

**WHO'S THE BOSS WHEN EAST MEETS WEST IN THE CHURCH?**

The Tradition of Power and Authority in the Hmong Church in Transition

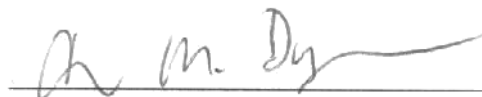
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## ABSTRACT

After twenty-five years of democratic church governance, the Hmong church is resorting to what some Hmong leaders are calling “the Hmong way” of being authoritative. This new definition has caused an upheaval within the church—locally as well as nationally. With the backdrop of emphasis on unity and solidarity to demonstrate its authenticity, divisions are breaking up churches in multiple folds and even within the Hmong District of the denomination itself due to this change. My hypothesis is that this authoritative definition is only a reinvention of "tradition," and “the Hmong way” of governance is to govern by consensus rather than utilizing an authoritative or even democratic style.

To ascertain whether this claim is true, I am utilizing the concept of “the invention of tradition” to understand and analyze the tradition or definition of power and authority in the Hmong church throughout its existence. In order to obtain this data, I follow the Hmong church as it has evolved and the different influences in defining power and authority in the church. This involves looking at leadership practices in traditional, indigenous Hmong social systems as well as religious life, and how these practices have been integrated into indigenous churches in Laos. Then, I follow the various definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church, mainly the Hmong District of the C&MA, which also happens to be the largest Hmong Christian denomination, as it encounters various Western and Southeast Asian social and political influences, including its transplantation into the United States. Finally, I compare those with current practices today, and ascertain what factors contribute to the current definition of governance within the Hmong church in America.

**DEDICATED TO**

My dear wife and son, Alina and Levi Chai Xang Yang.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### Turmoil in the Hmong Church in America

As far back as I can remember, power and authority in the Hmong church in America—specifically the Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) in the United States, of which I am a lifelong member, has been relatively peaceful, with decisions made by those in leadership positions considering those they serve by bringing major issues to the congregation for a final decision. The family remains intact for the most part as each family network system made its own decisions to become Christians. Major concerns such as hiring a pastor or moving the church to another area would be brought to the congregation for discussion and voted on before proceeding.

Since 2004, a number of upheavals have disrupt this working relationship within the church and turned it up-side-down—or top down in our case here. It has created a wedge within Christian denominations and between churches, families, brothers and sisters, parents and children, even among husbands and wives. Where there was one united church in most cities before, now there exist two or three separate churches. Where once a mutual relationship prevailed between the clergy and the laity, there is now a clear division between the two. Where there was once unity in the denomination, there are now divisions more obvious and public than ever. And where there was a spirit of unity, multiple dissensions are rampant on all levels. As if there were not enough divisions in the Hmong church already, with its clan, dialect, regional, religious, and denominational divisions, now other divisions have crept in, furthering the existing divisions even more. A part of this research will be dedicated to understanding the dynamics of these divisions and struggles. From these divisions, a sermon was forwarded to me via email in 2006 by a friend who was involved with the leadership in his church. The sermon claimed that

the Hmong way is authoritative (Yexus.com 2007:para. 3). This sermon revealed the existence of this new development and sparked my interest, compelling me to examine power and authority in the Hmong church as it transitions in the United States and how this definition of power and authority, combined with other historical, political, and sociological factors, has contributed to the divisions mentioned above.

Growing up in the Hmong church, I have been accustomed to a democratic type of leadership. I was born into a Christian family in the village of Phoua Kang Houa of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos, in 1974. At the time my father had just become a Christian two years earlier, after witnessing, through prayer, what he believed to be an instant and miraculous healing of my older brother shortly after his birth. My brother was diagnosed as dead and hopeless by the Hmong shaman, after which my father resorted to prayer, appealing to the Christian God for mercy on his newborn. Since birth, I have been with the same church—even following its transplantation into Kansas City, KS. The only practice of church governance I have encountered is a democratic model, where the congregation would be involved in the decision-making process on major decisions such as selecting their own pastor, moving the church, or electing the board of elders. This practice extended even to the election of department directors and special ministry leaders (such as the Mission or Outreach Director).

However, at the 2006 national Hmong District conference of the C&MA denomination—the largest Hmong Christian sect—one pastor asserted that the “Hmong way” is to give the pastor full authority in all church decisions, even decisions such as who should be the department leader and who should be in charge of which events. These include the positions mentioned above, as well. The Hmong District is a district under the The Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination. Historically, the C&MA came out of the Presbyterian Church for theological and



practical reasons which will be discussed in the section about the historical context of the C&MA.

On the district level of the Hmong District, the District Superintendent (D. S.) echoed the same position as the conference speaker but applied the pastor's authority to himself. Therefore, attributing such decisions as which pastor would be sent to which church regardless of the feelings and any opposition from the church. Upon hearing this, I began asking myself the question, "What exactly is the Hmong way?" This question eventually led to my research on the traditions of power and authority in the Hmong church.

### **Hypothesis and Overview of the Hmong Church**

My hypothesis is that 1) there is no set "Hmong way" of governance, 2) the previous indigenous practice, however, was to govern by consensus, rather than by utilizing an authoritative or even democratic style, 3) the current authoritative governance is only a reaction to twenty-five years of a democratic bureaucracy in the United States, and 4) the authoritative governance, deemed the "Hmong way," is but a reinvention of another past tradition, though its proponents attribute it to being "traditional" practice. I use "traditional" to mean the animistic customs the Hmong practiced prior to and, still for most of the Hmong, after the introduction of Christianity. To test the hypothesis that there is no set "Hmong way" of governance, that the previous indigenous practice was by consensus, that the current authoritative governance is only a reaction to democratic bureaucracy, and that the authoritative governance is but a reinvention of another past tradition, I will explore what is meant by the "Hmong way," here and compare them with the indigenous practices, and demonstrate that the indigenous practice is neither authoritative nor democratic, and hence the claims to reinstate the "Hmong way" are not only to legitimate the current aspirations, but more importantly to advance the agendas of the current

leaders. To obtain the information necessary to test my hypothesis I will be looking at historical socio-cultural developments, interviews, sermonetic rhetoric, authoritative texts, and be involved in participant observation during major decision-making processes.

Throughout church history, the struggle in church governance has been, “Who’s the boss?” Some denominations have adopted authoritative governance, some governing through a delegation while others have incorporated more democratic governance. The Hmong church has not been exempt from this struggle. I will elaborate on each of these in the section on church governance and polity. But for now, an overview of the Hmong church can help in better understanding the subject here.

It has been over 30 years since the Hmong first came to America as refugees in 1975. As soon as they resettled, they began to regroup. Some major factors led to the regroupings, including previous residential patterns (those whom they lived with previously) in Laos and extended family ties (Thao 1982:106-107). Another major factor, which is related to the previous ones, was religious reasons as Hmong families who lived together in Laos were typically extended families who shared the same religious traditions and practices. This was true for both traditional Hmong animists and Hmong Christians. For example, the Hmong in Kansas City are mainly comprised of the Christians from the village Phoua Kang Houa. Other reasons had to do with the availability of other Hmong networks and public assistance such as in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Fresno, California, bringing various extended families together—both White and Blue (or Green) dialects<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hmong classification of colors groups the colors blue and green as one term, *ntsuaab*, hence, Moob Ntsuaab would be translated as either Blue or Green Hmong. Note that the specific term for green under *ntsuaab* is *xav*. Because many of the Blue or Green Hmong would take offense at the designation of Green, connotating cannibalism, I use the term Blue Hmong in this research.

Since 1975, the Hmong church also continued to evolve as it adapted to “American ways.” One area of dramatic change that I will focus on is the traditions of power and authority in the Hmong church. This change in definition has caused many political tensions within the church as the Hmong church continued to define and redefine its tradition of power and authority. The definition of church governance has never before been an issue in Hmong churches as it is today. As mentioned above, within the last two years, however, there have been a number of church divisions resulting from these definitions.

### **The Hmong and the Hmong Church Worldwide**

Though seemingly an insignificant population, the UCLA Asia Institute states that there are more Hmong people today than Tibetans (Meneses: 2009). According to [www.infomekong.com](http://www.infomekong.com), a website dedicated to researching the religious practices of ethnic groups in China and Southeast Asia that focuses on Christianity in the region; there are currently a total of 9,032,000 Hmong world-wide. The most recent Chinese census in 2000 (National Bureau of Statistics 2004:para. 5) counted 8,940,116 Miao individuals. How many of these Miao ethnic minorities were actually Hmong is still being questioned along with the definition of and differentiation between Hmong and Miao (Lemoine 2005: 7). As the natives of modern-day China, specifically along the Yellow River, the Miao/Hmong were persecuted by the Han Chinese and pushed further south into Zuizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan (Michaud 1997:121). From there, they continued into what is now northern Vietnam and eventually northern Laos and Burma (Michaud 1997:122). According to the 1999 Vietnamese census, the Hmong in Vietnam numbered 787,600 (Diamond (1995:112). In Laos, where those in the United States migrated from, there were an estimated 450,000 Hmong in 2005 (Government Steering Committee for Census of Population and Housing 2005). There are lesser numbers in northern Thailand and

northern Burma. Their involvement in the Vietnam War against the Vietminh or Vietcong brought many Laotian Hmong into the United States, Australia, Germany, and Francophone countries and colonies, including French Guyana, Canada, and Argentina. The 2000 U.S. Census counted only 186,310 in the United States. According to Mark Pfeifer (2005:5), director of the Hmong Cultural Resource Center at the time, because of a number of cultural factors that distorted the data, a secondary census from the Hmong community was done. He reported the Hmong in the United States at 275,000. Along with other Hmong organizations, the Hmong Cultural and Resource Center and Hmong National Development (2005:48)—of which I recently became a board member in 2007—partnered in this research and numbered the U.S.-based Hmong at 283,239 in 2000.

This research follows the history of the Hmong church in Laos and into its development in the United States as founded by Laotian Hmong refugees with a focus on a historical understanding of power and authority in the Hmong church. Of the close to 300,000 Hmong in the United States today, only about twelve percent of them are Christians, totaling about 38,000 Protestants and Catholics, which I will elaborate on next. The rest remained animists<sup>2</sup>, which will be explained in more detail below. The largest Hmong denomination is the so-called Hmong District of the C&MA comprised of 29,827 members (Her 2007). According to the Director for the national Hmong Baptist Fellowship, Pastor Tong Zong Vang, there are approximately 5,000 Hmong Baptists in the summer of 2008. The President of the Association of Hmong United Methodist Churches stated that there are about 2,080 Hmong Methodist members in the summer of 2008 (Lee Vang 2007, personal communication). Various other

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<sup>2</sup> Animism in the Hmong context includes a form that integrates Confucian filial obligation and Hindu concepts of reincarnation. Hmongs maintain spiritual health and harmony, venerate the ancestors and deceased family members through various offerings, and ensure continuity of the person and soul, from one generation to the next and from this life to the other (Her 2005:3).

denominations include Lutherans, Catholics, Assemblies of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Mennonites, Mormons, and other various ethnic denominations recently established in the United States, including the Trinity denomination. Therefore, the focus of this research will be specifically on the churches and the district of the C&MA.

Prior to missionary contacts in the early 1950s, the Hmong in Laos were primarily animists. As animists, they practiced a form of shamanism for healing and their animistic worldview explains life phenomena. As a result, they led elaborate funerals to prepare and guide the spirit of the deceased to its proper places in the world, or worlds, of the Hmong cosmology. In the 1950s, the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) was first to successfully share their message with the Hmong and masses of people who came to Christianity in Laos. Since then, the Hmong church has had to invent or define its traditions of power and authority. This initial tradition was facilitated by the missionaries, considering the cultural context of the villages. From there, this tradition has been reinvented or redefined as the church came in contact with varying definitions of power and authority among different societies such as French colonialism and American democracy.

In comparison to the current authoritative definition, the previous structure of authority (a rational-legal authority) in the Hmong church consisted of the pastor, the elders or church board/council, and the congregation. According to the C&MA Constitution for the denomination, the pastor assumes the role of the “shepherd,” the elders assist the pastor in making final decisions as elected officials, and the members elect their elders as well as vote on who the pastor will be. Now with a change in conference procedures on a national level, there is a division within and among the local churches as to whether the church should give the pastor, church board or the congregation more authority in major decisions. For example, can the pastor

select or recommend his own elders and exclude everyone else? Or should anyone have a chance to run for election as an elder. How about department leaders? Should the elders have the authority to employ the pastor of their choice? Or should the choice be deferred to the congregation for approval first? Or is this decision solely up to the District Superintendent (or D.S.) as the current D.S. states? These questions and others will be explored throughout this research.

### **Historical Timeline of the Hmong Church**

Looking at history of the Hmong church, there are five eras that has had significant impact on the church, also corresponding to the different definitions of power and authority. I have developed a chart that looks at these five phases of development since its inception in the 1950s up to today. These are the newly missionized era when the Hmong first were converted to Christianity, the nationalized Hmong church prior to the Vietnam War when the church had become nationalized and self-sufficient, the Vietnam War era during a time of chaos when the military leaders rose to power, the resettled church era when the church was transplanted in the United States and the millennial church era in the USA today after new ideologies, and practices were introduced into the church. Therefore, the historical timeline of the Hmong church can be divided up to the Hmong church at its inception or the newly missionized Hmong church (1950-1956 from the inception of the church), the nationalized Hmong church (1957-1970 when the national church came into existence), the Vietnam War Hmong church (1971-1977 when the church struggled for order amidst a dispersed church), the early Hmong American church (1978-2005 as the church transplanted itself in the U.S.), and the millennial Hmong church of today (2006-present when the leadership of the Hmong District implemented an authoritative leadership). Though these dates do not correspond directly with the events, they do correspond

with the approximate time when the beliefs and practices of those events had an impact on the Hmong church. These will be referred to as the Missionized Hmong church, the nationalized Hmong church, Vietnam War Hmong church, the early Hmong American church, and the millennial Hmong church of today.

### **An Overview of Previous Research**

Little research has been done on the Hmong church in America. The church has been struggling only recently to solidify its definition of power and authority in the United States; hence, not much has been done with this subject specifically. However, an abundance of research has been done on the Hmong themselves and the earlier history of the Hmong church in Laos in particular. Texts on Hmong social and religious systems were also consulted. In terms of the invention of tradition, early focus has been on rituals and memorials, which have been researched quite extensively. But the Hmong church has not been studied specifically as it defines and redefines power and authority. Details of research on the history of the Hmong in general and the Hmong church as well as other related factors influencing definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church will be explored in the Literature Review section.

### **Terminologies**

The Hmong church is a collection of churches comprised mainly of Hmong ethnic individuals and leaders. Their worship services, business meetings, and conferences are typically in the Blue variety of the Hmong language. The majority of those in the Hmong church are Protestants, with a small percentage being Catholics. The Hmong church in the United States, which is the subject of this research, is comprised mainly of those in the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination—specifically the Hmong District.

