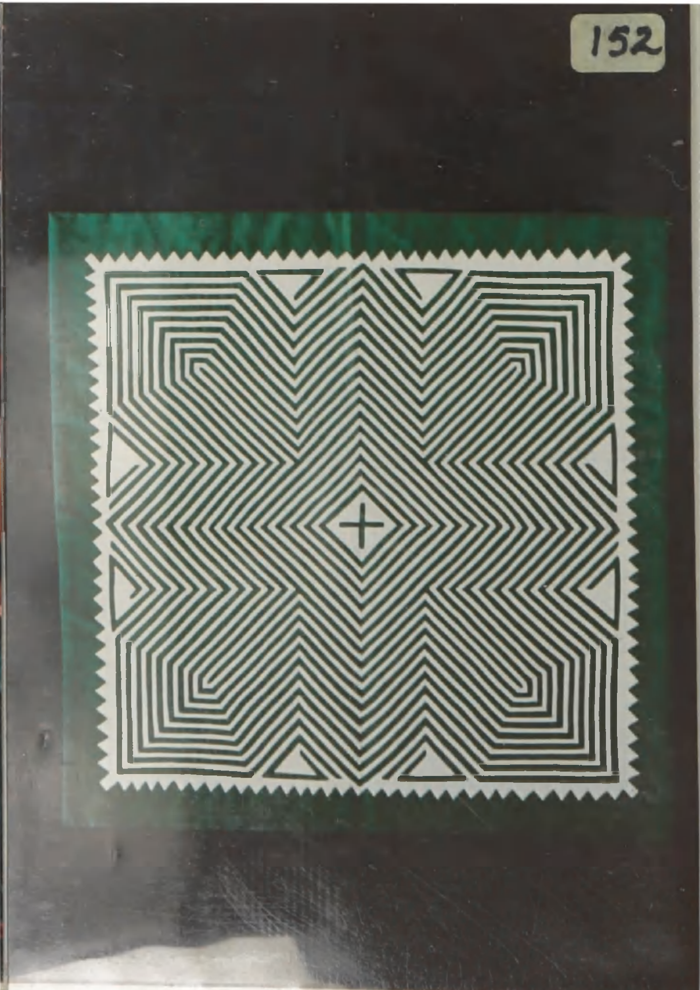
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PLATE

149. "Dragon" hat made by Blia Xiong for her daughter in Milwaukee, 1987. Cross-stitch and lace embellishment on cotton and synthetic fabrics.

150. "Dragon" hat made by Blia Xiong for her daughter with reverse-appliqué in the Xieng Khouang tradition, and lace embellishment on cotton and synthetic fabrics. Milwaukee, 1987.

151. Front view of three "dragon" hats made by Blia Xiong. Milwaukee, 1987.

152. Reverse-appliqué done in the _tho_ technique, which is to cut and sew as you go, instead of cutting out the entire design before stitching it to the backing. This _paj ntaub_ is a modern adaptation of very old design elements, made by May Yang in Missoula, in 1988. It shows the _plawv_, or heart, or center, surrounded by mountains on all sides. It is the center of the Hmong home, where the main post is located, and the mountains can be in Laos, or here in Missoula, or anywhere. The concept of _plawv_, or the center, is essential to Hmong life.