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A critical hermeneutic approach to Hmong leadership in the Lao PDR : horizons of forgiveness and action through imagination in community development

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A CRITICAL HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO HMONG LEADERSHIP IN THE LAO PDR: HORIZONS OF FORGIVENESS AND ACTION THROUGH IMAGINATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Dissertation Abstract

A Critical Hermeneutic Approach to Hmong Leadership in the Lao PDR: Horizons of Forgiveness and Action through Imagination in Community Development

The field of leadership study has received extensive academic exploration however little has been written on the topic of Hmong leadership. Using the approach advocated by Herda's (1999, 2007) description of critical hermeneutic interpretative participatory inquiry and Ricoeur's (1981, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1992, 2004, 2007) theories of mimesis, forgiveness and action through imagination as the conceptual framework, this research explored Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and the implications for community development.

The Hmong people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) presently live in a difficult political and economic climate that is informed by a long history of exclusion within a nation that has experienced extreme turmoil over both the recent and extended past. This situation calls for appropriate action and ethical leadership on the part of the Hmong who can develop and communicate a shared vision of hope for the future. I examined the narratives of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR, considering both their interpretation of the past and their aspirations for the future, in order to better understand the present opportunities and challenges facing the Hmong community. This examination is critical, for a dark historical past conflict continues to overshadow the livelihood of the Hmong in Lao PDR.

Research conversations with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR through shared narratives created transcribed texts for interpretation. It is through the interpretation of

texts that Hmong leaders may come to understand, in Ricoeurian terms, their prefigured world and imagine a refigured world through a reflection of a configured world. Through this research Hmong leaders have been given voice to their stories of the past, present, and future. Through this process, new understandings have emerged, opening possibilities for Hmong leadership that includes encouraging the establishment of new relationships among Hmong leaders themselves as well as their relationships with the other as they are involved in the country's policies and community development activities. Furthermore, Hmong leaders' horizon of forgiveness and their acts of forgiveness toward the others—Hmong and Lao nation—is one of the significant keys to the successful leadership on the part of both the Hmong and the Lao leaders. Importantly, Hmong leaders in Lao PDR may find it is paramount for Hmong to initiate and show acts of forgiveness amongst each other.

The significance of this research study sheds light on the barriers Hmong leaders are facing under Lao PDR's political climate and how they may assist the government guide the country's future. The revealing of Hmong leaders' stories untied the bound of the past hurt and gave the Hmong their own voice to speak of an imaginable future. Leaders in Lao PDR (Hmong, Lao and other ethnic groups) may find through discourse and a sharing of their narratives a new way of thinking about leadership that may be developed and shared among the diverse communities in Lao PDR which, in turn, may contribute to the development of new policies that are designed to benefit and meet the developmental goals of the Lao nation.

Chai W. Xiong, Author

Ellen A. Herda,
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This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH FOCUS

Not only one tree will make a fence,
not only the leader can create societal change.
-Lao Proverb-
-Dr. Kikeo Khaykhamphitoune

Introduction

Many people in developing nations struggle to achieve basic survival needs; envisioning a future that includes living in dignity with opportunities can challenge both individuals and groups who lack resources, power, or a historical expectation of hope. However, that vision, provided through leadership grounded in ethical action, is essential. The Hmong people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) presently live in a difficult political and economic climate that is informed by a long history of exclusion within a nation that has experienced extreme turmoil over both the recent and extended past. This situation calls for appropriate and ethical Hmong leaders who can develop and communicate a shared vision of hope for the future.

This research study explores Hmong leadership in the current political climate of the Lao PDR. More specifically, I examine the stories of emerging Hmong leaders, considering both their interpretation of the past and their hopes for the future, in order to better understand the opportunities and challenges facing the Hmong people. This examination is indispensable, for a long and turbulent history has led to stagnant inaction in which the future has become unimaginable for too many Hmong. Activating the imagination of the Hmong may allow them to appropriate their own future, changing their lives from the current state of bare survival to one in which they flourish.

In the years immediately prior to 1975 many different groups of people within the

Lao PDR worked together to effect change in support of a shared vision for the future. Ethnic minorities, including the Hmong, worked with the majority population to help the Lao PDR come into power. Nonetheless, that support has not been reciprocated in terms of shared power in the decades since then, for the Hmong continue to live in poverty that is caused in large part by political marginalization and intentional isolation from educational and economic opportunities. This ongoing exclusion is the result of both the historical ties that the Hmong had in the past to western powers and the traditionally remote locations of Hmong villages. The majority of the Hmong sided with the United States in a Secret War for Laos during the Vietnam conflict. This allegiance continues to negatively affect the Hmong in tangible ways; for example, in the military, even long time Hmong supporters of the Lao PDR government have not received promotions to the rank of general because the government continues to hold the past connection of the Hmong with imperialism against them. This combination of issues has resulted in a situation in which many Hmong people struggle for their physical survival, finding it increasingly difficult to even envision a better future, much less to appropriate one.

Recent changes in leadership decisions within the Lao PDR hold hope for greater inclusion; however, they are insufficient to effect the change that is needed for full Hmong empowerment in leadership and community involvement. That empowerment is imperative to ensure that the Hmong people have a voice in their own future. In early 2006, the Lao PDR had its Eight Party Congress gathering at which the government made drastic leadership changes, which included promoting ethnic Hmong to higher positions. Still, more changes are still needed at the local levels because the Hmong people have not received positions commensurate with their representation in the overall population.

Furthermore, most of the Hmong leaders' positions that were awarded are ones that function primarily for ceremonial purposes. Consequently, Hmong leaders in the Lao PDR government are ineffective and invisible even within the Hmong community as they have little influence on either the country's well-being or the development of their people. Lately, the problems facing the Hmong have exacerbated as the government has targeted many people for resettlement programs that are designed to eradicate opium growing and diminish slash-burn farming practices (Baird and Shoemaker 2005; Gonzales, Diaz-Boreal and Cottavoz 2005).

Nonetheless, the Lao PDR is effecting these changes with limited participation, suggestions, or consideration from or of Hmong leaders. Baird and Shoemaker (2007:885) say that "tens of thousands of vulnerable people from ethnic minorities have died or suffered over the last ten years due to impacts associated with ill-conceived and poorly implemented internal resettlement initiatives in Laos. Many can expect to be impoverished long into the future." This observation suggests that unless the government allows more ethnic minority leaders to influence policy that affects development programs, the negative effect of resettlement will continue to plague ethnic minority groups. Without having a voice in development programs, including such drastic measures as those represented through resettlement, Hmong leaders experience disempowerment and leadership flounders. In such scenarios, the future becomes unimaginable, which makes it difficult for leaders at any level to understand either their past or their future, leading to inaction in the present.

Statement of the Issue

This research study explores Hmong leadership in Lao PDR from an

ontological lens through critical hermeneutic theory. Drawing upon the theoretical concepts of mimesis, forgiveness, and action through imagination, the narratives of Hmong leaders will create a text for interpretation leading to a new shared understanding of Hmong leadership in present-day Lao PDR. As the people of Lao PDR move forward, the country's historical past has to be unfolded as the present is being interpreted, allowing the Hmong to imagine a possible new better world.

For more than three decades, Lao PDR has been a one party authoritarian communist state (U.S Department of State 2009). Between the late 1970s and mid 1980s, the Lao PDR government enforced strict economic policies to generate surpluses in order to implement development programs, finance the state, and maintain political stability (Evans 2002:191-95). Yet, beginning in early 1986 continuing to the 1990s, the country has slowly made progress toward a more socialist market economy, increasingly encouraging industrial development and allowing growing opportunity for new investment at the local level (Mabbitt 2006:189). Nonetheless, Lao PDR remains under the United Nations classification of a Least Developed Country. Lao PDR leaders have been directing the country toward more economic development and hope to be removed from this list by the year 2020 (Altorfer-Ong 2004; Australia Government –Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2009; CIA World Fact Book 2009; Lintner 2008:179, Economic Intelligence Unit 2007b:8).

This would be a major achievement for the leaders in Lao PDR; however, the burden to accomplish this goal and other dreams falls not only on the shoulders of the Lao PDR government but also with its citizens, including minority groups such as the Hmong, who compose approximately nine percent of the Lao population and can play an

important role in moving Lao PDR from being a “land-locked” to “land-linked” country with its neighboring countries in the region (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006:2).

I investigate Hmong leadership in Lao PDR through conversations with Hmong leaders about their leadership stories. I explore this topic because increased understanding of the Hmong capacity for leadership may open the possibility of active Hmong contribution both among Hmong leaders and among other leaders within Lao PDR. It is important that these conversations include how Hmong leaders think about their leadership roles, their approach to forgiveness, and their abilities to take action through imagination. These three concepts carry the potential to move the Hmong within Laos to a new future, one that represents their aspirations and one that they self appropriate.

This research project is based in an ontological orientation toward forgiveness because it is the key to reconciliation, a required element given the long history of problems between the Hmong and the Lao PDR government. I believe that openness among Hmong leaders to conversations about their historical past will enable them to confront the present issues and allow them to see beyond it to a new better future. I am also very interested to understand the way that leadership develops within the Hmong community. This research project is designed to describe the possibility that through engaged conversations, Hmong leaders may have a clearer understanding of who they are as people in relationship to the other, thus opening the experience of a new fusion of horizons, which include the past, present, and future in a meaningful way. In addition, I have designed the research conversations with the intention of gathering data to explore how to approach reconciliation between Hmong and the Lao PDR government. As a

Hmong youth growing up in the United States of America (I came to the United States at age 11), I did not forget my historical roots and ties to Lao PDR; therefore, I often tried to position myself as a neutral observer when considering the issues that arose between the Hmong and the Lao PDR government. Even so, as a researcher, this observation role changed and I am now drawn into looking at the issues not as criticism but as a medium to appropriate a new world. I truly believe it is time for both sides (Hmong and Lao PDR) to tell their stories and together create a new narrative that incorporates both sets of experiences.

Background of the Research Issue

In the early 1800s, a group of people who identify as Hmong emerged onto the northern mountains of Laos, escaping from persecution in China (Symonds 2004:xxv). As the country of Laos unfolded through many internal conflicts, peace, and war, the Hmong people became an important force in shaping the direction of Laos' future. Since the Hmong arrival, there have been many established relationships between the various ethnic groups in Laos. In spite of this, none of the establishment can be compared to the bond of loyalty shown by the Hmong and their leaders toward the newly inhabited land. Therefore, gaining support, establishing trust and friendship between the Hmong leaders and the Lao majority set a foundation that was paramount for the stability of the country.

More recently, the Hmong continue to live through the consequences of a more immediate past history; specifically, their involvement in the Secret War for Laos from 1960-1975. After the conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1975 and the establishment of Lao PDR government, the majority of the Hmong remaining in Laos have coexisted peacefully among the Lao and other ethnic minorities (Chan 1994; Evans 1998, 2002;

Ovesen 2004a; Lee 2008). Nevertheless, their involvement in the Vietnam conflict created distrust and misunderstanding of Hmong leaders by Lao PDR government, especially regarding the country's social, economic, political and leadership affairs (Ovesen 2004b:235-237). Consequently, Hmong leaders in Laos have been confronted with many challenges and dilemmas regarding the Hmong's internal and external future. In spite of this, they presently continue cooperating with the Lao PDR government in transitioning Laos beyond the 21st century while struggling to envision a possible future for themselves.

In summary, as the Lao PDR government opens access to the international community for the purpose of development, Hmong leaders remain marginalized, retaining positions that mostly exist for ceremonial purposes with no real influence in the investigation, development and implementation of the policies that so intimately affect their people. Therefore, it is imperative for the Lao PDR government to allow Hmong leaders full participation in decision making processes involving the identification and implementation of policies targeting both Hmong and the overall betterment of the Lao nation.

Educational Significance

This research study highlights the process by which Hmong leadership in Lao PDR is developed and how Hmong leaders can be involved to assist Lao PDR government in guiding the country's future. The text considers ways to improve open dialogue and shared understandings between Lao PDR leaders and Hmong leaders as they work together to change relationships among each other as well as toward the other. Though research grounded in a critical hermeneutic approach, leaders in Lao PDR

(Hmong, Lao and other ethnic groups) may find through discourse a new way of thinking about how leadership is developed and shared among the many communities in Lao PDR that contribute to the development of new policies that are designed to benefit and meet the country's economic development goals. Hmong leaders may discover that in order to change the story of now, the story of the past must be written, thus revealing new narrative possibilities. I fully anticipate that the findings of this study could aid in deepening our understanding of international and cross cultural leadership which, in turn, could become part of curriculum in leadership studies departments and programs.

Summary

In brief, this research study uses interpretative participatory inquiry to explore Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and its influence on decision making as related to development policy. Through conversations with Hmong leaders, this text has been created and Hmong leaders have come to a shared understanding about oneself as the other. With this shared understanding and through discourse, Hmong leaders can now present in front of the text a new world for the reinterpretation of a new future. This new future may allow Hmong leaders an opportunity to imagine and start acting toward appropriating new ideas toward development.

In Chapter One, I introduce the research focus, background of issues and the educational significance of this study. In Chapter Two, I discuss the background of Lao PDR and Hmong's historical ties to the country's political and leadership, social and economic, cultural and educational experiences. In Chapter Three, I provide a brief overview of leadership theories and explore the history of the Lao PDR's leading figures, including historical leaders among the Hmong. In Chapter Four, I present the theoretical

framework and background of this research study along with descriptions of the research protocol, which is grounded in critical hermeneutic tradition. In Chapter Five, I introduce the presentation of the data and preliminary analysis, followed by the analysis of the data in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the research summary, findings, implications, and recommendations for future research including my own personal reflections as the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF LAO PDR AND THE HMONG

We don't want money…but all we want are ideas…
knowledge, for idea is more valuable than gold and silver.
-Dang Xiong (Hmong Village Leader)

Introduction

Lao PDR has a long historical past dating back to the mid 1300s when it was unified under a monarch. The subsequent history is one of turmoil, continuing in various forms to the present day. The presence of the Hmong people in Laos created a prefigured historical world contributing to the complexity of the current situation. In fact, because Lao PDR and the Hmong share a similar prefigured past, they can also both share an imaginable better future world by working together on a shared configured present. This Chapter introduces Lao PDR, including its overall history, people, and modern political and leadership structure; it also delves into the specifics of Hmong leadership, including its brief history, education, economics, social organization, family and clan, and religion. I also include more information about the Hmong involvement in a Secret War for Laos during the Vietnam conflict and the presence of Hmong resistance in the remote areas and jungles of Lao PDR.

A Glimpse at Lao PDR

Since 1975, Laos has officially been called the "Lao People's Democratic Republic;" however, its construction as a modern nation state dates only from the mid 1940s (Stuart-Fox 1999:6). Laos is a landlocked country in Southeast Asia and is bordered by five countries. Vietnam is on the eastern border, Thailand is on the west, Cambodia is on the southern border, and Burma (Myanmar) and China are on the

northwest and northeast border (Appendix A). Laos is slightly larger than the state of Utah, with a total land area of 91,428 square miles that contains dense forest and mountainous areas. Lao PDR has an estimated total population of approximately 6.8 million people, consisting of over 49 different ethnic groups (CIA World Fact Book 2009); furthermore, more than half of the population in Lao PDR have been born since the conclusion of the Vietnam conflict (Pholsena 2006:221). The country is divided into 16 provinces (Khoueng), a capital city—Vientiane (NaKhon Luang—Vientiane), 140 districts (Moung) and 10,500 villages (Ban). Vientiane has 464,000 people, which makes it the largest city. It is located on the banks of the Mekong River and has become one of the major attraction cities for tourists as the city houses many Buddhist monasteries, including both the oldest monastery, which is known as "Vat Sisake," and other significant monuments such as the "That Luang Stupas," which are the National Symbol of Laos (Stuart-Fox 1982; 1999; Evan 2002; Chan 1994; Lintner 2008).

The Mekong River flows out of its base in the eastern Tibetan plateau, through southern China and then through Laos' western boundary with Thailand over a course of 932 miles (1,500 km) to the South China Sea. It is a major means of transportation for the country. The climate of Laos is tropical monsoon with a rainy season from May to November and a dry season from December through April. The country is mostly rugged mountains with some plains and plateaus. The highest elevation point in the country is Phou Bia mountain at 2,817 meters (U.S Department of State 2009).

Brief History

The history of the Lao people can be traced back as early as the eight century when they migrated out of southern China into present day Laos. Chan (1994:2) asserts

that “the Laotian sense of national identity, based primarily on the history of its dominant ethnic group, the lowland Lao, was formed during the reign of Fa Ngum, who founded the kingdom of Lan Xang (“land of a million elephants”) in 1353, with its capital at Luang Prabang.” During the establishment of the kingdom of Lan Xang, the country was plagued by war with its neighboring countries as Lan Xang was repeatedly invaded by Thailand, Burma and Vietnam. Vietnam invaded the country five times, leading the reigning monarch to relocate the capital city from Luang Prabang to Vientiane in the sixteenth century. Subsequently, due to a dispute among the monarch’s family members, Lan Xang was divided into three sub-region kingdoms (Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the middle, and Champassak in the south) during the late seventeenth century. Between the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Burma, Vietnam, and Thailand attacked and invaded the country, at one point reducing the capital city of Vientiane to ruins. The country “managed to survive by acknowledging the suzerainty of both Thailand and Vietnam” (Chan 1994:3). Throughout its long history as a land locked country, Laos had been subject to influence and domination by its neighboring countries, including Thailand, Burma, China, and Vietnam (Phraxayavong 2009:283).

Nonetheless, the French maintained a presence in Laos from the late 1800s to the beginning of the nineteenth century and eventually took Laos as one of its Asian colonial possessions. On July 19, 1949, Laos gained its independence from France and the United States recognized Laos as an independent state on February 7, 1950 (Stuart-Fox 1999:xi). After more than 30 years of internal struggles for stability, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic government was established on December 2, 1975, one day after King Sisavang Vatthana abdicated the throne, ending 600 years of monarch rule (Stuart-Fox 1999:xii).

The People of Laos

Lao PDR has a population that was estimated at 6,834,942 as of July 2009. The majority of the people settle around valleys close to the Mekong River and its many streams (U.S Department of State 2009; CIA World Fact Book 2009). Lao PDR government officially acknowledges 49 ethnic groups of people residing in the country. Lao PDR's multi-ethnic population is categorized into three main ethnic groups: Lao Loum 'Lao of the Plains,' Lao Theung 'Lao of the Mountain Slopes,' and Lao Soung 'Lao of the Mountain Tops.' The Lao Loum are related to the Lao – Tai speaking family who reside in the lowlands, comprising over sixty percent of the country's total population and dominating all sectors of the government. The Lao Theung are Austro-Asiatic or Mon-Khmer-speaking ethnic groups who reside on the hillsides, comprising about twenty-two percent of the population while the Lao Soung are hill tribe people of various ethnic groups who reside in the highlands and represent approximately nine percent of the population (Lintner 2008:174). Ethnic minorities make up almost half of the country's total population (Bulter-Diaz 1998:17). Approximately 67 percent of the population's religious belief system is Buddhist while thirty-two percent are unspecified and two percent are reported as Christian (CIA World Fact Book 2009).

The Central Level Committee on Ethnic Groups, which was formerly known as the Central Level Sohnsard Committee, released a report in 2008 through the Lao PDR Department of Ethnic Affairs entitled, "The Ethnic Groups in Lao P.D.R." This report states that in Lao PDR, "ethnic diversity is of great importance for…development" and that therefore the committee hopes to study ethnic affairs in Lao PDR further in order to "increase the sense of firm and strong unity as well as equality and concord among the

ethnic groups [and] to gradually eradicate the gap of development between the plains and mountainous areas, between urban and rural areas" (Lao PDR Department of Ethnic Affairs 2008:i-j).

While these goals are worthy, their effective implementation is dependent upon the approach that developers take. For development to be most effective and grounded in ethical models in which individuals can appropriate their own futures, ethnic groups in Lao PDR need to be allowed active participation in their future. The alternative will relegate development efforts to a slow, difficult and unsuccessful process. This report includes both problems and opportunities. It confirms that the "ethnic problem" in Lao PDR has not faded away (Pholsena 2006:92); nonetheless, by acknowledging it, the report opens the possibility that the country can gain access to the vast support of its ethnic citizens, thus opening a new world of endless possibilities. Equally important, Phraxayvong (2009:282) states, "Lao leadership has to make better use of its limited skilled and educated human resources…and must make decisions free from political pressure and individual interests." In other words, the success of Lao PDR's future depends on having its educators, including ethnic minority leaders, promote justice that is not based on selfish or political interests but on those of the Lao nation as a whole.

Modern Lao PDR Political and Leadership Structure

Lao People's Democratic Party (Lao PDR) government is a one party authoritarian communist state under the leadership of an eleven member Politburo of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), which is the only legal political party. Nevertheless, "the present regime still struggles with the process of defining a form of nation as it finds it difficult to come to terms with the country's past" (Pholesena 2006:2).

When Lao PDR government came into power in 1975, Prince Souphanouvong was selected as President while Kaisone Phomvihan was selected as Prime Minister. During the period of 1975 to 1991, the position of Prime Minister was very visible and had real influential power in the government while the position of President remained as the party's ceremonial background figure (Economist Intelligence Unit 2007a:5).

In addition, when the Lao People's Revolutionary Party gathered at the Fifth Congress meeting toward the end of March 1991 to discuss the country's political future, a shift in power from the Prime Minister to the President had occurred. Subsequently, the party initiated steps for moving Lao PDR toward socialism while relying on the general principles of Marxism-Leninism. Two important statues reinforcing the party's political role and control over the armed forces were enacted. Furthermore, some of the major changes added to the final draft of the constitution limited the power of the Supreme People's Assembly, but increased the power of the president and abolished the party secretariat. It was during this time that Prince Souphanouvong resigned from his post as President of Lao PDR; Kaisone Phomvihan was then unanimously named President of Lao PDR and Khamtai Siphadon became Prime Minister.

Besides holding the position of President of Lao PDR, Kaisone Phomvihan also became President of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), giving him more power than his predecessor. Though this may be, when Kaisone Phomvihan died in November 1992, the two powerful positions he had jointly held were assumed by different individuals, with Nouhak Phoumsavanh being named President of Lao PDR and Prime Minister Khamtai Siphadon taking the position as President of the LPRP (Stuart-Fox 1999:202-203). Nouhak Phoumsavanh served as President of Lao PDR for almost

six years but resigned in office due to health problem; he was replaced by Khamtai Siphadon in 1998. Khamtai Siphadon not only served as President of Lao PDR but also held the position of President of LPRP for approximately eight years. He retired in 2006. Upon Khamtai Siphadon's retirement, Choummaly Sayasone was elected as President of Lao PDR and also became the President of the LPRP. When Choummaly Sayasone became President of Lao PDR, he picked Bouasone Bouphavanh to be Prime Minister, a decision approved afterward by the 115 members of the National Assembly. Bouasone Bouphavanh's previous three predecessors are Khamtai Siphadon, Sisavath Keobounphanh and Bounnchang Vorachith. Khamtai Siphadon served as prime minister from 1992 to 1998 while Sisavath Keobounphanh held the position from 1998 to 2001 and Bounnchang Vorachith held the office from 2001 to 2006.

Currently, Choummaly Sayasone is the head of State while Bouasone Bouphavanh is the head of the Lao PDR government. According to the country's constitution, the position of President of Lao PDR holds more formal, symbolic, and official power. On the other hand, the position of Prime Minister holds more political and administrative power, such as issuing and implementing laws to govern the people (Bulter-Diaz 1998:18). However, the limited power afforded the President under the constitution has not manifested in reality because since 1998 the President of Lao PDR has also held the position of President of the LPRP. This arrangement has given the position of President of LPDR more official political and administrative power, contributing to the LPRP revolutionary's leadership ties to Vietnam. In other words, although the Lao PDR government demonstrated sign of changes in leadership through the promotion of new faces and younger Lao leaders, the country's political climate is

deeply rooted and remains in the hands of old revolutionary leaders and its communist doctrines.

At the age of 52, Bouasone Bouphavanh became the youngest prime minister of Lao PDR and is the first non-member Politburo to be elected into the position, marking for the first time in Lao PDR's history a sign toward political changes. Lao PDR has a National Assembly consisting of 115 members elected by the people; nonetheless, the country's policies are determined by the eleven Politburos and fifty-five members of the central committee (U.S Department of State 2009). The country's political leadership has always been influenced by the military, which plays a significant role in the country's overall activities because six of the eleven Politburo members are army officers, therefore reinforcing strong ties among the state, party, and army (Lintner 2008:174).

Contemporary Hmong Leadership in Lao PDR

When the National Assembly resumed its Eight Party Congress gathering on March 2006, Lao PDR surprised the country and the international community by electing Pany Yathotou as a member of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party's Politburo. Ms. Yathotou is a Hmong woman and also the daughter of a long time pro-Pathet Lao supporter. The elevation of Ms. Yathotou to the Politburo position can be interpreted as an indication that Lao PDR is finally recognizing the leadership and contribution of ethnic minority groups, including the Hmong. Ms. Yathotou's position ranks eleventh on the party list, making her the highest Hmong government official. She also serves as the Vice-President of the National Assembly. In addition, there are also other Hmong who have been elevated to positions within Lao PDR government. Sombat Yialiheu ranks thirteenth on the party list. He previously held the office of governor of Sayaboury and is a member of the central committee (Lintner 2008); however, in early 2009, he was

promoted to the position of General Mayor of Vientiane (Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL) – Lao New Agency 2009a). Chaleun Yapaoheu is a minister of justice, which represents another significant position (Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL) – Lao New Agency 2009b). On the other hand, as stated earlier, most of these Hmong high positions are primarily for ceremonial purposes because in situations where the government targets the Hmong for development, Hmong in high positions have not been visible in the local Hmong community. Therefore, there are growing animosities among the Hmong in Lao PDR about their leaders' true administrative power and policy developing responsibilities. In the case of Hmong resistance in Lao PDR, Mr. Yapaoheu is not allowed to start an open dialogue between the government and Hmong for any possible resolutions; therefore, animosity between Hmong citizens and its leaders in Lao PDR and the government continues.

The Hmong in Lao PDR

The exact origin of the Hmong is uncertain, but many researchers believe that the Hmong people originated from southern China (Cooper 1998; Geddes 1976; Hamilton-Merritt 1993; Millett 2002; Mottin 1980; Quincy 1988; Pfaff 1995; Tapp 2001; Vang 2008a; Yang 1993). The Hmong people first appeared in Chinese historical records as early as 3000 B.C. (Taichiming 2004:79), where they were known as 'San Miao' (Mottin 1980:16). Moreover, Geddes (1976:4-5) indicates that the 'San-Miao' may have been living around the region of the 'Yellow River' and 'Yhaze River' in southern China 4000 years ago. Others believe the Hmong have been traced to central Asia as far back as 5000 B.C (Pfaff 1995:12). The Hmong in China are still referred to as 'Miao' (Geddes 1976; Lee 2007; Schein 2000:xiii); nonetheless, outside of China, the people prefer to be

known as ‘Hmong.’ It was during early 1969 that General Vang Pao, a Hmong who had risen to the rank of General in the Royal Lao Army, announced to U.S military officers and embassy personnel in Vientiane that “the time has come to call my people Hmong.” However, the term ‘Hmong’ only appeared in western texts after the late 1970s, when the Hmong became refugees (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:206-207).

Hmong elders’ oral history indicates that the Hmong had a long journey, migrating from southern China into northern Vietnam and then into northern Laos (Thao 2006). Moreover, the Hmong movement out of southern China may have reached as far as Indochina 400 years ago (Geddes 1976:27). There were two high peaks of Hmong migration in 1800 and 1860 in which the Hmong came southward into Indochina and eventually crossed the border of Laos (Mottin 1980:42). Coincidentally, the last major Hmong rebellion in southern China lasted approximately 20 years from 1854 to 1873 (Jenks 1994); after its suppression a mass movement of Hmong migration occurred, spreading down into Southeast Asia. Moua (1993:27) says that Hmong ancestors were very determined but lacked the political agenda and, consequently, lost the struggle for self-rule against the Chinese. Mottin (1980:47) estimates that the Hmong’s initial arrival in Laos may have been between 1810 and 1860. For almost a century, the Hmong lived in relative peace and solidarity, establishing small villages along the mountain sides and raising their families among the natural wonders of northern Laos (Yang 2003:18).

Education

In 1902, the French helped build the first school for adult education in Laos (Luangpraseut 1989:124); however, prior to 1953, the Hmong language had no official written form and most Hmong were therefore illiterate (Faderman 1998: 2; Ng 1998:5).

Those few Hmong who received a formal education learned to read and write in either Laotian or French. The majority of the Hmong's villages are in mountainous areas, making formal education virtually impossible due to the lack of access between existing schools and the remote areas where the Hmong live.

As a result, the percentage of people who are illiterate is one of the highest in Laos (Yang 1993:83). Probably one of the earliest Hmong families to send their children to be formally educated was the LyFoung family in Xieng Khoung Province. They had three sons, Touby, Toulia and Tougeu, who were all educated in French elementary schools and then attended secondary school in Vientiane where they received their baccalaureate degrees. When Touby became a district chief in the mid 1930s and eventually a middleman who bridged the gap between the French and Laotian governments, he used his influence to have young Hmong admitted into public schools (Barney 1978:23). Hmong children received the most formal education between the early 1960s and 1970s. Through USAID and funded by the CIA, about three hundred elementary schools, nine junior high schools, and two high schools were built (Quincy 2000:244). By 1975, there were approximately 37 Hmong students who had been educated overseas in different fields and one had completed a doctoral degree (Yang 2004:481).

Nonetheless, Thant and Vokes (1997:154-195) stress that the educational challenges of ethnic minority students in Laos occur because of its diversity, including different languages and cultures. Additionally, the Lao PDR educational system continues to experience setbacks due to its demographic structure and physical demography. In other words, accessing the educational system in Lao PDR is difficult for

ethnic minorities for practical reasons, as they inhabit mountainous areas that are remote from much of the existing infrastructure. These challenges continue to hold true, although efforts have been made to promote the development of education to the people of Lao PDR and specifically to ethnic minorities. Still, despite these efforts, the Lao PDR government's attempts to allocate educational resources amongst its people has not been successful especially for the Hmong community (Lee 2004:446).

Due to the remote location of the Hmong, who mostly reside in mountainous areas, further education has been a very difficult task. The children who do attend school often have to travel long distances down from the hills to the lowlands where there are schools. The high level of illiteracy among the Hmong will continue unless effective steps are taken. After a change of government personnel in 2006, the Lao PDR government has promised more resources to address these issues; on the other hand, Laos continues to experience a "shortage of schools, lack of textbooks, poorly qualified teachers and low school enrollment and completion levels" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2007a:13). In consequence, improving the Lao PDR children's educational system is an essential part of the solution as the government moves forward to enact policies designed to effectively address community development needs.