Though the Hmong church exists within many other Protestant denominations, including Baptist and Lutheran, the Hmong in the C&MA numbers the greatest and comprises of about 80% of the Christians in the United States. The Hmong District is one of six ethnic districts of the C&MA within the United States, which are comprised of ethnic minority groups not based on geographic localities but more on specific ethnicities on a national level. Realizing the need to contextualize the leadership and allow the ethnic churches to self-propagate, these districts were established. The Hmong District is one of these ethnically focused ministries within the Intercultural Ministries Department. Other districts include the Korean District, Vietnamese District, Cambodian District, and two Spanish Districts (an eastern and a central district). During my observation at the national conference in the summer of 2007 of the General Council, ten new Portuguese-speaking churches were incorporated into the C&MA, which became an ethnic district in themselves—the Portuguese District.

Within the Hmong District in the U.S. are seven different Regions, depending on the number of churches in a particular region. As elected members from the annual District Conference, the President works with the Board of Directors to oversee the organization. Under the board are the staff and various departments, set up to work with specific aspects of running the organization and serving the local churches. These include the media department, the youth department, the Alliance Women, and Alliance Men departments among others.

The term “invention of tradition” is used to denote the idea of what’s considered “tradition” that has been invented at a certain point in time for specific purposes. Details of what this entails will be elaborated in the theoretical section.

The term “Hmong traditional indigenous religion” refers to that which was practiced by the Hmong in Laos prior to missionary contact in the 1950s—also referred to as Hmong



animism. Timothy Dunnigan (1986:52) defines Hmong animism as “a belief in spirits that reside in nature and sometimes interact with people.” This would be a form of animism similar to other Asian shamanistic beliefs. A more thorough explanation of Hmong animism or their traditional indigenous religion will be elaborated on in the section on the Hmong religious system in Laos.

Understanding power and authority in Hmong religious system also warrants an understanding the major religious or spiritual practitioners. These include the Hmong shaman, the Hmong psychopomp, and the *saub* prophets. The term “shaman” is one that has been attributed with different meanings and roles. Eliade utilizes it in a manner that would be all encompassing. He lists a number of terms, indicating the different vocations his “primordial shaman” assumes. These include “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” and “magician.” Other roles include doctors, psychopomp, priest, mystic, poet, and prophet. Though it has its value in attempting to understand the spiritual phenomena that are woven through different belief systems as they affect human health and healing, a generalization of the term also carries with it certain connotations and assumptions that are not applicable to certain contexts—here being the Hmong context. These can range from being a “witchdoctor” who can inflict harm to being a spiritual medium or, going to the root of the term, a wild and animating spiritual healer from Siberia (Kehoe 2000:38). The Hmong does not have such a general term. For the sake of this research paper, I will not go into detail about these various usages and implications of the term “shaman.” However, the “shaman” in a Hmong context does need clarification. Though we will delve deeper into the history and work of the shaman in terms of power and authority, I will only refer to those characteristics relevant to have a firm grip of the definition used in this research paper. When referring to Hmong shamans, the Hmong community typically thinks of the religious spiritual healer or *Txiv Neeb*—one who communicates to the spirits on behalf of the family in

order to bring spiritual protection and healing. The term, *neeb*, is usually associated with what has been called “spirit worship” or shamanism (Heimbach 1969:137). However, the Hmong’s practice of animism is not necessarily what we would consider as a “worship” of the spirits. Rather they venerate or appease the spirits rather than worshipping them while trying to trick or fight with malicious spirits. So “spirit worship” would be far from the essence of the term, *neeb*. Rather, the term *neeb* is used in conjunction with other aspects relating to the supernatural. Therefore, the term *neeb* would make a person or object sacred to the realm of the spiritual—such as *Txiv Neeb* is the neng father, *thaaaj neeb* is the shaman’s neng console, and *nruag neeb* as the shaman’s neng drum. As one possessing the priestly ministry of accessing and inquiring the spirits on behalf of the family, we can relate the role of the Hmong shaman to that of the priest. Max Weber (1968:425) describes the term “priest” as one that “may be applied to the functionaries of a regularly organized and permanent enterprise concerned with influencing the gods,” an association with a social organization, and being equipped with special knowledge, fixed doctrine, and vocational qualifications. This definition would apply to Hmong shamanism, as well.

It must be understood that Hmong shamanism is different from shamanism in Siberia, Africa, and here in the Americas. Of these, Hmong shamanism is probably closer to those practices in Siberia than Africa or the Americas, being neither non-hallucinogen related, involving vision quests nor all-encompassing of various vocations as in the idea of *ngoma* in South Africa. French anthropologist, Jacques Lemoine (1996:144), believed that the Hmong shaman is a “professional shaman.” He continues, “the type ascribed to tribal groups like the Chukchi or the Koriak of northeastern Siberia, and an individual who, unlike the ‘clan shamans’ of some other groups, plays no political role.”

The other major spiritual or religious practitioners that are less relevant to this research are the Hmong pshychopomp—including the *qeej* (pipe organ) and *nruag* (drum) players—and the *saub* prophets. The *qhuab ke* is the pshychopomp who shows the spirit of the deceased the way to the ancestors and to be reincarnated while the *qeej* and *nruag* accompanies the spirit on the way (Her 2005:9). The antithesis of the Hmong shaman is the *siv yig* or *saub* (*saub* prophets), whose role is to relay messages from *Yawm Saub*, or God (Shao), which will be explained more thoroughly. Max Weber (1968:439) defines the prophet as “an individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine or divine commandment.” This definition is also applicable to the Hmong animistic context as *saub* prophets, with great charisma, believed they were given revelation to teach the Hmong a better way to live. In religious terms, comparing the two, the shaman is endowed with the priestly role of intermediating with the supernatural on behalf of humans where the *saub* prophets are given the prophetic role of intermediating with humans on behalf of the supernatural—here being *Yawm Saub* or God.

The phrase power and authority encompasses both the realm of power as well as authority. Alice Schlegel (1977, 8) defines power as the ability to exert control in domestic, political, economic, or religious arenas, while authority is socially legitimated power. In looking just at power, John Janzen in his textbook on medical anthropology with references to Hmong medical systems (2002:293) defines power as the ability of some individuals or groups to manipulate and control other individuals and groups. Investigating the power dynamics of Hmong women in Laos, Carol Ireson (1996:4) defines it as the ability to exert control over self, others, and/or valued resources in economic, political, religious, domestic, or other social arenas.

In this research, power is referred to as the ability of one or more individuals to influence, manipulate or control others both consensually and coercively.

Authority, on the other hand, has to do particularly with legitimized power. In his textbook, Raymond Scupin (2006:497) defines it as power generally perceived by members of society as legitimate rather than coercive. Gary Ferraro (2008:208) defines it in his textbook, *Cultural Anthropology*, as the power or right to give commands, take action, and make binding decisions. Janzen (2002:287) refers to authority as the consensual exercise of power in a legitimate manner. Max Weber (1968:215) further classifies authority into traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic authority. 1) Traditional due to the sanctity of immemorial traditions, 2) rational-legal due to impersonal, rational, legal application of commands, and coordination in a bureaucracy, and 3) charismatic due to the attributed forceful aura of an individual practitioner or founder. In the light of this research, I would further divide Weber's rational-legal authority into (using Weber's terms) hierocratic rational-legal and democratic rational-legal. The hierocratic rational-legal authority would be one set up ultimately by a higher authority where democratic rational-legal authority hinges more so on the electoral ballots of the constituents or members. The Hmong church has seen its own examples of Weber's three types of power in its short lifetime as well as the two sub-types of rational-legal, will be demonstrated. In this research, authority is the legitimized ability to give commands, take action, and make binding decisions consensually given by members of a society to one or more individuals.

The research here utilizes the phrase "power and authority" to be inclusive of both legitimate (or authorized) and illegitimate (or unauthorized) power, both explicit and implicit power, as well as consensual and coercive power. However, the context of the research lends itself to looking at legitimately constituted power specifically set forth in the Bible and

constitution of the denomination, though acknowledging that unauthorized power exists in practice even in the midst of constituted authorized power in polity.

Power and authority in this particular research refers to the governmental structure in decision-making of the church—church polity or governance. However, each term will be utilized depending on which term is best suited for the specific context—whether exclusively about power or exclusively about authority. The question here is “Who has the ultimate authority in decision-making on major issues in the church?” The church would overwhelmingly respond: God is the ultimate authority! The next question then is: Who then is God’s representative(s) on earth? On a global scale, the Pope? Or every member in good standing of a Protestant church? Just those who are evangelical? Denominationally, are the denominational presidents God’s representative(s)? The denominational board? The denominational delegates or assembly? Denominational pastors or licensees? Every member of the denomination? In the church, the pastors, members’ assembly or annual meeting, or every member of the church? Regardless of the level, who is the boss?

For example, should the issue of hiring or firing a staff be brought before the congregation (as in a democratic system) or should the board decide (as in a representative system) or does the pastor have the final say (as in an authoritative system)? Better yet for this research, does the congregation have any say at all under the authority of the District Superintendent? These definitions of spiritual power and ecclesiastical authority will be the focus of this research.

### **Future Developments and Applications**

I hope that this study will lay the foundation for future work on the development of the Hmong church. I also hope that the Hmong church (both clergy and laity) will utilize this

research as a guide to understanding itself and the complexity of power and authority in America in its current and future issues relating to that which exists in the church. It will not only benefit the Hmong church but it will shed light on other areas of power and authority as I reveal how the Hmong church continues to survive and adapt to the different larger social systems in its theology (or worldview) and practice of church governance. Other areas of study that my research can benefit include a better understanding of the institutionalization of the church as well as the formation of ethnic or national (transnational) and religious identity. As a result, religious and secular (as well as commercial) institutions can have a better understanding of the dynamics of power and authority and their varied definitions on both a micro and macro level.

## CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Power and Authority in the Hmong Church**

Not much has been written on power and authority in the church, even less on the Hmong church in transition (see Capps 1991). However, literature on two anthropological systems that are encompassed in the research subject here will be examined. These are power and authority in Hmong social systems and Hmong religious systems. The Hmong church has essentially replaced these two social systems: where the clan used to deal with both the social and religious practices, now the church has come to replace the clan. Finally, a theoretical framework on the invention of tradition is also considered.

### **On the Hmong**

A couple of works on the history of the Hmong include *Histoire des Miao* by F. M. Savina and *Hmong: History of a People* by Keith Quincy. Savina was a Catholic missionary, sent to preach to the Flowery Miao subgroup of the Hmong of Southwest China. Savina's work was an ethnography of the Hmong. Though insightful to revealing the distinctiveness of the Hmong among other Asians, his work has been criticized as being religiously biased. Mentioning Savina's work, Quincy traces the Hmong's history from China to Southeast Asia to the United States. Quincy gives a more recent historical perspective of the Hmong and draws on Savina to give a background of the Hmong. For my purpose here, these materials serve only to give a background on the Hmong. I did not find anything anthropologically revealing about power and authority among the Hmong. The Hmong anthropologist, Gary Yia Lee, has done a number of publications on the Hmong, including his website, [www.garyyiale.com](http://www.garyyiale.com). Through his website, Gary has been able to preserve an anthology of Hmong history, culture, and poems along with other publications. Though providing a plethora of information, his website focuses

more on particular cultural items such as kinship, household, marriage, worldview, and issues pertaining to the Hmong Diaspora, including Hmong identity. He has written numerous other articles along these same lines. However, I did not find much information on power and authority.

### **Traditional Hmong Social System in Laos Prior to the Vietnam War**

As the Hmong church has incorporated traditions and belief of both the social and religious systems, a literature review of both was considered. A text focusing specifically on the Hmong social system includes *The Hmong Culture: Kinship, Marriage and Family Systems* by Teng Moua (Moua 2003). Moua investigates into how the institution of marriage and kinship has changed among the Hmong in St. Paul-Minneapolis, MN, especially as they are enculturated into the mainstream society. However, other works have also touched on the subject of power and authority in Hmong social system. Barney (1961) describes the leadership and village decisions of the Hmong in Laos, while Fink (1982) describes how the Hmong social system—represented in the clan of all those with the same surname—operates among those in Rhode Island. Having been a village head or chief, Thao (1982) looks at migration and the decision-making process involved and factors considered among the Hmong in Laos and how it has been transferred into their second migration practices in the United States. Pao Saykao (1997) shares his insights and research on Hmong leadership as seen in the different levels of leadership in the Hmong social structure and qualities necessary to be a good leader among the Hmong. Carol J. Ireson (1996) compares definitions of power among the Khmu and the Hmong (in contrast to the ethnic Lao) between the 1960s and 1980s. Her focus is on women and power among these two groups as it relates to daily life activities as well as economic and political involvement—particularly with the Lao Women’s Union. This research includes the dynamics of power in the



family as well as nationally among the Hmong. Looking at the above literature on Hmong social systems, I extrapolated the indigenous traditional practices of power and authority in the Hmong social system. These works show how the early Hmong church in the 1950s incorporated elements traditional social elements such as clan allegiance into an Hmong American church, These works also help explain many of the power dynamics in this church today and how indigenous leadership was defined differently than those in power claim today. As will be demonstrated, indigenous leadership then was a mutual and consensus leadership, where now, the pastor has been given full authority.

### **Traditional Hmong Religious Systems**

Though extensive research has been done on Hmong religious practices and belief systems, there is very little attention given specifically to power and authority in Hmong religious system. I divide the religious material into five subcategories, materials on traditional Hmong indigenous religion in general, Hmong shamanism, Hmong funerals, those on *saub* (shao) prophets, and the Hmong church. As power and authority in Hmong animism were cultural systems that were transferred into power and authority in the church—more specifically from the shaman to the pastor and now, at least in certain circles, from the prophet as well. This social dynamic is something that will help shed light into the definitions of power and authority of the Hmong church, especially at its inception.

### ***Traditional Indigenous Hmong Animism***

I argue that Hmong animism has affected current Hmong Christian leadership style in a number of Hmong churches by transferring the authority of the shaman into the position and role of the pastor. The shaman acts as a mediator between the sick family member and the spirits. The Christian Hmong also practice making a personal contractual agreement with God, and then

throw parties to thank God after the healing. Such an answered prayer very much resembles the traditional Hmong's *paujyeem* (or thanksgiving where *pauj* means to pay back) ceremony. And so an understanding of traditional indigenous Hmong animism has shed light on some of the beliefs and practices of the Hmong as we shall see in the analysis of this research.

Nicholas Tapp (1989) did anthropological research on two major aspects of Hmong religion: healing and the funeral. Tapp (1989:74) mentioned that a village can have several shamans, and he discussed the ritual to determine which shaman to go to for healing. Germane to the subject of religion as it relates to definitions of power and authority is Max Weber's (1968) second volume in *Economy and Society* where he sought to understand the role and responsibilities of the priest as opposed to that of the prophet, which is mirrors in the traditional Hmong roles of the Hmong shaman and the *saub* prophets. Though covering quite a broad scope of religious concerns, of value to this research are those dealing with priest, prophets, and the various strata groups—specifically in regards to the peasants as they relate to the oppressed Hmong in Laos. Though Hmong traditional religion includes the role of the psychopomp who guides the spirit of the deceased, the *qhuab ke*, this research will not focus on him because his role does not affect the decisions made by those in power. Rather his role is to guide the deceased.

