

Hmong Displacement in Asia  
Up to 1975

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# The Stage

Asia  
3000 BC – 1975 AD

# The Players

Hmong

China  
Vietnam  
Laos  
Thailand  
France  
Japan  
America

## INTRODUCTION

The Hmong are an ethnic minority that have been persecuted since ancient times. They were stubborn montagnards who refused to succumb to Chinese civilization. Chinese history begins mentioning them around 2500 BC, though their presence in China dates as far back as 3000 BC. Wherever they settled, they fell victim to discrimination and political abuse. The ancient Hmong were so adamant about their freedom that they would not even tolerate being ruled by one of their own, so of course they would fight oppression from other groups.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many fled to Southeast Asia where they suffered under French imperialism. They fought the Japanese during World War II, and the Vietminh and the Pathet Lao during the Vietnam War, or what the Hmong termed *Thaum tebchaws tawg*, “when the world exploded.” After Laos fell to North Vietnam, public policy mandated annihilation of the Hmong for their role against the communists.

This first paper will focus on Hmong displacement in Asia.

## HOMELAND

The Hmong likely trekked to China from Siberia, though it is not ruled out that their origins may be beyond that region as well. Siberia is a strong possibility for the following reasons: 1) the Hmong practice shamanism, whose roots originate from Siberia (deoxy.org); 2) Hmong legends of origin speak of a land of frozen water and white “sand” that covered the earth for two-thirds of the year (Quincy), and 3) Chinese historical texts reveal their first contact with the Hmong in the north-northeast region of China and also describe the Hmong as the light-haired barbarians from the west (Quincy). If anything, we at least know that the Hmong were not originally from Asia.

Shamanism is present in cultures throughout the world. But Hmong shamanism is different because the Hmong shaman does not use magic and ritual to influence events, like a witchdoctor would. Instead he deals with the spirits themselves. The soul leaves the body and enters the spirit world, calling for his *neeb* spirit helpers to battle the evil demons. It is not entirely inconceivable to say that the Hmong may have been one of the first cultures to spread shamanism into Asia.

Since the Chinese described the Hmong as beastly savages, Christian missionaries were hesitant to open contact with them. A few missionaries, against the warnings from the Chinese, decided to brave the paths to Hmong villages and to their surprise observed that the Hmong not only shared western ways but looked rather “western” themselves:

[the Hmong] did not...use chopsticks, but ate with spoons ... Their children played many of the same games as European children: hide-and-peek, shuttlecock, marbles, and spinning tops. And particularly striking was the fact that ... red or blond hair was not uncommon, and more than a few had blue eyes" (17, Quincy).

Though these features may be anthropologically fascinating, they did nothing in the preservation of Hmong life. In fact, these very same features made it easier for the Chinese to single them out and kill them. That, as well as forced intermarriage with Chinese, probably explains why the light skin and hair is now an exception rather than a norm in the modern Hmong population.

#### CHINA'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE HMONG

The Chinese referred to the Hmong as "Miao" (sometimes spelled "Meo") which translates to "savage" but has connotations of "being like a monkey" (Thoj). They were seen as inferior and in need of "civilization" because they opted to reside in mountain villages rather than lowland cities. From the Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1028 BC) to the Manchu Dynasty (1644 – 1911 AD), Hmong and Chinese were mortal enemies. China wanted them to conform and the Hmong did not agree. Not only did they resist integration, but they also actively fought in retaliation, initiating numerous uprisings throughout the dynastic years.

From the 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, the Hmong experienced a time of significant political power, becoming such a daunting force that the Chinese erected a small-scale wall on the Hunan-Kweichow border to help ward them off. They were never strong enough to overthrow the Chinese, but they were stubborn enough to consistently annoy them. Armed with only knives and spears, their ferocity often provoked dread in Chinese infantry who had to face them in hand-to-hand combat.

The Hmong were experts in guerilla warfare, using their mountaintop access to their advantage. They would ambush unsuspecting Chinese soldiers in the valleys below and crush or suffocate them by pushing down rocks to create an avalanche effect. Tens of thousands of troops died this way, and there were never survivors to tell of it so the Chinese never knew, except to say that their troops had disappeared without a trace. No doubt this was the reason the Hmong were called the "boogie men."