Economy

Traditionally, Hmong rely on 'slash and burn' agriculture as a way of farming. This method of agriculture practice is widely used throughout the mountainous highlands of Hmong villages in Lao PDR. Hmong farmers cut down vegetation to clear the land and then burn it, leaving the land as planting ground for crops as the burn vegetation serves as fertilizer. The planting lands are only good for planting crops for several years before

new planting lands are needed. Hmong farmers often leave the old planting land, move to a new land and many years later come back. This process allows the old land to reforest and to be reused. Often farmers will shift back and forth between land, recycling the planting land and enabling a balance of natural environmental resources while minimizing deforestation. Those Hmong who have been relocated to the lowlands have refrained from past agriculture practices and are instead farming irrigated paddy fields. Hmong also traditionally raise domestic animals such as chickens, pigs, horse and cattle. The two primarily staple food crops for the Hmong are rice and corn, while secondary crops are cucumbers, melons, eggplant, Chinese mustard, onions, beans, soybeans, cabbage, ginger, parsley, chicory, yams, taro, manioc, sugar cane, peaches, bananas, pumpkins, radishes and tobacco (Yang 1993:50; Quincy 1998:77). Unfortunately, the crop that the Hmong are best known for cultivating is opium poppy because opium is grown best on high elevation plains. Although it has not been substantiated, the Hmong have been accused of being participants in underground opium trafficking during the Vietnam conflict (McCoy 1972).

Under French colonial rule, heavy taxes were collected from the Hmong and those who did not have money used opium as a commodity to pay off the tax. Opium is also used as an exchange for cash and can also be traded for supplies (Chan 1994:11-16; Vang 2008a:169). Within the Hmong community, using drugs, especially opium, has always carried a very negative connotation and is frowned upon. Almost all Hmong parents forbid their children from using opium; consequently, a person who decides to smoke opium without any substantial serious medical complications to justify the use is labeled as disgraceful or shameful. Moreover, the shame is not brought upon to just the

individual but to the whole family, clan, sub-clan, and community. As a result of such negative stigmatization, very few Hmong men or women have ever smoked opium as recreation, although they are known to cultivate poppy fields for purposes of trade and medicine. Due to a lack of modern medicine, opium has been one of the forms of medication used to treat various illnesses by Hmong traditional healers and in traditional Hmong society opium was used as a "painkiller especially among the elderly" and "to ease the pain of infections, malaria, headache, fevers, toothaches, and intestinal problems" (Yang 1978:10).

Social Organization

Hmong social organization is based on a patrilineal clan system. There are 19 Hmong clans in Lao PDR (Yang 1993:23) and the clans are further divided into sub-clans. The Hmong clans system serves as part of a mutual association while the Hmong household serves as the primary unit rather than an individual (Kitano and Daniels 1998:155). Within each of the clans and sub-clans are elders who preside over economic, political, social, and religious affairs. Hmong people place a great value on those who have achieved old age. Children are taught to respect the elders and to be self-reliant (Barney 1978:24). There are usually about 20 to 40 households in any given village and villages are typically situated on the side of a mountain (Ranard 2004:11). Because of its relatively small size, most Hmong villages are in harmony with their surroundings and can maintain traditional ways of life with little resistance and intrusion. In crises, these Hmong villages can unite to support each other. This unity is important and was instrumental during the Secret War in Laos.

Family and Clan

A typical Hmong family may consist of two or three generations living under one roof. The eldest or husband is usually the head of household and is the decision maker and responsible for making sure the family remains connected. While the husband is the head of the household, there are Hmong families where the wife is the decision maker and takes on most of the responsibilities of the family. Hmong stress the importance of family as a unit rather than individualism. Yang (2003:18) states, "Hmong have survived from many thousand years past to the present, due in part to their strong family units." In this way, the family functions as a group that is not only limited to close family members but also to extended family, sub-clan, clan and the Hmong nation. One of the purposes of the Hmong clan system is the practice of exogamous, which mandates that marriage has to occur from outside of the clan (Yang 2004:478).

According to Lee (2005:15) "clan divisions have been the nemesis of every Hmong leader;" however, the clan system also serves as a way of balancing the life cycle of Hmong society and when approached appropriately can be understood as the force of the Hmong community. Nonetheless, Hmong leaders have a challenge to "identify the essential elements that would instill the confidence and respect needed to achieve supra-clan legitimacy" (Lee 2005:16). Below, in a section of the Literature Review entitled, Historical Hmong Leaders, I discuss two Hmong leaders (Touby Ly Foung and Vang Pao) who I believe are the only known Hmong leaders of the 20th century to have reached and achieved "supra-clan legitimacy" of the Hmong clan system.

Religion

There is not a universal traditional religious written text for the Hmong; rather,

most of Hmong religious beliefs has been passed down orally. The Hmong primarily worship their ancestors and believe in animistic practices because of the unique role that nature plays in their lives. Hmong people believe that every life, including those found in the natural world, has a spirit; therefore, respecting human beings, nature, and living creatures are an important part of their belief system (Keown-Bomar 2004:44). It is a common practice to use a shaman, who serves as a go-between from the real world and spirit world, to treat certain illness relating to having a spirit lost or taken away from the body (Thao 1986:365-378). The practice of ancestor worship holds the existing family members responsible to remember and pay their respect to the deceased. The Hmong believe that by worshiping their ancestors, the ancestors' spirits will bring protection and bless the health and well-being of the living members of the family. Further, ancestor worship has cultural implications for the living, for it allows Hmong elders to pass on their spiritual knowledge to younger Hmong, thus continuing the cycle of life within any given Hmong community (Lee 1986:57-59).

The Hmong and the U.S CIA Secret Wars in Laos

The Hmong are best known to the West because of their involvement in a 'Secret War' (Stuart-Fox 1999:139, Hamilton-Merritt 1993:144) in Laos from 1960 to 1975, under the support of the United States Central Intelligence Agency during the Second Indochina War (which is called the Vietnam War in the west and the American War in the east). My intention of revisiting this part of the Hmong/Laos conflict is not to "explain their outcomes" but, more importantly, to explore "the effect the war had on Laos, how the Lao themselves responded; and what the long-term impact and implications" were (Stuart-Fox 1999:136). The Secret War in Laos left many scars in the

hearts and minds of the people of Laos. The Hmong people were not the only ethnic group drawn into the conflict and not all Hmong sided with the United States. Other ethnic groups and Laotians were also involved and suffered through the same struggles and hardships related to the conflict. However, as Stuart-Fox (1999:153) states, "the burden of war had not been equally borne. Most affected were the country's ethnic minorities, none more than the Lao Sung, the Hmong in particular."

This involvement had its roots in the decade preceding the Vietnam War. When the French lost the battle at Dien Bien Phu (Vietnam) on May 8, 1954 to the North Vietnamese communists and began pulling their forces out, the United States responded by beginning to increase its influence in Southeast Asia in order to contain the spread of communism. Laos's officially position was as a neutral state during the Vietnam War, but secretly it was used as a buffer state by the North Vietnamese and the United States. Because the Hmong inhabited places that were strategically pivotal, they were drawn into the war (Evans 2002:134; Lee 2008:2; Tapp 2004:61-62).

While a few Hmong joined the Pathet Lao communist movement, the majority of the Hmong sided with the United States and its allies (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:xi). Because the Hmong inhabited territories around Pathet Lao's military bases and areas, Hmong were recruited by the CIA to distract the North Vietnamese so that the forces from the United States could send troops, military supplies, food and medicine through the Ho Chi Minh Trail via Laos to South Vietnam where tens of thousands of troops from the United States were stationed. The Hmong's role was to protect the U.S. troops and their radar in Phathit (highest mountain in northeastern Laos) and rescue downed U.S. pilots (Keown-Bomar 2004:35). Furthermore, Hmong were also trained and served

as counterguerrilla forces gathering intelligent information on North Vietnamese movement (Kitano and Daniels 1998:154). Jane Hamilton-Merritt (1993:334) estimates that during the 15-year conflict from 1960 to 1975, at least 17,000 Hmong soldiers lost their lives while uncounted numbers of soldiers sustained wounds and an estimated 50,000 civilians suffered casualties. Other sources estimate that as many as 35,000 Hmong soldiers died (Quincy 2000:5), a number that represents the loss of more than ten percent of the Hmong Lao population (Warner 1996:366).

When the United States withdrew from Laos in 1975, the Hmong were left behind in chaos, defenseless and uncertain about a future that promised reprisal (Morrison 1999). Immediately afterward, tens of thousands of Hmong fled the country to Thailand, seeking refuge. Stuart-Fox (1999:168) estimates that ten percent of the people in Laos left the country, including almost all the educated class. This may have caused a setback in Lao development by at least a generation (Stuart-Fox 2009:42). For the Hmong, approximately 130,000 people fled the country and became refugees, eventually resettling in other countries around the world. An estimate made by Vang (1996:235) indicates there were approximately six hundred fifty thousand Hmong in Laos in 1975; 20 years later, the remaining number of Hmong in Laos was about five hundred thousand. This number coincides with the actual number of Hmong in Lao PDR's last 2005 census.

When the Lao People's Revolutionary Party came into power in 1975, the Royal Lao government officials, King Sisavang Vatthana and his family members, and an estimated thirty to sixty thousand people including Hmong were sent to reeducation camps known as *samana* (Lawyer Committee for Human Rights 1989:6). The majority of these people never returned home and their whereabouts are still unknown. Moreover,

under the new regime, most of the Hmong were considered enemies of the state and the new government announced a discriminatory policy targeting them. According to the plethora of evidence that supports the narrative of oppression that the Hmong tell, they found themselves on unfamiliar ground after Lao PDR government came in power. Rather than seeking the cooperation of the Hmong, they branded them as imperialist empathizers and instituted a policy in which they must be 'wiped out' (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:340). This caused thousands of Hmong to go into hiding from Lao PDR government in remote areas and jungles because they feared the intended retaliation against them (Quincy 1998:208-211; Lee 1982:212). Thousands of Hmong fled into the remote areas and jungles of Laos, fearing for their lives (Amnesty International 2007; Congressional Research Service Report for Congress 2008; Fact Finding Commission 2003; Hmong International Human Rights Watch 2008; Hmong Time 2008; McGeown 2003; Perrin 2003; Radio Free Asia 2004; Voice of America 2008). Sadly, some of these Hmong remain as outcasts accepted neither by the Lao PDR government nor recognized by the United States government as friends. In the following section I elaborate briefly on this development.

Hmong Resistance in the Remotes Areas and Jungles of Lao PDR

The existence of internal conflict between Lao PDR government and a few groups of Hmong in the remote areas and jungles remains a secret that still is sealed from most outsiders. Hmong resistance in Lao PDR is a complex phenomenon full of controversy and continues to be a very sensitive issue. The Hmong and the Lao PDR government are facing a tumultuous dilemma; nonetheless, I believe through openness toward the other, new stories may be written and rewritten integrating the two plots and leading to

inclusion of possible new narratives. It is not my intent to disclose Hmong resistance to discredit the Lao PDR government or to encourage Hmong resistance groups. In contrast, by revealing the Hmong resistance quandary, I hope to voice and unveil a story that can be interpreted by Lao PDR leaders, including Hmong leaders (in Lao PDR, United States and other countries), to uncover the hidden agony and wounds that need to be healed.

I believe it is important for Lao PDR government and Hmong leaders to openly address this issue and present solutions to end the struggle as the country moves forward. If Lao PDR does not effectively deal with the issue of Hmong resistance, it will always remain a challenge that causes resentment and prevents the full engagement of either Hmong leaders or Lao PDR leaders within the Lao PDR government. Thereupon, "the government (Lao PDR) will continue to struggle to project an image of stability in Laos until it finds a lasting solution to the 'Hmong issue' amid persistent allegations of genocide of the Hmong" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2007b:7). Equally important, the creation of this text should not be viewed as either a panacea or an enigma. Alternatively this text creation allows the act of preconfiguration, configuration and reconfiguration when it is present in front of the reader, enabling the reader's reinterpretation of the created text, which may lead to new possible texts. Through such reinterpretation, the new text created could put the two groups on the road to a participative reconciliation that leads to joint efforts to solve problems together.

Hmong Resistance's Stories

The story of Hmong resistance has two faces and plots. The Lao PDR government's interpretation of the story is that the Vietnam conflict ended more than three decades ago and the Hmong have since been treated fairly. For Hmong resistance

groups, the Vietnam conflict ended between the United States and Lao PDR government but remained between Hmong and Lao PDR government and continues to the present day. Tracing the birth of Hmong resistance may be a repetitive narrative as mentioned above in the section (The Hmong and the U.S CIA Secret Wars for Laos); however, its significance for interpretation is appropriate. Moreover, voicing the Hmong resistance story requires the retelling and reinterpreting of events in the Hmong's eyes after the United States' last mission to Laos, which included the airlifting of Vang Pao, his family, and high ranking personnel and their families out of Laos on May 14, 1975 to Ubon airbase in Thailand (Morrison 1999). This action left thousands of Hmong civilians and military personnel stranded behind in panic and pandemonium. Immediately afterward, tens of thousands of Hmong civilians trekked on foot along open roads in the direction of the capital city of Vientiane as they were hoping to cross the Mekong River and be reunited with their leader Vang Pao in Thailand.

On May 30, 1975, an estimated 20,000 – 30,000 Hmong civilians reached the vicinity of a village name Hin Heup about 55 miles from Vientiane. In between, a river called Nam Lik lay before them and in order to trek forward, those Hmong civilians needed to cross a bridge. Lao PDR and neutral soldiers were in position to guard the bridge checkpoint and stop their intended progress. Soldiers ordered the Hmong civilians to turn back; however, when the warning was unsuccessful, shots were fired into the crowd of mobilized civilians. The reports of this incident spread like wild fire, igniting the flames of fear among the Hmong, who already harbored a fear of communist reprisals (Pfaff 1995:51-52; Quincy 1988: 208-210).

It is estimated that the incident at Hin Heup Bridge resulted in the death of five

Hmong civilians and the wounding of approximately 30 others (Evans 2002:185). The Hmong viewed this incident as a "massacre" (Hamilton-Merritt 1993:361); thus the Hmong resistance movement was born as thousands of Hmong took the weapons left during the Vietnam conflict and hid in dense and remote forests in fear of communist retaliation. While this incident appears in retrospect minor to have fueled such a reaction, (as stated earlier) Lao PDR also introduced prison labor camps known as "*samana*" (re-education camps) where former military and civilian officials as well as soldiers were sent to be reeducated. While Hmong leaders were imprisoned, the majority of Hmong civilians (elders, women and children) were allowed and encouraged to return to their villages. Nonetheless, by imprisoning leaders in the samana, the Laos PDR effectively broke family ties. Those who were released often decided to retrieved their weapons and join forces with the Hmong resistance groups rather than return to their families. These groups were later labeled by the Lao PDR government as "Chao Fa" meaning "Lord of the Sky" (Pfaff 1995:53-54).

In 1976, the stronghold of the Hmong resistance movement was centered at Phou Bia, which is a high peak in north eastern Laos (Pfaff 1995:54). Lao PDR forces alone could not contain the Hmong resistance movement; therefore, between 1977-1978, Lao PDR requested the assistance of approximately 30,000 Vietnamese soldiers to subdue it (Evans 2002:186). Moreover, while the Lao PDR interpreted this conflict as one related to subduing resistance, its effect at times can fairly be described as a form of "ethnic cleansing"(Evans 2002:1986). By 1978, Lao PDR and Vietnamese forces were successfully breaking the back of the Hmong resistance; however, in the process, "they had killed and mistreated so many people….that resentment still festers today, [in]

sporadic… out-breaks of fighting against the government" (Evans 2002:187). Furthermore, according to Hart-Davis (2007:584), the Lao PDR government continued to initiate counter-offensive military actions against a Hmong right-wing guerrilla base in the outer provinces of Lao PDR during the period. These occurred as recently as 1990. In addition, in 1998, former U.S Ambassador to Lao PDR Wendy Chamberlain "acknowledged that violence between Lao and Hmong was still taking place in Laos;" nonetheless, she reiterated that the greatest threat to the Hmong is "poverty" (Vang 2009:224). Additionally, Vang (2009:224) states, "many Hmong Americans believe that persecution of the Hmong in Laos exists and persists at various levels;" however, the Lao PDR government "has denied all claims" (Vang 2009:214); and consequently, Lao PDR officials have "blamed [Vang Pao]" for the Hmong problem (Vang 2009:225).

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An Imaginative Story

The reality of the Hmong resistance are the unfortunate thousands of Hmong of all ages who remain in hiding where they are faceless victims of past conflict. Consequently, as Lee (2004:441) states, "unless the Lao PDR government and Hmong leaders in the diaspora change their respective approaches towards the Hmong of Laos, the latter will continue to suffer from distrust and political exploitation, and will find it difficult to integrate fully, despite only a very few small number being involved in armed resistance." Hence, I believe Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have a moral and ethical responsibility to speak on behalf of the voiceless Hmong in the remote areas and jungles and the Lao PDR government has a corresponding responsibility to be open to dialogue with Hmong leaders so that the voices of the Hmong are incorporated into the economic, political, and social future of Lao PDR. The Hmong and Lao nations together experienced a painful past; however, they did so without any initiations toward understanding the other (Hmong and Lao nation). If this painful cycle is not broken, the hurtful past will continue to overshadow the country's current and future leadership and

development. Still, I have a strong conviction gained through open dialogue with both sides that as people retell their stories and fulfill their stated willingness to come to new understandings that new narratives will be created. Besides, this process also allows for the possibility that old memories will be re-remembered with potential for imagining a different, more workable, and better future for the Lao nation.

Summary

Hmong in Lao PDR have very deep roots in the country's history and as the country emerges through development, Hmong need to become a part of the evolving processes. Hmong leaders have an obligation to participate in the dialogue about both the country's future and Hmong wellbeing within that future, a possibility that must occur through open dialogue on the part of Lao PDR government and Hmong leaders.

The Review of Literature, Chapter Three, presents a brief overview of leadership theory and then focuses on Lao PDR and Hmong leadership, including policy implications. Lao PDR leaders and Hmong leaders hold the steering wheel to turn the country's direction forward or backward. If Hmong leaders are given the opportunity to lead, they can assist Lao PDR government in bringing Hmong out of the shadow of past struggles and conflict into a world of endless possibilities. In this new possible world, both Hmong and Laotians need to understand their historical past so that they can benefit and grow accustomed to dreaming and working together for a better Laos. I believe this is one of the challenges facing the Lao nation.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world…as in being able to remake ourselves.
-Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

In the previous Chapter, I discussed the background of Lao PDR and the Hmong historical past, setting the foundation for this Chapter. In this Review of Literature, I provide a brief overview of some the leadership theories that have emerged into practice. Furthermore, I discuss leadership in Lao PDR, including Hmong leadership. This Review of Literature sets the stage for this research study and its relevance by supporting the need to approach Hmong leadership from an ontological perspective with the purpose of understanding and bringing forth Hmong leaders' leadership praxis.

Brief Overview of Leadership Studies

This portion of the Literature Review will be from the Western perspective, although this project adopts an overall assumption that leadership takes on different forms in various cultures and political structures. In the case of leadership in Lao PDR and Lao PDR government, the political structure based on Marxism-Leninism's ideology dominates the country's leadership practices. More specifically, drawing from my personal experience, Hmong leadership is influenced by this people group's cultural traditions and, to some extent, the Lao PDR's governmental leadership style, particularly when there needs to be communication carried out between the Hmong and the national or provincial government.

In a search for international leadership studies that reference Lao PDR or the

Hmong, I found none. Nonetheless, there are some research projects on international leadership that focus on Asia. For example, House et al. (2004) released one of the first studies known as "The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies" on culture and leadership, which included five countries in Asia: the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, India and Thailand. According to the GLOBE Study report, some Asian countries score high on "humane orientation and in-group collectivism." The GLOBE study also reports "strong family loyalty and deep concern for their communities" (in Northouse 2007:305; 313). Whether these values hold true for the Lao PDR or for the Hmong calls for further exploration.

Another international leadership project is a long-term venture that was initiated in 1961 by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton. Originally named Scientific Methods, it is currently called Grid International and boasts 40 years of work in 40 countries using 17 languages. However, the sites of their research are for the most part in North American and Western Europe. Blake and Mouton (1965) set out to formulate a grid that responds to management practices based on a scientific theory of human behavior. This grid purports to transcend all cultural boundaries. In later years, they (now Blake and McCanse, 1991) changed their discussions from management to leadership. Today, their website (http://www.gridinternational.com/seminars.html), Grid's Power to Change, displays a focus on leadership style seminars, team building workshops and development designs that are appropriate to all organizations no matter what culture, tradition, or country the organization is in. This kind of thinking does not hold cultural differences to play any significant role in the study of leadership styles nor does it question the epistemological stance represented in the majority of western orientations toward the study of leadership.

Northouse (2007:3) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." This definition is based on an approach to leadership that is grounded in an individual's or individuals' actions which, in turn, are consistent with the majority of the research on leadership. This body of research occurs more often within an epistemological model rather than an ontological approach. This section of the review offers a brief overview of some of the main leadership theories that have emerged in the United States since the 1900s.

Since the dawn of time, people have believed and postulated that there are born leaders who emerge in time of crises in order to get people out of a problem. This theory is known as the great man theory (Carlyle 2007; Wagner 2010). However, as time has passed, other theories have been introduced. Stogdill's (1974) research discusses the trait theory, which posits that certain people have traits that make them suitable for positions of leadership and one of the keys to understanding and enabling leadership is the ability to identify those traits. On the other hand, behavioral theories such as role theory and the managerial grid approach leadership as a skill that can be learned, which suggests that if a person wants to be a leader he or she can acquire the necessary skills through active engagement and observations of good leader's actions (Merton 1957; Pfeffer and Salancik 1975; Blake and Mouton 1961). Other studies, such as those by Likert (1967) and Lewin, Liippit, and White (1939), propose that leaders are those who encourage others to participate in the decision making process to reach a consensus goal and to support participative leadership.

Another theory of leadership is known as situational leadership. It suggests that a good leader is one who is able to adapt to any given circumstances and operate

accordingly to the needs of the present situation. Situational leadership is supported by studies conducted by researchers such as Hersey and Blanchard, Vroom and Yetton, and House (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson 2007; Vroom and Yetton 1973; House 1971, House and Mitchell 1974). Similarly, contingency leadership represents a style in which nothing is etched in stone, therefore requiring that the leader take different approaches in leading in different places and situations because what works in one particular location may not work in others. This leadership approach is based on research performed by Fiedler and Hickson (Fiedler 1967, Fiedler and Garcia 87; Hickson, et al 1971).

Transactional leadership theory suggests that leadership should be based on a hierarchical system because people work best if there are incentives or consequences at the end. This leadership approach is supported by Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975). Advocates of transformational leadership believe that leaders should be inspirational so that others follow them; its effectiveness depends on engaging other's enthusiasm about wanting to achieve the set goals or dreams. Prominent researchers who support this leadership approach are Bass, Burns and Kouzes (Bass 1985, 90; Burns 1978; Kouzes 2002).

One of the most prominent leadership theories that recent authors (Avolio and Garner 2005) suggest falls under the rubric of authentic leadership theories is that of Greenleaf (1977). Greenleaf's coinage, Servant Leadership, suggests that leaders can only be successful in serving those they lead and involving others in decision-making processes. Many prominent researchers on leadership, such as Blanchard, Covey, Wheatley and Senge, find strong resonance with servant leadership as noted on the website of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (www.greenleaf.org).

In summary, the above authors represent a brief outline of leadership theories. Recent work, under the auspices of authentic leadership, shows promise in developing leadership applications that encompass not only action but also values and ethics. In order to develop a complete understanding of the leadership that is needed within Lao PDR, action, values, and ethics must be combined with an understanding of identity that encompasses cultural and ethnic differences. In the following section I will elaborate on this subject by discussing studies that specifically address Lao and Hmong leadership.

Lao and Hmong Leadership Studies

There are very few sources that address modern Lao leadership and even fewer sources that consider current Hmong leadership. Earlier work by Zasloff (1973) describes the leadership of the initial Pathet Lao political organization and its ties to Vietnam. Zasloff (1973) also documents the presence of Vietnamese communist ideology in Laos since the mid 1940s in supporting Lao leaders who empathized with communist doctrines. Vietnam continues to influence present Lao leadership; therefore, it may be inferred that Laos leaders mirror closely Vietnamese leadership practices. Most recently Freeman (2006) discusses recent changes among the top political leadership in Lao PDR while Lee (2008) discuss the plight today of Hmong in Lao PDR with some reference to leaders. These few studies suggest the need for more research study on Hmong and Lao leadership in Lao PDR.

Since there are limited studies on Hmong leadership in Lao PDR, this portion of the literature review will discuss only the few available sources on the subject matter. Through the lense of personal experience, Pao Saykao Thao (1997), who is a Hmong medical doctor in Australia, examines Hmong traditional leadership. In an article he

presented at a Hmong community leadership conference in Ohio, Pao Saykao Thao (1997) presented qualities Hmong identify as valuable for a Hmong leader to possess and gives a description of the Hmong social and leadership structure. According to this research, some of the qualities Hmong leaders should exhibit are to be accountable, kind, considerate, controlled; to lead by example, to be diplomatic in what they say, to be just and fair in all dealings; to be sociable and mix well with all; and to know the rules, customs, and norms. The ultimate goal of most Hmong clan leaders is to be responsible for all conduct pertaining to his or her clan members; consequently "clan members thus pledge allegiance first to their clan leaders, instead of the Hmong national leader" (Yang 2006:294). These Hmong leadership attributes may continue to hold true throughout the Hmong diaspora community because Hmong social and leadership structures have not experienced any major changes in the intervening years.

Moua (2001), a Hmong living in Northern California, conducted an exploratory study looking at Hmong clan leaders' roles and responsibilities in the California Central Valley. She found that Hmong clan leaders' roles and responsibilities vary according to their respective recognition as a traditional or professional leader. The traditional Hmong leaders are categorized as village head, legal, religious or Lao military leaders. Hmong traditional leaders,

> are to protect clan members; to resolve problems or conflict within and between clans; to maintain cultural rituals; to be a peacemaker at weddings and funerals; to set oral laws and policies to govern the Hmong people, and to legally represent a particular clan on a certain issue or with a particular concern (Moua 2001:61-62).

On the contrary, Hmong professional leaders are categorized as organizational and modern occupational leaders such as doctors, lawyers and social workers. The

professional Hmong leaders are responsible for “gaining the support of other clans, to be creative in finding resources, and to work on program issues of concern relating to the Hmong community” (Moua 2001:66).

Understanding the Hmong traditional and historical leadership model, its structure, and its power is a complex process that needs further study; however, the challenge facing both Hmong traditional and professional leaders is understanding the other. Whether they are traditional or professional leaders, Hmong in Lao PDR must be willing to hold open dialogue with the purpose of maintaining a cohesive community while adjusting to the country’s community development policies.

In another research, Moua (1993) conducted a descriptive correlational study regarding Hmong in the United States and their attitudes and beliefs about values and political leadership. Moua (1993) concludes in this study that younger Hmong hold more traditional leadership practices while older Hmong hold more traditional values. In other words, the younger Hmong continue to embrace older Hmong leaders while older Hmong continue to maintain Hmong language, tradition and culture. This study took place in the United States and is not directly applicable to those who remain in Lao PDR; still, the Hmong people share connections regardless of where they reside and so the leadership experiences of those living in the United States have implications for those who remain in Laos. In Laos the younger Hmong have been guided by older and more traditional Hmong leaders while at the same time older Hmong continue to instill into the younger generation the importance of Hmong tradition and culture. This speaks to the significance of shared leadership experience between the young and old, in remembering past Hmong leadership practices while maintaining Hmong cultural values.

Using the critical hermeneutic approach, Vang (1992) explores the processes and rationale Hmong Thai students use for pursuing higher education. This research investigates the role that leadership plays in the decision making processes as well as the influences of beliefs, traditions, and values. Although Hmong in Lao PDR live in a different environment, Vang's research sheds light on how leadership may play a role in influencing Hmong children. His specific interests are to consider their ongoing educational opportunities; nevertheless, this research is relevant in that it reveals the influence that Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have on the children who are their future.

In the remaining section of Chapter Three, I discuss Lao PDR historical leaders and their diplomatic relationship with the United States. I also discuss Hmong historical leaders, including those who emerged under the French, those from the United States, those from Lao PDR, and Hmong leadership in the United States. These may play an important role in future Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and these historical Lao and Hmong leadership accounts create the foundation for understanding among Lao and Hmong leaders regarding leadership in the past, present and future.

Lao PDR Historical Leaders

Laos had a monarchy, a ruling system that existed in the Kingdom of Laos for more than 600 years. However, on December 1, 1975, King Sisavang Vatthana abdicated his throne under pressure and on the following day a new government was established, ending a 600 year monarch era. The newly formed communist government announced a new name change for the Kingdom of Laos, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). The new Lao PDR government operated under Marxist-Leninist political doctrines (Vang 2008:233-34); to this day, the Lao PDR government can be considered relatively

new and its leadership has not seen much evolution.

The modern evolution toward the establishment of Lao PDR can be traced to August 8, 1945, when Prince Phetsarath and his two half brothers, Prince Souphanouvong and Prince Souvanna Phouma, and other members of the Lao upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy formed a "Lao Issara" (Free Lao) group movement opposing the ruling monarch of King Sisavangvong. The Lao Issara movement was a result of Japan's short presence in Laos during the Second World War; however, when the allies defeated Germany and Japan and the French government reemerged in Laos recognizing the crowning of King Sisavangvong and adopting a constitution for Laos, the country again became a constitutional monarchy within the French Union (Pholsena 2006:10).

Eventually, Prince Phetsarath would be exiled in Thailand for ten years while his half-brother Prince Souvanna Phouma returned to Laos after the dissolution of Lao Issara movement on October 25, 1949. Nonetheless, Prince Souphanouvong did not accept the political ideologies enacted by the ruling monarch; he resigned from the Lao Issara movement before it was dissolved. Less than one year after the Lao Issara dissolution, strong Vietnamese communist support paved the way for the selection on August 13, 1950 of Prince Souphanouvong as Prime Minister of a new Lao resistance movement, which occurred during the first congress of Lao communist leaders gathering in Tuyen Quang, North Vietnam. In addition, in a second meeting in November 1950 in North Vietnam, a new political movement "Pathet Lao," the Neo Lao Issara (the Free Lao Front) was activated (Pholsena 2006:11). The Neo Lao Issara new movement would gradually play a vital role in shaping Laos' political future with its eventual "National Democratic Revolution" succession to power on December 2, 1975 as Lao People's

Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). Nevertheless, Lao PDR's foundation is "indebted to the participation of some highland ethnic groups allied with Pathet Lao and Viet Minh troops during the French and American-North Vietnamese Wars" (Pholsena 2006:3).