Though the Hmong *saub* 'prophets' (meaning those who God has given a message to share) were seen by the obsolete by Hmong Christians in the early Hmong American church once they resettled in the United States, some in the church today have incorporated this role, along with his authority, into the pastor. Unfortunately, there is an even greater void of research material about Hmong *saub* prophets in particular. The only materials mentioning this area are either biographies or historical accounts of certain individual *saub* prophets. These include Keith Quincy's *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat* on Shee Yee Pa Chay Vue's life and leadership in

leading a rebellion against French colonialism and the book *Mother of Writing*, a life narrative of Shee Yee Shong Lue Yang's life and contributions—his moral and ethical teachings as well as his messianic writing system given by God to the Hmong. Paoze Thao briefly mentions a couple of female *saub* prophets who prophesized the coming of judgement of *Yawm Saub* and the expediacy of embracing *Yawm Saub* by letting go of Hmong animism and right living—a precursor to Christianity. Nevertheless, very little research and analysis has been done on *saub* prophets.

### ***The Hmong Church***

Considering that the A Hmao Hmong (also called Hua Miao or Big Flowery Miao) in Northeastern Yunnan Province, China, were the first to become Christians in 1900, Zhang (1992:99) shows how those A Hmao Hmong were converted to become Christians through Samuel Pollard's mission, which he set up among them in 1900 as a missionary of the London Missionary Society. Though some would link the two subpopulations of Hmong, saying that the Christian teachings of the converts in China influenced the traditional religious beliefs and practices of those in Laos, I believe that they were both distinct and separate groups without any exchange of information as the Hmong in Laos migrated between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the A Hmao Hmong exist in patches of population from around Kunming, spreading northeastward, whereas those in Laos were mainly from southern Yunnan (Joshua Project 2003). These historical assumptions are reserved for further research. Jack Davidson's (1993) history of the development of the Hmong church gives general ethnographic description and recounts the conversion of the Hmong in Laos. Davidson (1993:107) shows that the mass conversion of the Hmong in Laos was due to the work of the missionary, the national witness, and the Hmong, where everything was the all-encompassing work of God (the Holy Spirit).

However, very little of his research was devoted to elaborating on the role of the missionaries, pastors, and church leaders in term of power and authority in the developing church.

Nevertheless, his work did prove beneficial as it gave detailed accounts of the Hmong Christian movement in Laos. Davidson referred many times to Smalley (1956). Andrianoff (2003) witnessed the decision-making process of the villagers and the role of the village head in a religious decision. Commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Hmong church in Laos, Thao (2000) gave detailed accounts as to the historical developments of the Hmong church throughout its various periods. These periods include the Hmong church in China with the Flowery Miao to the beginnings of the Hmong church in Laos, its migration to the United States and the progress the Hmong church has made up to the year 2000. His work was proven beneficial because it provided detailed dates, times and individuals. Another of Thao's (1997) book, a linguistic manual, was written in Hmong but proved to be very insightful to the history of the church as he included a dictation of two prominent Hmong leaders involved with the movement in Laos— Rev. Xu Xu Thao, the first Hmong president of the national church in Laos (1963-1966), and Seng Pao Thao, the second (1967-1969). Similar to Thao's works, Kue (2000) and Vang (2000) are complementary works in that they both focus on the historical development of the Hmong church. These two texts, along with Davidson's, provided the bulk of the historical background for the Hmong church. However, Kue's account also included the Hmong churches in Laos and China, where Vang focused strictly on the development of the Hmong Christian movement and the church in Laos. Kue also includes other socio-historical facts, including insights into the worldview, practices, and power of Hmong shamans. Vang on the other hand, provided some very detailed information about the movement, including a table listing all the presidents of the Hmong national church in Laos and another of the different ministries and whether the

missionaries or the national Hmong church was responsible for each. The definition and redefining of governance in the Hmong church can be seen in the development and leadership of the Hmong church in Laos through these books.

Other resources that focus on the C&MA denomination—the denomination of most Hmong Christian Protestants—include the C&MA manual, which can be obtained online from their website, along with other historical works of founder A.B. Simpson (1980) such as *The Gospel of Healing* and Simpson’s (1907) report, *A Story of Providence*. These writings gave the rationale and evidence of power and authority in A.B. Simpson’s life.

According to the Hmong church’s historical development as well as that in A.B. Simpson’s life and ministry, the definition of power and authority was likely established in the beginning for the Hmong church in the 1950s, but the church has evolved throughout its short history and into its current dilemma today. This research sorts out factors within as well as outside factors that have contributed to these changes.

### **The Invention of Tradition**

I use the term “tradition” “in a broad, but not imprecise sense, including both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed, and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period—a matter of a few years perhaps—and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983: 1). The term refers to practices based on rules that are ritualistic and symbolic, intending to reinforce values and behavior through repetition in continuity with a previous history (1983:1). They (1983:1) further explain that the intention of traditions is to achieve continuity with a “suitable historic past.” Therefore, the “invention of tradition” describes inventions that have been created. At the same time, it implies that all traditions have been invented at some point. Hmong traditions are not

exempt, whether referring to annually seeking the ancestor's blessings with New Year traditions or venerating them with healing traditions. Even in the church, traditions of leadership have been created and recreated over a short period of time.

Allan Hanson distinguishes the views on the invention of tradition. The objectivist approach states that "there are such things as genuine traditions or cultures, which can be identified by careful scholarship, and which are subject to politically-motivated distortion or displacement by inauthentic, invented traditions" (Hanson 1997:196). On the other hand, the constructivists believe that "tradition and culture are constantly in the process of renegotiation and redefinition, such that invention is a normal and inevitable part of the perpetuation and use of all culture and tradition" (Hanson 1997:196).

As a proponent of the objectivist's view, Edward Shils asserts that "essential elements" of tradition "persist in combination with other elements which change, but what makes a tradition is that what are thought to be the essential elements are recognizable . . . as being approximately identical at successive steps" (1981:14). He adds that "it has to last over at least three generations. . . to be a tradition" (1981:15). This implies that a practice should be passed down from one generation to the next down to the third generation in order for that practice to be considered a tradition. For Shils (1981), traditions are static if they meet certain requirements, implying that those that meet these time duration requirements would be considered traditions whereas those only practiced in one or two generations would not be. However, for the Hmong church, traditions have changed dramatically. The church has invented and reinvented its tradition in church governance within one generation. While the essential element of the members has remained the same, the definition of power and authority has changed tremendously. Thus, this research invalidates Shil's assertion that traditions are constant down

to the third generation. Furthermore, using his definition of tradition would be impractical when applied to the context of the Hmong church as traditions have changed within a single generation. Therefore, I will not be using the objectivist's definition of tradition in this research.

On the other hand, the constructionist's approach would be more practical in the Hmong context because of the varying traditions of power and authority within the last half decade or so. Those of the constructionist's approach acknowledge the difficulty of defining tradition. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) set this issue into the forefront of anthropological studies with their book, where they assert, with examples from various western societies, that traditions of these societies were recent developments in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. David Schneider stated that traditions are "fuzzy" for both actors and observers (1968:67).

Other research that has looked at the invention of tradition along the same line is that of Keesing (1982), who looks at the dynamics of *kastom* in Oceania and how it has been practiced by various opposing groups with opposing motives at times. Alain Babadzan (2000) reiterates this for Hobsbawm but integrates the dynamics of nationalism and political discourse as represented by various groups across various times as traditions change or evolve. Errington and Gewertz (1994) also confirmed the claims of Hobsbawm and Ranger as they responded to the challenge by Don Kulick and Margaret Willson by analyzing the various groups involved in celebrations of Papua New Guinea. They point out that factions in society present factions of conceptions of tradition, which can also change as time and the social context progress (Errington and Gewertz 1994:117). Andrew Buckser (1998) shed light on how various Jewish and Danish groups tell of a standard story and their various differences in order to present each in a positive light and supply a framework in which each understands and interacts with the others. A notable work is Richard Handler and Joycelyn Linnekin's (1984) research on the

invention of tradition as seen among Québécois and Hawai'ians, which I will come back to later in this section. All these reiterate how the varieties of the same tradition, being altered for various purposes by various parties (even those in opposition), can reveal the power as well as versatile nature of traditions as with the Hmong traditions of power and authority within the Hmong church since its inception in the 1950s.

Proponents of the objectivist's view include both indigenous scholars and advocates who have responded quite strongly. Charles Briggs (1996) was one who criticized the constructionists as diminishing the authority of the local and historical experts as well as the negative ramifications of such designations considered by Briggs as metadiscursive. He seemed to hinge his argument on the voice of the people under study—an emic perspective. Gaurav Desai in “The Invention of Invention” argued against the semantics involved when anthropologists impose hegemonic terminologies and “othering” concepts on indigenous traditions (Desai 1993:137). He delved into the futility, history, and etymology of the term “invention” and points out the negative connotations and stigmatism associated with the term (id.:122). Haunani-Kay Trask (1991) was a prime example of the response from indigenous scholars. She criticized Keesing and Linnekin for reinforcing the hegemony and countering the political success of native Hawaiians. Others like Edward F. Fischer (1993), looking at the pan-Maya movement and scholars, resonated the hegemonism along the same lines. On a post-modern note, James F. Weiner and Katie Glaskin (2006) advocated for a collaborative or multi-vocal approach to traditions of customary law between the invention of tradition as a “generalized theoretical trend within social science” and the “indigenously utilized tool of the post-colonial reconfiguration of the ‘indigenous’” (2006:10). E.J. Dickson-Gilmore looked at the People of the Longhouse of the Kahnawake Mohawk Nation as a genuine tradition of



political process laced with an “old” philosophy of dispute resolution (Dickson-Gilmore 1992:497). He proposed that the Longhouse justice system was “not an invented tradition, but rather an example of a much older and less emotionally-charged process, that of adaptation” (Dickson-Gilmore 1992:498). He pointed out that the concept of invented traditions are characterized by a consciously manufactured and essentially factitious connection to a particular historical period which was believed to enhance the legitimacy of the invented tradition and points out that it would be difficult to make this determination with the Longhouse. Likewise in the area of multi-ethnic literary analysis, Mary Louise Pratt called the open and safe collaboration of voices or an “autoethnography” as being in the “Contact Zone” (Pratt 1999). The intention of the objectivists then is to liberate the indigenous voices to define themselves as an alternative voice. Referring to himself as an objectivist, Friedman (1992) looked at the varying interpretations of various cultures with the invention of tradition in mind. He concluded that instead of the present being shaped by the past, it is the past that is largely shaped by the “collective actors” involved in the present—each with their own interpretation. Considering the demystification of modernism and the hegemonic structures that comes with them while existing in a global context, Friedman (1992:853) advocates for a multivocal approach—to include indigenous self-constructions along with the ethnographer’s account.

Handler and Linnekin assert that “there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present” (1984:276). To them, tradition is dynamic and the tradition itself is merely representative of the past based on the motives and interpretation of those in the present as consistently demonstrated in the Hmong church throughout its history and development. They explain themselves by concluding, “In sum, traditions thought to be preserved are created out of the conceptual needs of

the present” (id:280). Therefore, in order to best understand the dynamics of the establishment and changing definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church, I will utilize the constructionist view of tradition to this study.

In this research, drawing from the constructivist’s view, “tradition” then means a (set of ) belief(s) and/or practice(s) which a group adheres to that have been invented at some point in time and, continuing to undergo reinvention, use preexisting elements of practices and ideas from and by various parties of power and authority within and outside the group into its own belief(s) and practice(s) during a historical time period. Much like other traditions mentioned above and as will be demonstrated, the Hmong church has practiced traditions of power and authority that were invented at its inception in the 1950s with the availability of elements of practices and ideas from Christian and traditional Hmong animistic religion. Throughout the Hmong church’s historical development, it has undergone various reinventions as it encounters various powers and authorities from outside socio-political influences as the various parties with power and authority within the church continue to reinvent the Hmong church’s own changing definitions of power and authority.

### CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

Again, my hypothesis is that 1) there is no set “Hmong way” of governance, 2) the previous indigenous practice, however, was to govern by consensus rather than by utilizing an authoritative or even democratic style, 3) the current authoritative governance is only a reaction to twenty-five years of democratic bureaucracy in the United States, and 4) the authoritative governance, deemed the “Hmong way,” is but a reinvention of another past tradition, though its proponents attribute it to being "traditional" practice. To test this, four methods were utilized: a historical socio-cultural analysis, interviews, close sermonic and text analysis, and participant observation. Power and authority in the C&MA as a denomination were investigated more particularly in the Hmong C&MA churches in Laos and America up to 2009. The broader historical and socio-economic context was considered as the history and socio-economic developments of the Hmong unfolded. These played a major role in influencing traditions of governance in the church. A number of pastors and church leaders were interviewed who represent various generations and different levels of positions involved in leadership. Sacred and authoritative texts were obtained and examined to see where official definitions stand. For the C&MA, the Bible is believed to set forth the rationale and methodology of church governance while the constitution clarifies the details of that method. As such, the C&MA constitution also is said to be based on the teachings and rationales of the Bible (Christian and Missionary Alliance 2007:H1-1). Books and journals have been consulted to consider the theoretical and historical background that may have contributed to the invention of tradition in power and authority in the Hmong church. I have also observed dynamics in the church during significant decision-making processes, such as the annual business meetings and elections when members of the congregation voiced their concerns and asked questions to church leaders in public. Key

church and denominational meetings were observed to see how the definitions of power and authority played out in the churches, and sermons from the meetings as well as from other pastors were analyzed for their rationale. These resources have also shed light on the complexity of defining and redefining this particular tradition in the church.

Despite my personal involvement with the Hmong church, I will be coming from the perspective of an anthropologist. I consider myself an indigenous ethnographer. As such, I will make references to myself where I have been involved with the Hmong church. My rapport with both Hmong parishioners and laity has afforded me the ability to obtain information on all the factors involved and has given me access to informants I would not have otherwise had. Paul Xang and Sarah Yang from Kansas City, Kansas, a couple in their late 50s, have been my key informants because they grew up or worked in the church in Laos and came to the United States in their late 20s. In the U.S., they have been involved in the church on different levels and in different capacities—locally and in the district, such as the local church and district board. I have made every effort to separate myself from my own biases and to look at both sides of the argument, interviewing proponents from both sides. Apart from my involvement as a youth, I became the volunteer Youth Pastor for one of the largest Hmong churches in America during my schooling at Toccoa Falls College in Georgia (affiliated with the C&MA). After a couple of years in that position, I began working part-time as a Minister of Youth and Education for a Caucasian (those of European descent) Southern Baptist Church in Carl, Georgia. After about four years there, I came to Kansas City, Kansas, where I eventually obtained my M.Div. from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. My education there and at Toccoa Falls College afforded me insight into understanding constitutional and sacred authoritative texts. I am currently at the University of Kansas working on my Master's in Anthropology focusing on the

Hmong and the church in transition. While in Kansas, I was asked to be a volunteer Youth Pastor for a new Hmong C&MA church in Kansas City.

### **Historical Socio-cultural Analysis**

For historical developments in power and authority in Laos, historical texts were utilized as referred to in the literature review. Historical accounts were then validated and looked at further through interviewing pastors and local church leaders who were practicing in Laos as the church adapted to life in the United States. Based on the interviews and library research, charts were made looking at the development and evolution of the Hmong church along with its different traditions of power and authority (in Appendix A, B, C & D). I labeled and organized topics and reasons brought out in the interviews, then I compared them with each other while considering the demographic (training, age, etc.) of the individuals. I also charted and compared the socio-economic factors that may have influenced the definitions of power and authority during each time period. These charts reveal the relationship between traditions of governance, the Hmong church, the Hmong people, and the larger context of the nation or country in which the Hmong church resides. At the same time, the charts show how the socio-economic system and the existence of class divisions have evolved over time, hence, revealing the evolution of power and authority in the Hmong church in the larger scope of the socio-economic systems as they define and redefine traditions of power and authority. The chart defines six time frames of the Hmong church within the last fifty-seven years: the newly missionized Hmong church, nationalized Hmong church, the Vietnam War Hmong church, the new Hmong American church, and the millennial Hmong church of today.