The Hmong are not nomadic, as they are often called. Rather, they moved from place to place because of persecution. Their preferred life style is pastoral and hunting and gathering. They were not quite the boogie men that the Chinese thought they were, fighting only if provoked to do so. They felt they were not posing any competition for land because the Chinese could not tolerate the harsh climates of the mountains, almost 3000 feet above sea level. They only resided on unoccupied territory, their view being that empty land is free land. If they did happen to clash

with other tribes, they tried to resolve the situation by sharing, or even moving to avoid future problems. Unfortunately, each succeeding dynasty only hated the Hmong more and more. I will only mention the highlights of those battles.

The Shang empire (1600 – 1028 BC) forced many Hmong into a life of slavery and forbade writing. Due to this act, the Hmong written language was lost, not to be regained until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when French missionaries in Indochina transliterated Hmong words into Roman script. Until then, rich oral and hand-stitching traditions sufficed.

The Hmong passed down their legends and folklore through music, songs, stories and *paj ndaub*, “flower cloth.” These skills are such an important part of the culture that they are criteria for finding a mate. Young men impress girls by successfully playing the *qeeb* instrument (distant cousin of the Scottish pipe???) See Appendix) while simultaneously dancing or performing acrobatics to show their agility and fitness. Women impress future husbands by incorporating the *paj ndaub* onto their clothes; the patterns, because they are so intricate and detailed, are a symbol of a woman’s patience, creativity, and hard work.

During the annual new year celebrations, the most important holiday of Hmong life, single men and women play a game called *pov pob*, where the man and woman pass a tennis-sized ball back and forth as they coo each other in sung poetic verses (*kwv txhiaj*). The unique feature of this is that the verses are made up on the spot, as a response to what the other person has just said. They must rhyme and they must certainly make sense, for the response will represent a person’s intellectual capacity.

Hmong say *paj ndaub* is an evolution of their attempts to inconspicuously keep their language alive. The patterns on the clothes were coded communications for future Hmong (Lis). Whether or not the Chinese caught on to this is not clear, but the Hmong eventually were banned from wearing their own traditional clothes. Today, *paj ndaub* is a dying art, usually known only by seniors. The decorations themselves are no longer the secretly coded messages but rather are concrete representations (See Appendix) of Hmong life such as animals, vegetables, farming, or leisure activities, “a vocabulary of color and form rich with allusion to the natural surroundings and to Hmong myth and ritual beliefs” (21, *Tradition*). Hmong refugees of the Vietnam War also developed the story cloths, a manifestation of *paj ndaub*, as a creative outlet for telling their stories of suffering or simply as folk art.

To continue, after the Sung Dynasty (221 BC – 1367 AD) took the throne, they crushed the southern Hmong regions of residence. A legend explains the result of this defeat: the Hmong were ordered to wear clothes of different designs, in an attempt to physically and psychologically divide them and deter future unity (Xyooj). The legend possibly explains the five differently-

attired groups of Hmong today: the White Hmong, the Black Hmong, the Flowery Hmong, the Red Hmong, and the Blue Hmong. But the division, if it's true, hardly was successful.

When the Manchu (1644 – 1911 AD) ostracized the Ming, one of the fleeing Ming generals found refuge in a Hmong village in Lip'ing. Grateful for their help, he taught them how to use and make rifles, gunpowder and cannons. Now that they were working with Chinese technology, they became more than just gnats buzzing around. They posed more of a threat than ever and the Manchu declared war, ruining the Hmong farmers by taking their lands and taxing what little they had. In no time, the Hmong lost everything. Furious and desperately tired of the oppression, many of them took extreme measures – they killed their wives and their children and advanced towards the Chinese front with absolutely no fear. They had nothing else to lose now. They took control of four towns and rivers, forcing the Chinese to cover their backs in three zones. These Hmong were outnumbered and killed, but more insurgents already had other plans of action, capturing several key supply routes. The Emperor was furious and gave his general the liberty to take any action to recapture the routes and destroy the uprising. Eventually the Hmong were cornered but not before the Chinese lost thousands of their own. The Manchu destroyed 12,000 Hmong villages and also captured the Hmong headquarters, where they witnessed further testimony to Hmong conviction. No one surrendered. Women and children fought alongside the men as they tried to break through the Manchu seizure. Some made it to freedom, while most were killed. The Hmong rebel leader and his family were all beheaded, but none of them begged for mercy, much to the disappointment of the emperor.