Lao PDR's most revered leader is the late Kaisone Phomvihan, who was the country's first Prime Minister and who is credited with being the father of Lao PDR. The other significant figure is Prince Souphanouvong, who is known to the West as the "Red Prince" because he supported the communist presence in Laos during the American Vietnam conflict. Prince Souphanouvong was Lao PDR's first President after its establishment in 1975 and he held the position primarily for ceremonial purposes until his official resignation in 1991. Kaisone Phomvihan took a far more active role. As Prime Minister of Lao PDR, he called for "greater attention to be paid to promoting education among ethnic groups, improving their living conditions, and increasing production in remote minority areas" (Pholsena 2006:90). Equally important, under his leadership, Lao PDR and the People's Republic of Vietnam developed a bilateral relationship and subsequently signed a 25 year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on July 18, 1977 (Vang 2008:236). This treaty documented an agreement that both countries help and support each other in dealing with both states' political, military, economic and cultural concerns (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006:16-17).

In the early 1980s, Prime Minister Kaisone Phomvihan also introduced his views surrounding ethnic minorities and Lao PDR nationhood. He wanted Lao PDR to replace its calling and classification of people in Lao PDR in three main categories: Lao Lum, Lao Theung, and Lao Sung. Kaisone Phomvihan wanted the people of Lao PDR to be called "according to the name of their ethnic group that they had been called…since

ancient time" (Lao PDR Department of Ethnic Affairs 2008:e). In other words, the late Kaisone Phomvihan understood the importance of ethnic diversity and unification, acknowledged the existence of these groups, and supported the idea of promoting the retention of language, culture and tradition. His ultimate goal was to create a strong state and a united Lao nation. The terms Lao Lum (Lao of the Plains), Lao Theung (Lao of Mountain Slopes) and Lao Sung (Lao of the Mountain Tops), continue to be popularized and officially used in contemporary Lao PDR (Pholsena 2006:169-177). Nevertheless, it is unclear why Lao PDR government allows the continual usage of those terms; still, the government has taken steps toward understanding how the various groups value their differences and reaching consensus regarding the labeling of the diversity in the country.

In an effort to promote unification among the ethnic groups in Lao PDR as a nation, the late President of Lao PDR Kaisone Phomvihane is quoted as saying, "any ethnic group shares a common uniqueness of the Lao National Community and has its particularities on other aspects as well. Through the revolutionary process, all ethnic groups volunteer to become a part of the nation" (Lao PDR Department of Ethnic Affairs 2008:d). These statements reflect understanding about the invaluable contributions that various ethnic groups have made to the Lao nation in the past, present and future. One can only speculate what Lao PDR may have become had Kaisone Phomvihan been able to continue to drive the country toward change; unfortunately, he passed away in November 1992.

Shortly after Kaisone Phomvihan's death, Nouhak Phoumsavanh was named President of Lao PDR while Khamtai Siphadon was named Prime Minister. Nouhak Phoumsavanh served as President of Lao PDR from 1992 to 1998. Under Nouhak

Phoumsavanh's administration and leadership, Lao PDR became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997. This occurred amidst the financial crisis plaguing Southeast Asian nations in the late 90s and was part of a strategy of moving the country slowly toward economic and social change. Nouhak Phoumsavanh's reign lasted about six years, after which he was replaced by Khamtai Siphadon, whose administration and leadership can be credited with opening Laos for tourism. Nonetheless, gaining normal trade relations with United States in 2004 was his paramount achievement. Khamtai Siphadon was President of Lao PDR from 1998 until he retired in 2006; he was replaced by Choummaly Sayasone.

There is little information about what Chomaly Sayasone hopes to accomplish during his administration; however, he is one of the last old revolutionary leaders and it is certain that he holds a lot of power to create potential change. Under his leadership, Lao PDR started the process toward gaining membership into the World Trade Organization (WTO), which may happen in 2011. Currently, Choummaly Sayasone is the country's head of state while the head of the government is Bouasone Bouphavanh, who is the Prime Minister and believed by others to be the protégé of Khamtai Siphadon (Lintner 2008:174). Throughout Lao PDR's short leadership history, its leaders have been authoritarian rulers tied in political ideology to Marxism-Leninism. However, since the mid 1980s, Lao PDR's leadership has taken a lenient approach, shifting its economy toward more socialist practices, though its leadership practices remain grounded in communist doctrines.

Lao PDR and United States Diplomatic Relations

When the Lao PDR government came to power on December 2, 1975, the newly established communist government received widespread recognition from communist bloc states. Interestingly, the United States and its allies also recognized Lao PDR government as the new legitimate government. After the United States' withdrawal from Southeast Asia, the United States government broke off total relations with Vietnam and Cambodia; still, relations between the United States and Laos never ceased completely. Instead, the United States government merely reduced its relations with Laos from Ambassadorial to the level of *charge d'affaires ad interim* (Stuart-Fox 1999:168). Eventually, the diplomatic relationship was upgraded to *charge d'affaires* on January 9, 1987 (U.S Department of State Office of Historian 2008). In other words, the United States government assigns a representative to conduct and hold diplomatic relations with the Lao PDR government even when an ambassador is temporarily not present.

In the early 1990s, the relationship between the United States and Lao PDR became friendlier as evidenced by a story in the New York Times, which quoted the late Kaisone Phomvihan as stating "lately relations between the two countries (Lao PDR and the United States) have made some progress, after some delay" (Kamm 1990). As a result, when the former Soviet Union collapsed in 1992, the United States government restored its relationship with Lao PDR to the level of Ambassador. Charles B. Salmon Jr. became U.S Ambassador to Lao PDR, presenting his credentials to the Lao PDR government on August 6, 1992 (U.S Department of State Office of Historian). There have been open dialogues between the two nations since the early 1990s, leading to a partnership agreement to search for the remains of U.S MIA soldiers and remove

unexploded bombs left from the Vietnam conflict in Lao PDR because Lao PDR "had no real motive for remaining isolated" (Pholesena and Banamyong 2006:32). Additionally, the United States granted Normal Trade Relations to Lao PDR in 2004, signifying the ending of both countries' dark historical past while at the same time opening the path toward reconciliation. Furthermore, the continue existence of relations between the United States and Lao PDR may be interpreted as a symbol of hope in healing the past, present and future between the two countries. In the case of Hmong in Lao PDR, I am hopeful that Hmong leaders will initiate relations within the Hmong diaspora community.

The Myth of Hmong King Chi You

The long history of the Hmong includes the legend of a Hmong Kingdom that had a King named "Chi You." Yang (2009:8) argues it is more accurate to state, "Hmong believe that their ancestral king was Chi You" rather than "Chi You was the ancestral king of the Hmong." The mythology of King Chi You is similar to the myth of King Arthur and his round table of twelve knights. Chi You is believed to have lived around 5000 B.C along the Yellow River in present day China. It is not clear how Chi You and the Hmong ancestors' faith diminished; however, according to Chinese historical records, two Chinese Kings joined forces and defeated King Chi You, thus relegating the Hmong descendents to subservient roles in relation to the Chinese. It is believed that the victorious Chinese forced the remaining Hmong to gradually assimilate into Chinese society (Hmong Cultural and Resource Center 2005; Xiong 2006).

After the fall of King Chi You, the Hmong did not appear in Chinese historical records until 3000 B.C (Mottin 1980:16). However, though there were no written texts pertaining to Hmong leadership, throughout its history the Hmong had risen many times

to defend their homeland from Chinese expansion. According to Xiong (2005), between 1855 and 1873, under the leadership of Cha Xiong Me, Hmong rose against Manchu aggression and fought many battles but eventually were subdued by Manchu forces. The conclusion of this conflict ended the last known unification of Hmong leadership, thus leading to many major Hmong migrations southward into present day Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). In Laos, each clan had its respective leader or elder until the rise of Touby Lyfoung and Vang Pao, when Hmong leadership were truly unified as discussed in the remaining parts of this Chapter.

Chronological: Hmong Leadership in Laos

Leader or leadership are terms commonly used in conversations by many Hmong clan leaders and within the Hmong community, but its definition, contextual meaning, and implications have not been explored. Again, little research has been done in relation to Hmong leadership, which limits my references. Conversely, I have located several sources that discuss Hmong leadership from a historical perspective. Therefore, this portion of the literature review on Hmong leadership in Lao PDR is tailored to a historical background of prominent Hmong leaders since the early 1900s and the implications for the development of Hmong leadership. Lee (2005:i) states that the two types of Hmong leaders in the period between 1893 to 1955 are "secular political broker, legitimated by both the colonial and indigenous authorities, and the messianic or prophetic leader who proclaimed the mandate of Heaven to become the Hmong 'king' incarnate." Hmong leadership in Laos is categorized into three periods under the French, American and Lao PDR.

Under the French

Since Hmong resettled in northern Laos in the early 1800s, they lived a relatively private existence, which continued throughout the majority of the 18th century. In 1896 this changed when Hmong first rebelled against the French due to heavy taxation; nonetheless, there was no bloodshed as a truce was reached at the last minute. Between 1919 and 1921, a Hmong named Pa Chay Vue, who claimed to be a messiah who could communicate with heaven, rose to lead the Hmong of northern Laos against the French in what was called the war of the insane (Motin 1980:47). Eventually, Pa Chay Vue and his supporters were subdued by the French. As a result of this conflict, the French recognized a Hmong man named Lor Bliayao for his services and appointed him as chief of the Hmong in Nong Het and Xieng Khoung provinces. This post would later spark a bitter rivalry between two Hmong families, the Lor and Lee clans, and eventually divide the Hmong in the areas into two factions (pro-western and pro-communist).

Although one of the primary responsibilities of Lor Bliayao was to collect taxes from Hmong villages as ordered by the French, Lor Bliayao's position served as a catalyst and defined the primary roles of future Hmong leaders; in order to have power, "Hmong leaders must submit to dominant rulers, for only when a Hmong leader is legitimated by an outside patron does he hold sway over his much divided people" (Lee 2005:3). Lor Bliayao's unique style of leadership, serving as a mediator and communicating directly with French officials rather than going through local Lao officials, proved to be effective. During his term in office as chief of Hmong in Xieng Khoung province from 1919 until his death in 1935, conflict between Hmong, French and local Lao officials was minimal. Two years after Lor Bliayao's death, the French

transferred the post to Ly Xia Foung, who was Lor Bliayao's son-in-law and former secretary, because Lor Bliayao's eldest son Chong Tou, who had inherited the post, had failed to collect taxes from the Hmong villagers (Quincy 2000:47). In doing so, the French had ignited a spark that lit the fire of a bitter feud between the Lor and Ly Clans.

This feud was made worse by the fact that Chong Tou's younger brother Fay Dang resented the French and Ly Xia Foung because his brother had lost the post that Fay Dang and others believed rightfully belonged to him. Fay Dang unsuccessfully appealed this decision to the French and to Prince Phetsarath, a member of the royal family. When the matter came to Prince Phetsarath, he worked with the French to resolve the conflict, with both sides ultimately agreeing that Ly Xia Foung would keep the post until his death, at which time the post would be transferred to Fay Dang's Lor clan. However, when Ly Xia Foung passed away in 1939 from tetanus the French decided to pass on the post to Ly Xia Foung's son Touby Ly Foung instead of Fay Dang's Lor clan. Fay Dang was furious at the French and never forgave the Ly clan, vowing "whatever the followers of Touby Ly Foung might do, those of Fay Dang would invariably do the contrary" (Mottin 1980:48-49).

Touby Ly Foung's administration was no different than that of his two predecessors because one of his primary job duties continued to be to operate as a middle man collecting taxes from Hmong villages as instructed by the French. Nevertheless, Touby was an educated man. He spoke three languages: Hmong, Laotian and French and, with his two half-brothers Tougeu and Toulia, received an education in Lao schools. When Touby was in office, he encouraged Hmong children to pursue higher education because he understood its importance (Barney 1978:23). Gradually, Hmong were granted

limited autonomy, which allowed the recognition of Hmong clan leaders. By the mid 1940s there were seventeen Hmong Chiefs of cantons in Laos (Mottin 1980:47). Despite these Hmong leadership achievements, when Japan occupied French Indochina from 1941 to 1945 Hmong found themselves on both sides of the country's internal struggles. Touby Ly Foung and the majority of the Hmong remained loyal to the French, helping France hide its personnel who were trying to escape from Japanese soldiers and subsequently supporting French action in parachuting soldiers into the surrounding Xieng Khouang areas (Mottin 1980:49).

At the same time, Fay Dang threw his support with the Japanese. As it turned out, when Japan and Germany surrendered to the Allies, France reoccupied Laos and re-entrusted Touby, his brothers, and many Hmong in the Lao government with positions of influence while Fay Dang and his supporters continued to be excluded from any involvement in the Lao government. Fay Dang eventually made contact with Prince Souphanouvong in early 1947 and slowly joined forces with what would later be known as the "Pathet Lao" movement supported by North Vietnamese (communist). It was also during this period that Touby was appointed assistant governor of Xieng Khouang and later entrusted with the title Phaya, which means dignitary and is desired by commoners. In 1965 Touby also became a member of King Sisavang Vatthana's council (Evans 2002:139).

In short, Touby Ly Foung's leadership brought the Hmong from the mountain tops down into the lowland fields of Laos, changing the political dynamic of Hmong leadership and setting the stage for the next Hmong to emerge as a truly unified leader. This had occurred just in time for the emergence of the United States' presence in the

region in the early 1950s. Touby's administration is best reflected by Barney (1978:23), who said that "Touby has championed the Hmong people. While holding a position of influence with the administration, he also commands the respect, confidence and support of the Hmong. He is known through the entire area, and the Hmong are quick to respond to requests made by him." Touby was the most recognizable and influential Hmong leader under the French and he was well known amongst the Hmong of Laos. Touby triumphed during his time because he had literacy skills, which also made him a more qualified bureaucrat (Lee 2005:23). His leadership contribution to Hmong is still being felt today and he will be remembered as one of the Hmong's most distinguished leaders of the 20th century.

Under the American

The period of the United States in Laos, which occurred from 1960 to1975, may be understood with mixed feelings in the minds and hearts of many Hmong because Hmong are still experiencing its aftermath. During this time, a Hmong named Vang Pao emerged as a prominent leader because of his connection and support from the United States, which drew a majority of Hmong support. Vang Pao's roles were to unite the Hmong behind the United States to fight the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese; eventually, he rose to the rank of Major General, as mentioned above. During this time, education became more of a possibility for Hmong youth (Quincy 2000:244). As a General of Region II, Vang Pao established an independent civilian political administration consisting of "several hundred nai bans, seventy tassengs, dozen of nai kongs, and five chao moungs, plus hundreds of minor bureaucrats serving as staff for tassengs, nai kongs, and chao moungs" (Quincy 2002:238). Moreover, Vang Pao was

probably the first Hmong leader who understood the Hmong clans system and its role in leading the Hmong. He identified two important tasks for most of the Hmong clan leaders and assigned them to leadership positions as either political civilian leaders or as military leaders. Military leaders are high ranking officers and are usually promoted according to education, bravery, and group support while political civilian leaders are called *Nai Ban* – village leader, *Tasseng* – subdistrict leader, *Nai Kong* – subregion leader, *Chao Moung* – mayor, and *Chao Khoueng* – governor. Most of the political civilian leaders were appointed through Vang Pao though a few were elected by Hmong civilians in the respective areas. This process enabled both Hmong civilians and military clan leaders to effect direct influence among their group members and as a result, Hmong functioned cooperatively with little resistance (Yang 1978).

Vang Pao exhibited charismatic skill, demonstrating care for the well being of both the Hmong and the country. He urged Hmong to rally behind him in defense of their homeland, as Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces posed a threat to the country's security and future. He led by good example. His bravery and strong character are unparalleled, for he led at the front in battlefields where he was stationed alongside his soldiers. Although Hmong suffered great losses, Hmong sacrifices brought the Hmong recognition for their courage, love and determination. Saykao (1997) asserts, "most Hmong from Laos agree that [Vang Pao] succeeded in bringing the Hmong from the Stone Age to the Information Age in a period of 30 years. This is quite a remarkable achievement in the Hmong history."

Under the Lao PDR

Under Lao PDR establishment of 1975, Hmong who supported the Pathet Lao Movement since its creation in the mid 1940s were incorporated into the Lao PDR government but the extension of their leadership influence has been limited and has not transcended out to Hmong villages. Wekkin (1982:189) asserts that Fay Dang Lorbliayao and his half-brother Nhia Vue Lorbliayao, both Hmong, were initially appointed to positions with the government as a congratulatory gesture toward Hmong supporters but as time passed their positions never amounted to any meaningful leadership role. Fay Dang's position was primarily for ceremonial purposes; he had no administrative or policy-making power (Lee 1982:208).

It is not known why there have not been any prominent Hmong leaders to emerge under Lao PDR government. It appears that the government does not trust Hmong and its leaders, especially in politics and in the military, including those Hmong who had always sympathized with Lao PDR (Lee 2008:11). Under Lao PDR, no Hmong rose to the rank of general in the military and no Hmong members were allowed in the all powerful Politburo until 2006, when Lao PDR government promoted a Hmong woman, as noted above (on page 17), as a Politburo member in the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. This is encouraging; nonetheless, her leadership influence as a Hmong leader will be under scrutiny since Hmong leaders have historically lead under the shadow of past conflict. If the country is to move pass its historical past, current Lao leaders must be allowed to imagine a new future as they are creating a present life; however, "the challenges to be faced are not without risks, they also bring real opportunities" (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006:183).

In the United States of America

It has been more than three decades since the migration of Hmong to the United States as political refugees following the Vietnam conflict. Since the early 1990s, a few Hmong have been elected to public offices and could emerge as possible future Hmong leaders on a sustainable international level. In the Midwest, Choua Lee was the first Hmong-American to hold public office when she was elected to the St. Paul school board in 1991 while Neal Thao became a St. Paul school board member in 1995. Lormong Lor became a city councilman in Omaha, Nebraska in 1994 then the late Joe Bee Xiong was elected to the seat of city councilman in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1996. Consequently, Mee Moua and Cy Thao both were elected to the Minnesota State Senate and State House of Representatives in 2002. In 2003, Kazoua Kong-Thao won a seat to the St. Paul school board. In California, Dr. Tony Vang won his bid for Fresno school board in 2002. Blong Xiong became a city councilman in November 2006 while Noah Lor won his election bid to the Merced city council race in 2007 (Doherty 2007:17-19). The level of influence Hmong public office holders have within the Hmong local, state, and national community remains unstudied at this point in time.

Additionally, how future Hmong leaders in public offices (local and state) can contribute to the Hmong international community such as Lao PDR requires more exploration. Blong Xiong became the first Hmong elected official in the United States to be invited by the Lao PDR government and the U.S Embassy in Vientiane to publicly return to Lao PDR in November 2008 (KFSN–Action 30). The purpose of Blong Xiong's official visit to Lao PDR was to lecture on the processes of democracy in the United States to Lao government employees and college students. Blong Xiong hopes his trip

opens ways toward “reconciling differences between the U.S and Laos, and between the Hmong community in this country [the United States] and the Laotian government” (KSEE 24 News). I believe Councilman Blong Xiong’s action is a fresh new approach toward contributing to Laos development that can benefit both the Hmong U.S and Lao communities.

On the contrary, Hmong traditional leadership (clans and subclans) in the United States influenced Laos’ policies both positively and negatively, especially when it comes to the development of Hmong community. In addition, as Vang (2009:228) states, “advocacy by Hmong refugees in the United States has had some influence on U.S. actions toward refugees in Thailand and U.S. relations with Laos.” Resettling in the United States of America created a challenge for Hmong leadership: to retain their identity amidst a culture and climate that was so foreign in every conceivable way. Hmong found aid in the leadership of Vang Pao, whose life and the inspiration that he provided through courageous action, provided a sense of unity, hope, and sustained dreams for the Hmong diaspora.

Vang Pao sustained this leadership within the Hmong community in the United States because he consistently used diplomatic measures to oppose ongoing human rights violations by the communist government of Laos against the Hmong. In early 2003, Vang Pao began to publicly advocate for normalization of relations between the United States and Laos as a means to alleviate the human rights abuses by the Laotian government against the Hmong people (Hillmer 2010:290). On the other hand, the leadership that Vang Pao offered was challenged on June 4, 2007, when he, along with ten followers, was arrested as a result of warrants issued by federal courts in the United States on

charges of conspiracy to overthrow the communist regime of Laos and attempts to purchase illegal firearms. The arrest of Vang Pao and his followers left a deep scar in the hearts of many Hmong. The incident caused a shock wave of uncertainty for the Hmong leadership, on both the national and international stages. Part of the shock occurred because the arrest caused a deteriorated sense of identity among the Hmong as individuals and leaders have been thrown into a disarray of doubt about their own understanding of their past. Many Hmong have felt that they are leaderless; further, by doubting their past and their understanding of their leaders, many Hmong feel that their hopes for a better future in the United States have been shattered.

Nevertheless, the tide turned in favor of the Hmong and its leadership on September 18, 2009 when the U.S government dismissed all charges against Vang Pao (Walsh 2009). Now a free man, Vang Pao's influences on the Hmong community both in the United States and abroad is a key toward reconciliation between Lao PDR, United States, Vietnam, and the Hmong. On December 22, 2009, in a surprise turn of events, Vang Pao announced that he planned to return to Laos. He said that he believed the time had come for Hmong and Lao PDR government to be reconciled. Vang Pao announced he would attempt to resolve the issue concerning the 4,500 Hmong asylum seekers taken shelter at Ban Huay Nam Khao, Phetchabun, Thailand. Moreover, he said that once inside Laos, he would call out to Hmong to stop the resistance movement and plead to Lao PDR government to show amnesty toward Hmong still hiding in the remote areas and jungles of Lao PDR (Magagnini 2009). In addition, during a speech to tens of thousands of gathering Hmong on the opening day (December 26, 2009) of the Hmong International New Year celebration in Fresno, California, Vang Pao stressed the need for

unification in the Hmong international community. Equally important, Vang Pao vehemently voiced the themes of love, peace, respect, honor and recognition toward one's parents, teachers, doctors and leaders.

Interestingly, Lao PDR government did not welcome Vang Pao's plan to return. On December 28, 2009, approximately 5,000 Thai troops were ordered into the Ban Huay Nam Khao compound and forcibly evicted the 4,500 Hmong asylum seekers back into Lao PDR (Ganjanakhundee 2009; Magagnini 2010; Voice of America 2010). Presently, it is not known what Vang Pao has planned for the Hmong future, either domestic or international; however, his new action has opened a revolving door for Hmong, Lao PDR and U.S. governments to hold meaningful conversations in the direction of reconciliation. I believe the responsibility has shifted to future leaders to reinterpret the past through a shared understanding of the future in order to start writing a collaborative story of the present. Importantly, Pholsena and Banomyong (2006:183) raise a crucial question when they ask, "what will the attitude of the [Lao PDR] government to the Lao exiles [be]?"

More importantly, will Lao PDR government open dialogues with Vang Pao and Hmong Americans? I believe Lao PDR government and Vang Pao have the influence to move Laos toward "reconciliation and healing of a fraught past;" nonetheless, they also hold "a continuation of the separation between the two Laos [Hmong and Lao]" (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006:183). In short, it is only through discourse with the other that Hmong leaders and the Lao PDR government will commence conversations toward understanding each other's history, prejudices, and prejudgments, thus opening the reinterpretation of the past with an eye toward a better future.

Summary

The Hmong have played a major role in contributing to the establishment and success of Lao PDR government and have acted as a balancing force for maintaining peace in the country. As Lao PDR moves forth in development, the incorporation of Hmong leaders to address Hmong's issues needs to be understood and incorporated in policy making. An understanding of Hmong leadership through tradition, history and what this research hopes to uncover regarding a possible future may allow the Lao PDR government to better understand the delicacy of the effectiveness of Hmong leaders' ability to guide the Hmong and alleviate the misconception of Hmong and its leaders as exclusive supporters of a Hmong ideology of self-efficacy, self-determination, self-rule, and autonomy. Through an understand of the past and action that is inspired through imagination, Lao PDR government and Hmong leaders could open dialogue to narrate their past stories, allowing the sharing of present hurt and initiating the imagining of a better world through cooperative action. In Chapter Four, I discuss the research protocol for this research study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH PROCESS

When I change the rest of the world changes.
-Ellen Herda

Introduction

In the following section, I introduce the theoretical framework of this research study, describing critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry as it relates to language, narrativity, and my three proposed categories, which are mimesis, forgiveness, and action through imagination. The subsequent sections also provides discussion about my entrée to the research sites, identification of participants, invitation to conversations, research categories and questions, data collection, creation of a personal journal, my research timeframe, the process of data analysis, my pilot study and its implications, and the researcher's background.

Theoretical Framework

The critical hermeneutic interpretative participatory inquiry as described in Herda's (1999:96-115) research protocol is the basis of this proposed research study. Herda (1999:3) states, "critical hermeneutics, in a general sense, means passing judgment on that interpretation–speaking out on its legitimacy." Through conversations Hmong leaders in Lao PDR were invited to voice their stories, revealing their authentic selves in relation to the other—their clan, village and nation. Hmong leaders' stories in Lao PDR have been muted for too long. According to Kearney (2002:4) "when someone asks you who you are, you tell your story. That is, you recount you present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipations." Hmong leaders in Lao PDR hold much untold wisdom in their stories that is waiting to be discovered and shared with others.

According to Paul Ricoeur (1981:43), critical hermeneutics is the "theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts." In other words, hermeneutics involves the understanding of the other in relationship to the present texts. Equally important, Ricoeur (1981:43) says that an important key idea is the "realization of discourse as a text" and adds that a "text is any discourse fixed by writing" (Ricoeur 1981:145). In short, in participatory hermeneutic research the conversation between the researcher and participants can be interpreted as discourse fixed in writing.

Moreover, Ricoeur (1988:103) further defines hermeneutics as "an interpretation of the relation that historical narrative and fictional narrative taken together stand in, with regard to each of us belonging to actual history, whether as agent or a sufferer." In this way, both researcher and participants act as an agent or sufferer and mediate the interpretation of the told and untold narratives.

Language

Herda (1999:3) states that in critical hermeneutic research, the "researchers and research participants work collaboratively on the problem, including data gathering, and a determination of meaning and significance of the issues at hand." Thereupon, when researchers and participants hold and then transcribe conversations, a text is created and by interpreting the text with imagination they together "open the possibility of movement from text to action." In the creation of a text, language plays an important role in interpreting and understanding the "matter of the text" (Ricoeur 1981:62). Gadamer (2004:399) asserts that to "understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways." In other words, to understand a text

requires the interpretation and reinterpretation on the part of both researcher and participant through the use of language as a medium to disclose hidden and unhidden meanings because “language configures and refigures temporal experience” (Ricoeur 1984:54). Gadamer (2004:399) explains that “interpretation …is the act of understanding itself which is realized–not just for the one for whom one is interpreting but also for the interpreter himself.” The researcher must understand the participant and his or her relationship with the other and this may be done through interpreting language as an event. In other words, “to think of language as a tool or structure limits creativity and binds us to designated acts outside of our being and apart from our history” (Herda 1999:10). When language becomes an event, both researcher and participants can be active participants moving toward an infinite future.

Heidegger (1971:61) states, “language is the house of being.” Language as a house of being holds our values, identity, history, tradition and cultures. Heidegger (2001:144) further explains, “it is language that tells us about the nature of a thing.” Herda (1999:63) states, “our language constitutes our world, allowing us to live in a finite but open and changing horizon.” Language also allows the action of researchers and participants to be the agent of the text; therefore, the “tie of action to its agent adds a new and properly practical dimension to the self-designation of a speaker and to the designation of his or her interlocutor as other than self” (Ricoeur 1992:101). Furthermore, conversation between participants and researcher expose the “narrative voice” interchangeably and this “narrative voice” offers a text to be read (Ricoeur 1988:161).

Narrativity

Each human being has his or her own story imbedded in temporal time; however, through narrative a person shares his or her story with others revealing the person's history, judgment and prejudices. Kearney (2002:129) states "every human existence is a life in search of a narrative" and "our existence is already to some extent pre-plotted before we ever consciously seek out a narrative in which to reinscribe our life as life-history" (Kearney 2002:129). In this way as human beings, our very existence is a mortal life with a beginning and an ending and it is in narrative that we strive to live, share and write our life etched in history "aiming toward being as power-to-be" (Ricoeur 1981:94). For this research investigation, my participants narrated their leadership stories, thus reliving and revealing their past history. This opened that history for interpretation, thus allowing the creation of a present history that requires action in order to write a new possible future history. By interpreting these narratives the researcher becomes a part of the participants' narrativity. In other words, engaging in conversation with my participants allowed me as a researcher to play a role and become part of my participants' past, present and future history.

Furthermore, by interpreting Hmong leaders' leadership narratives and their implication on community development in Lao PDR, I hope to "reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the characters, giving rise to a new predicament which calls for thought or action or both" (Ricoeur 1981:277). In the case of Hmong leaders' narratives in Lao PDR, I am not looking for ways Hmong leaders can take action opposing the government. On the contrary, Hmong leaders' narratives hold them as agents of their action and they have the "capacity to make one of the things he or she knows how to do

[knows he or she is able to do] coincide with an initial system-state" (Ricoeur 1992:110). In other words, Hmong leaders' understanding of their own history, tradition, culture, and language holds these leaders as agents of their actions such as taking part in the development of policies and decision making processes. Hmong leaders could assist the Lao PDR government to reach its "system's condition of closure" and if possible "setting a system in motion" (Ricoeur 1992:110). Additionally, my conversations with Hmong leaders opened the possibility of Hmong leaders' understanding the need to take action in conjunction with the government's developmental goals. More importantly, interpreting the narrative texts of Hmong leaders opens the possibility of a new imaginable future world inhabited by both a Hmong and a Lao nation. As Ricoeur (1981:143) states,

> what I appropriate is a proposed world. This world is not behind the text as a hidden intention would be, but in front of it, as that which the world unfolds, discovers, and reveals. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed.

Through narrativity, I discovered the hidden world of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR, thus opening my understanding of the Hmong leadership actions that anticipated a new proposed world. This proposed world is achievable on the part of both researcher and participants for the Lao nation.

Summary

I base the design of this research study on participatory inquiry grounded in critical hermeneutic theory. I use language and narrativity as the initiating foundational themes to explore and understand Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. My research categories further support this exploration. In the following section, I present my selected categories for this research inquiry.

Research Categories

Introduction

Drawing upon the work of Paul Ricoeur's theories I used the categories of mimesis, forgiveness, and action through imagination as the parameters for my research conversations.