### **Interviews**

The goal of the interviews was to obtain an understanding of the different views of power and authority in the church—specifically, models of church or denominational governance—to realize the factors influencing these views and to solicit suggestions for redefining power and authority in the church. With this information, the question of the definitions and factors influencing those definitions of power and authority will be better answered. This process involved interviewing key individuals in the denomination, both nationally and in local churches, as well as observing their decision-making processes. Both pastors and local ministry volunteers were selected because the pastors play a large part in defining and redefining power and authority in the church, while the ministry volunteers complement the perspective of the pastors.

As a result, four senior Hmong pastors were interviewed to ascertain these views and their rationales. One was on the Board of the Hmong District, one was a previous board member, another was basically run out of his church, and the other has gone out to pastor a church in another denomination though still licensed through the Hmong District. One district board member was not a pastor but was currently on the board. Two church planters, a team member, and a couple who were on another church planting team were interviewed. One pastor-in-training was interviewed. He was going through the Theological Education by Extension<sup>3</sup> (T.E.E.) program at the time. Four youth pastors were also interviewed; one had just stepped down from the ministry but is now the newly-appointed Hmong Alliance Men's Director who oversees all the men's ministries of the churches in the United States. I also interviewed two

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<sup>3</sup> The T.E.E. program was originally created for indigenous leadership where there were no missionaries or formally trained pastors. In this research in particular, it is used for those Hmong pastors who elect to be trained at home to become pastors of Hmong churches in the United States. The track includes the basic tenets of evangelical theology, contemporary ministerial practices, and C&MA specific courses (Alliance Distinctives and Introduction to Missions). The T.E.E. program has been adopted by the C&MA as a ministerial training tool for the denomination—as a certificate, of ministry, it is not accredited by an accrediting association. However, one of the denomination's school, Crown College, is willing to take the credits at 2/3 credit. The difference between the denomination's and the Hmong's program is that the denomination oversees their program whereas the Hmong District oversees its own. Furthermore, the denomination requires a 2 year degree to be considered whereas there is no other educational requirement for the Hmong District.

local church board members and a former Hmong Alliance National Youth Director, who oversaw all the Hmong District youth groups. On the denominational level, the assistant corporate secretary, a Vice-President of Leadership Development, two C&MA Bible College professors—one of whom taught a class on C&MA history and doctrine, while the other was a dean—the Executive Director for National Church Ministry, and the chair of the denominational board were interviewed. These individuals were from Fresno, CA; Denver, CO; Kansas City, KS; St. Paul, MN; Toccoa Falls, GA; Colorado Springs, CO; Wausau, WI; and Warren, MI.

The ages of the interviewees ranged from 26 to 63 years, including those who are considered first-generation, "one-point-five generation"—meaning those born overseas but were resettled as children—and second-generation. Therefore, the *One-Point-Five generation* refers to those individuals who came to the United States as children and were acculturated in the States while growing up in a Hmong-speaking home. Their years in the ministry range from one year to 41 years. The individuals were mostly males. Because the Hmong is patrilineal and, hence, male representational, it is the men of the household and village who take on the role of leadership. However existing previously as indigenous and more egalitarian society, the Hmong usually make decisions considering the wives' input (Ireson 1996:96). This gender dynamic is reflected in the leadership of the church, except in the case of all-female groups such as the Alliance Women's department. On the local, district, and denominational level, those on the leadership board are all men. Also being limited in resources and their role being mainly domestic, women are not afforded the opportunity to continue their education into college and, therefore, are generally unaware of the power dynamics and their rationales in the church. For these reasons, not many females were interviewed. My key informants, Paul and Sarah Yang, are a married couple. Apart from them, there was one couple whom I interviewed, which

included both the husband and wife. Sometimes both husband and wife were present, but the wife chooses not to participate. As proponents on different sides of the debate, the interviewees differ in their perspectives on the definition of power and authority as well as their rationales for one particular definition over the other.

The interviewing process began with asking the interviewee some questions regarding governance in the Hmong church. I began the interviews with verbal informed consent. (Since I am a member of this community myself, written consent would seem offensive.) During this portion of the interview, I explained the intentions of the interview and obtained interviewees' names, ages, church, years in service, position(s) in the church, training, and institutions of training for ministry. In addition to the demographic questions, the questions used to obtain research data from the interviews were mainly open-ended questions. Questions addressing ministers in Hmong churches were asked about the Hmong church, while those in the denomination headquarters were asked about the denomination and the denominational churches at large. The interview data were obtained by asking the following five questions:

1. What are some of the perspectives that exist on power and authority in the Hmong church (or C&MA denomination)?
2. What factors do you think contributed to the church's getting to this point?
3. What role do you see for the congregation, elder, or pastor in the decision-making process of the church?
4. What are your suggestions for the Hmong church (or C&MA denomination) and the rationale, and why would each suggestion be effectively deal with the controversies of power and authority in the church?



5. Is there anything else that you would like to share about power and authority in the Hmong church (or C&MA denomination) today?

These questions were vital in understanding the current state of the Hmong church or this denomination and its definitions of power and authority as well as factors that have contributed to the definitions. The answers to these questions can indicate factors influencing each definition in the church.

### **Textual Readings**

Assembled by the pastor or church leader, sermons and authoritative texts were also vital to this study because they provided the rationale for power and authority. Depending on where he stood, each pastor or leader devised his own excerpts, illustrations, and points that would justify one model or the other. Thus, sermons and texts were analyzed to reveal the current rationales for the views of power and authority. The following list details the sermons and texts.

#### ***Sermons***

I downloaded the audio sermon of the plenary sessions from the Hmong District conference in 2006 (Yexus.com 2006) in St. Paul, MN. I wanted to discern each pastor's stand on the various models of leadership. After the conference, attendees from the church in Kansas City (including my informants, Paul and Sarah Yang) reported on the division among the attendees as to whether the pastor or the congregation has the ultimate authority in church matters. Along with other sermons at the meeting, one in particular stated that giving the pastor the authority to administer the church as he sees most effective is "the Hmong way." He reasoned this is how the Hmong have always done it and that this position is supported by the Scriptures. I analyzed other sermonic audio files relating to power and authority from prominent pastors in the Hmong District (Yexus.com 2006) by listening and taking notes on each sermon,

noting statements as to who is and is not involved in the decision-making process of the church or district—whether authoritative, democratic, or consensus—then drawing out the rationales supporting the pastor’s claim, such as from “Hmong tradition” (“this is how we’ve always done it”), the C&MA constitution or the Bible. Finally, sermons relating to power and authority given by prominent leaders of the district apart from the 2006 conference were considered, such as that of the District Superintendent and members of the District Executive Committee (DEXCOM).

### *Authoritative Texts*

I also examined authoritative texts—those texts with unquestionable authority to define positions, procedures and the scope of policies—in order to understand power and authority as defined by the denomination and the district as well as local churches. The evaluative criteria that I applied to these texts included sections or excerpts on the decision-making process in the church as asserted or exemplified by the text as well as the rationale(s) behind them (if any).

These authoritative texts include constitutional texts, such as the Constitution of the C&MA (also called the C&MA Manual), the Hmong District Bylaws, and local church bylaws, as well as the Bible.

### *Constitutional Texts*

The Constitution provides the overall framework of denominational as well as local church polity. The Hmong District Bylaws basically translates the C&MA Manual into Hmong. Local church bylaws or policies specify practices that apply only to the local church and its members.

### *Sacred Text*

Finally, the Bible is a text that forms the basis of belief for the C&MA. It forms an unquestionable foundation for their bylaws and, where applicable, quotes Bible verses to justify

certain rules and policies. For the Hmong in the United States, there are basically two Hmong Bibles. The first one was supported and published by the American Bible Society (ABS), but the translation was done by a committee from the Hmong District of the C&MA (Hmong District 2000). The other Bible was supported by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), translated by members of the Hmong Baptist Fellowship of the SBC, and published by The Voice of the Martyrs (Hmong Baptist Fellowship 1997). Each group claimed its version is more authoritative. Though the C&MA quotes from the New International Version in its Constitution, there is no indication that they endorse one version over another. Likewise, there is no preference as to which English translation is considered authoritative to the Hmong church.

### **Participant Observation**

Individuals, leaders, and authoritative texts made claims about what should be the mode of governance in the research, but observations were invaluable to investigating the validity and reliability of those claims. Validating these claims and rationales involved participatory observations and further interviewing from those impacted by authoritative decisions. The decision-making processes I observed were from annual business meetings in two churches, along with national conferences. The annual business meetings were crucial to obtaining insights into the decision-making process of the church and how it is actually practiced. During these meetings, perspectives and clashes over power and authority arose as the pastor, elders, and congregation came together to elect new leaders, give reports for the current year, and approve reports, budgets, and plans for the coming year. These meetings brought forth more insights to the research. The first one was at the St. Paul Hmong Alliance Church in Maplewood, Minnesota, and the second was at the First Hmong C&MA Church in Kansas City, Kansas. St. Paul Hmong Alliance Church was observed on November 12, 2006, while the observations for

The First Hmong C&MA of KCK were divided between the elections on October 22, 2006, and the presentation of reports and plans on December 30, 2006. Interviews were conducted after each observation to understand the dynamics and rationales of power and authority that may not be evident.

In addition, other crucial district, national, and denominational meetings were considered. The Hmong District Regional National Conference was held between July 26 and 28, 2007, at the Hmong American Alliance Church, in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Christian and Missionary Alliance General Assembly for the denomination was held between May 22 and 27, 2007, in Orlando, Florida. I also attended the ASAPH Conference for church leaders and worship directors between October 6 and 7, 2006, in Maplewood, Minnesota, as well as the Yexus Communitas Conference between November 21 and 22, 2008, in Green Lake, Wisconsin. These observations provided insight as power dynamics on all levels were addressed as they affected the local church.

## **CHAPTER 4 - BACKGROUND OF THE HMONG IN LAOS**

Since its inception in the early 1950s, one of the challenges facing the Hmong church has been defining and redefining power and authority. Therefore, I explore here the history of the church. When the Christian movement began in the 1950s, power and authority also became solidified in the local village churches in Laos. The church came to replace both religious as well as their social systems, incorporating these two systems into its leadership structure and decision-making process. Therefore, a thorough and separate investigation into power and authority dynamics of Hmong social and religious systems is vital to understanding power and authority in the Hmong church at its inception.

### **The Hmong Social System in Laos Prior to the Vietnam War**

Hmong society is organized into a web of clan systems based on patrilineal descent. A Hmong clan is “a group of people [who] bond together through birth or adoption by a shared surname” (Lee 1993). Therefore, the clan represents the individual in inter-clan and even interethnic issues. One’s lineage or “extended family” within each clan is also familiar with the specific customs and rituals that will lead one to his or her ancestors in the afterlife. The clan provides the social support system during times of economic need for such members as the widowed, disabled, elderly, and others unable to provide for themselves. Hmong clans are organized according to surnames. Though some would count nineteen surnames, the majority of scholars conclude that there are only eighteen. Due to the social and religious significance of the clan, the Hmong social system was examined in detail. Below are details as to how the clan is realized in the patrilineal family (*kwvtij*<sup>4</sup>) and how the clan is seen in the village (*zog*) and beyond to the district (*cheeb tsaam*), province (*xeev*), and global ethnic group (*haiv Moob*).

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<sup>4</sup> The variety of Hmong cited here is Blue Hmong (ISO 639-3: hnj), also referred to as the Green Hmong. This is my own language as well as that of the majority of Christian Hmong in the United States though the overall majority

### *Power and Authority on Clan and Family Level in Laos—Tsev Neeg and Kwvtij*

Prior to the Vietnam War in Laos, the *tsev neeg* 'household, family' referred to the extended family, which includes three to four generations, rather than to the nuclear family as it is today. Today in the U.S., families work at salaried jobs instead of just farming, so the extended family is no longer necessary, for example, to help care for the children while the parents are out in the field, nor are they needed to reciprocate in clearing fields, gathering harvest, or making huts. With less interdependency and reciprocity, there is also less solidarity; hence, a family now is defined more as a nuclear family or just three generations in homes with residing grandparents. In the past, in this patriarchal society, every son that got married would built an extension off the parents' hut for himself and his new family. Becoming more neolocal once they entered the United States and having homes that could not accommodate more than

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of Hmong in the United States and Laos (both Christians and Hmong animists together) are actually of the White Hmong language (ISO 639-3: mww).

The Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) I use here is the standard script for the Hmong church as well as the Hmong in the United States. The Hmong RPA represents lexical tone with alphabetic letters at the end of the syllable. For the tones, the /\_b/ is the highest musical tone (as in the solfege tone Mi), no tonal indicator /\_/ is the medium high musical tone (as in Re), the /\_s/ is the middle musical tone (as in Do), the /\_g/ is like the s but breathy, the /\_v/ is a mid rising slur tone, the /\_d/ is a low dip-high rising slur tone, the /\_j/ is a high noise tone (as in a high knock), whereas the /\_m/ is a low noise tone (as in a low thump). The double vowels are nasals, whereas having two different vowels together are diphthongs. Being more latin in pronunciation, some consonants pronounced differently from the English include the unaspirated k, p, and t. Pre-nasalized consonants have a /n\_/ before the consonant. Pre-aspirated consonants have an /h\_/ . Post-aspirated consonants have an /\_h/ after the consonant. Sometimes there is a combination of pre-nasalized and post-aspirated consonants as in /n\_h/. Otherwise, the /c\_/ is a voiced palatal plosive with the tongue beginning from the front of the pallet and releasing with a palatal approximant, the /r\_/ is a voiced alveolar plosive with the tongue starting from the roof of the pallet, the /s\_/ consonant is pronounced as an “sh,” the /z\_/ is pronounced like the French “j,” /x\_/ is consistently “s,” and the /q\_/ is an epiglottal plosive in tightening up the throat and releasing it. Please see the glossary in appendix G for more details.

Also note that Ethnologue has an inconsistent classification between the Blue/Green/Leng/Njua Hmong (ISO 639-3: hnj) and the White/Daw Hmong (ISO 639-3:mww). Ethnologue designates one as Hmong Njua and the other as Miao, White. Because Njua is the transliteration for Blue/Green (also called Leng) and Daw is the transliteration for White, the pages for these two groups should be consistent—whether using the translations or the transliterations. Also, the Miao, White page has under its dialects description “Largely intelligible with Hmong Njua [hnj] and Hmong Daw (Mong Leng dialect) but sociolinguistic factors require separate literature for Hmong Daw.” The Hmong Njua webpage does not say anything under the dialect description, though the Chinese classification may be different considering that they are largely intelligible and not two separate languages, I suggest, leaving them as dialects of one another.

two families, the extended Hmong families are being forced to live in separate residences though in close proximity (Capps 1994:64).