Of the almost 13,000 rebels who fought the Manchu, only 200 were left and they were made into public servants. Hmong civilians were also snatched from their homes and forced into slavery. Their children were not allowed to speak Hmong and had to learn Chinese. Their women were forced to marry Chinese men while Hmong men were killed or taken away to labor camps. By this time, many Hmong had fled from the intolerable conditions to the mountains of Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand, in hopes of finding peace.

Fearing further trouble, they limited contact only for purposes of bartering items or selling crops. However, the peace they sought was not to come. With the arrival of the French, there was a growing market for opium. The Hmong engaged in the opium production but they did not support its use within their own communities. Anyone, even a family member, who became an addict was ostracized. But to them, opium was a necessary evil because it gave the best profits, even if the work was grueling.

Central to the opium market was the grand Mekong River, simultaneously a symbol of life and of death: “The Mekong rises beyond the Himalayas...it sweeps 2600 miles through

China and the heart of Southeast Asia to the South China Sea... [where] 28 million people [depend on it for their survival]" (744, White). With the river covering such a large area, it's no wonder the French immediately recognized its strategic value.

### THE "FRENCH DEVILS"

The French wanted the Mekong River to expand their economic platform. For them, Southeast Asia was nothing but a backdoor access to China and a cheap source of opium, which would help them compete against the British drug market. The French focused their major investments in Vietnam, though they also controlled Laos and Cambodia. They imposed a horrendous tax system that soon destroyed the Vietnamese economy, mostly made of peasant farmers. France drained money but never put any back into the country. With the Vietnamese impoverished and having no alternative income, revolution was inevitable.

Laotian officers also abused the French taxes to their benefit, often overtaxing the Hmong tribes while allowing Lao citizens to evade the taxes. They kept some or all of the collections for themselves, and if the French wondered where their money was, the officers merely said the Hmong did not pay. The helpless tribes were too far away from authorities to place complaints, and they could not prove the Lao's deceit.

The Hmong resented the double standard that charged them more for goods and yet gave them a mere fraction in wages of what a native Lao received. They were also insulted further by the requirement to kneel before a Lao official until their presence was recognized (Hawj). Officials thwarted potential Hmong conflicts by threatening French intervention. French authority was no stranger to the Hmong, who referred to them as *Fabkis*, "French Devils" (Xyooj). The French did nothing to stop this corruption as long as they got their end of the bargain. They were not a model government themselves. Xab Thoj remembers:

When the French soldiers came, we had to carry their luggage. It was supposed to be a privilege. If anyone had a horse, they had to give it to the French. And if anyone disobeyed, they were beat. Old men and young men of 18 years of age had to pay tax to the French or would be killed; but how could we pay when we were just poor farmers?

Only when Chinese bandits known as the Black Flags started raiding villages did the French and Hmong band together for the first time. The French despised the Black Flags because they stole opium, and the Hmong agreed to help because they were often victims of the raids. Now united, the two forces drove the bandits back north across the border. However, once the bandits were gone, France went right back to its previous ways, more severely because now they were facing an angry North Vietnam who was growing tired of French presence in their land. Ho

Chi Minh went to China for help in ousting the French and communist resources allowed North Vietnam to grow strong, making France very nervous. Like South Vietnam, the Hmong allied with France because they really could do nothing else. They did not like the French but worse was a communist government. They chose the lesser of two evils, though French-Hmong relations would always be strained.

As part of the plan to beat Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh army, France wanted to build an infrastructure that would link Laos to Vietnam, making it easier to transport troops and also to trade/sell resources that they were forcing the indigenous population to harvest. Since the roads were going through mainly mountain areas, most of the manpower came from the Hmong. Every family was required to contribute to the construction work on the roads for at least 15 days a month (Thoj). This created a vicious situation: working on the roads meant sacrificing work on the farm, which meant less income to pay taxes.

Sadly, within the Hmong community, there was a horrible trend emerging also. Up until Indochina, the Hmong generally banded together in times of crises. If any Hmong chose not to fight, at least they did not cross over to the enemy's side. But now things were different and getting more complicated. Ideologies were changing, perhaps because there were more political opportunities than before. Some Hmong decided to follow the paths of other corrupt officials and exploit poor uneducated farmers out of their income. Others decided to band with the Vietnamese and the Lao, hoping that their insight into Hmong life would give them lofty government positions. Others still, helped the French defeat Hmong rebels in an attempt to win political favors.