Mimesis

According to Paul Ricoeur, the idea of time from the interpretive approach is always in the present. The time of present is interpreted as present past, present present and present future. Paul Ricoeur (1984) refers to the threefold present of time as $mimesis_{1,2,3.}$ Therefore, I use Ricoeur's theory of present past, present present and present future to understand the narratives of the Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. For Ricoeur (1984:154), $mimesis_1$ is a "preunderstanding of the world of action" For Hmong leaders, it is through understanding past stories and imagining a possible future while looking at the present situation that Hmong and Lao leaders may be able to move forward together. In the pre-figured world, Herda (1999:76) states "$mimesis_1$ is the world of everyday action already characterized by a meaningful network that makes narrative possible." For the Hmong leaders, a world already prefigured ($mimesis_1$), would be their past leadership narratives experience. However, they gradually transitioned to the role of Hmong clan leaders through "[their] character, sense of power, and the capacity to act" (Shahideh 2004:46).

The pre-figured world was difficult for most Hmong leaders as they lived in a war torn country; thus, opening a refigured world of hope, possibility and dreams would be unimaginable. Hence, understanding Hmong leaders' stories may be inferred as an

understanding of language because "our language constitutes our world, allowing us to live a finite but open and changing horizon" (Herda 1999:63). Through narration of leadership stories, the conversation partners will retell their historical past, come to a new understanding, and, one hopes, imagine a better future.

Ricoeur (1984:xi) states $mimesis_3$ is "a new configuration by means of [a] poetic refiguring of the pre-understood order of action." This new configuration allows the imagining of endless possibilities. Moreover, Herda (1999:77) asserts $mimesis_3$, "represents an act of reading in the relationship between time and narrative" and our "narrative at the stage of $mimesis_3$ has its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action and suffering." In order for Hmong leaders in Lao PDR to imagine a new future, they need to open and share their narratives among each other and with Lao PDR government and others in their communities and country. Together, they must "critique our taken-for-granted world"(Herda 1999:77). Herda (1999:77) further states the researcher has a responsibility to lead the act of mediation between the present past and present future and come to new understandings.

Herda (1999:76) posits that $mimesis_2$ "imitates the configured life…" In other words, "the temporal dimension of the configured life $mimesis_2$ is a mediating function." This mediation act is a medium between the pre-figured world and the re-figured world and comes a new configured world. Referring to Ricoeur, Herda (1999:77) explains, "$mimesis_2$ mediates between the world we already have come to – already characterized by certain actions and cultural artifacts – and the world we can imagine ourselves inhabiting." Thereupon, $mimesis_2$ "opens the kingdom of the as if" (Ricoeur 1984:64). The kingdom of the "as if" has to be lived in the present.

In summary, Paul Ricoeur's theory of three-fold present time –mimesis$_{123}$, is best reflected by Kermode (2000:190): "for to make sense of our lives from where we are, as it were, stranded in the middle, we need fictions of beginnings and fictions of ends, fictions which unite beginning and end and endow the interval between them with meaning." It is my hope that the conversations with Hmong leaders will illuminate their understanding and the meaning of their roles that pertain to temporal times of past and future lived out in the present.

Forgiveness

Paul Ricoeur's concept of forgiveness is important because Hmong leaders need to forgive the historical pain caused by events such as the Vietnam American War, which is a "founding event" for the Hmong and Lao nation (Ricoeur 1996:7). According to Ricoeur, "the question forgiveness raises does not concern the forgiving of others, but rather the asking for forgiveness" (in Anthohi 2005:9). In the case of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR, it may or may not be important if they forgive the Lao government. However, Hmong leaders can come to the stance of forgiveness and ask Lao PDR government for forgiveness.

My conversations with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR shed light on the levels of forgiveness, "on a relation of excess, of over-abundance"(in Anthohi 2005:11) and how much forgiveness Hmong leaders have so they can show forgiveness through acts of "the order of charity" (Ricoeur 1996:10). Ricoeur further states, "forgiveness – if it has a sense, and if it exists – constitutes the horizon common to memory, history, and forgetting. Always in retreat, this horizon slips away from any grasp. It makes forgiving difficult: not easy but not impossible" (Ricoeur 2004:457). Conversing with Hmong

leaders in Lao PDR for the purpose of understanding their horizon toward forgiveness was not an easy task; however, it was not an impossible task. In other words, my conversations with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR as discussed below revealed hidden truth about Hmong leaders' openness toward forgiving the Lao government and the other.

Action Through Imagination

Understanding the interpretive idea of time as present and the role of forgiveness as part of our social responsibilities could open dialogue between Hmong leaders, Lao PDR government and others. This may or may not happen, but without any action, or an attempt to do something, nothing will take place. There is a sense of confirmation of such an effort in light of Paul Ricoeur's concept of action that encourages participants and researchers to take active steps toward improving the current situation by imagining potentialities and holding the agent, that is, ourselves, to such action (Ricoeur 2004:466).

Ricoeur further states, "an action, is like a text, is an open work, addressed to an indefinite series of 'readers'" (Ricoeur 2007:138). Through sharing past leadership stories and personally forgiving individuals within the Lao PDR government, a text is created in front of self and the others, thus the text takes place as action, which in turn may enable Hmong leaders to understand the need to learn from the past with an imaginable new world, starting at the present.

Moreover, Ricoeur says "acting is always doing something so that something else happens in the world. There is no action without the relation between knowing how to do something [and being able to do something] and that which the latter brings about" (Ricoeur 2007:137); and, also "action unfolds in a space of public visibility where it manifests its network, its web of relations and interactions" (Ricoeur 2004:486). In other

words, in order for community development to manifest in Lao PDR, Hmong leaders can take part in initiating action toward implementing policies affecting the Hmong community and more importantly, benefiting the Lao nation.

Entrée to the Research Sites

Lao People's Democratic Republic and the United States were the research sites. My research conversations with Hmong village leaders—*nai bans,* subclan leaders, and educators— occurred in Lao PDR between May 2009 and June 2009. Upon returning to the United States, I had many additional informal conversations with Hmong subclan leaders.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

In the middle of May 2009, I departed to Lao PDR to hold conversations with Hmong village leaders, subclan leaders, and educators. The provinces that I visited are Luang Prabang, Sayabouly, and Vientiane. In Luang Prabang, I had conversations with a Hmong college agriculture professor, a former President of Neo Lao Ha Xat in the Luang Prabang province, three village leaders (nai ban), a Hmong subclan leader and two Hmong with college degrees. In Sayabouly, I had conversations with two Hmong subclan leaders and two Hmong educators. While in Vientiane, I had a conversation with one Hmong village leader (nai ban) and I also had several informal conversations.

United States of America

The conversations in the United States brought forth new ideas of Hmong leadership and development in Lao PDR. Furthermore, many of the conversations both in the United States and Lao PDR revealed a need for more understanding of the other

between Hmong leaders and its leadership. My research participants are listed in Appendix B.

Selected Conversation Participants

This study abides by the Human Subjects regulations of the University of San Francisco (Appendix G). During a visit to Lao PDR in May 2008, I was introduced to Juu Moua, who is a Hmong student from Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. He is familiar with and knows many of the Hmong village leaders in the country. Juu is an undergraduate student and studying at Loei University, Thailand. Juu and I communicated through a series of e-mails and phone conversations about my research project. With Juu's assistance and with the aide of my personal and professional electronic contacts, I had pre-arranged several formal conversations with Hmong leaders prior to my departure to Lao PDR. My 13 formal conversation partners in Lao PDR resided in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Sayabouly, and Vientiane. These provinces are home to a dense concentration of Hmong residents and their exposure to life both on the mountain tops and in the lowlands brought out a mix of shared experiences. Since most of the participants do not have easy access to mail, phone or internet, it was not feasible to pre-schedule the conversations ahead of my departure to the country; nevertheless, whenever possible each formal conversation participant was introduced to my research topic sequentially through the following corresponding letters: a letter of invitation and research questions, letter of confirmation, consent to be a research participant and thank you and follow-up (Appendices C, D, E & F). The long term plan for this research extends beyond the dissertation and will hopefully include more leaders in Lao PDR (including the Hmong, Laotian and other ethnic groups) at different socioeconomic levels.

Formal Conversation Partners

In the following paragraphs, I briefly introduce my 13 formal conversation partners.

Wa Dang Thao

Wa Dang Thao is in his mid-sixties but he looks very sturdy and speaks firmly. He is an agriculture professor at a private college in Luang Prabang. Mr. Thao has been teaching in the field for more than 35 years and plans to retire in a few years. Mr. Thao has spent most of his adult life as a professional educator.

Chai Sher Xiong

Chai Sher Xiong is a village leader (nai ban) in a village called Khuav Vas. He has been the Nai Ban for the past several years. Mr. Xiong relocated to the city when he was in his early twenties. Currently, he is in his mid forties. He speaks softly but with sincerity. Mr. Xiong has many children; therefore, he is hopeful for a better life for his children and future generations.

Choua Mo Yang

Choua Mo Yang is a village leader (nai ban). He is in his early forties and has been in the position the last five years. Mr. Yang relocated to the city in his late teens. He witnessed many changes in the community during the last twenty years between the Hmong and other ethnic groups. Mr. Yang wishes to see Hmong parents continue to support their children to pursue higher education.

Ka Pao Thao

Ka Pao Thao is the former President of Neo Lao Ha Xat (National Lao Front for Reconstruction) in Luang Prabang province. He retired from the position in March 2009

and returned to a farming life. Mr. Thao has leadership experience pre and post war eras. He is in his late-sixties but he looks young for his age. It is worth noting that Mr. Thao is the highest ranked Hmong leader among all my participants.

Chia Tou Her

Chia Tou Her is a leader of the Her Sub-clan in a village called Qao Va. He moved to this village in his late teens. Besides serving as an elder, Mr. Her also knows the art of Hmong religious and traditional practices. Moreover, he serves as a mediator within his sub-clan resolving disputes. He has a son who is graduating from high school and will be attending college.

Shoua Lue Her

Shoua Lue Her is a village leader (nai ban) in a village called Qao Va. He also is the representative of a traditional Hmong organization that supports Hmong families in crisis. Mr. Her has been a village leader since 1996. He is approximately 45 years old. He relocated to his village in the mid 90s.

Pa Choua Xiong

Pa Choua Xiong holds a graduate degree in urban planning. He completed his graduate study abroad but returned to Sayabouly province and established a private college. The private college is in the process of obtaining permission to teach students at the graduate level. Mr. Xiong is only in his mid thirties but he has contributed much work in the education field.

Tou Moua

Tou Moua is the Deputy Chief of Minister of Education in Sayabouly province. He has been working in the education sector for more than 20 years. He is in his mid fifties.

Since early childhood, Mr. Moua had always been away from his parents to receive an education. He married a Laotian woman; nonetheless, he expresses the need to preserve Hmong culture, tradition and language. Mr. Moua recently completed his master degree in Vietnam and hopes for the possibility of one day completing a doctoral degree.

Nhia Chong Thao

Nhia Chong Thao is the leader of the Thao subclan in Sayabouly province. He is in his late sixties but continues working in the fields as a farmer. Mr. Thao has limited education; however, he is very knowledgeable. He expressed deep thoughts about the future of the Hmong in Lao PDR. He hopes future generations will rise to the challenge and move forth through change in community development benefiting the Lao nation. Mr. Thao has a house in the city while maintaining a farming life style in the mountains. He commutes regularly from and to both places.

Cheng Xue Thao

Cheng Xue Thao is an elder of the Thao subclan in Sayabouly province. He is in his early sixties. Mr. Thao has no formal education due to the war; nevertheless, he strongly encourages all his children to attend school because he knows that the old ways of life (farming) are not applicable in the future. He wants his children to be self-supporting and hard working citizens.

Dang Yang and Lue Yang

Dang Yang and Lue Yang are two graduate students in Engineering and Construction. Currently, they work for the Luang Prabang city development, which targets reconstruction in Luang Prabang. I believe Dang and Lue are future Hmong leaders as they exhibited good leadership attributes. They had visions of uniting the Hmong

community with other ethnic communities in order to benefit the Lao nation. In other words, they believe that the Hmong community will be more successful if it works in cooperation with other communities.

Wa Lor Xiong

Wa Lor Xiong is a village leader (nai ban) in Nong Hai village. He has been in the position for the last two years. He is in his late forties. Mr. Xiong moved to his current village in the mid 90s. The government has been promoting and implementing developmental changes in the community, which had presented many challenges among its citizens; however, it is moving forward.

Informal Conversations

I had many informal conversations throughout this research inquiry with participants in the United States and Lao PDR. The following participants' informal conversations produced data for interpretation and reflection to be included in this research study.

My informal conversations partners in the United States are Va Seng Xiong, Cha Thao Vang, and Wa Chue Xiong. They openly shared their leadership narratives. These informal conversations significantly contributed to my horizon of understanding Hmong leadership. While in Lao PDR I met many people along the way and was fortunate that several informal conversations resulted in data for this text. My first informal conversation was with Jay Thao, who acted as my guide during most of the duration of my stay in Lao PDR. He felt comfortable enough to openly share his life stories, including the hardship he had growing up with poor parents and his struggle in school during his teenage years. No matter the circumstances, he managed to learn how to read,

write and speak the Lao language. Eventually, he even learned English and has been working as a tour guide. Despite the past hardships, he envisions a better future and wants to give back so much to a Hmong community that once was and is at times still without hope because he dreams of a better community for future generations. He has not forgotten his Hmong roots.

Coincidentally and unexpectedly, I ran into my great uncle, Chou Cheng Her, whom I had not seen for more than 30 years. He is a younger brother of my great grandfather Yong Ko Her, who is my mother's grandfather. Chou Cheng Her is in his late nineties, however, he is very stern, sharp and speaks firmly. He shared his life stories of the old days and reminisced about his broken heart since the passing of his wife a few years ago. However many difficulties he sees and anticipates, when thinking of the future he wants, talks, and hopes of a better life for his children and grandchildren. His words of wisdom and proverbs to the future generations are "know the language and become more fortunate." In other words, becoming more educated will lead to prosperity. Though we met for a short time, I left full of amazement for his breadth of knowledge; I will never forget his words of wisdom.

Also in Luang Prabang, I toured an orphanage school where I witnessed many orphans. I had an opportunity to briefly converse with two Hmong orphans students who were about 14 or 15 years old. They want to go to college after high school; however, there are no colleges specifically for orphans, therefore they have few options. If someone could assist them, they want to reach for the highest achievement their hands can touch. Although the future seems very dark they still smile and study very hard day by day.

I also met two teenage girls in a far off mountain corn field in Sayabouly. I observed them working diligently, despite the hot sun, clearing wild grass on their parents' corn field. Their work reminded me of my childhood years and the memory drew me into conversation with them. I asked permission to take a picture of them and they freely obliged, standing proudly and happily to face me. I briefly talked to them about school, life and what they want for the future. Although it seemed like I was asking many questions with few responses in return, the words they did share meant much and gave me much hope. They told me about a new elementary school that is being build and said that they were looking forward to starting school in a few months. If given a choice, they would rather go to school than work on the farm. As they shyly conversed with me, I saw hope in their eyes.

In Vientiane, I met an uncle named Cher Pao Her. He talked of a Hmong diaspora and the fact that the Hmong in the United States are considered the more fortunate and educated. He speaks of a need for Hmong in the United States to give back to the community in Lao PDR who are in desperate need of development, specifically in leadership, social, economic, and educational arenas. Additionally, I spoke with Mr. Thao, a traditional Hmong elder, who expressed the future of Hmong students in higher education due to lack of funds.

I spoke with many relatives in Nong Hai (young and old); so many that I can not remember all of their names. When speaking of development, discussion always revolved about the need for kids to go to school and the educational support needed to support that goal. These words will always be a part of my heart as I partake this journey in researching Hmong leadership in Lao PDR in hope of developing a better community

for all of us and our future generations. Many of these informal conversations produced data for my research study.

Hmong Language Translation

All of my research conversation partners are of Hmong nationality; therefore, the conversations were held in the Hmong language. I can speak, read and write fluently in Hmong. I transcribed the recorded conversations in Hmong then translated them into English. It was not an easy task but "a task, then, not in the sense of a restricting obligation, but in the sense of the thing to be done so that human action can simply continue" (Ricoeur 2006:19). In this way, I am not limiting myself from the responsibility because the task of self-translation reveals a continuation of the researcher's action and reliving the conversations. Subsequently, I had a second Hmong reader proofread both texts (Hmong and English) for grammatical and spelling errors and consistency of Hmong English words usage.

Nonetheless, as Riceour (1998:332) states, "there is no innocent translation" for "to translate is already to interpret." In other words, translation itself is interpreting. Throughout the translation process, I attempted to refrain from any bias or prejudgment. Still, I used my own interpretation of the meaning of certain Hmong words and phrases when translating the transcriptions of Hmong text into English text; this may or may not have changed the participants' original meanings.

As a result, I hold myself accountable to any errors or misinterpretation in the final English text for data presentation and analysis because, according to Ricoeur (2006:25) in language, "it is always possible to say the same thing in another way" and "we can say something other than what is the case" (Ricoeur 2006:28); therefore, I

learned to "give up the ideal of the perfect translation" (Ricoeur 2006:8). In other words, the transcribed Hmong text may be presented differently in English by other readers because any text when present in-front of the reader may be translated differently and "it is because men speak different languages that there is translation" (Ricoeur 2006:11). In this case, I am fluent in both Hmong and English (speaking, reading and writing); however, I may have interpreted Hmong phrases, words and meanings differently than the participant's intent in part due to discrepancy in my English translation.

Research Categories and Questions

The primarily research categories for this research study are mimesis, forgiveness, and action through imagination. I developed several questions for each category to guide my conversations with Hmong village leaders. These questions were not designed to solicit specific answers from each participant. At the same time, the purpose was that of a guide to promote discussions and ideas.

Mimesis

- Tell me about your experience and knowledge as a Hmong leader in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).
- Tell me about the past Hmong leaders and how they influence today's Hmong leaders.
- How does your past help you think about the future for the Hmong people and the country?
- What good leadership attributes do you want to pass on to your sons, daughters, and the next generation of Hmong leaders?

Forgiveness

- Do memories of the past play a role in forgiveness? Why or why not?
- Do you think the Hmong people have forgiven the Lao PDR government? How do you talk to the Hmong people about forgiveness?
- Has the Lao PDR government asked the Hmong leaders and their people to forgive them?
- What will it take for Hmong and Lao leaders to forgive each other?
- Do you think it would be possible for Hmong and Lao leaders to learn to forgive each other?

Action through imagination

- What kind of future would enable Hmong Lao to have a better life?
- What can be done to encourage Hmong leaders and Laotian leaders to imagine a better future where both groups can co-exist?
- What have Hmong leaders learned about leadership in Lao PDR and its influence on the making of decision to meet the goals of the country?
- What can Hmong leaders contribute to guiding the direction of the country?

Data Collection: Conversations

Data for this research are tape-recorded conversations with participants that were then transcribed by the researcher, creating a text for interpretation. The initial transcription was in Hmong, then translated into English. This was a two-fold process combining the two texts (Hmong and English) as one for analysis and reinterpretation adds flavors to the transcriptions because "transcription is a text – the fixation of our conversation in writing" (Herda 1999:97). The two texts will not belong to the participants or researcher but will have its own meaning or "matter of the text" (Ricoeur 1981:62), allowing the unfolding of possible interpretations of a new possible world "in front of the text" (Ricoeur 1981:141).

Due to geographical and communication limitations, it was not feasible to do follow up conversations. Nonetheless, I made attempts to allow the participants to reflect and, if they so desired, to change, correct or modify the original transcription. Whenever possible, a final transcription was approved by the participants.

Data Collection: Personal Journal

In additional to the tape recorded conversation data, I kept a personal journal documenting my personal reflections and experiences of the formal and informal conversations as well as more general reflections I made as a participatory interpretive researcher. My personal journal serves as "discourse fixed in writing" (Herda 1999:98)

and gave me an opportunity to clarify, recount information, or create further opportunities to arise "whereby the conversants can think about ways to address the problem" (Herda 1999:98).

When I embarked on this journey toward pursuing a doctoral study, I began keeping a personal journal, writing down my thoughts and feelings as I commuted back and forth from home to school. Reflecting on my personal journal, I noticed that I have come a long way and am amazed to observe how much I have changed over the last couple of years in terms of how I see myself in comparison to my daily environment and the world in front of me.

The personal journal captured my struggles, success and failure as a student researcher, raised questions, and provided answers about my research interests. This journal has provided a means for reflection and will continue to do; moreover, it has served as a "life-source of the data collection process for in it goes the hopes, fears, questions, ideas, humor, observations, and comments of the researcher" (Herda 1999:98). In addition, I have had many informal conversations with Hmong clan leaders in the United States and have documented their ideas and suggestions in my journal, revealing the power of sharing stories, leading to an understanding of Hmong leaders' praxis, and thus have maintained the idea of "opening up of possible new actions in the real worlds of our lives and organizations" (Herda 1999:77).

Research Timeframe

Data for this study was collected between May 2009 and June 2009. I travelled to Lao PDR to hold conversations with Hmong village leaders, subclan leaders and educators. Upon returning to the United States, I also had many informal conversations

with Hmong subclan leaders. These informal conversations shed light on a very sensitive issue of Hmong/Lao leadership and how they can influence and address the dilemma of Hmong resistance in Lao PDR. Furthermore, I returned to Lao PDR for a second time from November 9, 2009 through December 4, 2009 to follow up on my previous conversations and hold informal conversations with Hmong leaders who hold higher positions in the Lao PDR government, especially those who live in Vientiane.

Data Analysis

The data analysis adheres to the guidelines set forth in Herda (1999:86-138) for participatory research grounded in critical hermeneutic theory. Analysis is "a creative and imaginative act;" thereupon, in data analysis "the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the text. When we expose ourselves to a text, we come away from it different than we were before" (Herda 1999:98). In this research study, I have been exposed to my participants' world; therefore, through data analysis I have an imaginable proposed new world inhabited by all. Traveling to Lao PDR and holding conversations with Hmong leaders opened my understanding of their leadership attributes, allowed my interpretation of the past and present community development issues, and confirmed the need for imagined future leadership resolution through action.

I adhered to the following steps as delineated by Herda (1999:98-99) for my data analysis.

- I recorded and transcribed my Hmong conversations then I translated the Hmong transcriptions into English. It was an arduous task but in doing so, I lived and relived through the conversation experience again from a different perspective (Herda 1999:98). Importantly, both texts when presented in front of me (the

researcher) created two world views. My interpretation and understanding of the texts hope to unite both worlds together.

- I pulled out significant statements, themes, quote and create relevant categories.
- I substantiated the themes with quotes from the conversation transcripts, observational data or from my research journal.
- I examined the themes to determine what they mean in light of the theoretical framework of critical hermeneutics.
- I provided continued discussion and conversation with participants using the developing text when appropriate.
- I set a context for the written discussion.
- I developed the text within each category in light of the theory and the problem at hand. In participatory research inquiry, themes may fit into more than one of the categories. When this occurred, I indicated this in the discussion and either brought forth more than one dimension to the theme or grouped themes.
- I included the discussion of the research problem at a theoretical level and ferreted out implications from the written discussion to provide insight and new direction for the issue or problem under investigation.
- When I noticed areas that need additional exploration, I indicated those in my discussion.
- I provided examples of changing experiences as a researcher and for my participants through what Gadamer (2004:305) calls fusion of horizons.
- Finally, I described how the data has been appropriated by relating the study to what I have learned and what role the study can play in my life.

The levels of personal leadership experience and knowledge about leadership and its implication on community development vary from one participant to another participant; therefore, when I conversed with participants, some provided more information about the research questions than others. Therefore, when I interpreted the final text for data analysis, some of the participants' voices are more visible than others.

Pilot Study

Introduction

On the evening of August 21, 2008, I met with Nkia Chue Her at his home to conduct the pilot study conversation. Using participatory inquiry in the critical hermeneutic tradition, I conducted this pilot study to evaluate and identify appropriate categories and questions with my conversation partner. Transcription of the pilot study conversation with Nkia Chue Her is presented in Appendix H. What follows below is a synopsis of my pilot study.

Conversation Partner

Nkia Chue Her is a 60 years old Hmong subclan leader. He has been living in the United States for approximately 27 years. In the past, he worked as a special investigator interrogator of prisoners of war at Region Two in Laos during the Vietnam War. He also works as a Tasseng, which is the equivalent to a post in a city council in the United States, and in that role he experienced the shifting of Hmong leadership across three countries: Laos, Thailand, and United States. My purpose for conversing with Nkia Chue Her was to explore how he became a Hmong clan leader and reveal data about Hmong leadership practices of the past, present and future. My presentation and analysis of this conversation follows as well as what I learned from doing the pilot study.

Synthesis of the Data

My initial conversation with Mr. Her was based on Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis$_{1,2,3}$ of time: present past, present present, and present future. This led to the identification of themes related to past Hmong traditional leadership styles, the Vietnam War, which was a founding event of the Hmong; love; forgiveness; and an imagined better future leadership model for and by Hmong youth.

As Mr. Her narrated his story of becoming a Hmong clan leader, he shared his memories of Hmong leadership in relation to the present past, present present and present future, including his recollection about the unfolding of the Hmong's story from the war-torn mountains of Laos, to Thailand, and his eventual migration to the United States after the conclusion of the Vietnam War. In doing so, Mr. Her "captured time," for in any story "our past and future belong to us, and the story we have to write (or read) only takes on meaning in the here and now of our lives" (Herda 1999:76). In the present past story, Mr. Her explained that he grew up on a small village in Luang Prabang, Laos during the period of French colonialism and before theUnited States' involvement in Southeast Asia. Mr. Her was born in Palamu, Luang Prabang province, Laos during the late 1940s when the French still had a lot of influence in Southeast Asia.

Mr. Her expressed a keen interest in leadership and exhibited great talent for it at a very young age. He recounts that

> in my life, since childhood at the time I was in school. I was always the leader in the class. I always liked to lead others. During those years in school, the students needed to line up so I was responsible to make sure they are in a straight line. In the classroom, I was also the leader in the class; therefore, ever since I was in school, I have always been the one who led others.

While in school, Mr. Her studied very hard because he knew that having a good education would eventually change his journey in life. At the time he did not know it but

he had strong internal character; therefore, as he aged his narrative identity as a leader became embedded in his character. Ricoeur explains that "narrative emplots the identity of character" (Ricoeur 1992:147).

Looking through the lenses of an existing world through temporal time, the Hmong have no known leadership model, making the connection between emerging young Hmong clan leaders and the older Hmong clan leaders difficult. The lack of interconnectedness in Hmong leadership identity among the different generations is still being felt in the Hmong community as the traditional Hmong leadership paradigm has not taken full form, creating many challenges in the emergence of a new way of looking at Hmong leadership. Mr. Her understands his own past leadership story and can also imagine a new future. As he explains,

> Hmong leadership practices of the past can't be used as a current leadership practices as time has changed. During the time of Chinese and French rule, they oppressed the people; therefore, the leadership as practiced by the Hmong isn't applicable to today's leadership practices. Hmong leaders at the time were not elected by the people. The selected leaders were mainly military officers. Therefore civilians who were capable leaders were not chosen. Those who had great minds and ideas were not in position to use them.

I infer from Mr. Her's reflections that the Hmong leadership paradigm needs a lot of effort to change out the tradition of the preconfigured world for a configured world. From the late 1900s to the mid–1950s, most of the Hmong leaders were associated or had association with the French; therefore, the Hmong leaders practiced strict leadership order. For this loyalty, the French government appointed them to military or civilian posts even if they had a limited education.

Another shift in Hmong leadership practices occurred in the period between 1960 and 1975, where most of the Hmong leaders were military officers or civilian officials

appointed by General Vang Pao and supported by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Since then, the traditional Hmong leadership paradigm has rested on the idea that only former Hmong military officers or Hmong civilian leaders during the period of the French and Vietnam War Era are capable of leading and they should continue to lead the Hmong people without much change. This stagnate of self identity of the present past ($mimesis_1$) Hmong leadership paradigm has caused a lot of resistance to change among most of the former Hmong military officers and civilian officials in leadership; therefore, seeing the pass ($mimesis_{2)}$ and imagining a possible better future ($mimesis_3$) has led to the current Hmong leadership struggle as those former military and civilians leaders continue to hold onto the past prefigured world. This correlation is best expressed in Shahideh (2004:26) when she states "people with fixed ideas are not open to configuration and new interpretations, and they generally contribute to the escalation of a crisis." Thus, it is important for the Hmong leaders to let go of their historical pain, caused by the actions that occurred after the Vietnam conflict, and forgive those involved, thus releasing their anguish and opening their imagination to a future that requires action at the configured world.

Mr. Her eloquently reflects on the concept of love and forgiveness as one of the needed attributes of a future Hmong leader.

> A Hmong leader is someone who has love and is forgiven. Hmong always talk about forgiveness. Hmong stress the importance of having a caring heart and being able to let go of disputes. Hmong has a proverb, "it doesn't matter if you're the winner or not," winning has no place in life; therefore don't start a dispute. Instead forgive and show love, Hmong always has a lot of love.

The need for Hmong leaders to show love and forgiveness toward the other is of paramount importance, especially when tracing the Hmong historical context to Laos and

the Vietnam War. This was a founding event for the Hmong people that connected them to a dark time in the history of Laos. It has been etched in the people's memory and in the stories retold by those involved. Retelling this part of the Hmong story during and after the Vietnam War brings back memories of an unforgotten and dead event; thus, is very painful. It was difficult for Mr. Her to tell this part of his story as it affected and changed his personal and narrative identity. As Kearney (2002) states, "history-telling seeks to address the silences of history by giving a voice to the voiceless" (Kearney 2002:136). In the case of Hmong in Lao PDR, their voices have been muted for too long; therefore, by giving the Hmong voice, new stories will emerge revealing untold narratives.

Analysis of Text

The conversation with Mr. Her unfolded the importance of narrating the Hmong historical past, present, and future leadership. The Vietnam War and its aftermath both contribute to the Hmong community's inability to forgive. Nevertheless, overcoming those barriers is important in order for the Hmong to take action through imagining a better future.

Hmong Past Leadership

Hmong have very unique past historical leadership practices, which are connected to Chinese, French and American rules. The pre-figured world of Hmong leadership influenced by strict rules and military disciplines needs to be better understood by those involved in imagining a better future for the Hmong in Laos. Mr. Her states, "our past Hmong leaders were very mean and strict." This may be due to a long history of Chinese oppression, followed by discrimination experienced at the hands of the French and the Lao. Being marginalized by those in power led Hmong leaders to serve primarily as mediators, exchanging messages from the dominant rulers to the Hmong community.

Furthermore, “Hmong leaders in the past had a lack of education” and therefore they may have lacked the ability to imagine a new world, thus limiting the creation of a present goal. While past Hmong leaders serving under the dominant rule with limited education may not had envisioned future Hmong generations assuming important leadership roles, their contribution to current Hmong leadership deserved some credit. For Mr. Her, learning to read and write the Lao language allowed him to understand the importance of Hmong leadership. Moreover, education also changed his perception of leadership, opening opportunities for him to demonstrate his leadership role in any setting. This shifted his leadership horizon toward a new vision as Mr. Her states, “for a Hmong leader…people will not come and serve him but he has to serve the people when they come to visit or settle dispute. That’s why it is important for Hmong leaders to be patienced and honest.” In other words, Hmong leaders in the past knew they had to serve the people in order to maintain a cohesive Hmong community. In times of conflict, past Hmong leaders have shown great wisdom in many leadership settings.