Representation beyond the power and authority of the household heads of the *tsev neeg* are the patrilineal clan, or *kwvtij*, leaders. The clan consists of a number of loosely-related families in a village based on the same surname. The clan leaders therefore are composed of the head of each household where the respected elder is the oldest of all the household heads of those in the village. Max Weber would refer to these clans as *verband*, meaning “organized groups” with an autocephaly established leadership based on traditional authority as opposed to being autonomous, heteronomous, or heterocephalous (Weber 1968:51). Social service providers of the clan included healers (*txiv neeb*), marriage brokers (called *meejkoob*), teachers (*xifwb*, or *naikhu*, the Laotian term), and disciplinarians (*tug qhuab ntuag*) (Fink 1982:2). Though decision-makers consider the input of each household head, each of them can also be influenced by their clan leader. According to Cheu Thao from the Center for Applied Linguistics and an ex-village head himself, each clan consisted of “more than five families chooses a single leader to deal with social and spiritual matters” (Fink 1982:115). These individuals were usually the eldest middle-aged individual with what Weber (1968:1011) calls “patrimonial” rights to lead the clan. Thao continues that those who had fewer than five families would band together with the largest of the minority clans representing the rest. These clan leaders are responsible for representing the group when dealing with members of other clans.

### ***Power and Authority on the Village Level in Laos —Zog***

The next level of authority is the village head, called *hau zog* (literally “village head”). The Laotian borrowed term is *nai npaab*. Under French colonial rule, the Laotian term borrowed was *Phuvphuajkhoom* “primary overseer of all things.” The idea seems to have been derived

from the Laotian government early in the twentieth century. Pastor Cher Moua believes the term and idea came from French influence (personal interview, 2006). Paul Xang Yang, who taught French in Laos between 1971 and 1976, also confirms this (personal communication, 2008).

However, prior to integrating the French colonial style of leadership during the Vietnam War, when moving to a new location as part of a swidden agricultural society, the village head's roles, responsibilities, and the extent of his authority were limited. There, he was a representative who held "a place of prestige at the local festivals, is the judge in inter-household disputes, and was expected to administer to the good of the community...maintenance of the trails, opening new ones, and for moving operations" (Barney 1961:20). The village head did have full authority in adverse circumstances such as an economic, environmental, political, or military threat. Hence, the village head was "not a dictator but with the counsel of other householders he served to make the community a cooperative unit" (id.). Just as each village head was appointed by a consensus, a consensus of all those involved and affected was considered before the village head made major decisions.

The position of the village head lasted for a lifetime, so if the family did not agree with major decisions made by the village head, the family would move to another village (Yang 2008). Being a swidden agricultural society and moving every couple of years or so, with extended clan ties in Laos, the Hmong had no problem moving into another village when they disagreed with the village head or the majority of the village. Their few belongings were carried on the backs of water buffaloes or cattle, and they were able to easily erect a new home with new furnishings when they arrive at their destination. Also, the social network and support that they may have had could be replaced in the new village by those of the same clan in that new village. In the United States, the Hmong have become more tied to a location. Many who were



sponsored in major cities with larger assistance have stayed in their particular city since their arrival in the late 1970s. They also have commitments to their workplaces, children's education, and other community obligations such as extended families, in-laws, or other civic responsibilities. Other economic factors also deter them from moving; for example, having accumulated more durable goods, the cost of moving in the United States is a lot higher than moving to another village in Laos. Even if they were able to move to another city, there is no guarantee that they would find a job or be able to make a living other than being a burden to their family members in the new city. Unfortunately, the rigid church structure, being more rooted in one locale and having Hmong communities not so close but being more spread out over a state or region, does not allow for this so easily, causing greater tension between the leaders and disagreeing members.

Confirmed by Paul Xang Yang, Cheu Thao described the process of selecting a village head (personal communication, 2007). First, "the heads of households would informally discuss among themselves, at ceremonies and social events, who should be the village chief" (Thao 1982:115). Though Cheu Thao uses "chief," I would avoid using this term because it is authoritarian as compared to the more egalitarian practice mentioned here. A particular man will emerge from each large clan group as a result of informal discussions. A "large clan group" is any group of *kwvtij*, or patrilineal clan group, consisting of five or more families. Therefore, and according to Paul Xang Yang, a village can have various village clan leaders as their village heads (personal communication, 2007). The smaller clan families select their own *hau zog*, or they can divide themselves into the other large clan groups. Having a slightly different experience from Yang's in Laos, Barney (Barney 1961:20) notes that local populations consider two men to be village heads—one is recognized by the national government and selected by the

villagers, while the other is the eldest householder in the village. I believe that different localities may have their own variations on government structures. Either way, once he becomes the likely leader of the majority of household heads, the village head will be formally asked to take office.

After the village head has been selected by the household heads and accepted by the candidate, the name of the new village head is given to the district chief to be confirmed and appointed. If the district chief, or *tasxaam*, feels the new village head is not capable of performing the duties, he can recommend another person. Paul Xang Yang also mentioned that the village secretary, or *teev ntawv*, would also be someone elected by consensus—selected by neither the *tas xaam* nor the *nai npaab* who the *teev ntawv* will be working with (personal communication, 2007). Thus, the village heads and village secretaries are kept accountable to make good or popular decisions considering those under their care lest they lose their positions. In this case, the district leader reserves the right to arbitrarily make an appointment despite the disagreement of some or all of the household heads. However, these household heads can appeal to the district chief, usually to no avail. Sometimes the decision of the district chief is made for reasons of self-interest rather than for the best of the villagers or the individual. The last resort is for disgruntled members to move to another village. As a result, unresponsive leaders can find themselves without villagers to lead, while a good village leader can gain power as people move from other villages into his. Therefore dependent on others for his position, the village head considers everyone involved or affected before making a decision. Pao Saykao confirms this as his first main point in one of the two major qualities of Hmong leadership, which is to “consult, consult, and consult” with everyone involved and affected by the decision on all levels. Consultation is even more important than the second quality: knowledge of acceptable norms

(Saykao 1997). Therefore, the indigenous traditional practice of power and authority in Hmong social systems is a consensus decision, which counters authoritarian governance as the “Hmong way.”

### ***Power and Authority Above the Village Level***

In Laos, prior to the involvement of the French and Laotian governments with local Hmong politics in the late 1800s, official geographic hierarchy above the village level was very minimal. The Hmong clan-based *kiatong* leaders, who were established in China during the Ming dynasty (between 1368 and 1644), continue to have some influence. In a final attempt to subject the Hmong to Chinese rule, the Ming dynasty rulers implemented a clan-based model where each fief was appointed a leader or “little king,” called *kiatong* in Chinese, who presided over a clan. That clan may span a region and overlap with *kiatongs* of other clans (McCoy1972:23). I would like to describe these as patrimonial Chinese fiefdoms that were regionally clan-based rather than land-based. In consideration of Max Weber’s definitions of authority, the *kiatongs* were given hierocratic rational-legal authority established by the emperor and rulers of the Ming dynasty, though, for practical reasons, traditional and charismatic authority may have influenced their selection. The *kiatong*’s reign in China lasted until the end of the Ming dynasty in 1644, when the rulers of the Manchu Qing dynasty decided to abolish the relative autonomy of the Miao kingdoms. This move drove the remnants of this old system southward into the Nong Het District of northern Laos (McCoy 1972:23). The abolition of the Hmong “little kingdoms” also severed the hierocratic system, leaving the Hmong *kiatongs* to rely on a democratic (or more precisely, consensual) rational-legal authority, which at this point (after 400 years) has also become a traditional authority for the Hmong—these were of the Moua, Lo, and Ly clans. As the district was previously uninhabited by the Laotian ethnic nationals, it

seemed the Laotian government did not have any interest in them and was unable to deal with the new arrivals (McCoy 1972:23). However, the newly-arrived Hmong did have to deal with the indigenous Mon-Khmer Kmu locals. In their battles, the flintlock rifles of the Hmong, obtained from the Chinese, rivaled the Kmu's sabers and crossbows (Vang 1998:14). The Kmu population eventually was either forced westward into Luang Prabang Province in Laos or integrated into the Hmong population.

Though French colonization began between the 1850s and 1890s, it was not until the 1920s and early 1930s that the French, through the Laotian government, implemented geographic administrations for political and colonial reasons. The Hmong *kiatongs* were in opposition to the newly-appointed district chiefs as they struggled for power over the Hmong. According to an interview with Touby, the election between Faydang and Touby was apparently unfair, as the French colonial commissioner in Laos favored Touby, barring Faydang from the election (McCoy 1972:23). As a result, though the authority may have been "given to the people," the French colonials still had a large influence on whether a person was on the ballot for an election or not, establishing again a hierocratic rational-legal authority over the Hmong in Laos—this time by the French colonials. This eventually led to the two sides of the Hmong fighting in Laos—the *kiatong* side being aligned with the Vietnamese Communists, represented by Faydang Lo (the second son of *kiatong* Lo Bliayao), and the district chief's side being aligned with Touby Lyfoung under the United States' CIA. Though the *kiatong* side had become largely traditional, it still had a number of followers and this conflicted with the hierocratic authority of the district chiefs. During this time, the district merely supervised and corresponded with the village heads. Each village had its own clan leader overseen by the district chief.

Before the war, the power rested primarily with the village head. Democratic rational-legal authority was also vested in the village head. During the Vietnam War, the clan-based leadership system increased in power. The power shifted from the village head to the village clan leaders (Thao 1982:118). Like that of the village head, the clan leaders' power was restricted to the village in which they lived. Beyond the village clan leaders, authority also resided in the clan-based *kiatongs*. Though their power had diminished after their migration from China, the *kiatongs* were still highly respected. During the war, this clan-based system experienced a resurgence of power, though not necessarily for the *kiatongs* themselves. A variety of social and political dynamics gave rise to the power of a new set of clan leaders. Cheu Thao (1982, 118) believes their power was due to a larger number of clan members present due to grouping civilians together in large villages, such as Long Chieng and Sam Thong in northern Laos. With district and local structures in disorder, clan power was needed to keep order in these civilian villages. According to Thao, another reason for their power is that the Hmong military general, General Vang Pao, selected a member from each clan among all the Hmong in Laos as his high-ranking officers. In this state of emergency, an authoritative structure was set up as national clan leaders were appointed in a hierocratic web of military leaders and ranks, overlapping one another as various clan-members shuffled throughout the region. Utilizing the clan was the obvious strategy because the Hmong social and religious systems were based on the clan, and as villages were destroyed, villagers dispersed and mixed together in various civilian camps. Order needed out to be made of this chaos, and the Hmong quickly resorted to what they had previously practiced.

As his leadership extended into the Vietnam War, Touby Lyfong continued to be an influential leader. Eventually executed for sympathizing with the U.S. cause, Touby was

recognized by both the French colonial government and the Laotian government as the leader of the Hmong (Davidson 1993:111). He was so influential during his time that after talking with the missionary Ted Andrianoff, Touby sent an edict out to all the Hmong village heads to inform them that he would not discourage any Hmong wishing to convert to Christianity (Davidson 1993:111). He was very instrumental in opening the door for many to be converted, considering that his personal shaman was Moua Yia Thao—the first Hmong convert to Christianity in Laos. However, Touby himself never made a public confession of any personal Christian conversion.

During the Vietnam War, military power and position determined power and authority among the Hmong (see Appendix A). The move by General Vang Pao to select clan leaders began a trend in power and authority, as those in military positions became equated with clan leaders, although not all military leaders were also clan leaders. Power was consolidated into the hands of one person, and that person appointed a bureaucracy comprising individuals whom he trusted over the various clans. This trend continued into the refugee camps of Thailand, located on the other side of the Mekong River, for those who were able to escape the Vietcong, the harshness of the jungle, and the fatal dangers of the mighty Mekong itself. Likewise in the church, many on the board of elders were selected based on their secular positions as military or clan leaders during this time. These lay leaders governed the church with their centralized authority—particularly the *Thawj Tsaavxwm* (chairman of the board) where the pastor did not have this kind of authority.

The French military and colonial rule influenced the definitions of power and authority in the Hmong social system during the Vietnam War. Much of the Hmong military mentality of this era continued into the churches in the United States as well. This practice may have legitimized the authoritative style of leadership as being “the Hmong way.” Military leaders

were elected to the church board despite their lack of integrity. Paul Xang Yang noted an elder who is now a pastor but who had attempted a number of affairs with women in other areas using his high ranking military position (personal communication, 2008). Without any formal church leadership training, military leaders, through their military authority, became the obvious candidates to lead the church. The rise of military leaders, along with the lack of leadership training among the Hmong churches, brought about a vacuum of leadership. With it came an acceptance and incorporation of authoritative definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church. Yang noticed that there were more problems in the church during the military leader's leadership (personal communication, 2008). He attributed it to their authoritative definition of leadership.

### **Hmong Religious Systems in Laos**

Understanding power in the traditional indigenous Hmong religious system in Laos will shed light on elements that were adopted into the definition of authority in the Hmong church. The Hmong shaman has no authority himself, except that which the spirits bestow upon his request. Animism was practiced prior to Christianity; thus, certain worldviews and traditional practices (which will be explained in the analysis section of this research) were integrated into the Christian worldview, theology, and practice (Yang 2001). Therefore, understanding power in Hmong animism also helps to understand power and authority in the Hmong church.

#### ***Power in Hmong Animism in Laos***

The Hmong worldview consists of three categories of beings—beneficial spiritual beings, malicious spiritual beings, and humans along with their ancestral spirits. Of the beneficial beings, the Hmong acknowledge a creator, referred to as *Yawm Saub* or *Tswv Ntuj*, who is omnipotent and omniscient (though not necessarily omnipresent)—similar to the biblical

account. *Yawm Saub* is the creator's personal name, literally “Grandfather Shao” connotating an ancestral forefather, whereas the word *saub* has been designated for Hmong prophets speaking on behalf of *Saub* or Shao. *Tswv Ntuj* literally means “Lord of the Sky.” Christians refer to this being as *Vaajtswv*, literally “Ruler King”—corresponding with the Mandarin word for emperor, *Huangdi*. Among others, another key beneficial spiritual being is *Siv Yig* (Shee Yee), who was sent by *Yawm Saub* to save humanity. The term *Siv Yig* refers to the mythical individual who was sent as the first Shaman or *Txiv Neeb*, but the term *Siv Yig* is also used as a position or title for other contemporary individuals alleging to have been sent by *Yawm Saub* or as *saub* prophets (Paul Yang, personal communication 2009). There are either ancestral (domestic) or wild (external) spirits who exist among the living. The ancestral spirits co-exist with each family and in their house to protect them from harmful outside spirits. If these spirits become upset, however, they will not inflict harm. Instead, they will relinquish their protection, allowing sickness and tragedy to fall on the individual or family, including those inflicted by the wild spirits. As malicious spiritual beings, the wild spirits, on the other hand, live in tree limbs, rocks, or caves or roam as the living-dead. If disturbed in any way, these wild spirits will seek out the individual or family and cause harm to someone (Tapp 1989:61). The leader of the wild spirits is *Dlaab Ntxwj Nyooog* (Dlang Ndzou Nyong). Spirits are referred to as *dlaab* (or *dlang*), but *Dlaab Ntxwj Nyooog* is the antithesis of *Yawm Saub*.