#### TUB NPIS LIS AND THE FRENCH

During this time of political distraught and economic instability, two major Hmong leaders emerged: Tub Npis Lis and Vaj Pov. Tub Npis' power flourished under French rule, while Vaj Pov would find his calling with American support.

Tub Npis was one of the few Hmong who had been educated in politics. Fluent in French, Laotian, and Vietnamese, he soon gained a place in the Lao government and used his influence to build schools, hospitals, and roads for Hmong villages. As part of his goal to make the Hmong indispensable to the French, he encouraged the Hmong to increase opium production, and he also offered the French military Hmong guides through the mountain wilderness. The second part proved to be immediately beneficial as Hmong hid and aided French soldiers against the Japanese during World War II. Consequently, the Japanese specifically attacked

Hmong villages, bombing, burning, and torturing residents in an attempt to discourage their aid to France.

When the war was over, France tried to regain control of Indochina. The problem was that America had financially supported Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh army against the Japanese, and now the army had grown into terrifying proportions.

While the Vietminh, Chinese and French battled over Southeast Asia, the Hmong bore an even heavier weight under the new taxes being imposed upon them. The French now needed the money more than ever for its campaign against the Vietminh. Tub Npis continued to hope for French support, so he encouraged the Hmong to pay. Many Hmong felt resentful but did not have much of a choice. They also wanted desperately to believe that their suffering would soon end, so they continued to believe in Tub Npis's efforts.

The Vietminh proved to be too powerful, especially with communist China on their side. After the French lost Dien Bien Phu they began withdrawing while the Americans began increasing their participation. Tub Npis's hard-earned status was virtually useless, as the Americans did not think too highly of the French for losing control Southeast Asia, and they wanted to prove they could do better. Tub Npis's political power declined. Never to reclaim his status, he spent his last days in a communist camp. He died of malaria in 1978.

#### VAJ POV AND THE AMERICANS

In 1954, the French signed the Geneva contract, officially recognizing North Vietnam as independent and also dividing Vietnam at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. The U.S. did not recognize the agreement, instead pledging to fight communism by any means. America increased its aid to Thailand, South Vietnam, and Laos in the form of money, logistics and intelligence (CIA).

It was during this time that Vaj Pov rose among the ranks to become the only Hmong to ever receive general stars. He was more of a soldier than a politician. In this respect, he differed from Tub Npis who did most of his work through his government office. Vaj Pov, on the other hand, preferred action. Though his education was not as extensive as Tub Npis's, he was still an apt student.

The Americans soon realized that his judgement surpassed theirs in terms of knowledge of the terrain and of the enemy. He and his fighters had the same advantage as their ancestors had had in China. Their expertise in maneuvering efficiently through the mountain forest allowed them the freedom from detection by enemy soldiers who used the normal routes in the valleys. Mountain life also made them hardy and resilient. They were able to move up and down slopes and to "disappear" quickly without mishap because they knew all the nooks and crannies of the

mountaintops. They were probably more fit than most of the soldiers in the war because their daily life constantly revolved around climbing up and down mountains. Due to Vaj Pov's success, the Americans gave nearly all their military support to him and his warriors.

The war fought by the Hmong had little publicity. As far as any presses knew, there was only the war between America and the Asian communists. The Hmong, however, were willing to fight for the sake of their children's future as well as for the sake of America. They had become close to their American friends and harbored no doubt in America's good will. But once the presses learned of the CIA's involvement, they began calling the Hmong mercenaries or even terrorists. This built a deeper gap between the Hmong and the ethnic citizens who may have helped their cause. Communists propaganda also justified the killing of Hmong for their pro-Western stance.

For the Hmong, this war exposed them to modern technology they had never ever imagined in their wildest dreams – machine guns, tanks, rockets, airplanes, helicopters, naval ships. And yet they mastered these machines as well as any American soldier and won the awe and respect of their instructors.

The conditions of the soldier camps were minimal at best and often temporary, as they had to be continually mobile. Xab Thoj, whose tour of duty lasted 10 years, cannot forget the experience even if he wanted to:

Never for any reason or for one moment did we put down our rifles. They were like a third arm. We slept with them, we ate with them, we went to the bathroom with them. We had to be ready to fight, even at night. Sleep was a luxury. I always had a constant flow of adrenaline, not from excitement but from deathly fear. Everyone was afraid, but no one ever questioned that we had to fight for our freedom.