Hmong Leaders Horizon of Forgiveness

Mr. Her eloquently reflects on the concept of love and forgiveness as one of the needed attributes of a future Hmong leader.

> A Hmong leader is someone who has love and is forgiven. Hmong always talk about forgiveness. Hmong stress the importance of having a caring heart and being able to let go of disputes. Hmong has a proverb, “it doesn’t matter if you’re the winner or not,” winning has no place in life; therefore don’t start a dispute. Instead forgive and show love, Hmong always has a lot of love.

The need for Hmong leaders to show love and forgiveness toward the other is of paramount importance, especially when tracing the Hmong historical context to Laos and the Vietnam War. This was a founding event for the Hmong people that connected them

to a dark time in the history of Laos. It has been etched in the people's memory and in the stories retold by those involved. Retelling this part of the Hmong story during and after the Vietnam War brings back memories of an unforgotten and dead event; thus, it is very painful. Nonetheless according to Mr. Her, "future leaders (Hmong) must have a lot of love. To be able to show love towards others, to love other and give love to the world, and always have forgiveness." In other words, Mr. Her understood his horizon toward forgiveness and the need for Hmong leaders to show acts of forgiveness toward the other. It was difficult for Mr. Her to tell the part of his story that involved the Vietnam conflict, as it affected and changed his personal and narrative identity. However, recounting the past allowed Mr. Her to let go of the hurt and pain and move on to the future.

Action Through Imagination for a Better Laos

Through sharing stories of the past, Hmong leaders will understand who they are as leaders, thus opening new possible worlds with present action. According to Mr. Her, Hmong leaders, "must be a servant…serve others openly and tirelessly with no concern about any physical or financial burden. It is someone who is willing to take charge and does not wait for anybody else to lead." In this way, Hmong leaders must take their leadership positions not as a privilege but a moral and ethical responsibility. One of these responsibilities is to serve their respective people through active leadership. Mr. Her further states, "a leader searches to solve problems instead of waiting for problems to find him. It is not that the leader creates problems but it is the leader who welcomes any problems." Hmong leaders in Lao PDR need to search for ways to help the country in community development and take active roles through imagination in guiding Laos toward a better future.

Moreover, in order to prepare future generation for a better Laos "the elders [Hmong leaders] must keep an open mind and train the youth to take action."

In other words, Hmong leaders must be willing to pass on their leadership attributes to the younger generation, thus allowing the next generation of Hmong leaders to start acting at the present toward future leadership roles. In conclusion, Mr. Her states, "Hmong always talk about forgiveness;" for Hmong leaders, the act of forgiveness is an act that begins as an individual and with the self. This act can be taken by all Laotians as a form of forgiveness as they work together as their own agents toward the betterment of Lao PDR.

Implications

The pilot study allowed me to understand the unique gifts of Hmong leaders as well as their horizon toward forgiveness. When Hmong leaders share their stories of past struggles and compare them to other people, they may understand that others experienced similar struggles. In the case of suffering and hurt, Hmong leaders need to recognize as Anthohi (2005:24) states, "one must see that the other has lost too, that loss is shared." In order to move beyond the past, Hmong leaders need to take action at the present and look beyond the foreseeable endless infinite "horizon" to a better future (Gadamer 2004:301).

What I Learned from the Pilot Study

The most important aspects of the Pilot Study stem from my experiences with a research conversation and the testing of my categories and questions. The categories and questions both seemed to work very well. Moreover and most importantly, I learned that this study is of strong personal interest to me. This research has significantly influenced my personal and professional life. According to Herda (1999:7), "when I change the rest of the world changes" and in this experience, I have seen personal changes in myself and my relation toward the other. I elaborate upon this more in the final Chapter of this

dissertation.

Summary

The pilot study suggested the possibility of new directions for Hmong leaders as they share their stories and have the opportunity to imagine a better future while dealing with current issues. As Lao PDR government moves forward with community development, they need to work together with Hmong leaders to establish a shared vision for change in order to appropriate a better future. By expressing solicitude toward the other, Lao PDR government and Hmong leaders can find ways to involve Hmong leaders in the planning and developing of community services.

As I reflect on my personal experience and interests in exploring Hmong leadership and what it means to be a participatory researcher, I observe that the conversation with Mr. Her gave me insight into the hermeneutic research inquiry processes as well as experience conversing with research participants. Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity of idem (other) and ipse (self), $\text{mimesis}_{1,2,3}$ (time) and narrative through the act of emplotment are instrumental in helping me to understand myself in relation to the other.

Background of Researcher

I am a native of Lao PDR. I have had a long journey from the state of Houa Phanh in Lao PDR to the state of California in the United States of America. Although I have become a naturalized U.S citizen, living here for more than twenty years, a part of me has always remained in my motherland of Laos. Therefore, when I pondered my research topic I was drawn back to the country of my birth. However, it was not until I took a trip to Lao PDR in May 2008 and acted as an interpreter for my schoolmates Edgar, Kim and

Don that I experienced a personal founding event and a fusion of horizons as a result of a conversation with two Hmong village leaders.

My classmates asked the two Hmong leaders what they needed the most for the village. One of the Hmong leader responded, “we don’t want money…but all we want are ideas…knowledge, for idea is more valuable than gold and silver.” These few words have been etched deeply in my heart and mind. The further I pondered a research topic, the more the process drew me to another personal experience, my reaction to the arrest of General Vang Pao and ten other Hmong men on June 4, 2007. Personally, General Vang Pao has been one of my Hmong heroes and I have known him both professionally and at some personal level. He is not only a leader of the Hmong but he is my personal leader, though I may not agree with him on all issues. Thereupon, his arrest touched me personally as it did thousands of Hmong. It is a fact that Hmong may have been persecuted in the remote areas and jungles of Lao PDR and Hmong clan leaders including General Vang Pao have tried unsuccessfully to address the issue with the United States, Lao PDR, and other countries.

The general’s arrest sent a shock wave of confusion, distrust and uncertainty across the Hmong community because some Hmong feel the U.S government has betrayed them by arresting their leader simply for trying to voice the suffering of his people, who were left behind by the U.S government. This raises the question who has right on his or her side and how should the issue be resolved? This event has left me wanting to reevaluate and redefine my understanding of Hmong leaders and their roles in the Hmong community and assess what role Hmong leaders can play to assist their respective people and governments.

Eventually, I connected the two experiences, which directed me to my research interest of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. The Hmong have lived in Lao PDR for less than two centuries, yet their contribution to the country's stability has been invaluable. However, Hmong ties to Lao PDR also include memories of pain, sorrow, and struggles. Hence, I see a need for Hmong leaders to lead differently where they can establish relationships among themselves and with the other. In Lao PDR, Hmong leaders can serve as mediators between Hmong, Lao PDR government, and other third parties. It is my intent to look for the strength that Hmong leaders have within their hearts and minds so they can represent the best of themselves not the best of another. Hmong leaders have to find their weaknesses and improve on them. It is not important for Hmong leaders to be like other leaders; however, Hmong leaders need to find and be their own leaders and lead in their own ways. To be a Hmong leader, Hmong people need to move out of their comfort zones, risking discomfort for change, open dialogue, and allow for the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Summary

Using the approach advocated by Herda's 1999 description of critical hermeneutic interpretive participatory inquiry, this research sought to explore Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and its implication on development. Conversations with Hmong leaders through story sharing created new texts for the Hmong. It is through the interpretation of text that the researcher and participants had an opportunity to understand the prefigured world and imagine a refigured world through a reflection of a configured world. The purpose of the research categories and guiding questions were to allow Hmong leaders to voice their stories of the past, present, and future. Through this process, a new

understanding emerged, opening endless possibilities for contemporary Hmong leaders, thus encouraging the establishment of new relationships among Hmong leaders and their relationship with the other as they are involved in the country's policies and community development activities. In Chapter Five, the data are presented along with a preliminary analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Every man is trying to live up to his father's expectations
or make up for his mistakes. In my case, both may be true.
-U.S President Barack Obama

Introduction

In Chapter Five, I recollect, retell and relive my research experience as I present the shared leadership stories of my participants. The present "text does not belong to the researcher or the participants. However, it is the text that connects us and gives us a way to communicate" (Herda 1999:127). In other words, my participants and I hold no ownership of this text; rather, this text binds both researcher and participants to a possible future through action that allows us to hold meaningful conversations. I present these conversations in the ensuing chapter, revealing the narratives, faces, and voices of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR through the themes of Hmong leadership of past, present and future; our diverse community, Vang Pao's leadership, educators as possible leaders, local community development, lack of formal education, Hmong leaders' act of forgiveness and leaders in need of action. First, I present a short commentary on my own journey in order to set a context.

My Narrative: A Personal Journey

I have been commuting from Fresno to San Francisco in pursuit of higher education for the past two and a half years. Since embarking on a journey at the University of San Francisco toward a doctoral degree in Organization and Leadership, I have been bombarded with a new ways of thinking, understanding, and researching. These are rooted in my introduction to critical hermeneutic participatory inquiry by my

advisor and mentor Dr. Ellen Herda, who has guided me toward a path of understanding myself in relation to the other, specifically in reference to organization and leadership and their implication for community development, especially for the Hmong people. Kearney (2002:4) illustrates, "storytelling may be said to *humanize* time by transforming it from an impersonal passing of fragmented moments into a pattern, a plot, a *mythos*." In other words, my personal narrative is similar to a story in a book constantly written in new text as each new chapter is added, unfolded and lived.

I am mindful of my past, present and future narrative and its relationship to my action in researching Hmong leadership in Lao PDR, which will influence and shape what Earl Fluker (2009:viii) characterizes as a quest for "character, civility and community." I have lived in the United States since I was a teenager; nonetheless, I have not forgotten my Hmong historical roots. Therefore, a part of me has always remained with the Hmong back in Asia and especially inside my motherland of Laos. Ricoeur (1996:6) indicates "it is possible to tell several stories based on the same events;" therefore, I realize my narrative continues to unfold as the many plots intertwine; nonetheless, I will not be complete until and unless I bind my narrative with the understanding of Hmong leaders' narratives in Lao PDR.

Ricoeur (1996:6) articulates "the story of my life is a segment of the story of your life; of the story of my parents, of my friends, of my enemies, and of countless strangers." In other words, my journey toward comprehending my own narrative and Hmong leaders' narratives began in the middle of May 2008, traveling on a boat along the Mekong River with my advisor and classmates and eventually visiting a Hmong village called Huay Nor Kong in Lao PDR. It was the first Hmong village in Laos that I had

stepped foot into and I witnessed first hand the Hmong living conditions and the clear need for community development. While I was there, Da Xiong, who is one of the Hmong village leaders, said, “I know that because we are Hmong, we are treated differently.” I remember asking myself why that should be. I imagined the burden of past conflict as a heavy weight on the shoulders of Hmong leaders and saw how difficult it must be for Hmong leaders to lead their community when they have no hope themselves of a better future. I asked myself what I could contribute as a doctoral student to understanding more about the Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and its implications on the country’s future.

Recalling these few words draws me back to the moment, time, and place when my research topic was born. I began to question the possibilities for Hmong leaders in the United States to return to assist our motherland and for Hmong leaders in Laos to take action as the country moves forward. Through my reflection, I developed my belief that in order for the Hmong to fully contribute to community development, Laos and the international community should rely on the wisdom and leadership of a revered Hmong leader named Vang Pao and other emerging Hmong leaders.

This belief consequently led me to ponder how I can merge my narrative with Hmong leaders in the United States and Laos so that a new narrative may be written. This curiosity led me in search of possible narratives half way around the world, back in the land-locked communist state of Lao PDR. When I remember, retell, and relive my quest for Hmong leaders’ narratives in Lao PDR, I find myself becoming a part of the shared narratives intertwining between researcher and participants in an ontological cycle of text created for interpretation. For Ricoeur (1981:53) “the text must be unfolded, no longer

towards its author but towards its immanent sense and towards the world which opens up and discloses." In other words, these texts call for action to change the impossible into possible, thus reaching endless futurity.

In Search of Hmong Leaders' Stories

Kearney (2002:5) conveys "every story shares the common function of *someone telling something to someone about something*." In other words, the following text is a revelation of my story while embarking on a journey to converse with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR. I am aware that Lao PDR has been a communist state since 1975 and that its historical policies toward the Hmong people who are overseas have been less than friendly. Moreover, mentioning the term "Hmong leader" is often viewed synonymously with the Vietnam American conflict era and political or anti-government activities, creating a precarious environment. Nevertheless, I made a journey through Laos holding conversations with Hmong leaders in search of their leadership narratives. I left San Francisco International Airport on a Saturday morning and reached my destination in Luang Prabang, a city in northern Laos, on a Sunday evening in the middle of May 2009. I was exhausted so I took a taxi to a nearby hotel to rest for the night.

Nonetheless, the next morning after breakfast, I made a phone call to Jay Thao, who is a tour guide, to discuss my research topic and then identify possible participants. I got to know Jay Thao through my friend Juu whom I had met in Loei, Thailand back in May 2008. I was uneasy about holding conversations with Hmong leaders regarding Hmong leadership in Lao PDR because I knew it was a very sensitive topic. While I was being extra cautious, I was careful not to judge others and I made an effort to remain open to new horizons. In other words, I was afraid of communicating with Hmong

leaders in Lao PDR regarding their leadership experience because Laos is a communist government and I did not want to jeopardize the Hmong leaders' livelihood; however, I was hoping to hold conversations with the Hmong leaders who wanted to share their leadership stories because I wanted to understand their horizons. I was in search of Hmong leaders' narratives, but more importantly I was in search of my own leadership narrative in an unfamiliar place. In preparing this presentation of data, I had some hesitations about mentioning names for fear that doing so might exacerbate further misconceptions; however, upon reflection I have concluded that my participants and I have not committed any act that could be thought of as wrongful. Therefore, this text presents their names in accordance with standard critical interpretative participatory research protocol.

Hmong Leadership: Past, Present and Future

Wa Dang Thao

After a lengthy discussion, my tour guide suggested that we hold an initial conversation with one of his grandfathers, who is an educator and Hmong subclan leader. He suggested that afterward, we could ask him for recommendations, suggestions, and referrals for other possible participants. I agreed and we drove north to the outskirts of Luang Prabang, where he introduced me to Wa Dang Thao. Initially, I was a little skeptical about the encounter but as the conversation progressed, I was amazed with the breadth of knowledge, wisdom, and leadership experience Wa Dang Thao holds in his heart, mind, and soul. He told me that "a person who speaks loudly may gain lots of attention but often may misspeak; therefore, people only respect the person who speaks softly because often this person thinks before he speaks." With these words, Wa Dang

Thao expressed his understanding of the importance of Ricoeur's concepts of "solicitude" (Ricoeur 1992:190) and "care" (Ricoeur 1992:310-11), love, and patience. He also tied these concepts to leadership, asserting that

> a leader is someone who can distinguish between the future and past. The past consists of two things: positive and negative. How can you change the negative past so that it is not repeated? On the contrary, how can you improve on the positive past so that the future is better than the past? A leader who understands the importance of past and future time can avoid or resolve lots of conflicts. A person who does not understand the past and future of time gets frustrated easily and therefore cannot hold leadership positions.

Wa Dang Thao's grasp of the concept of time is remarkable. He articulated the importance of comprehending the past in the present in order to prepare for a better future. Moreover, he tied this understanding about the leadership needs of the future with the reciprocal nature inherent in relationships, expressing a full loyalty toward, commitment to, and support of the Lao PDR government by saying, "whenever we meet leaders at the higher levels, they talk to us about how we should lead our citizens because citizens have taught leaders too." I empathize with this statement, for it shows that he holds his leadership accountability to the government through reciprocal recognition of its legitimacy.

This conversation discloses hidden truth narratives of the researcher and Hmong leaders in Lao PDR, which have possible implication for the country's future. Moreover, in these comments, Wa Dang Thao discloses information about Hmong leaders, including the fact that I, the Hmong, and Hmong leaders in Lao PDR are good law abiding citizens who acknowledge the legitimacy of their respective country's current government. This is further reflected in the following conversation:

> CX: As a leader, how do you think we should prepare our children to be good future leaders?

> WDT: As human beings we are very cautious and do not want to make any mistakes. When we meet and hold conversations, we are not talking about disrupting the government, we are only talking about better development for our community. I think the government would welcome our ideas and thank us in return.
>
> CX: I have to ask this question because I know some people think the government would be suspicious when people hold good conversations. Furthermore, whether you hold talks with good or bad intentions, the government will not trust you. I want to know the truth. I believe if we hold conversations in Laos for the purpose of understanding how we can assist each other toward community development such as education, good health, and a better economy. In this way, we are assisting the government to better their citizens. Is this wrong?
>
> WDT: No, it is not wrong. As human beings whether in America or Laos, we have our own set of laws. Those who violate the laws will be dealt with according to the violation. However, if you have not violated any laws, no matter how others accuse you, you will be not found guilty. Furthermore, when holding conversations, as long as we reframe ideas that violate the laws, we are allowed to exchange ideas freely. On the contrary, if we hold conversations with bad intentions, criticizing the government and not remaining neutral, if the government knows of our intentions, necessary action may be taken.

The conversation with Wa Dang Thao reassured me as a researcher about the potential moral and ethical issues I had worried about in terms of working openly with Hmong leaders who possess good leadership attributes that may contribute to Laos' development for many future generations. My conversation transcriptions hold truth and serve as evidence that conversations amongst the Hmong about development needs do not threaten the existing government in any way. As a researcher on Hmong leadership in Lao PDR, I had no intention of spreading propaganda or deceptive plans to disturbing the peace and stability of the people. Moreover, any association or contact between Hmong American and Hmong Lao should not automatically be under suspicion. Both the Lao PDR government and the Hmong leaders want the Hmong community to prosper together in harmony.

Wa Dang Thao proudly told me that "our village or community is a mixed community of more than three ethnic groups living together. They all follow the leader's direction." In other words, as human beings and citizens, the Hmong and their leaders respect the diversity and care of both Laos in general and its leaders' developmental goals. Wa Dang Thao summarized this respect by discussing the interconnectedness of Hmong and other groups through mutual respect. He said that

> when Hmong see a Lao, Hmong show respect. When Lao see a Hmong, Lao show respect. When we see a Khamu, Hmong show respect. A few Hmong have converted to Lao religion. When the village or community gathers to worship Buddhist, we participate. When we perform Hmong traditional rituals, other groups participate. Furthermore, interracial marriage among Hmong, Lao, and Khamu are very common.

Lao PDR's ethnic diversity may be its greatest resource in developing and implementing policies affecting its communities; furthermore, only "when we are able to reinterpret our past and fuse our horizons with other cultures and traditions, then we may be capable of projecting in a concrete and persuasive manner our interest in freedom" (Herda 1999:10). Gadamer (2004:302) likewise affirms that "we must place ourselves in the other's situation in order to understand it." In addition, Kearney (2002:63) postulates "our own memories [personal and communal] can be exchanged with others of very different times and places, where the familiar and the foreign can change hands." In other words, leaders within each community can combine their leadership experience through acts of understanding each other among the others in relationship with the self, whereas "if each of us accept that we are the strangers, then there are no strangers – only others like ourselves" (Kearney 2003:76). As a result, leaders in a diverse community can be "experiencing oneself as another and the other as oneself" (Kearney 2002:140).

Chai Sher Xiong

Later on that day in the afternoon, I visited several Hmong villages and came across a Hmong village leader (nai ban) name Chai Sher Xiong. After a brief introduction, I was invited to go inside his house for a visit. According to Hmong culture or tradition, it would be rude or inappropriate to not accept his invitation; therefore I gladly entered his home. As I did so, I noticed that there were several younger teenage boys sitting on the side of a bed on the northern part of the house watching television and listening to music. They quietly lowered the volumes on both devices as the nai ban's wife brought chairs for us to sit in. I was not planning on holding any conversations that afternoon; meeting Mr. Xiong unexpectedly, I was caught off guard. Nonetheless, I had one of the best conversations with this participant, for it reaffirmed my research purpose and expanded my horizon about Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. Chai Sher Xiong proudly told me that

> through my personal experience I'm able to distinguish between a good and bad life. There are lots of consequences for living a bad life because it only takes a moment to take the wrong direction; however, to live a good life one must lead in way that helps one's country. In life you need to have the mindset of letting the hurt be within so others will not see it. In order to lead a country the hurt has to remain within and let other criticize you rather then you criticizing them. In cases where you've been criticized by your citizens don't be angry. Instead, welcome it as an opportunity for growth.

It is interesting to see the level of understanding that Chai Sher Xiong has toward the other, which he expresses through this discourse about life, starting with the self and projecting outward onto his country. In other words, leading others is not as important as leading oneself in relation to the other, which in this case means the country of Lao PDR.

Chai Sher Xiong further affirms, "without criticism there would be no opportunity for leadership growth…before you can lead others you must first lead yourself." I believe

that Chai Sher Xiong's leadership praxis exemplifies the true essence of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. This leadership has to be allowed to flourish onward toward the next generation of Hmong leaders. Though an educational difference exists between the older Hmong leaders and younger emerging leaders, those emerging among the Hmong have the potential to become better leaders if they acquire past Hmong leaders' positive leadership wisdom and attributes. Contrary to some misconceptions, Hmong leaders have no intention of using their leadership positions to influence the Hmong community for any personal interest; alternatively, Hmong leaders always see their leadership roles as leading citizens toward betterment, as individuals and as a nation. In return, the Lao PDR nation benefits greatly from the leadership of the Hmong and its community. Chai Sher Xiong vocalizes,

> some Hmong parents misunderstood the Lao water festival new year celebration as belonging only to Lao people and the Hmong new year celebration as belonging only to the Hmong. On the contrary, we all are Lao citizens; therefore, Lao new year is all the people of Lao PDR new year therefore we Hmong have to give our full support. In this way as the years progress, they [the government] will see the positive contribution of the Hmong as good citizens and eventually they will join hands to support us [the Hmong]…. as a leader I have a responsibility to inform the government of Hmong way of life; specifically when it comes to Hmong culture, tradition and leadership settings. It is important for the government to understand Hmong people are not against the government; however, Hmong people have good intentions of helping the country move forward in development.

I interpret the above statement as describing one of the primarily roles of most Hmong leaders in Lao PDR, serving as mediator between Hmong community and the government. Therefore, it is of great advantage for the Lao PDR government to encourage Hmong leaders' full participation in the government at various levels. Moreover, the popular view of associating Hmong American and Hmong Laotian conversations to anti-government activities holds no bearing; in fact, in this case,

conversation between the researcher and participants allow opportunities for growth. The only recommendations we discussed occurred in our search for ideas to improve people's lives and contribute to making our shared world more inhabitable. The spoken words between my participants and I "are what contribute to creating the world we live in, rather than developing to fit the world" (Herda 1999:25). Conversations between the researcher and participants revolved around the sharing of leadership knowledge, ideas and experiences. The conversation with Wa Dang Thao and Chai Sher Xiong serve as catalysts for understanding that informed my subsequent conversations; they illustrate the vast amount of wisdom Hmong leaders have from within and how Hmong leaders lead oneself as another.

Ka Pao Thao, Nhia Chong Thao

Most of my participants are between the ages of 34 and 60; these two are in their late 60s; I was therefore curious to talk with them and hear how their narrative varied based on the experiences of their lives. They lived in different provinces (Luang Prabang and Sayabouly); however, they share the clan name "Thao" and in the Hmong culture they are believe to be related by family lineage. It is interesting to note that it took me the longest time over the most difficult terrain to reach both of them. I traveled for many hours on rough roads in order to approach their homes in the highlands and then I walked on foot to their farms for our conversations. Further, though their locations are distant from one another, the places in which our conversations took place are similar (under a makeshift structure).

On the morning of my third day in Luang Prabang, I got the disappointing news that an identified participant would not be able to engage in conversation because of the

sensitivity of my research topic. I was feeling distressed, unwelcomed and unwanted; however, I simultaneously felt more determined to push forward with other possible participants. At the last moment, I decided to try to locate Ka Pao Thao, who was the father of a friend of mine, but I discovered that he no longer lived in the city, having relocated to the highlands. We drove almost two and a half hours to meet Ka Pao Thao and on our way stopped for lunch near the Mekong River with a friend named Phia Thao, who is Ka Pao Thao's son.

I met him at Loei Rajabath University back in May 2008 and it was good to see him again. After lunch we parted ways. I continued my path to meet Phia's father with a long and bumpy ride to Ka Pao Thao's village and when I got there he was not home for he had gone to his farm, about a 30 minute walk away. I thought of waiting and asking his grandchildren to go fetch him; however, the kids did not want to go and I therefore made the decision to go meet with him as I was eager to have the conversation. Unfortunately, when I had gotten dressed earlier in the morning, I had not been planning on walking and had on my shinny formal dress shoes. To attempt the walk, I needed to first switch shoes with my Dad, who had accompanied me thus far. My guide and I walked up an uphill bumpy dirt road; it was very hot, humid and dry and I was tired and sweating.

As we headed north on a dirt road, we were told to turn left onto a small off road so that we reached a Khamu farm. My guide yelled at people in the distance for directions; however, they responded that they did not know the name Ka Pao Thao. However, when my guide clarified that he was looking for the guy who owns the Toyota pick up, they respond knowingly, directing us to go back to the main road to turn right,

then go up to see his farm. We turned back and got back to the main road; however, as we were walking downward we saw a mother and her three children walking toward us. We waited and asked the mother if she knew the way to Ka Pao Thao's farm. She informed us that the little grass road we could see on the right leads to his farm. They were heading to their own farm, which was on the other side of the mountain, a distance of about three hours away, where they planned to sleep overnight. I noticed a little girl who was about eight or ten years old carrying on her back a little baby who was too young to walk. After our short encounter, they walked away and I took a snap shot of them walking up toward the uphill road into the far distance.

My guide and I headed up the side road and within a short time we finally met Ka Pao Thao. I was introduced to he and his wife and told them that I know their son Phia from a visit to Loei, Thailand. After a brief introduction, Ka Pao Thao agreed to hold a conversation, which took place under his makeshift farm house. It was one of the most memorable moments of my research process. Ka Pao Thao told me that he wants "our children to be able to lead from one generation to the next toward a future so we all can have a meaningful life." He honorably praised my high status as an educator in words I will never forget, telling me, that "you are an educator yet you came all the way from America, up the bumpy road to my house, and then walked uphill on the dirt road under the hot sun just to hold a conversation with me about Hmong leadership…I feel very honored." Ka Pao Thao graciously diminished his status as a Hmong leader, focusing instead on future leadership needs, for "our youth need to hold conversations with current leaders and learn from our leaders' leadership attributes because if our youths do not hold conversation with our leaders both sides will miss out on the passage of knowledge." The

conversation I had with Ka Pao Thao mirrors Gadamer's thought that "in a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without necessarily having to agree with him" (Gadamer 2004:302). I noted in my research journal that "it was at this point that I realized (interpreted) the depth of [Ka Pao Thao's] ideas and knowledge about leadership."

The conversation with Ka Pao Thao revealed more animosity related to open dialogue between Hmong in the United States and Lao PDR and Lao PDR government. I was concerned that other Hmong leaders would not hold conversations with me; thereupon I asked whether I should have recieved an official authorizing letter from the government. Nevertheless, Ka Pao Thao reassured me, "an official letter is [only] required if it is an interview by the media for the purpose of showing or releasing to the public." He added that, "anyone who just wants to hold conversation with me should not use or have an official letter…I would consider that an insult." I was very relieved to hear those heartening words.

Ka Pao Thao's message to future Hmong leaders is that "leaders need to have a purpose of leading others toward the right direction rather than in the wrong direction. Our children need to learn to conduct themselves toward positively bringing credibility to themselves as well as to their respective people." Future generations of Hmong leaders must hold themselves to the highest standards as oneself in relation to the Hmong; however, as Ka Pao Thao affirms, "a person will not succeed on his or her own without the support of critical people within the leadership community." It is critical for present Hmong leaders to recognize the contribution of past leaders, therefore preparing for future leaders through the present Hmong leadership.

In comparison, while in Sayabouly, I had a similar experience with another older Hmong clan leader named Nhia Chong Thao. I had already had conversations with two Hmong educators; however, I was looking for more participants. An older Hmong leader was identified as a possible participant but he had gone up to his second house located on the highland, which was not easily accessible. After many phone calls, we found the owner of a jeep to drive us up the tough terrain. In the middle of the morning of May 24, 2009, I was on the back of a Jeep heading toward the highlands for a conversation with Nhia Chong Thao. Initially, the main road in the city was cemented, but half way through it became a bumpy road, which lasted for approximately 30 kilometers. About an hour from the main city road, we exited to a dirt road. Thus commenced was one of the bumpiest rides I had ever been involved in. The seat on the Jeep was as sturdy as a rock. I could smell the flume exiting behind. I attempted to hold my breath as much as I could but each time I held my breath for fresh air, I felt weaker so I gave up and breathed freely, eventually forgetting about the flume.

It took about two hours before we reached our destination at Nhia Chong's village. It was very hot but often there were cool breezes so it was not too humid. Upon reaching the village, we discovered that my potential participant had gone to work on his corn field and we had to drive the jeep further, going down into the village until the road became too narrow. We had to continue on foot for about 20 minutes further up the hill before reaching the corn field.

On our way up the hill, I came across two sisters between ten and twelve years old, resting under the shade of an old burned tree. We got directions from them as we trekked further up the hill and finally we came face to face with Nhia Chong Thao. He

was planting corn along with his wife, son-in-law and daughter. After a brief introduction, we agreed that it would be best to return to the makeshift farm house for our conversation because it was too hot under the sun. Before my conversation with Nhia Chong Thao, I described my research topic and the purpose of my conversation to him. He hesitated at first because a few days ago, there was a misunderstanding with the local village leader; nonetheless, after further clarification, he agreed to hold the conversation. According to Nhia Chong Thao, the Hmong have an old saying, that "life has a root." In other words as Nhia Chong Thao emphasizes, "leadership knowledge comes from a predecessor." Nhia Chong Thao understands the historical roots of Hmong past leaders in relation to present leaders, which may be passed onto future generations of leaders because "each of us has not only contemporaries but also predecessors and successors" (Ricoeur 2007:179).

Furthermore, Nhia Chong Thao recognizes his mortality as a human being because as Heidegger (2001:145) states, "to be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal." Ricoeur (1988:254) reflects a similar view when he writes, "mortality–not the event of death in public time, but the fact that each of us is destined for our own death – indicates the internal closure of primordial temporality." In other words, as Nhia Chong Thao explains, "a leader will perish one day…his or her words of wisdom may never be heard." This understanding leads present Hmong leaders to acknowledge their vulnerability as mortal beings and their subsequent responsibility for identifying possible new leaders.