The worldview of the Southeast Asian Hmong includes the belief that each person has three souls—the incarnate soul or *plig thawj thab*, the shadowing spirit or *ntsuj dluab*, and the good ancestral spirits who reside at the family alter or *dlaab xwm kaab*, protecting the living descendants from harm otherwise done by the bad, foreign spirits (Kue 2000:13). The bad spirits live in large trees, rocks, caves, and rice fields. These can cause sickness and death to



individuals trespassing, which would warrant someone to seek a shaman to make a determination as to the cause and remedy needed—usually offering a chicken, pig, or at worst, a cow. In return if the remedy is effective, the shaman would receive a portion of the meat for his fee. He or she is also respected for his specialized service and ability to contact the spirits.

Hmong shamans, or the *Txiv Neeb*, do not have supernatural powers to manipulate spirits or humans, nor do they have any other natural or supernatural powers (Kue 2000:9). The term *Txiv* is literally translated as “father.” It signifies a person of expertise or one responsible for a certain task. Likewise, the term *Nam* is literally translated as “mother” but signifies a female person of expertise or one responsible for a certain task. For example, during funerals, the *Nam Ua Mov* are responsible for overseeing the rice and other food. However, the term *Txiv* is also gender-neutral in that it can be used for a woman doing a task normally reserved for men, as in this case. Davidson recounts a situation where a female *Txiv Neeb* had visions of missionaries before their visit to her village. Thus, the term *Txiv Neeb* may be etymologically male-oriented, but the role is played by both genders, and both genders are equally respected.

According to the Hmong, there are various versions of how humans began practicing this. Kue asserts that the shaman’s supernatural powers were not possessed by the shamans. Rather, the shamans were possessed by the supernatural powers. In other words, the supernatural powers seek out the person, and not vice-versa. This tradition comes from a legend that said the devil, or *Ntxwj Nyooog*, wanted to rule over the earth, but *Yawm Saub* did not allow this. At that time, the first couple (the wife *Puj Sis*, a.k.a. *Pu Shee*, and the husband *Sis Lis Qoo*, a.k.a. *She Lee Kong*), who was sent by *Yawm Saub* from heaven to dwell on earth, had difficulty conceiving a child. They went to ask *Yawm Saub* for the seed of human life to bear children. Upon hearing this request, the devil tricked them by giving them a seed to produce a mortal body with sickness and

corruption. To redeem the first couple, *Yawm Saub* sent *Siv Yig* into the world to save them from sickness and death. This angered the devil even more, so he killed Shee Yee's son and took away his soul. Leaving the earth and unable to be here to save the humans, Shee Yee left his supernatural powers on top of a mountain for certain humans to use. These humans who are able to access Shee Yee's powers are today Hmong shamans. With Shee Yee's powers, Kue (2000:9) concludes that "the task of the shaman is to learn the wishes of the ancestors and spirits and make them known to human beings." The Laotian Hmong shaman's functions are:

- 1) protecting a newborn child from the evil spirits by placing fetish bands on his neck and limbs; 2) performing rituals at funeral and marriage ceremonies and reciting long dirges at the former; 3) securing protection for a rice field at planting time; 4) performing extensive rituals for the sick, including the sacrificing of some chicken or animal offered by the family of the sick person (Barney 1957:33).

Kue adds, "It is also impossible for the shaman to bewitch human beings or to perform other evil deeds by means of his supernatural powers, just as he cannot influence the weather." Therefore, a shaman's power is not something that he or she possesses. Rather the Hmong believe it is something that possesses him or her.

The tradition in indigenous Hmong religious systems of power may seem effective at first, since no one else would know the spirits' wishes, but this is only to a certain extent. For example, an individual would perform a divination ritual to determine which shaman to go to for healing (Tapp 1989: 74). If the individual does not feel that the shaman's prescription is ineffective or if he or she is just not satisfied with the explanation, the person can elect to go to another shaman for spiritual advice (Kue 2000:7). Usually a village has several shamans who may not be equally powerful but provide alternatives to the family. Nicholas Tapp mentions as many as nine shamans in a village of only 25 households (Tapp 1989:73). Here, the religious leader has some authority to proclaim his or her diagnosis and remedy, but another of the same

profession can give an alternative explanation. Likewise, if the analysis and prescription performed by one shaman are not successful, another shaman in the village may be consulted. Although there is no hierarchy where shamans follow a chain of command, there is an understanding that shamans are not equally powerful. Some are more successful, and therefore more powerful than others. The shaman has no political power or political role in the community, nor do they play any part in funeral rites. Instead, the funeral is reserved for the *Qha Kev*, or the “one showing the way” (to the ancestors) (Symonds 2003:27).

Considering the beliefs and practices of the Hmong shaman, it is evident that he or she has no power except his or her access to the spiritual realm and those inhabitants of it. The shaman’s powers are restricted to healing through calling back lost souls by journeying to the land of darkness to retrieve the erring soul. Any power that he or she possesses is that which possesses him. He or she is but a channel between the physical and the spiritual realm. He or she has no power to influence, manipulate, or control any person or thing. He or she has no authority to heal sicknesses other than the ability to seek out the deranged spirits and try to convince them to come back to the patient. In terms of authority over others, his or her authority is limited to the prescription of his or her recommendations among those of other shamans. Nevertheless, there was no set system of political hierarchy in Hmong shamanism to legitimize any hierarchy, unlike in the contemporary Hmong Christian church. Thus, the shaman’s power was not only limited to his or her interpretation but also to his or her own influence.

However, besides Hmong shamans, there are other religious practitioners—specifically the Hmong *saub* prophet or *saub* with the title *Siv Yig*—whose sphere of influence is so effective that they have had renown impact in the Hmong community. These individuals are chosen by *Yawm Saub* to be his spokespersons to the Hmong. They are believed to be endowed with

spiritual autocratic authority to led the Hmong to do certain things in order to avoid trouble or to be successful as a “nation” or a people—referred to by the Hmong as *Haiv Moob*. On the other hand, they also have charismatic authority among the people who followed them.

Pa Chay Vue was a *Siv Yig* who lead the Hmong against the French colonials due to heavy and burdensome taxation—referred to as *Guerre Du Fou* or Madman’s War. Another was Shong Lue Yang, a man who is referred to as the “Mother of Writing.” It was Shong Lue who was called by *Yawm Saub* and was given a writing system from *Yawm Saub*, called Pahawh, to save the Hmong during the Vietnam War. Some alleged that his prophetic messages were strategic in battling the Vietnamese communists. Others say that he had communications with those on the other side of the war. He believed that by embracing this sacred writing system, the Hmong could become modernized and escape hardship. At the end, both sides regarded him as a traitor and he was killed in 1971 (Mother of Writing 2009:para. 5). Finally, two female *saub* prophets, referred to as Mrs. Sai Sue Thao and Mrs. Nchoua Yao Thao, rose to prophesize between 1928 and 1940 in the province of Xieng Khuong (Thao 1997:107). These two were called by *Yawm Saub* to bring repentance to the Hmong by exhorting them leave their “depraved ways” of animism and shamanistic practices, opium usage, and alcohol consumption, and by having them follow the ways of *Lawb Dlaab Siv Yig*, “the *saub* prophets who rid the spirits” (Thao 1997:107). The consequences of not repenting were that the Hmong would suffer tremendous hardships and even death, which was believed to eventually come into fruition the decade following their prophecy (Thao 1997:108). As a result, many came to repent and left their animistic ways (Thao 1997:107).

Paul Xang Yang believes that though some of these *saub* prophets may be authentically from *Yawm Saub* himself, there were also those who said they were sent but may have been false

prophets—those demonically influenced (personal communication 2009). Paul Xang stated that one can tell if their prophecy did not come to pass at the appointed time. Nevertheless, these Hmong *saub* prophets were quite successful with a large number of followers, having been given spiritual autocratic authority from *Yawm Saub* himself and being able to prove it with their prophetic knowledge and supernatural evidence; they were endowed with charismatic authority by their followers.

As mentioned, traditional indigenous Hmong animism in Laos also integrated Confucian filial obligation and Hindu concepts of reincarnation, and the Hmong maintained spiritual health and harmony, venerated the ancestors and deceased family members through various offerings, and ensured continuity of the person and soul from one generation to the next and from this life to the next (Her 2005:3).

### ***Power and Authority in the Hmong Church in Laos***

In addition to animism, observing the inception of power and authority in the Hmong church in Laos allows us to understand the incorporation of animistic ideals into Christian theology and practice into its own definition of power and authority. Previous work has been done on the conversion of the related Big Flowery Miao (*A Hmao*) subgroup in northeastern Yunnan Province, China between 1900 and 1915 by the China Inland Mission, then London Missionary Society (Zhang 1992:99). However, my focus here is on power and authority in the Hmong church in Laos, so I will focus on the church's developments there. For more information on Samuel Pollard and his work among the A Hmao, see Tan Zhang (1992). Those Hmong in Laos are originally descended from the Blue and White Miao subgroups of the Hmong-Mien minority in China. The Hmong of Laos are descendants of those from the southern

Chinese Guizhou province, rather than from the southwestern Chinese Yunnan province (Michaud 1997:122).

The following account of the Hmong church in Laos mainly comes from Jack Davidson in his dissertation, *Hmong Ethnography: an historical study of the Hmong culture and its implications for ministry*. Where possible, other writings are inserted as indicated to supply additional background and contextual information.

Power and authority in Hmong churches in Laos began with missionaries in 1950. Prior to the Hmong Christian movement, mission efforts were done primarily among the Laotians and Mon-Kmer, though they were not very successful among either group. In 1641, the first Christian missionaries who set foot in Laos were Roman Catholics, who worked in Vientiane (Vang 2000:1). After numerous attempts and failures and after being opposed by the Buddhist monks as some were even killed, a Catholic mission met with success in the south of Laos among the Laotians. Meanwhile, Presbyterians began a mission from Thailand in 1880 among the Khmu (Vang 2000:2). These Presbyterians continued preaching until World War I, when the French suspected their missionaries of treachery (Vang 1998:53). Meanwhile, the Christian and Missionary Alliance—a Protestant denomination that had branched from the Presbyterians over fifty years before—came to reach the ethnic Lao in 1929, when Edward Roffe went to Laos and translated the Bible into the Lao national language. By this time, Field Director D.I. Jeffrey had received permission from the French Governor-General of Indochina, M. Pierre Pasquier, to live in Laos. Once in Laos, Roffe began working among the ethnic Lao in Luang Prabang. Another missionary couple under the C&MA, Rev. and Mrs. J.W. Whipple, arrived in south-central Xieng Khouang province in 1939. They worked among the Lao of Xieng Khouang (Kue 2000:61); however, their work was very brief because they had to leave due to the Japanese

invasion of Laos in 1943. In 1947, the C&MA missionaries Rev. Ted and Ruth Andrianoff first went to Vietnam. At the Indochina Field Conference, they were assigned to work in Xieng Khouang province in Laos, taking over what the Whipples had started four years before.

The event that sparked the Christian movement among the Hmong took place during the time of the Andrianoffs, when a Mon-Khmer Christian pastor, Nai Kheng, and the Laotian translator, Nai U-Tee, moved into a Hmong village to help the Andrianoffs with their mission. Prior to Nai's move, some Mon-Khmer were turning from their indigenous animistic religion to Christianity through efforts of the C&MA missionaries. The Mon-Khmer subgroup in Laos are also referred to as the *Kmu* or *Ka*, literally “slave” (Ireson 1996:89). According to Ruth Andrianoff, the Khmu were on the lower end of the Laotian social scale (Andrianoff 2000:5). Nai Kheng's conversion and call to ministry were a result of the work of the missionaries among the Mon-Khmer.

After a year in Xieng Khouang Province, Ted and Ruth Andrianoff made plans to attend a missions conference in Vietnam. Aware of their absence away from the villages during the conference and realizing the missionaries were still learning the language, field chairman Ed Wolfe sent Nai Keng a second-year Bible-college student to help them. He was asked to move to Phumi-ung village in Xieng Khouang Province to watch the missionary's property—though not living on it—and to reassure the villagers that the missionaries were only going to be gone temporarily. The only house available for him and his family was owned by “the most influential shaman in all of Laos and Thailand”—Moua Yia Thao (Andriannoff 2000:5). This shaman was also referred to as Phaw See (*Po Si, Boua Ya Thao*). The house had a grave history: It had actually been built by a French couple called *Besxoog* or *Beson* (Thao 1997:109). There is no written record of why they were there, but they eventually died there and were buried at the

house. No one wanted to stay in it because all who stayed there reported it to be haunted by evil spirits. When Nai Keng moved into the shaman's house, the village people told him that the home was haunted. He shrugged off their warnings and said, "I will show you that my God is more powerful than any evil spirits" (Andrianoff 2000:6).

Overnight, the people watched Nai Keng as they had with others in the past. However, he made no noises, nor was there anything out of the ordinary, as usually had been the case. He shared with them that he knew there were evil spirits because he heard some noises in the walls at night but they were driven away by prayer. "Hearing this," Davidson wrote, "Po Si was astonished. He knew well the power of spirits, having been a shaman for many years. He had never heard of a God so powerful. He stated that if there was such a God, he wanted to know him" (Davidson 1993:97). Upon hearing Moua Yia's request, Nai Kheng left to bring the Andriannoffs to him. After they presented the gospel through the Life of Christ picture roll to him, he responded "I'm ready." With that, they prayed for him, removing the spirit paraphernalia and burning all that had to do with animistic practices. The next morning, many in the village who heard about what had happened also accepted his faith and became Christians.

Two days following this event, the Andrianoffs left for their conference in Dalat, Vietnam, scheduled for May 12-23, 1950, as Moua Yia and Nai Keng continued onward to share the Christian message with neighboring villages. Even prior to their arrival, there were reports of visions and dreams by individuals and shamans among the indigenous Hmong villages of Xieng Khouang. In one village, the village shaman reacted to the presentation, shouting, "This is it! This is what I told you two years ago! Listen to these two men! They are telling you about God himself, *Fuabtais!*" Then she later helped the villagers take down their animistic fetishes



(Davidson 1993:99). This individual may very well be one of the two *saub* prophets who had been spreading the message of repentance in the same province years before.

With their network of extended families and belief in the supernatural, the stage was set for a religious movement. Eventually, these events and circumstances led to a mass conversion of the Hmong in northern Laos. There were claims of self-conversions without the assistance of missionaries or indigenous church leaders (Kue 2000:67).

Most of the conversions were among Blue Hmong villages even though the majority of Hmong in Laos were of the White Hmong dialect. Seng Pao Thao, in his historical account, pointed out that those speaking the Blue Hmong dialect comprised 90 percent of the Hmong Christians in the national church, while the rest of the Hmong conversions were White Hmong (Thao 1997:114). It has been noted (Thao 1997:112) that not many of them were educated, wealthy, or prominent. As the minority dialect speakers in Laos who also migrated into the area later in history, the Blue Hmong did not have the social standing or social networks to elevate themselves regionally or nationally prior to their Christian conversion.

After the conference, the Andrianoff's eleven-day trip was delayed for three months due to a tropical rain storm (Andrianoff 2000:8). Three months after the initial conversion, Ted Andrianoff reported 1,000 conversions in Xieng Khouang Province. The Hmong church had grown tremendously even in the absence of the missionaries.