Vaj Pov's secret headquarters was a plateau called Long Cheng. This is where cargo was picked up and dropped off, where Hmong pilots and soldiers were trained, and where information about troop movements was exchanged. Vaj Pov's forces intercepted two-thirds of the enemy forces, allowing America to deal with a lesser amount of ground battle (Austin). For a time, Vaj Pov enjoyed many victories, even without the cooperation of the ethnic Lao who refused to fight alongside the "inferior" Hmong. Unfortunately, as much as they did, Ho Chi Minh's forces were far too strong and numerous. Ho Chi Minh was willing to sacrifice thousands of lives, and America was not. Bitterly failing to outshine France, America decided to pull out. Vaj Pov was not ready to quit, but without backing from America, he could not do much. America withdrew their forces and Vaj Pov was helicoptered to safety – first to Thailand, then America where he

received political asylum. He feared that as long as he stayed in Laos, no Hmong would be safe from the communist regime.

Perhaps Vaj Pov had good intentions, but his actions angered thousands of Hmong who had fought by his side and fought for him. Though many still saw him as a hero, there were many others that became embittered and resentful of what they viewed as his abandoning them. Soldiers were left stranded in enemy territory without any backup or any way to reach safety. They had to fend for themselves and find their own way back home. Many were easily slaughtered while others died from hunger since they no longer received food supplies.

Whether Vaj Pov was aware of this or not, his leaving did not help the Hmong situation in any way. Even before he left, there was already published literature detailing the systematic execution of all Hmong. The communists intended to rid themselves of the Hmong once and for all. President Podgorny in Moscow was reported as saying that for the good of international communism the Hmong would have to be liquidated (Quincy).

## THE SKY FALLS

Even though the ethnic Lao had also fought against the Vietminh, it was politically more advantageous for them to point their fingers at the Hmong, who became the scapegoats of a fallen country. The ethnic Lao blamed the Hmong for provoking the Vietminh to cause all the bloodshed.

Hmong, fearing for their lives, ran to Thailand in the masses. In their way was the Mekong River which would be the path to freedom for some and a grave for others. They left everything they owned, and with only the clothes they were wearing, they attempted the long and dangerous trek to the Thai border.

Tiaj Yaj had been 28 years old and pregnant with her fourth child when she attempted the journey to Thailand:

My husband came back from the army. He didn't have to say anything. I knew from the look on his face that we had lost the war. We prepared to run, but we could not talk about it to any of our neighbors. We no longer knew who was our friend and who was our enemy. There were Hmong turning in their own to the Vietnamese. You didn't know who to trust anymore. We left during the night. I didn't even get to say good bye to my parents and siblings. I left, without knowing if I would ever see them again. We paid for a taxi to take us part of the way but we encountered a road checkpoint. My heart immediately dropped. I thought it was the end for us. My husband and I looked at each other with pure dread. The guard stopped the car and knew we were Hmong. He turned and was about to call his colleagues when I suddenly remembered the wad of money I had under my shirt. I quickly but inconspicuously thrust it into his hands. He looked at me for a moment, not saying a word. And then he motioned for the car to proceed. I didn't even have the strength to cry. My fear and relief was too overwhelming. I thank God every day that he was corrupt enough to accept the money.

Being on the move made the Hmong susceptible to patrolling enemy soldiers who did not hesitate to remind them that they had lost the war. At Hip Heup, a small village outside of Vientiane, a border city, an unlucky group of Hmong were caught by Pathet Lao troops who herded them to a narrow bridge that crossed the Nam Lik River. Many Hmong fell off the bridge and drowned in the roaring waves. Others were deliberately flung into the water. As some Hmong tried to run back into the forest, soldiers chased them and shot them down. The few survivors of the Hip Heup massacre returned to their villages only to be taken along with others to “reeducation” camps where they were interrogated, tortured, and/or killed. The general communist assumption was that every Hmong had aided Vaj Pov and therefore must be punished.