In summary, Nhia Chong Thao expressed understanding of a basic underlying concept, that "not all people are good and not all people are bad. There is always a bad

apple in a basket." In other words, Hmong leaders should not be limited by other leaders' past conflicts because "understanding one's past is not an end itself" (Herda 1999:10). Moreover, Hmong leaders and their community should not be confined to the restrictions of interpretations brought about by such past conflicts, which in this case includes the possible misinterpretation of my research topic of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR.

Our Diverse Community

Choua MoYang, Chia Tou Her, Shoua Lue Her

These three participants know each other at a more personal level than other participants because they participate together in a Hmong cultural organization that provides assistance to families who have lost a loved one. They may have spoken amongst themselves about this topic both before and after our conversations. Each of them offered valuable reflections about leadership amongst the Hmong, which I present below, after I introduce each individually with a description of my initial encounter with them. These situations put the data that resulted from the conversations in relevant context.

Choua Mo Yang agreed to speak with me after being referred through my friend Juu Moua, who had discussed my research topic with him. I met Choua Mo at his residence. At first he was uncomfortable with the presence of a tape recorder; nevertheless, after explaining the purpose, he consented to having our conversation recorded. In contrast, my meetings with Chia Tou Her and Shoua Lue Her came about without preplanning. In fact, they occurred as part of a tour that I undertook during planned leisure time in the midst of my research trip. After one long day of commuting back and forth in an attempt to find prospective participants, I decided to indulge my

interest in touring a few Hmong villages, purely for my own interest and at my leisure. We subsequently visited a Her village, which is where I met Chia Tou Her. It was very hot and humid so he was shirtless; however, he got dressed and greeted us. My guide Jay Thao knew Chia Tou Her to be a great Hmong subclan leader so he introduced my research topic to him and asked if it would be possible to hold a conversation. Chia Tou Her kindly accepted the invitation.

After my conversation with Chia Tou Her, I headed up to a nearby village. After walking a short distance up onto a road, I heard the voice of a shaman chanting. Immediately, my guide told me that he addressed the shaman who was chanting as grandpa and identified him as a well known shaman in the region. I walked passed his house, continuing further down, then walked back to the house. I could see another house on the right; however, I did not initially know who lived there, though I found out later through my guide that it belongs to a village leader. My guide then proceeded to show me an old original Hmong ladder. I was very curious so I approached it and started taking pictures; while I was doing so, a woman and a man approached and started speaking to me. The man identified himself as Shoua Lue Her.

After this short encounter, I found out that he is my grandpa from my mother's side of the family. Afterward, I was introduced to man who turned out to be the younger brother of my mom's grandpa. He was sitting on a wooden chair in traditional Hmong attire. He stood up as I got close to him. After a few seconds of greeting, he recalled my mom's name and we shook hands. As I shook his hands, I could not hold back my tears and I sobbed. Not knowing if it was acceptable or not, I hugged him in affectionate recognition because he bore such a strong resemblance to my great grandpa. It was one of

the most memorable moments of my trip. Eventually, I became acquainted with all of these individuals and according to Hmong tradition, began to address Shoua Lue Her as grandpa. When my guide realized that Shoua Lue Her and I are related, he initiated a request for a conversation on my behalf. My newly-discovered grandfather amiably welcomed my presence and agreed to this conversation.

Choua Mo Yang, Shoua Lue Her and Chia Tou Her all provided reflection about Hmong leadership within a diverse community. The emergence of Hmong leaders at various levels of the Lao PDR government is not a new phenomena because the Lao PDR government has always understood the importance of Hmong leaders' traditional roles and responsibilities within their community; nevertheless, a new paradigm shift in Hmong leadership has taken course. Hmong leaders who traditionally have only led the Hmong community have begun to lead a more diverse community through contemporary leadership practices rather than traditional ways. Herda (1999:7) asserts that "the identity of an individual is found in a moral relationship with others," which reflects Choua Mo Yang's knowledge that he is fully Hmong yet inclusively leading a diverse community. Choua Mo reflects on the challenges associated with this and the leadership approach required, saying,

> Hmong are a minority living among other groups or Lao; therefore, I have led with an open mind. In other words, people have spoken hurtful words to me but I have refrained from hurting their feelings. When others speak hurtful words toward me, I do not confront them; instead, I find a better time to converse with them. In this way, Hmong as well as Lao have approved my leadership.

The task of leading a diverse community is not a simple role; nonetheless, many Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have tried to meet the challenge and many have shown an ability to

be effective leaders in the eyes of both citizens and officials. The Hmong leaders' ability to lead a diverse community is supported by Shoua Lue Her, who says that

> our village initially had 319 families, including 85 Hmong families. There were a lot of conflicts among Lao families resulting in fines as high as 20 to 30 million kips. When I was nominated and became an elder or advisor in 2002, I led differently. Lao citizens have acknowledged my leadership; therefore since 2004, conflicts among the various different groups have been minimal.

The majority of Hmong relocated from the highlands down into the city in the last 30 years; the Hmong have made tremendous adjustments to city life. In terms of Hmong leadership, it is evident that Hmong leaders have found a new role in leading a diverse community. Chia Tou Her described how the traditional Hmong approach to leadership has been applied effectively within the broader community, saying that "as a community but more importantly as a Hmong community, we dislike conflict or disputes;" furthermore, "it is crucial to lead citizens into the right direction while at the same time minimizing conflicts as much as possible at the local level." This resonates with a message about Hmong leadership that is key, for in order to see leadership have a maximum effect, work needs to start at the local level because that is the life line contact of the majority of citizens.

Consequently, as Herda (1999:134-35) articulates, "changing who we are in relation to others in a community or society involves changing forms of power and authority, which, in turn, involves a change foremost in oneself;" therefore, in order to lead a diverse community toward change, Hmong village leaders know they have to practice their leadership roles at a personal level (self) extending to family members and then toward others. In other words, Hmong leaders know they have to change themselves in relation to other members of a diverse community. Chia Tou Her affirms,

> I believe a leader shall be able to lead his or her family, cousins, relatives and then outsiders. For instance, leading from within the family builds credibility and accumulates leadership experience. Similarly, leadership requires care and an openness toward serving other people at the same time maintaining, avoiding and minimizing conflicts.

In other words, a leader must be able to lead his or her family before he or she can lead other members of a diverse community. Chia Tou Her also expressed understanding of the significance of an impartial leader in a diverse population, saying

> when leaders act as judge to resolve conflicts between defendants or plaintiffs, the verdict has to be fair. In situations where the judge knows one of the parties, the judge should refrain from supporting one side. Lastly, leaders who have integrity can lead citizens and the community at large toward the future.

Chia Tou knows a leader who judges others fairly will be successful in leading the general community, whether among the Hmong, Lao or other groups. He believes one of his roles as a Hmong leader is to prevent conflict from escalating. Chia Tou declares, "I always tell others that the way to stop a boiling pot may not be extinguishing the fire but by removing the pot from the fireplace." In other words, Chia Tou believes any issues arising between members of a diverse community can be resolved if the leader can get both sides to understand each other in relationship to the other.

Vang Pao's Leadership

Cheng Xue Thao

Some of the participants made vague references to the leadership of Vang Pao; however, only one participant (Cheng Xue Thao) spoke of him in a way that was open and direct. My conversation with Cheng Xue Thao at his residence in Sayabouly took place early in the morning and I think that these time and location selections made him feel secure and comfortable. I had visited him on more than one occasion and we had conversed informally so when I unexpectedly requested a formal conversation, he gladly

obliged. Cheng Xue Thao is the younger brother of Nhia Chong Thao. I was astonished that he was the only participant to talk about Vang Pao because I know that the name Vang Pao is synonymous with Hmong and especially Hmong leadership; therefore, any conversation or research on the topic wouldn't be complete without addressing his role.

According to Cheng Xue Thao, "it has been more than 30 years since the time of Vang Pao's involvement in the Vietnam conflict; however, under communist rule, lots of things have changed." Cheng Xue Thao is referring to the social, economic and political changes Lao PDR has made in the last ten years because Lao PDR government is no longer interested in war and instead wants the country to move forth in development.

Vang Pao remains a significant figure in the minds and hearts of many Hmong in Lao PDR including Hmong leaders both young and old. Cheng Xue Thao noted that "the American and Vang Pao time was a time of war so there was not much development or improvement to our educational settings. While Hmong were living in the highlands it was so difficult to request the assistance of a school teacher." In other words, the Hmong community saw development during the time of Vang Pao's leadership, resulting in the improvement of the educational system and the increased accessibility of education for children in the highlands; however, life continued to be very hard because of the war.

There are many points of view surrounding the leadership of Vang Pao before and after 1975; however, for the Hmong majority, Vang Pao's leadership is etched in time and history. Under Vang Pao's leadership, the Hmong were known among the developed nations as a brave, determined and loyal ally of the United States; nevertheless, during the same historical period, he was considered the very nemesis of the Lao PDR communist state. Vang Pao and the issue of the Hmong remains a burden and the

legitimacy of Vang Pao's leadership remains a mystery in the eyes of outside observers. Still, in the minds and hearts of millions of Hmong around the world, Vang Pao is a revered leader; this is especially true among the Hmong in Lao PDR. Vang Pao still holds lots of influence among the Hmong and many continue to see him as a voice of hope in bringing forth a better future. This makes his continued influence relevant to Hmong leaders' past, present and future leadership, for Vang Pao still exerts lots of power within the Hmong community and may hold one of the keys toward reconciliation between past, present and future leaders. In short, as Cheng Xue Thao conveys,

> more than 30 years have passed since the end of the Vietnam conflict. Lao PDR government has no interest in any future wars because they just want community development for the country. According to the rule of laws, no discrimination should exist between any minority groups; however, deep in our hearts we know other groups do not trust Hmong because we still have Hmong hiding in the remotes areas and jungles of Laos.

I believe the time has come for an open understanding that seeks the root cause of the misunderstanding about the past conflict, present options and future possibility. In other words, both Vang Pao and Lao PDR want Laos to prosper through community development; nonetheless, if neither side is willing to hold meaningful dialogue the historical past will continue to emerge onto the policy development of the present, thus preventing any future development of sustainable goals for the Lao nation.

Educators as Possible Leaders

Pa Choua Xiong, Tou Moua, Dang Yang & Lue Yang

My last two conversations partners in Luang Prabang were Dang Yang and Lue Yang, who are college graduates in the engineering field; afterward, I headed out to Sayabouly to visit a private Hmong college owned by Pa Choua Xiong, where I also held a conversation with Tou Moua, the region's Deputy Chief of Education. The trip from

Luang Prabang to Sayabouly took approximately four hours as the road was not pleasant; however, it was a memorable experience. When we reached downtown Sayabouly, we visited my guide's grandpa's residence, then headed to a nearby private college owned by a Hmong graduate student. It was not a preplanned meeting; however, I took the opportunity to hold a conversation with Pa Choua Xiong. This conversation brings to light the delicacy of Hmong educators, who use education as a mean of becoming and preparing possible future Hmong leaders. Pa Choua Xiong told me that he has realized that "no matter how educated a person may be there is always room for improvement because education is a never ending process." More importantly, he believes, "the ultimate goal in completing higher education [is] having the ability to lead others in the right direction; hence, as a leader you not only recognize yourself as the only one who knows know how to lead others but you also think of [others] as your consultants." This insight correlated to the reflections of all of my other participants who stress education as essential for future leadership; nevertheless, this recognition of the role of others for guidance may be even more important.

My conversation with Tou Moua also disclosed his appreciation for a good education, but according Mr. Moua, "we must inform our children of the importance of a good education not for the purpose of holding a leadership position but so they may have an opportunity for a better future." In other words, education may not be the key to good leadership, but it does open opportunities. I reminisce about my two previous conversations with Dang Yang and Lue Yang. Lue Yang stresses,

> I had gone through higher education, I know how to adjust and change my lifestyle. I learned how to change my bad habits and keep the good habits and as a result, I gained the courage to live alongside others in the main city. Furthermore,

> I know how to improve my living standard due my education; therefore, education is a good deed.

Lue Yang understands the effect higher education has on his personal life as well as the opportunity it provides to prepare him for leadership. My conversations with these four Hmong educators' shows their past struggles in pursuing higher education. More importantly, they show the crucial roles Hmong educators and leaders must demonstrate together in order to benefit the Hmong community, which may lead to improving the Lao nation. Educators may be future leaders and future educators can be present leaders. Dang Yang proudly vocalizes,

> while education and cooperation are critical for community development, we also need to establish relationships with other groups of people outside of the Hmong community. Importantly, our relationship with other groups will enable us to be more successful as they may hold important resources and ideas that we need for development.

It is vital for Hmong educators and leaders to unite in leading the Hmong community forward in conjunction with other diverse Lao PDR communities. Both Hmong educators and leaders may hold the keys toward a better world; however, I believe Hmong educators and leaders abroad may play an integral role in the development of future prospective leaders. These four Hmong educators may be future leaders.

Local Community Development

Wa Lor Xiong

My last conversation partner was a gentleman by the name of Wa Lor Xiong, who is a village leader. I visited his town a few days before my up—country departure and while touring the town, I saw a few community development projects in progress. I was curious to hear the story behind these projects and so during our conversation I inquired about any difficulties he experienced while implementing them. Wa Lor Xiong said that

"since I became a leader of this village, I have been on the receiving end of many hurtful words from citizens. Some citizens verbally assaulted me by calling on heaven to take away my life; however, I did not express any anger." This demonstrates some of the resistance Hmong citizens have demonstrated toward Hmong leaders; nonetheless, he believes, "at the present time, if someone has a good idea on community development and the ability to ensure that at least 75% of the development funds are being used toward the set goals, eventually we'll see growth and improvement." In other words, successful developmental projects fall heavily on the shoulders of people in leadership positions; therefore, if leaders are honest and act with integrity, they can limit corruption, enabling the funds to reach their intended developmental goals.

In terms of community development for the Hmong, most of my participants see it as lying in the hands of future Hmong leaders and only "when we work together in a spirit of critique, understanding, and shared responsibility, [can we] appropriate a specified future" (Herda 1999:2). Choua Mo Yang said that

> in order for community development to be effective, leaders and parents need to be involved. Leaders and parents need to understand each other's intentions. Furthermore, they need to cooperate and work in unison because we all want a better community for our children. I believe community development may be successful through the commitment of its citizens including its leaders as a united community.

Rather than relying exclusively on leaders, I agree that citizens must also be involved as a truly united community in order for the Lao PDR nation to prosper. Moreover, I strongly support the statement made by Chai Sher Xiong that,

> to be prosperous, leaders should know how to lead all people inside their country, in the case of Lao PDR, there should not be labeling of Hmong, Lao or other minority groups. Leaders have to acknowledge all people in Lao PDR are all Laotian therefore love must be shown toward all people of Lao PDR. The day our

> children are growing up not competing to be better than other ethnic groups may be the day we truly see development at its maximum

In this way, individual leaders must install "diversity at the very heart of every plot of life" (Ricoeur 2005:113). In other words, a diverse community that is moving toward development is changing the community way of life; thereupon, each member of the diverse population must be encouraged to actively participate and understand their plot in relationship to the community life.

Lack of Formal Education

Most of my participants had limited formal education; as a result, they believe it is important for future Hmong leaders to receive more education. The sub theme of education emerged frequently as a past, present and future need. All the participants want to see children pursue their education because without education neither parents nor children will have a better future. Furthermore, education gives our children more opportunity to improve their lives and is one of the keys to enhancing the image of the Hmong, especially the Hmong community at large. That said, I also strongly agreed with Wa Lor Xiong's reflection that "education does not necessary lead to one becoming a leader; nevertheless, without education it is difficult to understand one's leadership setting." It is imperative for Hmong leaders to promote higher education for our children while at the same time "promoting communication, understanding, and community building" (Herda 1999:10); which may lead to new ideas in developmental change because according to Wa Lor Xiong, the future development of Laos PDR "lies in the hearts of our children and how we are educating them in school." In other words, if we provide quality education to our children, our next generation will be more successful in the long term.

Hmong Leaders' Act of Forgiveness

I am amazed to learn the level of forgivable acts that Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have imputed onto themselves and their citizens. The act of forgiveness is an overarching theme throughout all my conversations. The four village leaders Choua Mo Yang, Shoua Lue Her, Chai Sher Xiong and Wa Lor Xiong all expressed their views about the importance of the delicate act of forgiveness amongst colleagues (leaders) and citizens in a diverse community. Choua Mo Yang asserts, "those of us who have leadership responsibilities met monthly and discussed our mistakes but moved forth through forgiveness" while Shoua Lue Her said that "when the Hmong can show acts of forgiveness toward each other we can start establishing relationships with other groups of people so they can see that Hmong have cooperation; therefore, that may make them prone more toward forgiveness."

In retrospect, Wa Lor Xiong assures, "the act of forgiveness enables the unification of many scattering people into a cohesive group." It can be interpreted that Hmong leaders' horizon toward forgiveness is unconditional, which is of paramount importance because, as most of the participants agreed, forgiveness is a part of their leadership and guidance. When issues arise between the Hmong, leaders encourage both parties to forgive the other's mistakes. In conflict involving other groups, Hmong leaders stress the message of forgiveness as a means of leading cross culturally instead of just for the Hmong. Chia Tou Her indicates, "most conflicts arise out of minor disagreements or misunderstandings; therefore, we have always been able to show forgiveness toward each other." Furthermore, Wa Dang Thao believes, "the majority of Hmong leaders in Laos do practice the act of forgiveness toward each other. When leaders at the village level or

higher make mistakes, they will not argue against those in a higher position. In comparison, when leaders in the higher hierarchy make mistakes there is no resentment from the lower level." Ka Pao Thao further illustrates Wang Dang's assertion when he emphasizes,

> the act of forgiveness varies among citizens and colleagues; however, we all should practice the act of forgiveness. When citizens have disputes, it is crucial for leaders to inform citizens about how their dispute is related to the law, which is a quest for justice. In this way, citizens are prone to the rule of law and act accordingly by showing act of forgiveness. On the contrary, if colleagues make mistakes toward citizens or among themselves, the act of forgiveness shall be applicable. In other words, whether a person is a government official or ordinary citizen, the act of showing forgiveness diminishes any further conflict between two parties.

In this way, Nhia Chong Thao signals, "a leader should understand the importance of forgiveness; therefore, the act of forgiveness should be shown toward subordinates." In other words, the act of forgiveness should not only be practiced at the local level but it should be embraced from the top of the hierarchy. Importantly, Hmong leaders' acts of forgiveness should be reciprocated throughout the Lao PDR government. That said, Cheng Xue Thao believes the way toward showing acts of forgiveness is to "be patient and seek the truth." Similarly, the four educators (Dang Yang, Lue Yang, Tou Moua, and Pa Choua Xiong) agreed and hold the view that education plays a major role in shaping a person's ability to show acts of forgiveness.

Pa Choua Xiong believes "the act of forgiveness is taught throughout Laos, not just among Hmong but other groups of people. Forgiveness is not a result of an act of caring and kindness from one heart but also as a result of higher education. I say this because I believe people who have no education will find it more difficult to forgive others." If this holds true, as more educators are becoming leaders, their leadership acts

of forgiveness toward each other and the general community will result in significant change in policies affecting community development.

Leadership in Need of Action

Hmong leadership in Lao PDR remains a taboo discussion, especially with regard to Hmong leaders' roles, responsibilities, and actions pertaining to the country's future. I have seen the levels of poverty occurring in the Hmong community; nonetheless, in the past, I had not heard much about Hmong leaders taking initiative toward improving those conditions. Furthermore, Hmong have the concern that the Lao PDR government always associates Hmong leader's actions negatively, even when their actions are authentically directed for the betterment of the Lao PDR nation as a whole. I ponder often whether or not Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have seen or know the condition of the Hmong; moreover, if they do see or know, why they have not taken effective action toward improving the Hmong living conditions?

Five of my conversation partners reflected on the need for leaders and citizens to take action together to make things happen. Ricoeur (2005:96) articulates, "ascription of the action to an agent is part of the meaning of *action* as making something happen." In other words, it is critical to credit the outcome of an event to the action of an agent. Dang Yang echos his understanding of taking action for the purpose of making something happen when he stresses that, "we need to put our best effort into our work and not blame one another for the unfinished tasks. This is especially true in the development of our country; we should not wait for one another to start." On the other hand, Wa Dang Thao asserts, "a leader is someone who is quick to take action as well as exhibiting great patience;" furthermore, "if you think but you don't act, nothing will happen. If you have

the strength but you don't act then you will not achieve what you desire. First and foremost, if you have hope for a better future you must take an initial action at a personal level." Wa Dang believes the act of taking action to make things happen starts at the personal level and falls more on the individual person act than it extended outward to the other. He elaborates,

> in terms of community development, if you have hope for a better community you don't just keep the hope to yourself. You share your hope with others so they understand your purposes. Once people understand your purposes they will also voice your hope. It is through discussion about a better future that people will think of action that can be taken to reaching it.

Nhia Chong Thao also affirms Wa Dang's statement as he assures, "a leader's action can contribute to the success of his family, subclan, and community." In addition, Ka Pao Thao suggests education may influence a person's call to take action; therefore, he voices, "a person with higher education can learn and adapt according to any circumstance; nevertheless, a person without higher education may say a lot but has no action." Moreover, Wa Lor Xiong maintains, "you must take the first action before you ask others to act." In other words, as Ricoeur (2005:89) reflects, an individual will only take "action for which its author acknowledges himself to be responsible." In the case of Choua Mo Yang, he holds himself responsible to act as he declares, "people respect an individual who is not afraid to do work for others."

Choua Mo Yang elaborates, noting that "before others place their trust in you, you must be able to act upon your spoken words." Wa Lor Xiong best summarizes the need for leadership in action when he voices, "the future is possible; however, without action nothing gets done." This raises a call for Hmong leaders to always be in search of action. I believe that Hmong leaders need to initiate action within the Hmong community and

exercise their leadership responsibilities with regard to their approach to community development, not from the perspective of Hmong leaders but more importantly, in conjunction with Lao PDR policies, goals, and actions. In this way, Hmong leaders' action may bring resources in community development from Lao PDR government to benefit the Hmong community.

Summary

Ricoeur (2005:103) stresses, "the story of a life includes interactions with others;" for my story, when I started my journey in search of Hmong leaders' narratives in Lao PDR, I also went in search of my own leadership narrative in relationship to others' stories. As Ricoeur (1992:147) states, "the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character." The sharing of stories by Hmong leaders has constructed the Hmong's leadership character through the creation of their leadership identity. As a result of the connections that I made through this research, I have a deeper understanding of Hmong leaders' leadership attributes.

In Chapter Six, I continue the narratives of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR as a text through data analysis based on my research categories of mimesis, forgiveness and action through imagination. According to Herda (1999:2), "when we work together in a spirit of critique, understanding, and shared responsibility, we can appropriate a specified future." In other words, the text creation of Hmong leaders' narratives has been a mutual act, which may enable both Hmong and Lao leaders to take ownership of the unknown and make a new and better world for the people of Laos. I discuss the research summary,

findings, implications, and recommendations for future research and personal reflection in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX

SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF DATA

There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why…
I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?
-Robert F. Kennedy

Introduction

The Hmong people have relied upon in their leaders through their migrations out of China to Laos and then to other countries around the globe. This research focuses on Hmong leaders and specifically Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. I believe that this is the first research project among the Hmong in Lao PDR to use participatory research through critical hermeneutic tradition. This research study raises many unanswered questions; however, I hope the findings will stand the test of time in terms of both practice and implications for they have the potential of opening endless possibilities.

In this Chapter, I analyze the narratives of Hmong leaders as presented in the previous Chapter using the critical hermeneutic theoretical concepts of mimesis, forgiveness and action through imagination. The research process, from conversations to transcriptions and then from data presentation to data analysis creates a text consisting of past, present and future events. According to Herda (1999:2), "the creation of a text is a collaborative achievement, and by virtue of people working together to uncover shared meaning there is opened in front of the text the possibility of a different and presumably better world."

I hope that this text creation contributes to the remembering of past Hmong leaders, invigorating current Hmong leaders to understand oneself in relation to the other, and possibly identifying future Hmong leaders to be always in the process of becoming

leaders by understanding the self in relationship to others. In turn, this may enable Hmong leaders and then the Hmong people to imagine new possibilities.

This text creation is a "living text," always growing and moving toward reaching new possible and imaginable better worlds (Carey 2000:89) for the people of Laos. Importantly, Ricoeur (1991:432) asserts, "it is the act of reading which completes the work, which transforms it into a reading *guide* with its zones of indetermination, its latent richness of interpretation, its ability to be reinterpreted in novel ways within historical contexts that are always new." In this way, the embodiment of this text opens to reading by readers and in return allows the interpretation and reinterpretation of the present text; bringing forth innovative leadership ideas toward improving a "community always on its way" (Herda 1999:79) in making a better life for Laos.

Narrativity

Ricoeur states "the structure of narrativity demonstrates that it is by trying to put order on our past, by retelling and recounting what has been, that we acquire an identity" (in Kearney 1995:222). In other words, the act of narrating the self in language with the other in conversation allows the storytellers to retell tales of the past, present, and a foreseeable future and opens the possibility of self understanding in relation to other narratives. Furthermore, as Kearney (2002:14) posits, "whether as story or history or a mixture of both [for example testimony], the power of narrativity makes a crucial difference to our lives." In other words, narrating gives the storytellers the opportunity to recount events of the past, relate to the present conditions, and chronicle potential future stories. In this case, the storytellers are Hmong leaders in Lao PDR. Through conversation they openly share their leadership experience between researcher and

participants as we "fall into conversation, or even we become involved in it…taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may be conducted in some way, but the partners are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will 'come out' of a conversation" (Gadamer 2004:385). In other words, when I initiated the conversation with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR, the participants and I did not know where our conversations might lead; nonetheless, at the end of every conversation both participants and researcher experienced what Gadamer (2004) refers to as a "fusion of horizon." In the conversations that were part of this research, we always learned something new from each other. This exchange of meaningful experience is "a true conversation" between researcher and participants that "open dialogue which presupposes a background of intersubjective agreements and a tacit sense of relevance" (Bernstein 1983:2). In other words, the conversations between participants and researcher extended our understanding of each other's horizon and our conversations continue to be "living conversation" circulating between past, present and future actions (Bernstein 1983:2).

Mimesis

Time and Narrative (1984, 1985, 1988) is the title of Ricoeur's three volume work linking human existence between time and narrative. From the interpretive approach it is vital to think of time as always in the present and "time must be thought of as transitory in order to be fully experienced as transition" (Ricoeur 1984:25). Ricoeur classifies his concept of time into a three fold $mimesis_1$ (present past), $mimesis_2$ (present present), $mimesis_3$ (present future). For Ricoeur, $mimesis_1$ is a "reference back to the familiar pre-understanding we have of the order of action" (1984:xi). On the other hand,

as stated above, $mimesis_3$ is "a new configuration by means of [a] poetic refiguring of the pre-understood order of action" while $mimesis_2$ acts as a "mediating function" (Ricoeur 1984:65). In other words, $mimesis_1$ is our preunderstanding of history and tradition along with our prejudgment and prejudice while $mimesis_3$ is our imagination of a possible future. Nevertheless, it is the mediating act in $mimesis_2$ that propels us forward through the past, present and future. Shahideh (2004:35) refers to Ricoeur's concept of mimesis as a "circle of mimesis: the end point seems to lead back to the starting point or, worse, the end point seems anticipated in the starting point." In other words, $mimesis_{1,2,3}$ is not linear but circular in time "thus the hermeneutic circle of narrative and time never stops being reborn from the circle that stages of mimesis form" (Ricoeur 1984:76). Ricoeur (1981:292) illustrates mimesis as a form of metaphor, saying

> there is *mimesis* only where there is 'doing' or 'activity;' and poetic 'activity' consists precisely in the construction of plots. Moreover, what *mimesis* imitates is not the effectivity of events but their logical structure, their meaning. *Mimesis* is so little a reduplication of reality that tragedy 'seeks to represent men as better (beltiones) than they are in reality'… Tragic *mimesis* reactivates reality – in this case, human action –but in accordance with its magnificent essential features. *Mimesis*, in this sense, is a kind of metaphor.

Interpreting time as a metaphor allows us to constantly imitate life in the present while remaining in contact with reality because it is the "unrepresentability of time, which makes even phenomenology continually turn to metaphors and to the language of myth, in order to talk about the upsurge of the present or the flowing of the unitary flux of time" (Ricoeur 1988:243). The concept of time plays a significant role in understanding the narrative of human action and its relationship to the world of mortal others. Heidegger (2001:176) asserts, "mortals are human beings…because they can die." In other words, the story or life of human beings chronically have a beginning, middle and an ending;

however, “we human being…can help to be voiced” (Heidegger 2001:144). In this way, the narratives of humans should always be kept in the active present voice consisting of past experiences and future imagination. It is the active present voice that is spoken, heard and lived.

Herda (1999:78) says that Ricoeur’s three fold $mimesis_{1,2,3}$ stages are “creative acts and are interrelated.” According to Herda (1999:78), $mimesis_1$ is a figured world where a person is born into and $mimesis_3$ is a refigured world where a person can imagine inhabiting while $mimesis_2$ is the configured world where the person is currently living. In narrative, action is important at all the three stages of mimesis; however, it is most crucial to reach the refigured world. In other words, it is essential for humans to take action toward reaching “an imaginary world we might inhabit” (Herda 1999:78) while understanding that “what has happened is not fixed” (Ricoeur 2004:381); so that we may recognize “the great horizon of the past, out of which our culture and our present live, influences us in everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future. History is only present to us in light of our futurity” (Gadamer 1976:8-9). Kearney (2002:133) asserts that “the act of mimesis involves a circular movement from action to text and back again – passing from prefigured experience through narrative recounting back to a refigured life-world. In short, life is always on the way to narrative, but it does not arrive there until someone hears and tell this life as a story.”

For my participants, recalling the past a pre-figured world was very not easy and it is difficult to envision a future because the Hmong faced harsh discrimination before and after the Vietnam conflict; however, Hmong leaders’ past leadership have created opportunities for Hmong to participate in the Lao PDR leadership arena. My participants

understand that Hmong past leadership is no longer applicable as a model because the current community is very diverse. As a result, Hmong leaders are not only leading Hmong citizens but also leading other diverse groups. In the case of Chai Sher Xiong, he states, "when I was living on the rural highlands I only led Hmong. However, since I have been residing in the lowlands, presently, I lead many different ethnic groups. Leading various ethnic groups is difficult but I have learned to change according to the leadership settings. Leaders of different ethnic groups have different leadership actions." Chai Sher knows his leadership is ground in Hmong tradition and values; however, in order to lead a diverse community forward he understands that he needs to adjust his leadership action at the present because "the actual present of doing something bears witness to the potential present of the capacity to do something and is constituted as the present of the present" (Ricoeur 1984:60).