Differing factors contributed to this mass movement. Jack Davidson (1993:107) attributed it to the Holy Spirit working through the Hmong religious and political leaders, the national Kmu ethnic witnesses, and the missionaries. However, the Rev. Xu Xu Thao (Thao 1997:111) attributed it to the prophetic urging of the two female *Siv Yig* some years before the arrival of the missionaries and the tribulations that came about after their prophecies that drew

the Hmong toward receiving Christianity. Paoze Thao (2000:56) lists the various manifestations that came about such as 1) the two female *Siv Yig*, who prophesized about the coming of the Hmong messiah (“*Namtxiv Vaaj Moob*), 2) the rise of *Tswvxyaas*, a man who can do wonders and transform into a tiger who killed animals but eventually turned to kill the beautiful maidens and handsome young men, 3) the increased use of black magic by the Lao nationals and Khmu natives, 4) the increased sickness and death due to a disease called *qhua-taum*, 5) a number of massive farm fires as unseen before, 6) certain individuals who repented became sober from their opium and alcohol use, 7) the French recruited some Hmong to be involved with World War II, 8) a couple, the Besons, came to live in Xieng Khouang where they died and their house became haunted, and 9) other Hmong *Siv Yig* rose to prophesize and brought many to leave the old ways of using opium, drinking alcohol and even stopped practicing traditional Hmong animism. I believe it may have been a combination of these factors, with some more true in one area than others. In either case, Max Weber (1968:468) was correct in assessing religious groups like the first Hmong believers in Xieng Khouang province. He stated:

“The lot of peasants is so strongly tied to nature, so dependent on organic processes and natural events, and economically so little oriented to rational systematization that in general the peasantry will become a carrier of religion only when it is threatened by enslavement or proletarianization, either by domestic forces (financial or seigneurial) or by some external political power.”

These characteristics were evident among the Hmong prior to and during the time of the missionaries.

Eighteen months after the first conversion in November 1951, there were 50 Christian villages, with a total population over 2,500. Of these, 2,000 were Hmong and the others were Mon-Kmer. Ted Andrianoff gives a report in the C&MA magazine that there were 5,000 Hmong Christian converts in 1954 (Andrianoff 1954:9), which were made up of 96 villages.

The Andrianoffs continued working with the Hmong in Xieng Khouang, while Roffe continued working with the Hmong in Luang Prabang. After the missionaries had shared their message through the villages, leadership was given to indigenous leaders (Appendix C, #1). When there were clashes, they were taken to the missionaries for an answer. Davidson wrote down these questions of concern:

“Should we let our children go to school? Should our young men enter military service? How can we have Christian marriages? When is it right or wrong to plant our fields? Are there good and bad days (taboo) to go into town to sell our wares?” (Davidson 1993:115).

Though Davidson did not include the outcome or process of how decisions were made, his dissertation implies that the missionaries made arbitrary decisions in these matters for the Hmong. This may have been another rationale for those labeling the authoritative governance in the church as “the Hmong way.” However, still wary of animistic beliefs as mentioned above and without the extensive knowledge of this new religious system, the Hmong felt inadequate to make a decision on these issues themselves, relying therefore solely on the missionaries.

Despite the advice of the missionaries, decisions in specific cases were still made by the family, and particularly by the father, as the head of the household. Each family decided whether they wanted to utilize the Christian or animistic rituals in healing, marriage, and funeral rites. The Hmong Christians had a choice between asking their animistic relatives or their Christian relatives to do their healings, weddings, and funerals. Though reverting to animism was looked down upon, many still practiced a syncretistic religion, such as praying for their children, but they also consulted a shaman when praying did not seem to help. This idea of power and authority in animism was transferred to the pastor, as will be discussed later in the findings. The pastor had no power in himself but that which God does at the pastor’s request. He was but a mere channel between the physical and spiritual realm—one who made petitions to

God (or prayed) on behalf of the sick or the requestor. He had no power in and of himself. As with the shaman, if one pastor's prayer for healing was ineffective, they would consult another (Yang 2001). However, in practice this has proved difficult due to the fact that each village had only one pastor. At the end, the real authority still resided in the hands of the family—like his shamanic counterpart, the pastor's authority was limited. Up until recently while the families who practiced a syncretistic religion were looked down upon, there was no formal procedure as to deal with them at the time of the inception of the Hmong church.

Like the social system, each extended and/or nuclear family in the Hmong religious system was entitled to its own belief—whether the family was animist or Christian. If one disagreed with the village head or the majority of the villagers on which religion to choose, that family was welcome to leave and seek another village. Jean Andrianoff noted an incident where Moua Yia and Nai Keng introduced the Christian message to the villagers (Andrianoff 2000:10). The next day, the village head announced his decision to follow Christianity. He then left the decision to each household. According to Andrianoff, “Hmong practice in such situations was that discussion would continue until consensus was reached. If that did not happen, those disagreeing with the majority would move to another village or set up a new village” (Andrianoff 2000:10). Thus, the indigenous traditional Hmong practice of power and authority was consensus, being on a nuclear family (or *tsev neeg*) level regardless of their religious preference. Even in social matters, any major village social decision was made by a consensus of all the village heads.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in the missionized church tradition, like the Hmong shaman, the Hmong pastor had no power but what God chooses to do upon hearing the prayer of the pastor, and his authority was as limited as the shaman's in religious matters. Nou Fong Her

stated that the pastor's role was to preach and pray only, which was enough for him along with trying to farm and make a living like everyone else (personal communication 2009). When asked about conflicting opinions, he stated that there was no conflict because both sides were willing to give in.

Though there was some general cooperation, the local church was still struggling to find some sense of organization and self-sufficiency. Each village church had a local group that would make its own decision as to what the code of conduct was, and each village built its own chapel. Each village church elected its elders under the direct guidance of the missionary. Three years after the movement began, William Smalley noted a lack of organization within the fledgling church apart from the village elders (Davidson 1993:119). However, Ted Andrianoff noted in 1951, just one year later, that there were 38 Christian villages which were divided into ten districts (Davidson 1993:115).

With the mass conversion of the Hmong, a Bible training program was needed. A Bible school first opened in Vientiane in 1939 but was soon closed due to war. It was reopened in Luang Prabang in 1948 but moved back to Xieng Khouang in 1951. As the first short-term Bible school, the program included six weeks on campus and six weeks off-campus. The first group of students numbered only 18, as compared to over a thousand new converts. Of these 18, there were some Lao and Khmu students, the majority of whom were Hmong (Vang 2000:10). In 1975, when the war officially ended, the Bible School was closed.

Prior to having Hmong pastors from Bible schools available and not having enough trained pastors for the burgeoning churches, indigenous leaders and lay pastors were elected by the local church. Rather than being assigned in a hierocratic manner by the missionaries, local indigenous leaders and pastors were democratically elected. A democratic rational-legal

authority was practiced. The elected leaders, along with the lay pastor, administered the religious traditions, while respected clan elders oversaw the social duties (Appendix C, #2). For the most part, each had his area of jurisdiction. For example, the church elders would lead prayer time and pray on behalf of the people, while the clan elder would make plans for social events such as Easter and Christmas (Yang 2008). Thus, the definition of social and religious authority in the missionized Hmong church mimicked that of the animistic Hmong social and religious system. The difference, however, was evidently in the selection of those in authority.

After the movement leveled off during 1957-1960, village-wide conversions ceased and only individuals and family units were converted. Moua Yia explains, “Because there were no pastors...to help these new converts,...they gradually went back to evil spirit worship” (Davidson 1993:105). In an attempt to survey the commitment of the new converts, a questionnaire was sent out with student workers. The report showed there were Christians in 56 different villages “but only a few were zealous for God.” Though no statistics were taken on how many Christian villages existed during these years, Davidson did mention factors that may have impeded the movement (Davidson 1993:117). These factors were 1) dependency on missionaries for support to train and sustain pastors, 2) lack of literacy materials in Hmong, and 3) lack of religious training in the villages (id.:118). Smalley confirmed that the Hmong church was dependent on the missionaries “financially and spiritually” (Davidson 1993:120).

As the movement grew, the Hmong churches of the C&MA saw a need to be more organized. At first, according to Timothy Vang (2000:12), a past District Superintendent of the Hmong churches in America, there were basically two groups of churches based on their geographic location. The following are the details of formulating the national church according to Vang. The churches in Xieng Khouang Province were organized in 1954, and those in Luang

Prabang Province became organized in 1955. Then in 1956, a joint committee was formed, and together the two groups drafted a constitution for the national church organization. The first national conference of this merger was held in Xieng Khouang in March 1957, when delegates from forty-two churches attended. There, the constitution was adopted and the Executive Committee was elected. All members served a two-year term and comprised Hmong, Lao, and Khmer. They adopted the name “Gospel Church of Laos,” which later was changed to the “Lao Evangelical Church.” Dr. Edward Roffe wrote in the C&MA news magazine, “No longer was each church group a law unto itself, but each local church was now bound by membership in the national body to respect all action taken by the assembly insofar as it affected the local church.” Thus, the national Hmong church was born. Separated by more than a day’s walk between villages and without a modern transit system, the Hmong churches were still quite autonomous, and a hierocratic rational-legal system of authority was neither necessary nor feasible. Nou Fong Her recalls having to travel one day to the closest church in Xieng Khouang before his church built their own in Tham Thao, Laos (personal communication 2009). Sometimes they would just spend the night. As a result of these geographical (and lack of technological) dynamics, the national church did not have much influence on decisions on the local level.

On the national level in Laos, however, things were different. This can be observed in the power dynamics in the creation, usage, and adoption of the Hmong Bible, which the C&MA missionaries who were commissioned to help create the Hmong RPA writing system were not permitted to use their system. However, those with the Overseas Missions Fellowship (OFM), Paaj Mim (Doris Whitelock) and Maiv Neeb (Seng Pao was unsure of her English name), used the Laotian script. Pleased with this move, the Laotian government allowed them to translate and use the script of the national language for the Hmong. The only problem was that they did

not translate it according to the dialect of the majority of Hmong Christians, the Blue Hmong. These two individuals were not Hmong, but they were of European descent from the United States, so the social dynamics of the Hmong clans were not of concern to them. When it came to creating a script for the Blue Hmong vernacular, the Hmong Christians were at the mercy of the Laotian government and then of the OMF missionaries, even sixteen years after their conversion. Without the linguistic skills to create their own writing system, they were at the mercy of the missionaries. Seng Pao believed that the reasons were political, as most of the Hmong in Laos were White Hmong even though most of those converted spoke the Blue dialect. He pointed out that those in secular and military leadership, those who were literate or learned, and those with wealth were the White Hmong. Seng Pao Thao recounts the five years of frustration the national board had while obtaining permission from the missionaries at the LEC national conferences.

Success finally came in 1972, the sixth year of their attempt to translate the Bible into the dialect of the majority (Thao 1997:117). Thao points out that this was only made possible after their complete obedience to God in prayer and, after seeing a sign from God, Thao believed it was God who had to put the right people in power. These individuals included Rev. Saly Kounthapanya the instructor of pastoral training in Thailand as the national Lao Evangelical Church president (also the best trained Bible teacher at the time) who made the request. Thao stated “Rev. Intam” gave permission along with the permission of Rev. Clement Dreger, head of all the missionaries in the region (Thao 1997:117). Despite this success, the Blue Hmong Bible was not completed until after Laos fell to the Communists and the Hmong had fled into the refugee camps of Thailand in the spring of 1975 (Thao 1997:118). Between 1977 and 1979, when Seng Pao suggested a switch from the Laotian script to the RPA script and when Paul Yang arrived at the refugee camp and actually received a copy, the complete Bible was published



in the RPA. According to Paul Yang, it was put together by the Hmong in Thailand with the RPA characters Barney and Smalley had created almost twenty-five years before (personal communication 2009). Being versatile for both Blue and White Hmong, the script did not need to be translated any further.

Today, the RPA is being used by the Hmong District to rewrite their Bible themselves in 2000, and this script has become the preferred script of commerce and communication among the Hmong in the United States. Hence, despite the desire of the majority, the decision still came down to a number of individuals who were given the power and hierocratic authority—the missionaries and national leaders—to grant permission or not. This seemed to be the case on a national scale until the Hmong arrived in the United States.

As the church came into existence in the 1950s, it integrated familiar elements from its indigenous and animistic background with those of Christianity—both Hmong social and religious systems. This integration became a part of church belief and practices as outside influences have defined and redefined the Hmong church's definition of church governance as it continued in Laos. These definitions occurred during the periods of the missionized Hmong church, the National Hmong church, and the Vietnam War church. The next stages of development for the Hmong church will take place in the United States. These periods include the early Hmong American church and the millennial Hmong church, which are the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 – DEVELOPMENTS OF THE HMONG CHURCH IN THE U.S.

### Resettling the Hmong Church

Because of the Hmong's involvement in the Vietnam War, they were resettled to Australia, the United States, and French countries and colonies. During the Vietnam War, the Hmong were key in holding back the Northern Vietnamese by ambushing military and ammunition transports through the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which was dug through Laos, beginning with northern Laos where the Hmong had settled. They protected the U.S. communications satellite in Xieng Khuong Province of Laos and retrieved downed American pilots. Ten Hmong soldiers risked their lives to ensure every one American soldier downed in Laos were found and returned safely. Finally, the Hmong troops ran special missions under enemy lines to collect intelligence as well as going on special strike missions that were impossible. The operation in Laos was called the Secret War, as many Hmong were hired by the CIA to carry out special projects. By the time of the fall of Laos to the Communist party in 1975, the number of Christians had grown to about 15,000 in Laos, most of which were Hmong (Robinson 1993:161).

Just three years after the first Hmong came to America, there was an event that redefined authority for the Hmong churches in their new location. The C&MA sponsored a conference of Hmong church leaders at Rolling Ranch in Lake Hughes, CA. Twenty-five Hmong leaders were present to discuss whether they should join the C&MA under Specialized Ministries or stay with the Lao Evangelical Church—the indigenous component of the C&MA in Laos. Other ministries under Specialized Ministries included Ethnic, Disability, Prison, and Chaplaincy. Most of those present decided to affiliate with the C&MA, while a small group remained in the Lao Evangelical Church (Davidson 1993:162).

The group of Hmong churches that came under the C&MA became known as the Hmong District. The C&MA had national and geographical districts in Canada and in the United States. The national office, located in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is also called C&MA Headquarters. Under the C&MA Headquarters are districts such as the South-Atlantic District, the Mid-American District, and Northwestern District. The Hmong District is not geographically defined like the other regional districts mentioned here, but rather it is ethnically defined (along ethnic lines, culturally and linguistically) and done so on a national scale—all the Vietnamese churches under the Vietnamese District, the Koreans under the Korean District, and likewise with others. Today, the Hmong District is one of six "ethnic" districts. The Hmong District office is currently located in Thornton, Colorado. In 1978, the Hmong District had 1,525 members. Today, there are about 30,000 with 84 churches and 130 licensed pastors, both paid and volunteer.

From its beginning in the United States, a democratic process was set in motion in the fledgling Hmong District. As a district of the C&MA, it had to adopt the C&MA Constitution and follow the bylaws set by Headquarters. Thus, the Hmong District implemented a democratic tradition of church governance. Rules became formalized across the nation for all churches under the Hmong District of the C&MA, and the autonomy of the local churches began diminishing as all churches were forced to adopt a democratic process. Though there was consistency between churches in the denomination, there also was the loss of local church variations from the loss of local authority to a large extent. Eventually, the district itself would lose its own autonomy over the denomination, as will be demonstrated.