Between 1975 and 1978, the Hmong became targets of chemical warfare. Soviet gunships shot rockets that exploded into a fine powder of red, yellow, green, or black over fields and villages. Contact with the powder caused bleeding, nausea and severe stomach cramps followed by diarrhea. The powders most often led to death but not always. The Hmong had never seen this before and could not describe it very well, except to say that their children and family had been killed by poisons from the sky. This would later pose a problem when they tried to tell of the atrocities to skeptical officials who brushed off their claims as nonsense, that no such things existed. As a further insult to their tragedy, scientists tried to pass the powders as bee feces, claiming that certain bee populations in Asia had excretions resembling the powder. The media fell for it and publicity became centered on the bees instead of the Hmong. And then the media forgot about it, but the Hmong could not forget. Almost 50,000 of their people were killed by these “feces.” The chemicals as well as the bombings turned Hmong farms into a waste land. No crops would grow for years.

The exodus was too overwhelming for the unprepared Thai, who already disliked them. Hmong refugees were at their mercy. On many occasions, Hmong successfully reached the border only to be killed by guards, directly or indirectly. Other refugees were left stranded on the river islands after being refused entrance into the camps, to be shot later by Vietminh passing overhead in helicopters and planes. Some Hmong tried to brave the river and swim across but drowned or were shot by the border guards.

Thailand knew Laos had become a communist puppet. They feared that Hmong rebels might use the camps as headquarters for more fighting against the communists, and the last thing the Thai wanted was to be caught in the middle. They did not want the Hmong to spread insurgency ideas to their own people so they prohibited Hmong from moving to urban areas. They also did not want the Hmong to grow dependent on them and thus provided very minimal

assistance in the camps. With no income and barely any food or medical attention, the refugees died of starvation or lowland sicknesses that their bodies were not immune to.

Among the refugees in the camps, there were accounts of mass killings in the villages. When asked about their missing families, they drew pictures of kin members being executed: men being beat to death or cut and left to bleed to death, children being maimed and beheaded, women being raped and then shot. The communists wanted for the Hmong to serve as an example to anyone else who wished to resist the regime.

The soldiers who made it to the refugee camps were disillusioned by their situation. They felt abandoned and desperate, with no one to help them, no where to turn. Their American friends had left. The people who had worked with them for almost two decades were nowhere to be found:

[Where were] their CIA advisors like Colonel Billy, Kayak, Bamboo, Mr. Clean, and American civilian pilots who had worked long, difficult years with them and who had shared fears, triumphs and defeats? They thought that those who knew them best would surely help them; those who ... could testify that they had been trained in intelligence by the U.S... They were certain that these men... could get desperately needed food and medicines to those still in Laos. Sadly, the names by which the Hmong had known them were only code-names or nicknames  
(15, Hamilton-Merrit)

Some of the men brought their wives and children to the refugee camps and then turned right back around to look for other relatives (Lis). Making it to Thailand the first time was hard enough. Would they make it a second time? Finding their family was worth the risk to them.

Those who continued to fight felt that their sacrifices had been too great for them to stop now. But their attempts to carry on were futile and meaningless. Communism had prevailed and no Hmong would have mercy under the new system.

In the next decade or so, there were a few more small-scale rebellions, but the general attitude was one of bitterness. Lajlim Thoj, who was four years old when his family fled, said despondently and sadly, “Whatever the Hmong were before, they are nothing but shadows now, if even that.” Is it Hmong destiny to always lose? Is it their fate to always be pushed out? One ex-soldier said: “We Hmong are so pitiful... we fight, we run, and we die...”

For the simple peasant farmers who had trekked from Siberia centuries ago, not much had changed. The psychology of their loss would impact them deeply, some committing suicide, some wallowing in depression.

In 1975, other countries began accepting refugees. America allowed only those who could prove they had served in the army. France and Australia did not have that same requirement, but they did set a quota. The Hmong, who lived in extended families, were fearful and nervous when they were separated and assigned to be flown to different parts of the world.

Before their departure, they gathered in the camps for final instructions of their heritage and lineage (Hawj). After tearful good byes, they boarded the planes, wondering if their paths would ever cross again.

Many more refugees remained in the camps, for two reasons: they were either hoping that current conditions would change so they could return to their homes, or they were too afraid of life beyond what they knew.

For the ones who stayed, their lives would be more suffering and waiting for a dream that was not to come. For those who chose to leave Laos, they would experience many more problems, one being that of assimilation, the exact thing they had run from for so long. Living in “civilization” would become a double-edged sword as they faced a variety of challenges. In their new land, they also had access to resources that had not been in Laos. Women would experience a new kind of freedom. Children would forget the past and quickly adapt to western ways and forget their Hmong traditions. But for older survivors, their hearts would still be in Laos, and in their sleep they would still cry for home.

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