Furthermore, Hmong leaders' abilities to "mediate the past and future to the present, to bring into one plot many inconsistencies in our lives" (Herda 1997:37) is best reflected by Chia Tou Her when he states, "leading others requires the understanding of a Hmong concept called Vaj Tsab Xeem Lis. In translation, Hmong elders [leaders] value the concept of unity among many clans such as Vang, Cha and Lee." Hmong leaders' understanding and use of the concept of "Vang, Cha and Lee" (Ovesan 2004a:230) as a leadership framework for ongoing unity is similar to Ricoeur's theory of time in three fold $\text{mimesis}_{1,2,3}$.

More importantly, in the case of Nhia Chong Thao, he understands that his time as a leader is limited by his mortality. Nhia Chong's understanding of time as a Hmong leader is intertwined with past, present and future. He describes this by saying, "I am the

leader this year but you may be the leader next year. I may be the leader today but you may be the leader tomorrow. It is important to inform other potential leaders as much as possible so when the time comes they are able leaders." Nhia Chong understands that "we belong to history before telling stories or writing history" (Ricoeur 1981:294).

Kearney (2002:151) states, "every moral agent must, after all, have some sense of self-identity which perdures over a lifetime of past, present and future – as well as over a communal history of predecessors, contemporaries and successors – if it is to be capable of making and keeping promises." Hmong leaders' stories always revisit a painful history and memory of a hurtful past conflict as Hmong leaders' witnessed the great losses and sacrifices of the Hmong; nevertheless, they also show Hmong leaders' courage, love and determination in uniting its citizens. For Ricoeur (1984:64), mimesis_1 is the "…preunderstan[ing of] what human acting is, in its semantics, its system, its temporality." My research data show the participants had a preunderstanding of the hardship resulting from the gradual relocation from the highlands down to the city in what Heidegger (1996:135) refers to as "thrownness" where Hmong and its leaders are "thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world;" nonetheless, as Hmong leaders they have seen progress, especially among Hmong children who have pursued higher education. The conversation with Tou Moua reveals Hmong leaders understanding of time in three fold: past, present and future. He asserts that

> in the past not many Hmong kids attended school; however, in recent years, Hmong kids have been attending school. They are also very determined and hard working students. Hmong parents are encouraging their children to go to school. Furthermore, when possible they also provide financial support for their children's education in Laos or abroad. I noticed the number of Hmong girls attending school has increased as well as Hmong boys. I am aging but I have seen Hmong educators taking part with the government to assist our country's community development.

Ricoeur (1981:296) states, “the world of fiction leads us to the heart of the real world of action.” For my participants, Hmong lifestyles on the highlands practicing slash and burn farming as a primarily source of survival was not leading to a better future; therefore, relocating to the city has contributed to a new present community for the Hmong. In other words, Hmong leaders opened possibilities to “create newness that houses [the] future” (Herda 1999:37). The pre-figured world of $mimesis_1$ according to Herda (1999:76), “creates the prefigured life, our traditions, assumptions, goals and motives.” In terms of the leadership setting, Hmong custom and tradition was that fathers would pass on their skills to their sons through oration and observation. Likewise from mothers to daughters. Ricoeur talks of this transcending knowledge from one person to the other, saying “like me, my contemporaries, my predecessor, and my successors can say ‘I.’ It’s in this way that I am historically bound to all others” (Ricoeur 2007:180). My conversation with Nhia Chong Thao provides a good example of this transcending acknowledgement, for he states, **“**there is a Hmong old saying, “life has a root.” In other words, leadership knowledge comes from a predecessor. In leadership settings, you have to acknowledge past leaders… In addition, our past leaders had led us and they had made efforts in mentoring potential future leaders.”

Hmong leaders learned about leadership from a predecessor as they became a successor through oration and mimicking past Hmong leaders’ good attributes and proper behaviors. Nhia Chong Thao understands the concept of time as always in the present, asserting, “gaining the trust of more than ten people should be credited to our past leaders because without their support it would not have been possible. In Hmong leadership, the present leaders are the result of past leaders’ wisdom.” In other words, Nhia Chong Thao

recognizes the leadership of past leaders with present Hmong leaders who "are merely the contemporaries of our contemporaries" (Habermas 2008:12). On the contrary, recognizing past leaders leadership does not mean Hmong leaders need to follow or do what other great past Hmong leaders accomplished. Instead, the past should be kept in the past, for as time changes and circumstances become different, having new and better understandings of the present interest ($mimesis_2$) and forging on with our best abilities are required. In doing so, the imaginable future ($mimesis_3$) according to Herda is where "we imagine ourselves acting and inhabiting a world with indirect reference to the world in $mimesis_1$" (Herda 1999:79). Nonetheless, it is essential to think of the present present ($mimesis_2$), which, according to Ricoeur (1984:64) and to use the quote again, "opens the kingdom of the as if." In other words, Hmong leaders do not need to replicate the past in order to have a future because time will be unfolding in many directions requiring one to find his or her self leadership in relation to other leaders. Shahideh (2004:14) eloquently states, "although we cannot predict what will emerge in the future, we can learn from our past and leave our future generations with a series of interconnected stories so that they can understand how to relate to one another in the next phase of social and personal development."

The retelling of Hmong leaders' stories have transformed and given life to an untold story. As Kearney 2002:14 states, "the unnarrated life is not worth living." Therefore, as sad and tragic as many of the Hmong people stories may be, it is by telling their stories that the Hmong leaders identify their roles and partake of a different scene. As a researcher, I know I have a role to play, to be a part of and possibly write a new Hmong leadership story. By telling their stories, Hmong leaders are not putting an end to

their leadership narratives but are writing new stories for each chapter of their new lives. Many of the shared leadership stories may not have happy endings as many stories in the real world are unforeseen and new and unpredictable turns of events may change the way a story will conclude. Even though Hmong leaders in Lao PDR are surrounded by the driving forces of political upheaval, cultural and religious change, language and educational differences, economic and market demands, housing and financial needs, Hmong leaders should continue to remember and tell their stories the way they happened without any external influences.

As Kearney 2002:5 states, "stories seemed to make some sense of time, of history, of their lives." By sharing their stories, Hmong leaders are creating their own history. History is deeply embedded in the lives of millions of Hmong around the world (present past, present present and present future) who live in a world based on their past experiences, mistakes, and circumstances while continuing to imagine a future. Some Hmong leaders may never see this future because they have either lost hope or are reaching old age. However, as Herda (2004:viii) states, "through imagination of contemporaries, predecessor and successors in our lives" Hmong leaders continue to live their history at the present as best as they can through their children and grandchildren because as Ricoeur (2007:179) reminds us, "each of us has not only contemporaries but also predecessors and successors."

In summary, through narrating and understanding of time consisting of present past, present present and present future, Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have established relationships among themselves in relation to the others. Hmong leaders' preunderstanding of the present past and present future link them to an understanding of

the present that may open dialogue, allowing Hmong and the Lao PDR government an opportunity to work together for change benefiting the entire Lao nation.

Forgiveness

In an epilogue in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur (2004:457) states that forgiveness is the "representation of the past on the plane of memory and of history at risk of forgetting." Forgiveness is twofold. It is an enigma of a fault preventing a capable being from acting while on the other hand it is also an enigma of a possibility allowing the capable being the ability to act. The two-fold enigma of forgiveness runs diagonally through our past and effects our memory and history; thus, it places a distinctive mark on forgetting (Ricoeur 2004:457). It bears to echo Ricoeur's (2004:457) words again, when he further states that forgiveness, "if it exists – constitutes the horizon common to memory, history and forgetting. Always in retreat, this horizon slips away from any grasp. It makes forgiving difficult: not easy but not impossible." For Hmong and Lao leaders in Laos, a horizon toward forgiveness is paramount because the people of Laos hold a similar memory of a sorrowful past. They also shared and experienced a dreadful history through the Vietnam conflict era; therefore, it is difficult for Hmong and Lao leaders to hold discussion about a shared history.

As a result, initiating dialogues surrounding the need for forgiveness among Hmong and Lao PDR's leaders at all levels of the government is not easy but not impossible. Importantly, all my participants talked about the need to show acts of forgiveness because forgiveness is an integral part of being a leader, and, more importantly, to the very definition of being a Hmong leader. All of the participants discussed various situations and gave examples of how they had show acts of forgiveness

toward the other – Hmong, Laotian and other ethnic groups. Ka Pao Thao eloquently asserts:

> forgiveness needs to be considered because I always say to others that the hurtful feelings remain hidden from within while showing forgiveness toward other. The act of forgiveness varies among citizens and colleagues; however, we all should practice the act of forgiveness. When citizens have disputes, it is crucial for leaders to inform citizens about how their dispute is related to the law, which is a quest for justice. In this way, citizens are prone to the rule of law and act accordingly by showing act of forgiveness. On the contrary, if colleagues make mistakes toward citizens or among themselves, the act of forgiveness shall be applicable. In other words, whether a person is a government official or ordinary citizen, the act of showing forgiveness diminishes any further conflict between two parties.

As difficult as it may be to forgive the past, Arendt (1958) rationalizes that, "without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever" (Arendt 1958:237). All my participants believe a Hmong leader must demonstrate an ability to show acts of forgiveness toward citizens and colleagues. Furthermore, they have initiated acts of forgiveness within their respective communities and toward other diverse communities whenever issues or disputes arises. Shoua Lue Her states that,

> when Hmong can show act of forgiveness toward each other we can start establishing relationship with other groups of people so they can see that Hmong have cooperation; therefore, that may make them prone more toward forgiveness…I had told them [Hmong and Lao]when we do not show acts of forgiveness toward others, they will not show acts of forgiveness toward us. A leader who can lead citizens to show acts of forgiveness may open the citizen's ability to hold a caring heart of friendship toward one another. There is a Hmong saying, the land may be narrow but the heart is not, the land may be small but not the heart. In this way, we all can live together in harmony.

In Lao PDR, Hmong leaders' acts of forgiveness toward the other are "the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act

which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven" (Arendt 1958:241) and also acts of "charity" (Ricoeur in Anthohi 2005:11). Moreover, it is imperative to understand that forgiveness is "a personal act, an act from one person to person that does not concern juridical institutions" (in Anthohi 2005:9). As a Hmong leader, Choua Mo Yang understands his personal act of forgiveness toward the other when he asserts, "a leader who practices the act of forgiveness can hold onto their friendship and attract others; therefore, there has to be forgiveness toward those who have been wrong. In this way, you still have the wrongdoer's friendship so that some day in the distant future the person may realize their wrong act and let go of the anger." Choua Mo knows his acts of forgiveness toward forgiving wrong doers are personal acts and these personal acts may or may not be in accordance to the laws; however, his praxis of forgiving the other as a personal act is one of the true essences of Hmong leadership in Laos.

Ricoeur (2004:469,) referring to Derrida, states, "forgiveness is not, and should not be, either normal, or normative, or normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, standing the test of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality." For my participants, the act of forgiveness does not need to be a consensus because only the few Hmong leaders may be able to act on the act of forgiveness; however, through time their action may prevail and become the embodiment of Hmong leadership practices through historical temporal time. Additionally, Arendt (1958:241) states, "the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus being a reaction, something of the original character of action." My participants know their acts of forgiveness toward the other may or may not

be openly received; however, it is through the action of showing forgiveness toward the other that individuals release themselves and the other from any animosity. For Hmong and Lao leaders in Lao PDR, how will each side react when the other does not accept the act of forgiveness? In other words, what will Hmong leaders do and how will they react if their act of forgiveness is not been welcomed? As Ricoeur (1999:17) articulates, "to hear the anger of other people forces us to confront our wrong-doings, which is the first step towards forgiveness" and furthermore, "asking for forgiveness is, indeed, also being prepared to receive a negative response: no, I cannot forgive, I cannot forgive" (Ricoeur 2004:483). Hmong leaders have to be willing to listen to other's stories and accept the fact that their act of forgiveness may not be reciprocal because "forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal [though not necessarily individual or private] affair in which what was done is forgiven for the sake of who did it" (Arendt1958:241).

Ricoeur (1996:11) emphasizes "we can forgive only when there is no forgetting;" moreover, "forgiveness requires enduring patience." In other words, forgiveness does not imply forgetting what happened but importantly, remembering what happened while exhibiting the patience to initiate an act toward forgiveness. Pa Choua Xiong recognizes the need for Hmong to be patient in order to show acts of forgiveness when he voices "the act of forgiveness is surrounded through patience. A person who does not have patience can not show acts of forgiveness toward the others….through patience if others have made mistakes, you are able to forgive them." Cheng Xue Thao reemphasizes Pa Choua's statement when he states, "the act of forgiveness may be difficult for some Hmong because of their short temper. Most misunderstanding or conflict arises as a result

of gossip; therefore, if you hear another person gossiping about you or others, caution must be taken. I mean you must be patient and seek the truth. This is a way of showing forgiveness." My participants who are leaders know their leadership roles can guide Hmong toward becoming more patience leading to the act of forgiveness so Hmong may accept "the forgetting of the debt and not of the facts" (Ricoeur 1998:125).

Ricoeur (2004:483) states as indicated above that "asking for forgiveness is…also being prepared to receive a negative response: no, I cannot forgive, I cannot forgive." In other words, asking the other for forgiveness does not necessarily mean the other will forgive, which may not lead to acts of forgiveness. Nonetheless, my participants know it is critical for Hmong leaders to understand the fact that all of their acts of forgiveness toward the other may not be reciprocated onto the other and the other may not accept their act of forgiveness. Nevertheless, Hmong leaders have to continue practicing and asking others to show acts of forgiveness. They must be willing to accept the fact that not everybody will show acts of forgiveness.

Action Through Imagination

Kearney (2002:151) understands that the "acknowledgement of a two-way passage from action to text and back again encourages us to recognize the indispensable role of human agency. This role is multiple, relating as it does to the agent as author, actor and reader." Equally important, "an action depends on its agent" and that individual's ability to act; however, it is "in the agent's power" to imagine a possible better world that opens new possibilities (Ricoeur 1992:101). Moreover, an agent's action through appropriation can "make one's own' what was initially [alien]" (Ricoeur 1981:185) and this will unfold the "world of fiction…to the heart of the real world of

action" (Ricoeur 1981:296). Heidegger (1971:127) reemphasizes that appropriation is "what brings all present and absent each into their own, from where they show themselves in what they are…" In reviewing my participants' leadership stories, they were not born into leadership positions; nonetheless, they all had to take action leading them into such a role. In other words, the participants did not become respected leaders without taking any action. Furthermore, they all want to continue taking action toward making the Hmong community a better place for many future generations because through action a person can bring "a change in the world" (Ricoeur 2007:137). For example, Chai Sher Xiong's parents and family were not leaders; however, his observation of other leaders' inability to lead effectively motivated him to eavesdrop on other good leaders' words of wisdom, which eventually propelled him to become a leader. Now, he has a chance to bring change to his community.

In addition, as Kearney (2003:80) asserts, "it is the other within who is calling us to act on behalf of the other without." Arendt (1958:236) states, "acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself." All the participants made the decision to act not as a result of external influence or force, but because the opportunity for action was open to all. Besides, the Hmong community remains in need of leaders who envision a better place for Hmong children; therefore, relocating from the highlands down into the city was a major act for all the participants.

Arendt (1958:190) further states that "action…acts [in] a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where process is the cause of new processes;" however, there may not be any action without self-designating oneself as "being able to speak" (Ricoeur 2005:253). The participants' simple act of talking about their leadership

story is in itself an action and this may not have been possible had they not designated themselves as capable speakers. Again, a person' action goes beyond the act of acting because the action can inspire others to act. My participants' act of disclosing their leadership narratives go beyond their ability to act because as others interpret the narrative as text they may take action on behalf of the participants.

For Kearney (2002:131) "every action is directed toward some result that informs and motivates the agent's aim in acting." In the case of all my participants, they knew the Hmong community was not developed; as a result, they took specific action to become leaders so that they could influence the Hmong community; however, when it comes to developing the Hmong community "the outcome of an action may be a change in fortune toward happiness or misfortune" (Ricoeur 1988:55) and "actions are capable of being submitted to rules and that agents can be held responsible for their actions" (Ricoeur 1992:99). For example, Wa Lor Xiong took action to implement the government developmental plans to improve the city main roads and sewage system. The developmental plans resulted in changes to the city house zoning requiring a few houses to be relocated and rebuilt. Many citizens were angry, including Hmong parents. Wa Lor's actions show the government's willingness to allocate resources toward community development at the village level; however, citizens may not accept it with open arms. This is a predicament facing many Hmong village leaders. Despite resistance from his citizens, Wa Lor acknowledges that he hopes his actions to improve the village will take place and he has pledged responsibility to [his citizens and the government] for his actions.

Arendt (1958:192) indicates that an "action reveals itself only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants;" nonetheless, the "responsibility to others has to come from beyond itself – that is, from others…[T]his involves an 'enlarged mentality' of imagining oneself in the place of everybody else" (Kearney 1996:184). Reviewing my participants' narratives indicates that their actions have created many networks among Hmong leaders, citizens and the government at large. Equally important, they have been instrumental toward voicing and imagining the Hmong interest in the public arena that is "aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992:172) because a Hmong leader as an "agent has the power to do things, that is to produce changes in the world" (Ricoeur 1992:112).

Summary

In this Chapter, I present an analysis of the data presented in Chapter Five. I had conversations with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR. I transcribed the conversations held in the Hmong language, then translated it into English text. I analyzed the created text using the participatory hermeneutic framework under the research categories of mimesis, forgiveness and action through imagination. I gained insight into Hmong leaders' narratives and leadership praxis. In consequence, I understand myself better in relation to the other – Hmong leaders. My participants understand it is important to know their past [Hmong history, tradition, and culture] and understand the present condition [Hmong community] that may enable them to move forth into the future [a new better world].

Importantly, Hmong leaders know that forgiveness plays a crucial role in successfully leading a diverse community. Moreover, they frequently preach and practice

the act of forgiveness toward the other – [leaders, families, citizens and the diverse community]. Hmong leaders' ability to show acts of forgiveness allows them to resolve most disputes at the local levels. Furthermore, acting on behalf of oneself in relationship to members of the community has enabled most of my participants to assume their respective leadership position or role.

The next Chapter concludes with the summary, findings, implications, recommendation for future research, and the researcher's personal reflection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

"You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals"
-Madame Marie Curie

Introduction

Chapter Seven presents a summary of the research project retracing the research topic, description of conversation partners, historical background, literature review, theoretical framework, and research process. I outline the research findings, implications and suggestion for future research. The dissertation concludes with my personal reflection on the research study.

Summary

This research explores Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and its implications for community development. The Hmong and Lao shared a similar historical tie through the Vietnam American conflict that continues to resurface as the country moves forth in development. Leaders in Lao PDR, especially Hmong leaders, may find themselves in a precarious environment; therefore, it is only appropriate that Hmong leaders' narratives are told. Hmong leaders share their leadership stories by retelling their journey from the highlands into the city. They also reveal the practice of showing acts of forgiveness toward the other. Furthermore, they speak of the need to take action to steer the country's diverse community forward into the future.

My conversation partners are located in the provinces of Luang Prabang, Sayabouly and Vientiane, Lao PDR. Their ages range from their mid-thirties to their late

sixties and they represent many elements of Hmong leadership: four village leaders [nai ban], four college educators, three subclan leaders, and two elders.

Chapter Two presents a brief historical overview of the research site, which is the country of Lao PDR, addressing specifically Hmong tradition, culture, economic and social settings. Lao PDR is attempting to move forward to become a developed nation, despite its many challenges; however, the country may reach its development goals if the country's diverse leaders, including Hmong leaders, are encouraged to take part in the development processes.

The review of literature in Chapter Three provides a quick synopsis of leadership theories that emerged throughout the ages in the Western perspective. This is followed by a discussion on Lao PDR historical leaders and the historical relationship of Hmong and Lao leaders. There is also an introduction of Hmong chronological leaders, outlining their influence on the Hmong people.

In Chapter Four, I present the research protocol for participatory research ground in critical hermeneutic tradition, as guided by Herda (1999). I describe the research categories of mimesis, forgiveness and action. Chapter Five is a discussion of all the conversations I had with my participants, including major themes. In Chapter Six, I analyze the data based on Ricoeur's theories of mimesis, forgiveness and action. In Chapter Seven, I present my findings and implications, suggestions for future research, and a personal reflection.

Findings

Examining the data from my conversation with Hmong leaders in Lao PDR discloses the following findings.

Finding #1: Openness toward the Other

The majority of my conversation partners have lived in the city for less than 20 years; however, their leadership openness toward the other [in Lao PDR] epitomized the importance of Hmong tradition, values and culture. For many generations Hmong leadership has been grounded in family morals and clan solidarity; nonetheless, Hmong leaders in Lao PDR have found ways to extend their leadership practices onto other groups, such as the Lao PDR nation.

Finding #2: New Leadership Paradigm

The Hmong had no known leadership model, making the connection between emerging young Hmong adults and older Hmong rather difficult. The lack of interconnectedness in Hmong leadership identity between the different generations is being felt in the Hmong community as the traditional Hmong leadership paradigm has not taken full form creating many challenges; however, Ricoeur (1984:69) states, "the labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound one way or another to the tradition's paradigms." It can be inferred that current Hmong leaders make efforts to change the tradition of the preconfigured world for a configured world to be evaluated because Hmong leaders "are merely the contemporaries of our contemporaries" (Habermas 2008:12). Hmong current leaders can instigate moving toward a new Hmong leadership paradigm that may open possibilities for future Hmong leadership.

Nevertheless, this new Hmong leadership paradigm may be the result of Lao PDR encouraged or forced relocation of the Hmong from the high hills down to the lowlands creating many challenges for both Hmong leaders and the Hmong local community. Therefore, as the Hmong local community shifts to the Lao PDR nation national

community, the Hmong and its leaders may experience the expanding need of their local community onto the national community, creating and opening their leadership horizons of a new Hmong leadership paradigm for the local and national communities.

Finding #3: Hmong Leaders' Hospitality

All the participants became leaders not because they have to, but rather because they want to. Being a Hmong leader is not about receiving importance, it is about giving. In other words, Hmong leaders hold many leadership responsibilities, such as knowing the tradition, religious practices, and cultural norms. Leaders are responsible for resolving conflicts in order to maintain cohesion among family, sub-clan, clan and intra-clan members. In general, a Hmong leader is supposed to serve the people. Hmong leaders are expected to treat all guests as honorary guests by providing food and shelter; therefore, only a few are willing to take on such roles. The act of hospitality is "unconditional hospitality to the alien" (Kearney 2003:68) and is expected of all Hmong leaders. Kearney (2003:69) referencing Derrida asserts, "hospitality of justice – open to the absolute other as another without name." In other words, hospitality should be extended beyond the other without distinction, name or proper name (Kearney 2003:69). It is not an easy task to be a Hmong leader; however, a few Hmong have gradually transitioned to the role of leader through personal "experience, relationship, and actions" with others (Shahideh 2004:40).

Finding #4: Our Children's Education

Education is one of the overarching themes throughout all of the conversations. Hmong leaders are hopeful that if children are given ample opportunity to pursue higher education, the country will be more prosperous in the future. Importantly, Laos'

educational system is made available to children in the city but if possible education also must be made accessible to children in the highlands. Education does not necessary make a person a good leader; nonetheless, education does open horizons. All of my participants have high hopes that future leaders will be more educated and can lead differently than the current and previous leaders.

Implications

Implication #1: Leaders as Mediators

Ruth Benedict (1934:44) emphasizes that "the history of culture is in considerable degree a history of [an individual's] nature and fates and associations." Moreover, Clifford Geertz (1973:14) iterates that "understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity." For the Hmong, culture is rooted in their history, tradition and values. Hmong have a very complex social structure; nevertheless, Hmong leaders can serve as mediators between the Hmong community, other groups, and the Lao PDR government.

The majority of Hmong parents have no formal education; therefore they may not understand government policies toward changes. It is therefore appropriate to use Hmong leaders as middle people to communicate between the Hmong community and Lao PDR government. In addition, Hmong leaders can serve as neutral observers and hold conversations with several government leaders including Lao PDR's ambassador and his staff in Washington, D.C.; Hmong leaders who hold high position in the Lao PDR government; United States' Ambassador in Vientiane; members of the United States Congress as well as the United States Department of State. My hope is for all the above mentioned participants to come together and understand the other. All the participants in

Laos can work as a team toward community development "with others to bring to life, in a practical and just manner, a process for critiquing existing social realities and creating new ones" (Herda 1999:1).

Implication #2: Development at the Local Level

All my conversation partners believe that for community development to be effective, it is imperative that village leaders [nai ban] are involved, partly because village leaders have direct daily personal contact with citizens making the flow of communication more visible. Once the groundwork at the village levels in the city has been established, then it may gradually move outward into the highlands. If local leaders and their citizens are encouraged to cooperate and work together as a team, the country's long term developmental goals may be possible.

Implication #3: Healing Community

The Hmong and Lao shared a hurtful historical past that is being felt today; therefore, the time has come for both sides [Hmong and Lao] to tell their stories and create a new narrative that includes both stories. This may be a very challenging task; one that is not easy but not impossible. It is critical for Hmong leaders at various levels in Lao PDR to initiate an open dialogue addressing any animosity between the Hmong and Lao nation. Shahideh (2004:26) states that "people with fixed ideas are not open to configuration and new interpretations, and they generally contribute to the escalation of a crisis." Thus, it is important for leaders in Lao PDR to look for new ways of interpreting the past and thinking about what the future may be, which allows people to take action at the level of the configured world.

Importantly, Hmong leaders may start the process of educating the Hmong community to reinterpret the past and re-imagine a new community inhabited by a diverse population that needs interpretation at the present. Hmong leaders in Lao PDR can slowly engage others to open up discussions about the need for the Hmong community to initiate a movement toward asking the government for forgiveness. Furthermore, Hmong leaders in Lao PDR may hold the keys to bringing the Hmong community and Lao government together into a healing community.

Implication #4: Leader in Need of Action

Hmong leadership in Lao PDR continues to be a very sensitive issue for discussion, especially with regard to their roles, tasks and action pertaining to the Lao nation's future. The Hmong community remains one of the poorest communities in Laos; however, Hmong leaders have not taken much initiative toward improving their own living conditions. As a result, it is essential that Hmong leaders open discussion within the Hmong community and exercise their leadership duties with regard to their approach to community development, not just from the perspective of Hmong leaders to benefit the Hmong community, but in conjunction with Lao PDR policies, goals, and actions to benefit the Lao nation.

In this way, resources from the Lao PDR government toward community development may benefit both the Hmong and Lao nation communities. In short, Hmong leaders may take action toward exchanging discussion within the Hmong community openly about the need for forgiveness. Gradually, the Hmong can thus begin the process of forgiving the Lao PDR government regardless of whether the government's policies and actions reflect forgiveness toward the Hmong.

Implication #5: Potential for Leadership Education

The findings in this research can be useful in teaching about leadership in leadership studies programs. Also this research can be used to further understand international leadership challenges. In particular, the findings of this research may be integrated among the participating institutions of educational leadership curriculums within the Greater Mekong Subregion University Network comprised of Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and the People's Republic of China. In addition, countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion may find through partnerships among the diverse local village leaders (such as Hmong leaders) and their respective citizens that these partnerships may contribute to the economic, social and leadership development goals of each country. On the whole, Lao PDR utilization of its diverse local leaders' leadership experience during the policy and decision making processes may set examples for its neighboring countries to enact similar aspirations.

Recommendation for Future Research

This research study focuses mainly on the narratives of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR; however, since Lao PDR has a diverse population it would only be appropriate to hear other groups and their leaders' leadership stories, especially Lao leaders. Furthermore, I recommend looking at leadership narratives of the Hmong diaspora, particularly, in the United States, France, Thailand, China, and Vietnam. In the long term, both the Hmong and the Lao PDR nation will benefit from the contributions of the Hmong diaspora toward development in the country. In other words, the narratives of Hmong diaspora leaders may bridge understanding about the Hmong leaders' call for the Hmong diaspora community to contribute financial support toward Hmong community in

Laos. I also recommend examining the life story of Vang Pao and his leadership influence on the past, present and future Hmong leaders.

Another interesting topic worth exploring is Hmong women's leadership and their influence and contribution to the country's development. An important part of this would include addressing how Hmong women in leadership positions have assisted the Hmong community.

Personal Reflection

Reflecting on my journey toward completing this research study takes me back to the time I decided to visit Lao PDR in May 2008 after living abroad for more than twenty five years. It was a personal defining event for me due to the fact I felt I had to make a very profound personal choice asking Hmong leaders and Lao PDR government for forgiveness. It was a personal act from one person to another with no attachments. I was a man in search of a research topic but importantly, I was in a journey to redefine myself in relation to the other. I am not a leader nor do I want to be a leader; nonetheless, I am interested in knowing more about leadership in order to identify people who have the potential to become leaders.

The experience I gained through studying Hmong leaders in Lao PDR has allowed me to accept my Hmong identity because, "I cannot choose my ancestors, or my contemporaries. There is, in my origins, a chance element, if I look at things from the outside, and an irreducible situational fact, if I consider them from within. So I am, by birth and heritage. And I accept this" (Ricoeur 2009:62). As human beings, we are predetermined in origin and ancestry through birth; therefore, human beings should not be attached to their ancestors' past. We should not treat people differently but rather treat

all the same, despite their origins because the others are "*more like us than our own selves*"(Kearney 2003:75). In short, I hope this research has shed light on Hmong leadership settings in Lao PDR but importantly, I hope Hmong leaders and Lao PDR government leaders will carry out the personal act of asking each other for forgiveness so that the country can reconcile and truly move all the diverse people together forward into the next millennium.

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Appendix A
Map of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)

Electronic document, http://www.sitesatlas.com/Maps/Maps/lao-pol.htm, accessed February 16, 2009.

Appendix B
Research Participants

Formal Conversations

Participants	Age Range		Ethnicity	Occupation	Location
Wa Dang Thao	55-60		Hmong	College professor of agriculture	Luang Prabang
Chai Sher Xiong	40-45		Hmong	Village leader (nai ban)	Luang Prabang
Choua Mo Yang	40-45		Hmong	Village leader (nai ban)	Luang Prabang
Ka Pao Thao	65-70		Hmong	Former President of Neo Lao Ha Xat (National Lao Front for Reconstruction) in Luang Prabang	Luang Prabang
Dang Yang	30-34		Hmong	City engineer and housing construction	Luang Prabang
Lue Yang	30-34		Hmong	City engineer and housing construction	Luang Prabang
Chia Tou Her	40-45		Hmong	Subclan leader	Luang Prabang
Shoua Lue Her	40-45		Hmong	Village leader (nai ban)	Luang Prabang
Pa Choua Xiong	35-40		Hmong	Private college administrator	Sayabouly
Tou Moua	55-60		Hmong	Deputy chief of education in Sayabouly	Sayabouly
Nhia Chong Thao	65-70		Hmong	Sublan leader	Sayabouly
Cheng Xue Thao	55-60		Hmong	Subclan leader	Sayabouly
Wa Lor Xiong	40-45		Hmong	Village leader (nai ban)	Vientiane

Informal Conversations

Va Seng Xiong	60-65		Hmong	Subclan leader	U.S.A
Cha Thao Vang	45-50		Hmong	Subclan leader	U.S.A
Wa Chue Xiong	40-45		Hmong	School teacher	U.S.A
Jay Thao	30-35		Hmong	Tour guide	Luang Prabang
Cher Pao Her	60-65		Hmong	Business man	Vientiane
Chou Cheng Her	90-95		Hmong	Elder	Luang Prabang

Appendix C

Letter of Invitation and Research Questions

Date

Participant Name
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.,

I am inviting individuals to participate and to share their ideas and reflections on Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. It is anticipated that sharing the stories of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and engaging in conversation will shed light on the research topic. I expect that the finding of this research may contribute to the policy making in community development and foster understanding among people of different cultures in Lao PDR. Furthermore, it is my hope that this research will provide insight and implications towards a better understanding of Hmong leadership in Lao PDR and eventually partaking the processes of policy making towards community development.

In addition to the opportunity to share ideas, I am asking your permission to take your photograph and to record our conversations with audio and video recorders and transcribe our conversations. In doing so, our conversations will act as data for the analysis of the context I have described. Once transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of our conversational text so that you may review the same. You may add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time. When I have received your approval, I will draw upon our conversation to support my analysis. Data that you contribute, your name, and position will not be confidential.

Below you will find a series of proposed questions. These questions are primarily used as guidelines to direct our conversation. They also indicate my specific interest in the research topic. My hope is that the conversation provides an opportunity for us to learn something together through the exploration of the topic I have described. Reflecting upon your life and your experiences, please consider the following questions:

- Tell me about your experience and knowledge as a Hmong leader in Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR).
- How does your past help you think about the future for the Hmong people and the country?
- What good leadership attributes do you want to pass on to your sons and daughters, and the next generation of Hmong leaders?
- Do memories of the past play a role in forgiveness? Why or why not?
- How do you talk to the Hmong people about forgiveness?

- Do you think it would be possible for Hmong and Lao leaders to learn to forgive each other? How would this forgiveness be demonstrated?
- Do you believe Hmong leaders and Laotian leaders can imagine a better future where both groups can continue to co-exist?
- What are Hmong leaders learning about leadership in Lao PDR and its influence on the making of decision to meet the goals of the country?
- What do you think Hmong leaders can contribute to guiding the direction of the country?

Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. Please don't hesitate to reach me at 559.445.6058 or e-mail me at cwxiong@dons.usfca.edu should you have any further questions. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Chai W. Xiong
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
Organization and Leadership

Appendix D
Letter of Confirmation

Date

Participant Name
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.,

I would like to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to have a conversation with you about your experiences and perspectives on Hmong leadership in Lao PDR. I am confirming our meetings on_____. Please let me know if you need to change our arranged date, time, or the place for the meeting.

With your permission, I will take a photograph of you and I will record (audio and video) our conversation, transcribe the recordings into a written text, and submit the transcript to you for review. I would like to discuss our conversation again and include any follow-up thoughts and comments you may have. Please know that the data for this research are not confidential.

The exchange of ideas in conversation is the premise of interpretative participatory inquiry research. The process encourages you to comment on, add to, or delete portions of the transcripts. In addition, this process allows you the opportunity to reflect upon our conversations, and possibly gain new understandings of the issue at hand. Only after you have approved the transcripts will I begin to analyze the text of our conversation.

Again, I would like to thank you for your generosity in volunteering your time and energy for this research project. I look forward to meeting with you and to our conversation.

Sincerely,

Chai W. Xiong
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Organization and Leadership Program
cwxiong@dons.usfca.edu
559.917.5682

Appendix E
Consent to Be a Research Participant

Purpose and Background

Mr. Chai W. Xiong, in the University of San Francisco, School of Education, asked me to be a participant in his research. He plans to explore Hmong leadership in Lao PDR as Hmong leaders share their leadership stories, experience, and knowledge. He will be exploring questions related to whether through forgiveness, action can takes place with imagination to change dialogue about development in Lao PDR. More specifically, he plans to critique concepts of development as they affect the Hmong leaders and Hmong community. Moreover, he will explore new ways of seeing development to create a space for a new and shared understanding of the way development affects those who are supposed to be served.

Procedure

I agree, as a part of this study, to participate in conversation with Mr. Chai W. Xiong regarding Hmong leadership in the Hmong community of Lao PDR and their stories of development. I agree that Mr. Xiong may take my photograph, and record the conservation on audio and video recording devices which will be transcribed. A copy of the transcription will be returned to me for review, editing and approval before its inclusion in the analysis. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, discontinue the conversation at any point, and may request changes or deletions. My participation in this research project is voluntary and any data I contribute to this study will not be confidential. I agree, as a part of this study, to participate in conversation with Mr. Xiong regarding Hmong leadership in the Hmong community of Lao PDR and their stories of development. While the conversation and transcription in this research are collaborative, the writing that comes from them is the researcher's product, and may include some editing by the respondent. I am therefore consenting to forgo anonymity under these conditions. I acknowledge that I have been given complete and clear information about this research. It is my option to make the decision at the outset about whether or not to participate and withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

Risk and Discomforts

I am free to decline to answer any questions, stop the conversation at any point, or my participation at any time. I understand that I may request to remove my entire transcript from the study. I also understand that I may be identified and quoted in the dissertation or subsequent publications.

Benefits

I will receive no monetary compensation. The anticipated benefit of this conversation to me is the personal reflection on how the stories of Hmong leaders in Lao PDR reveal a space in which a new and shared understanding of development can occur.

Alternative

I am free to choose not to participate in this study.

Cost
There will be no cost to me to take part in this study.

Questions
If I have questions or comments about the study, I may contact Mr. Chai W. Xiong at 2550 Mariposa Mall Room 2000, Fresno, CA 93721, USA, via phone at 559.445.6058 or via email at cwxiong@dons.usfca.edu. I may also contact his advisor, Dr. Ellen Herda, at the University of San Francisco via phone at 415.422.2075 or via email at herdatemp@yahoo.com. Should I not want to address comments to either of them, I may contact the office of Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday by calling 415.422.6091 or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Bldg. – Room 017, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA USA, 94117.

Consent to Participate in Research
I have a copy of this consent letter to keep. I understand that my participation in the dissertation research conducted by Mr. Chai W. Xiong is voluntary. I understand and agree with the above procedures and conditions.

Participant's Signature	Date
Researcher's Signature	Date
Researcher's Name (Print)	Date

Appendix F
Thank You and Follow-up Letter

Date

Participant Name
Address

Dear Mr./Ms.,

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to have a rich and engaging conversation with you. I appreciated you sharing your experiences and opinions on Hmong leadership in Lao People's Democratic Republic.

I have attached a copy of our transcribed conversation for your review and approval. Please review the transcription and provide any feedback, changes and or additions that you may have. This is an on-going document and any new understandings or reflections are important to include. Please provide me with your comments by [date].

Again, I would like to express my thanks to you for your generous participation.

Sincerely,

Chai W. Xiong
Researcher, Doctoral Student
University of San Francisco
School of Education
Organization and Leadership Program
cwxiong@dons.usfca.edu
559.917.5682

Appendix G
Copy of IRBPHS Approval Letter

April 16, 2009

Dear Chai Xiong:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #09-026). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

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IRBPHS - University of San Francisco
Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building - 017
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
(415) 422-6091 (Message)
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)
irbphs@usfca.edu

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http://www.usfca.edu/humansubjects/

Appendix H
Transcripts of Pilot Study

Conversation with Kia Chue Her on 8/21/08

CX: The first question I want to ask you is related to Hmong leadership in the 40's, 50's, 60's or 70's, what do you think of their leadership during those times? What were some of the positive as well as negative points?

KCH: Let me explain so that you know. I'm not a leader but I used to be a leader. I didn't hold a high position. The Hmong people never held a position such as the president or etc. The highest position ever held by the Hmong is General Vang Pao but within each sub-clans or groups, there's a clan or group leader.

I just wanted to explain this little bit of information just so that you know. In my life, since childhood at the time I was in school, I was always the leader in the class. I always liked to lead others. During those years in school, the students needed to line up so I was responsible to make sure they were in a straight line. In the classroom, I was also the leader in the class; therefore, ever since I was in school, I have always been the one who led others.

I always loved to be a leader, even at home. I liked to follow our grandpa or great-grandpa when they were settling disputes. Though I didn't know much, I would just sit there and watch them. Why did I watch them? Because I was learning, I used to be this. Before anybody can be a leader, the person has to want to and willfully… The second thing is, as gifted as you may be naturally, you have to always learn. Your natural ability may not be enough. To truly be smart you also have to be educated.

When I was growing up, your father, we were in the war. If it was during the war years I may not be able to discuss it, but since the war is long ended. I can discuss it. At that time I attended leadership training in the south [Laos] taught by the American CIA. We were taught to read, listen and evaluate others' behaviors. Also before you can be a leader you have be able to observe and tell what type of person someone is based on their behaviors and what type of person can lead. You have to be able to judge a person's words for the truth.

In translation from Lao language, I was studying psychological tactics, using one's mind and ideas to seek the truth. When I was in my teenage years, I lived with Vang Pao. I worked for him too. I saw his weaknesses and strengths. In addition, I learned his leadership style. I have learned my leadership skills from the elders but I also established friendship with others. Friends are very important because they can assist one another. This is one of the important things in becoming a good leader.

You have to distinguish the positive and negative characteristics of a leader. What good qualities do people like or dislike about the individual? Why do people like this particular

leader and dislike the other one? So, when you become a leader, you have to decide to be which leader that people like?

For example, one leader is smarter but very strict, one leader is not as smart but people love him more. How does one combine both positive qualities as one's own when leading? This is how I have learned my leadership skills.

Let me finish answering your questions when we spoke earlier over the phone regarding three things. First, you wanted to know how did I acquire my leadership skills and how have I been conducting myself? No matter what, no matter how educated you have become, you have to always be open to learning new things. If you already have good character but you continue to learn, you'll be better off.

If we have two individuals, one has a high education and at the same time is very intelligent, another person is intelligent but at the same time is open to continual learning along with a lot of friends…one also has to go along with other ideas.

How does one conduct oneself as a leader? Hmong leadership practices of the past can't be used as current leadership practices as times has changed. During the time of Chinese and French rule, they oppressed the people; therefore, the leadership practices aren't applicable to today's leadership practices.

Hmong leaders at the time were not elected by the people. The selected leaders were mainly military officers. Therefore, civilians who were capable leaders were not chosen. Those who had great minds and ideas were not in position to use them.

Hmong leaders in the past had a lack of education. Vang Pao had natural skills. He is born with great talent. He only completed in Laos the equivalent of third grade in the U.S., but he has a sharp mind. I will not go in detail about the story of the Hmong. Hmong had no country and no written language so our leadership practices I had mentioned as above. There are good as well as bad practices.

From this point on, I will make a few points about leadership and how a leader should act. I'm speaking from experience from the time I was young to my old age. This is how I see it.

A leader is someone who is very patient and honest. Our past Hmong leaders were very mean and strict. This is the case when settling disputes. Hmong leaders of the past – for example, like a governor - take over all the activities of the state. The leader is like a judge. Whatever the leader decides, it's final.

What's expected of a Hmong leader? For a Hmong leader such as a village chief, the people will not come and serve him but he has to serve the people when they come to visit or settle disputes. That's why it's very important for Hmong leaders to be patient and honest.

A Hmong leader is someone who has love and is forgiven. Hmong always talk about forgiveness. Hmong stress the importance of having a caring heart and being able to let go of disputes. Hmong has a proverb, “it doesn’t matter if you’re the winner or not, winning has no place in life” therefore don’t start a dispute. Instead forgive and show love, Hmong always has a lot of love.

Hmong leadership and leaders do not choose sides even if the person is related to the leader. It’s important for the leader to remain neutral and not support the side that one is close to, only speak of what’s right and lower one’s pride. In my previous example, the people or citizens are supposed to serve the leader, but instead it’s the leader who serves the people or citizens.

A leader is someone who knows right from wrong. A leader is someone who doesn’t use force. For work related reasons, there’s room for compromise.

A leader is someone who can distinguish the future from the past, always speak the truth. The leader has to be wise and know how to judge people. For example, if you’re the leader – two people come to you to settle a dispute. It’s your wisdom that will decide in fairness. In your judgment, you have to be able to weigh the truth behind what both of them have presented to you. If you observe carefully, you can tell that one side is telling more truth than the other. Furthermore, look at their faces, you can tell a lot from their facial expressions. One side, when the person speaks in a loud tone, will exhibit an angry facial expression with a guilty facial expression such as redness of the face. The other person may not say much but exhibit a calm and normal facial expression, which is a sign of innocence.

A leader has to be able to make decisive decisions. If there’s a very big issue and lots of information had been presented, the leader has to make the right decision. The leader has to summarize all the information and conclude by making a final decision.

The leader has to look forward to the future while holding on to the past and be very cautious. Whatever the leader does or says, it has to be right and accountable. The leader’s words have to always be right and real. If the leader makes a mistake it can never be turned back, as this would diminish credibility.

The case surrounding Vang Pao is a good example. They didn’t judge the situation carefully such as the telephone contact made by the American regarding the information. They didn’t know the truth behind the information. Therefore, in the end, the leader becomes the follower and the follower leads the leader. The leader has to distinguish truth from falsities. And keep in mind, those who report the information to you may not be as credible as you. In addition, remember that a leader does not act carelessly or cunningly. Do you know what I mean by carelessness or cockiness?

CX: I have heard of others mentioning it before.

KCH: Carelessness or cockiness is someone who does not take things seriously by joking around. For example, in the old days, we heard of reports that in Xieng Khouang there were a lot of Chinese soldiers. Some would say don't worry about it. Let them come as much as they want to, B-52 will be used to bomb them. When you hear any reports or news, don't be careless or cocky? The leader has to remember not to put sexual relationship as a priority? Do you know what I mean by that?

CX: Yes, I know what you meant.

KCH: Let me give you an example, some of our past leaders who attended special village gatherings to discuss business in which various groups of people would come. First, they would discuss business, but later on they would ask if there were any pretty girls in the village. It is very shameful. A leader who acts like this will lose his integrity from the people. A leader has to be smart. Yes, a man needs to have a wife but it has to be at the appropriate occasion and time. A leader needs to be able to safeguard his integrity.

For instance, if you're not careful when you speak, even if it's just one mistaken word, it can damage your integrity. Those who are under you may be wiser than you but they are under you only because you're at a higher position. Those under you may catch your mistakes when you speak if you're not prudent. Your weakness can be exposed therefore, maintain your high integrity and be very cautious.

Hmong has a saying: one has to safeguard one's integrity; if you lose your integrity it's the same as losing face. A person only has one sense of integrity in his lifetime. It should be treasured and regarded significantly.

Hmong has a proverb that goes like this: a leader needs to maintain his place. A leader must not act in defiance towards his subjects. A leader should be able to adjust to any circumstances whether it's with kids or the poor. A leader has to lead by good example. ;A leader should not be arrogant. Don't be too proud of oneself; instead, let others be proud of you.

NCH: The future Hmong leaders should have the following attributes.

Future leaders, whether leading the Hmong or other groups, need to realize the world we now live in is different as situations are not the same. The situation is constantly changing so future leaders must have good education and be intelligent. Leadership is not only a natural gift but it is also a skill learned through education.

For example, we have two candidates to choose for a speech. They have similar leadership qualities but one is more educated or has a degree. The one with the higher degree will be the one we choose.

For a person who already has natural and talent leadership along with higher education, the individual will be wiser.

For example, the two candidates running for president are not only competing for people's votes but they are exhibiting their ideas for the future. A person's background will be checked. The leader should be someone who's very active and patient. The person shouldn't be resentful. Do you know what I mean by resentment?

CX: I don't know.

KCH: What I meant by that is a person who does a lot of work and is resentful when another does not do it. Also the person only wants everything for those who are close or related to them. There's also jealousy when one does most of the work. A leader is a person who has no resentment and envy towards others.

A leader is someone who is not concerned with status and acts in a small way. Even if one is a leader, the person doesn't behave in a flashy manner nor by not answering others when being spoken to; instead, the leader lives like any other ordinary citizen. A leader who is not willing to lower his status is someone who does not care about other's well-being.

The future leader must be a servant. On a personal level, serve others openly and tirelessly with no concern about any physical or financial burdens. It is someone who is willing to take charge and does not wait for anybody else to lead.

A leader isn't someone who has no housing stability. A leader must be someone who is self-supported, but it doesn't mean richness or wealth.

The future leader is someone who has faith. Faith doesn't necessary mean just Christianity but faith in general. Faith is a religion or cultural practice. At a personal level, faith is believing in oneself and being under the almighty God. One should be under God's guidance or spirit and not above it.

The future leader is not someone who is a loner. The person has to have a stable family. The person must be a good role model. This means the individual must not have any criminal records such as robbery, disputes or lack of credibility.

The future leader must have a lot of love. To be able to show love towards others, to love other and give love to the world, and to always have forgiveness because mistakes can occur in an instant.

Again, a future leader is someone whose priority is not to have a sexual relationship with the opposite sex. A person who puts sexual relationship as a top priority can't be a leader of the Hmong in any given lifetime.

The future leader is not someone who is arrogant and thinks highly of oneself for being the smartest or descendant of a former leader.

Has to have a big, kind and open heart as well as patience. Doesn't mind doing most of the work and doesn't scold others or gets angry easily.

The future leader is not someone who thinks of ways that others can help him/her, but is someone who thinks of ways on how to help others. How can I save others? Does not think if one helps others the other has to help in return. The person wishes to help others instead of waiting for others to return the favor.

KCH: This concludes my remarks to your first questions unless you have other questions?

CX: Thank You! You have spoken words which are similar to other Hmong clan leaders' ideas. There are many different races but in general, those who want to do well and be good share similar views. Some of the good attributes you have mentioned, I also have heard in my leadership studies.

Whether you're white or black, in general, most of the leaders share similar views as you have mentioned earlier. Thank you for your meaningful and inspirational words. Now, I would like to ask you to elaborate more about the word "love". As a child growing up, who taught you how to love? How did you find out the meaning and its importance?

NCH: Honestly, love is very important. Love is not something that can be created. Love is something that is a part of the person from birth. Hmong don't have a deeper word for love. Therefore, if we're not careful we may misunderstand love is between a man and a woman. Nevertheless, I'm not referring to this kind of love. The kind of love, I'm referring to is when you see someone in need of something, I will think to myself what can I do to help that person or my citizens? What can I do to make the world a better place to live?

When I see a group of people in need of something, there is not a part of me that say the person is a Khmu, Lao, or African American. Instantly, when you see this scenario, you would think that we need to help them and we just can't let them endure any more suffering. This is the kind of love I have been referring to. Personally, love is not something that I have learned. I'm born with love in my heart so when I see others struggle I'm inclined to help them.

For example, when I hear that someone is deceased. Whether I know them personally or not, a part of me wants to help them the best way I can. I just can't ignore it. I have to go pay them a visit.

Sometimes I might have forgotten and didn't help them. I would say to myself, how could I be so mischievous and forgot about it? I shouldn't do that again. If you want to love, this is how to show love. To see something, to have something such as a dispute between two people, love has to be shown. It's not necessary for one person to be punished, maybe they need to forgive and remain together.

CX: The love that you have mentioned, do you think it's something that can be taught to a person who doesn't have love in their heart, or do you think that if a person doesn't have love in their heart then love can't be learned?

NCH: In this world, it's only love that can resolve everything. For example, if I'm a person with anger and depression problems to the point of committing suicide then what could others do for me? I could be hospitalized and be medicated but after the medications wear off, I will still be depressed. Therefore, it's not easy but love has to be shown.

Human beings have two sides to their heart, the good and the bad. When a person falls into the bad side, you have to not give up on the individual. Never say that if you don't listen to me anymore, even if you end up dead, I wouldn't care. If you have to say and re-say, do and redo, to love and goodness must be shown. For example, this person may be this bad, that person may be that bad, but eventually, they become better. Therefore, if you're patient, gradually, you'll see improvement in the individual. This is how you can fix a person.

There are two ways to treat a person. One way is through medication, for physical illness by a medical doctor, but the other way is through counseling, a psychologist who treats mental illness. The psychologist will use love as one of the treatment plans. Even money and gold can not treat the person, only love can resolve a human being's problem. I have help resolved a lot of people's issues through love. Love can be used to establish a sense of calmness of an individual, who therefore will listen without getting angry and attacking you.

Remember when you are called upon to talk to a person, whether it's a man or woman, Hmong or American, or whatever the ethnicity it, if the person is in tears or remains silent. Two conclusions can be drawn. Either your words have gotten to into them or at the end, the person refuses to accept anything but is in tears… Yeah, that works, it has worked.

Love is not like medication in which if I have a headache, I would take one Tylenol 3 to release my headache. Using love to resolve issues takes time and require patience.

CX: I want ask you one more time, how old were you when you knew or heard about love?

NCH: As I remember it, we were very poor not in terms of food, clothing and shelter, but we were poor in term of orphanage. If I remember correctly, I might have been twelve. When I was eight years old, my father bought me a little instrument called Qeej so I can practice it. At such a young age, I was a quick learner. Within four years, I have learned all my uncle's skills. At the time, I was studying Lao and I was always at the top.

I have known the meaning of love since childhood in school, a kid who fell behind due to slow learning, I helped the kid. Those were the times I was asked to play Qeej, but I was

also shown love. When I heard of conflict and dispute in the village I would go take a look to see why they were arguing. This is also a way of showing love.

One time a couple, the husband didn't get through to his wife verbally so he dragged her out of her parents' house back to his place. When I witnessed that I asked myself why the husband dragged his wife. I have shown love. I was about 12 years old when I had love in me. Love is not only shown towards human beings but all things.

CX: I want to ask you about being a leader, how old were you when you heard the word leader or know of something related to leadership?

NCH: I don't remember exactly but I was probably about 15-16 years old, going to school, at that time, whoever is the top student. The person is made the lead person. The lead person is responsible for making sure other students line up properly and in a straight line before class. The lead person guides the daily morning, raising the flag while the Lao national anthem is played. I loved being a lead person since that time.
The Hmong in those times, my parents worked as farmers. Sometimes they would ask the teacher to allow me to skip school and go help out in the farm. I would be so afraid of falling behind because I knew what pages and chapter the other students were studying that day. The leader is always leading.

During the war, I was not that high in rank but I was an officer. I was not the highest ranking officer but I was one of the lead investigators, interrogating POW. I was the assistant but during those days, the assistant is the one who does all the work and have it signed by the officer in charge.

CX: How different was it to lead the Hmong during war and peace time? What's the difference between leading citizens and soldiers and how do you communicate?

NCH: I had experiences as a leader in both times. In a military setting, soldiers didn't like leaders who are mean and strict. When French were the rulers, they enforced strict physical discipline. If you're an officer and ask me as a soldier to do a task but it was not completed in time, then there's no asking why the task has not been completed. You would just kick me. This is very mean but that's how they lead during those times.

There were two different styles of leading during the time I served. First, a few of the military officers who lead through strict and mean discipline without forgiving had perished in battles. No one knows for sure which side shot them.

When I was the military officer and leading other soldiers, I didn't use strict and mean discipline. When I was a Tasseng, a City Council, and a civilian leader, I led them differently. When leading civilian you must know their interests, bring in economic development, and know how to judge them as civilians. When you're the leader (soldier or civilian), you're the judge. When leading civilians, don't be too strict nor get angry easily. You have to meet the interests of your civilians, serve and provide food when they reach to settling disputes.

CX: How does one teach those good leadership attributes to our youths? How does one prepare the youth to be our future leaders?

NCH: Regarding our upcoming youths, some elders still refer to their rank/position held during the war; therefore, when discussing matters, they will use their old positions as reference against those who are able to lead. Those elders who only consider themselves leaders are mistaken because they are not the true leaders.

If you're truly a leader, you have to be able to let down your position (hwj chim). When you no longer hold the position, you have to conduct yourself just as an ordinary citizen or civilian. Don't think the youths do not have abilities. They may have more ability.

For those youths who have abilities, what more can be done? First, we have to teach them to be good people and not hang out with the wrong crowd. They need to know who they were yesterday, who they are now, and who they want to become tomorrow. If they know who they were yesterday and know who they are now then they would be able to distinguish between the bad and good of the past to improve the past. This is how we teach them.

Our youths need to know they are our future leaders. The elders need to lower their pride, give and ask our youth for work, give them confidence. Mistakes can be corrected.

For example, I may be the leader now but you may be the future leader. We don't know what positions may be for you in the future but you had been prepared for it. For example, you're learning how to be a leader. We'll decide what positions you can do. The youth can be taught leadership skills but seeing and doing are two different things. One can't just pick up things and do. One must practice it. The elders must keep an open mind and train the youth to take action. The elders must realize time isn't forever because eventually their time will end. I would not tell them to just do what I do but teach all my knowledge. For the future, don't think they are not intelligent but always think they will be more intelligent.

CX: The Hmong in America, not just Hmong in America, but the international Hmong community knows about the incident surrounding General Vang Pao. It has been difficult for the Hmong as the incident unfolds a crisis, do you think the Hmong can overcome or move beyond this difficult time?

NCH: I'm not an expert but in my opinion, Hmong have issues not just in Laos but throughout the world and in history. Hmong had the same problem dating back to China. So, what can we do? In order to unite Hmong, all the Hmong clan leaders need to be unified. In this best case scenario, Hmong would still fall into a Hmong proverb, "Ntau tus txiv mum ces puas dab, ntau tus txiv liab ces ntau ntsiv toj."

The more people we have the more voices there will be. With many voices, argument will break loose and then at the end each one will go its own way.

What can we do with this Hmong problem? Personally, I would not solve it and wouldn't encourage Hmong to solve it. This falls into a time when I think we have to use our creative minds and ideas. Even if we have all the representatives of Hmong various organizations and clan leaders in China, Laos and America united in one place, they would still fall short due to lack of leadership skills. That's why even the General can't resolve the problem. For me personally, I think we should let the situation be the way it is. The bigger the problem becomes, the easier it will be solved. Let the problem resolve itself, even in the issues in Laos. There will be a person without majority consensus coming up with one voice and idea to resolve the issue. It will be done when it's the right time.

Therefore, where and who may that person be? It's not a question of where but it's a question of who, which lies in our future youth. This will lead back to the discussion around faith. If God lets us survive, God will not let us scatter and suffer a horrible death, God will bless our people and guide one person to lead our people. Still the question remains, who is that person? That person's parents may not be human, that person may come down from the sky or mountain cliff, or born to a couple of human beings. No, that person looks like you and I. Our youth, the one who has these attributes: calmness, know right from wrong, careful, lower pride, non-stinginess, who works for others but doesn't ask for anything in return. This will be the person.

It's not the right time. When it is the right time there will be one person where others will come and ask to lead them. When others see it they will offer to come join without anybody asking them to.

Hmong are in a difficult time, but something will happen so our youth need to be prepared for it. Which of our youths will be the one? You may not be the first but may be the second or third. Honestly, in life, the first wave of leaders won't last long but through gradual change, thing will improve. You asked the question, what do we do about the situation the Hmong are facing? At point in time, the harder we try to resolve the situation the more difficult it becomes. At the lower level, there's less resistance but when it gets to the top, there will be more resistance. Therefore, leave them alone.

Regarding the situation of Vang Pao, if I were him, I would have handled the situation differently. I would have remained in jail and voiced my concerns about the situation of the Hmong in the jungles of Laos. I would not denied the charges but instead rationalize my purpose of voicing the suffering of the Hmong in the jungles of Laos. Eventually, the world will see it so something would be done. Those of us who have resettled in another country don't have to worry about changing the country of Laos. Eventually, time will change the country. Those in need of development will call out to others outside of the country to return for development. When it's the right time, people will search for those who can assist in the development of the country.

Our youths today are different than our elders because when our elders speak and make mistakes, it isn't written or recorded. However, for our youth, after they speak it becomes records like storage in a computer that can be repeated and reread.

CX: It may not be appropriate, but maybe the elders have not changed according to time in the world. The world has shifted to diplomacy, liberty, and economic development. There are leaders in other ethnic groups with different religious practices but in all, they do good deeds. Since human existence on earth, the one person that time most recorded is Jesus. He preached goodness and love without any judgment to race and creed. Therefore, no matter a person's religious beliefs, good things will come to good people.

NCH: When you're attending meetings and conferences, if you want to know how you are in comparison to the speakers, listen to not only what the speaker presents but also whether or not you have gotten anything afterward. If you have not learned one thing from the presenter then it can be concluded that you and the presenter are of equal knowledge. If you do learn at least one thing from the presenter then it can be concluded that you may or not be equal in knowledge with the speaker.

Don't be hasty in life and don't assume that one is smarter than the other. The self must always think the other is smarter so the self is always cautious. There is a Lao proverb that goes, "the small will overcome the big so as soft will absorb hard." If you're cautious, the small things will overcome the big. Therefore, soft will win over hard.

The leader has to be very cautious in life. The life of a leader is not easy and luxurious. The life of a leader can be very poor. There is no freedom but stress all the time. There's no free lifestyle. This is the lifestyle of a leader so if you don't mind this type of lifestyle then you may be a leader. A leader searches to solve problems instead of waiting for problems to find him. It is not that the leader creates problems, but it's the leader who welcomes any problems. For this reason, the leader is always targeting those problems. A leader is always looking to resolve disputes. So if you're only leading you're a true leader.

Before a leader can resolve other people's problems he/she must resolve his/herself. If you see a thorn in another's eye, before you attempt to remove it, you have to look in your own eyes because there may be a log in yours. In interpretation, before you say to others and help them you must help yourself. If you can't do this you can't say it.

CX: Thank you for taking the time to have conversed with me. In just a short time, a person has shared knowledge and values to another person. In this country, the elders are not afraid of teaching their ideas to the youth. They are not afraid that the youth may gain their knowledge. In fact, they rather want the youth to advance the ideas they have learned. Thank you for sharing your experience as a leader and your knowledge on leadership.

NCH: Personally, I think no matter what happens we can never escape from the Hmong community. Therefore, our current leaders should not be afraid that our youths will

acquire their knowledge. Instead, we should worry they may not learn it. How can our youths learn the knowledge? This is what we should be worrying about. Again, we should not be concerned that our youth may learn the elders' wisdom, but we should be concerned on how our youth will learn it. Things will get better. Honestly, I'm not concerned that after our elders' times are over there will be no one to lead. From one generation to the next, things always improve with wisdom.