This also meant that the local congregation was to ensure that a democratic process was being followed. Positions were established to represent members of the church, elections were necessary to fill those positions, and ballots were necessary to approve the new leaders.

Everything from the election of all leadership positions to the budget and reports, as well as the hiring of a new pastor and moving the church, had to be discussed and ratified. The annual business meeting was instituted to discuss bylaws and policies of the church, to budget for the New Year, to give reports for the current year, and to elect new officers or leaders for the coming year. During this time and following Robert's Rule of Order, suggestions to change the bylaws and policies were welcomed from anyone in the church, and a committee was formed to discuss these and insert them into a proposal. The proposals were then brought before the church members during the annual business meeting to be discussed one by one and approved (for the most part) by a majority vote. Likewise, a budget proposal was made by asking each department to submit a budget request, which was then brought to the annual business meeting to be discussed and approved. New officers and leaders were selected in like manner. A nomination committee was selected with half the individuals being voted in from the floor and the other half being voted in from the church board along with the pastor. The nomination committee then met and proposed potential candidates. A list for each position was finalized with a majority vote or consensus of those on the committee. The list of candidates was then brought before the church to be discussed and voted on for approval. Also during the annual business meeting, the reports were given from the paid and volunteer heads of staff, such as the pastor, the church secretary, the Alliance Men's Ministry Director, the Sunday School Director, and the Youth Ministry Director. After each gave his or her report, all the members had an opportunity to ask questions and clarify items on the report. When there were no more questions or comments from the floor, the report was then voted on and approved by a majority of the congregation.

On both district and national (or denominational) levels, delegates from C&MA churches as well as accredited C&MA workers comprised the decision-making body of the district and

national assembly—the General Council. On both district and national levels, each church was allowed two “lay delegates” with an additional delegate for every 100 members above 150 members (Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance:A2-6). The delegates would be supported by the church financially to attend the district and national conferences (or meetings). Other voting members were the “accredited members,” who had been tested and accredited by the national office. These special voting members included graduates from Bible colleges, those coming from other denominations into the C&MA, or other C&MA official workers. At the conference business sessions, whether on the district or national level, these individuals discussed matters pertaining to the district or denomination and then cast their votes representing the church or themselves if they were accredited.

The Hmong clan system continued to be practiced and became even more evident here in the United States as different clan groups competed with one another. For example, different clan associations sprang up in the 1980s in order to spur those members within the clan toward higher education and economic wealth, such as the Yang Wameng Association for the Yang family. In Kansas City, the Her Family Association operated to do this among the Her clan. The church also reflected this clan system as individuals support the ideas and the leaders of their own clan in elections and business meetings. Clan loyalty and representation took precedence over qualified individuals, sometimes to the detriment of other clans as a majority clan would attempt to vote in as many representatives as possible. In a nomination committee meeting at the church in Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1998, one elder stated that if they wanted more people involved, the church needed a certain individual whose last name was Thao because that person was influential to the Thaos in that community. In the Hmong church bureaucracy, party lines

are synonymous with clan lines. As a result, clan bureaucracy contributes to fuel a push toward an authoritative definition of authority.

Ideal as it was, the democratic definition of authority was not met without challenge. Those previously with power and influence—whether it was from clan power, military power, or both—felt threatened by the democratic process as other individuals were given opportunities to lead the church. Paul Xang Yang recalls a trial in the Kansas City church where an individual who had been a teacher in Laos won the election—though from a minority clan—but was tried for “playing politics” to get the votes needed to win (personal communication 2006). It turned out that one of the previous leaders, himself a military and clan leader, admitted to spreading rumors about the candidate after the district became involved.

As we can see, introducing a new definition of authority poses problems for those previously in power. At the junction between military, clan, democratic, and denominational definitions of authority, an understanding of the history of the C&MA denomination sheds light on understanding the definitions of authority in the Hmong church as it saw itself practicing and redefining its national and local polity in a new sociological context.

### **History of the C&MA Denomination**

Power and authority in the C&MA have gone through their own evolutionary developments and changes. At the denomination’s inception in 1887, founder A.B. Simpson came from a Presbyterian background. Authority during his time resided in the elected representative elders—or what the Presbyterian Church calls “presbyters.” Simpson’s (1890:11) premise on power is that it is something that God does directly and personally—based on prayer— rather than through material objects or individuals. We must seek God personally to do so, but the seeking has to be done with reconciliation and faith. Simpson (1907:3) relied heavily

on prayer to move people into giving and volunteering to go on mission. As is the case today, on one extreme was the authoritative polity of such denominations as the Catholic or Anglican Churches, where those in leadership positions were elevated by the hierarchy, and they were responsible for making decisions affecting those under their care regardless of the concerns of the laity. As a result, a clergyman's decisions are made in consideration of those higher in the hierarchy who elevated him, working toward the interests of the hierarchy. The other extreme of this spectrum is the congregational polity, where every member of the church is responsible for every decision in the church, such as the Baptist churches. Those in leadership positions in these congregations or denominations work toward the interests of those who elected them—the congregation (or those who nominated and voted for him or her). Whether authoritarian, representative, and congregational, those in leadership positions work toward the interests of those who put them in office. Of these models or definitions of authority, the C&MA has traditionally, since its humble beginnings, operated on representative governance.

Today, the denomination has grown to 13,609 churches and groups with more than four million people in 81 countries and territories (Christian and Missionary Alliance 2009:para. 1). They are organized into various geographical districts in the United States and regions around the world. As A.B. Simpson was Canadian, the Canadian C&MA also exists alongside the U.S. C&MA.

### **Power and Authority in the C&MA and Local Churches Today**

In 2003, the constitution of the C&MA (or Alliance Manual) made some major structural and procedural changes to its bylaws, which drastically affected the Hmong District and its churches. One such change was that department chairs were no longer allowed on the Church Board. Where departmental concerns and interests were considered by the board, they were only

considered if they are a concern for a board member as well. This leaves the Board of Elders and the pastor (who has always worked closely with the elders as “head elder”) to make all the administrative decisions in the church. Departmental concerns and even hired ministerial staff were no longer directly considered in board meetings—not even for those issues concerning department staff members themselves (both paid and volunteer). Any concerns, now, will have to be made through the pastor (for ministerial staffs), a special appearance by the department director, or with a written letter to the board of elders—adding another bureaucratic hurdle that did not exist before.

Another change has to do with heads of specific ministries. An example is the local Alliance Men’s Ministry. The closest version I could locate of this change is in the 2005 edition of the constitution. In this edition in Section A8 under C&MA Men’s Ministry Local Constitution Article V on the Leadership Team and in Section 2 on Appointment of the Leadership Team, the pastor is given the authority to submit for approval to the Board of Elders the individual he wants to lead this ministry. Then the newly-appointed men’s ministry director can nominate a team of men to assist him—again, each with approval of the Board of Elders. In the past, this has been an position elected by those present within the Men’s Ministry. All the other officers had to be elected as well. With the new changes, the pastor can bypass the members of the Men’s Ministry and propose whichever director he desires. Likewise, the Men’s Ministry Coordinator can propose his own staff to be approved by the board.

On the other hand, the Alliance Women’s Director is one position that was still done as traditionally stated. The candidate was presented by a nomination committee to the floor with an opportunity to nominate others to be elected. However, this issue with the Alliance Women’s ministry was debated in the Hmong District in 2008. According to an announcement by the local



Alliance Women's Director at the First Hmong C&MA, the District Superintendent (or D.S.) wanted to have the ability to choose his Hmong District Alliance Women's Director but was not allowed to. She continued that this would be the topic of debate at the District Annual Conference in the summer of 2008. Eventually, it was voted in favor of the D.S. This precedent was automatically applied to the local church with the pastors being able to nominate their local Alliance Women's director—as is the case today. The difference, however, is that (like before) the rest of her staff would still be nominated by a nominating committee to be approved by the local Alliance Women members at their annual meeting.

Reflecting these dynamics is the change in nomenclature. The heads of the men's department used to be referred to as "Alliance Men's Department President and Vice-President." Some churches, for example, Hmong New Hope Alliance Church in Georgia, designated their department heads as "Alliance Men's Coordinator" and "Assistant Coordinator." Now, the term is "Alliance Men's Ministry Director and Assistant Director," reflecting the usage in secular, commercial, and other nonprofit organizations. As the Alliance Manual defines national, regional, and local constitutions, the Hmong District had to adopt these changes in its district as well as in the local churches. Those in leadership easily received this because the district was having its own frustrations and changes in power dynamics. These denomination-wide changes were unknown to many Hmong parishioners, which eventually caused tension within the local church. I will share these tensions below.

### **Power and Authority in the Hmong District Today**

Some would argue that if the definition of governance in the denomination changes, the change should also occur along district lines. However, as I shall explain, the Hmong District is an ethnic or foreign district that can and, at times, should be exempt, but the decision hinges on

the district. The questions now become the following: Who then is the district? Is the district the annual Conference with its delegates from each church? Is it the DEXCOM (or District Board of Elders)? Or does it suffice for the District Superintendent by himself suffice to make the decision for the district? In the past, it has been the delegates. Now, the new District Superintendent is challenging that notion.

In accordance with the C&MA Manual, the District Superintendent (D.S.) has the duty to have oversight of the entire work of the district. He is to be the pastor of the pastors under his care as well as the pastor of all the churches across the nation. And in the case where a church has no pastor, he acts as their pastor from a distance. Therefore, he plays a significant role in regulating and reconciling pastor-church relationships.

At this point in the history of the church (at least for the Hmong District of the C&MA), the leadership remains exclusively male. This includes the elders, the pastors, and the D.S. In accordance with the practice and doctrine of the C&MA, the role of the pastor is reserved only for men. And likewise, the women's role in the church is to pray for the ministry of the church though they have their own association and leadership amongst themselves, such as in the Alliance Women's Ministry of the Hmong District along with their local chapters.

The new president has been working with the Hmong District in Thailand as a missionary to the Hmong there, where the Hmong church is run with an authoritative tradition. With his newly-imputed authority from the C&MA Manual, he made some major changes in the district office even prior to beginning his term. This definition of leadership can be defined as autocracy—or legislative autocracy as one legislatively elected but given autocratic power. Whereas national department positions and directors were previously nominated at the annual district conference before being established or filled, the new District Superintendent has decided

to make some administrative moves. Before his term began in January 2006, individuals who previously occupied positions as directors of departments were given notice of their positions being “cut out” though the positions had been established at the annual district meeting. For example, the Youth Ministry and Discipleship-Making Ministry were established in the early 1990s by the annual district conference delegates (Yang 2005). Now, an incoming president has administratively removed them. In their place, the new D.S. will assign these responsibilities to himself. An informant who had been taken out of office shared that after many objections, the decision was retracted and taken to the annual district conference in 2007. At that conference, most of the delegates present agreed to take the positions out as the D.S. had wished. Other developments include the elimination of the region camps and limiting the youth conference to only those twelve to eighteen years of age, whereas “youth” had included anyone twelve and older and not married (SALT2007, 2006). Instead, a new conference was designated to focus on those over eighteen years old—the SALT (or Single Adult Leadership Training) conference. In light of these changes, interviewees who supported the D.S. believed the district needed a “strong leader to get things moving.” Those who disagreed with him did so along the lines he did not consider the concerns of those being affected before making an arbitrary decision.

On my family’s visit to Auburn, Georgia, in 2006, a representative from the Hmong District gave a speech to the congregation about the district’s vision for them as they were looking for a new pastor. “I want you to know as the Bible teaches, and we will do...,” he began. “We will not let the members give input. Some say that the members give the money, but we see the pastor as God’s servant....The church belongs to God. God will ask his servant to do God’s work here....We live by faith! When we trust, God will lead.” Then he concluded his remarks with, “We will send the pastor and we want you to accept it!” According to this speech,

the district is neither the delegates nor the DEXCOM (District Board of Elders) but the D.S. and his staff. More specifically and disturbing in terms of defining power is that spiritual power (God) is equated with the D.S. and staff—correlating with the concept of divine right.

According to the district staff, the congregation does not know who is best for them. Max Weber would refer to this as heteronomy, being imposed by an outside agency (1968:50).

For some Hmong District churches, the D.S.'s leadership seems to be lacking. During a trip to California in 2007, I visited a Vang family whose in-laws were members of their church board. They also had a close relative on the DEXCOM (District Board of Elders) and knew about some of the issues surrounding the new D.S. They were disgruntled about the way the new D.S. had handled issues in many of the churches in California. Their reason was that as they traveled and spoke with other friends and family members from different churches in the region, many expressed their frustrations and discontent with decisions made by the new D.S. The relative on the DEXCOM also shared some of his concerns. Mainly the complaints revolved around his inability to handle the disputes. Each church was required to send a tithe to the district. However, the church was unwilling to send their tithe. They felt their support was not going to make any difference. An incident with one of the local churches brought national attention from the district and eventually resulted in a Hmong church's move out of the Hmong District and into the regional geographic district—a move never heard of before in the Hmong churches. These issues and others have given the D.S. unfavorable ratings among many parishioners and a handful of pastors—something that had existed significantly less before.

As the district's popularity waned, its services also became irrelevant to many. Others created their own ministry. As the district reduced its annual conferences (district and departmental) to every other year, this left a vacuum for other ministries fill. A few of these

included the ASAPH Conference in 2007 and Yexus Communitas in 2008, along with the Yexusfest celebration. For the local churches, other ministries and small group meetings replaced attendance in Sunday School or local Alliance Men's/Alliance Women's chapters.

## **CHAPTER 6 - ANALYSIS**

I have organized and analyzed of the interviewed and historical data collected. I did this by labeling and organizing topics and reasons brought out in the interviews then comparing them with each other. I also compared the socio-economic factors that may have influenced the definitions of power and authority during each time period. Observations, sermons, and authoritative texts validated the different views, depending on the emphasis. From these, the findings were quite astounding and gave insight to the idea of the invention of tradition as applied to power and authority. I examined how power and authority were defined during the inception of the Hmong church as well as during the different time periods of the church since then. Finally, the different models of governance that exist in Hmong churches today were summarized. Socio-cultural factors and rationales behind each definition were also examined.

In a historical and contextual analysis of the Hmong church, it is obvious that the larger context gives the Hmong church reasons to justify their invention and reinvention of tradition in terms of power and authority. Each definition reflects the different and larger socio-cultural context (see Appendix A). This was revealed as I followed the evolution of the Hmong church.

### **Definition of Power and Authority in Traditional Hmong Social and Religious Systems**

I will first revisit power and authority in the Hmong social system. As mentioned, the Hmong social system operated primarily on consensus. Without the proper technological development that allowed for more active regional or national governing entities, the Hmong operated more on a local level. The consensus leadership was evident in the selection of the village heads and village secretaries as well as in the decision-making process of these leaders.

Of Hmong religious systems, this research revealed the Hmong shaman's authority was limited. When one shaman's explanation was not satisfactory or the prescription was not

effective, another was consulted. With more than one shaman to choose from, such action may have been practical. When the shaman's authority was transferred to the pastor, relationships and ministry were fine at first. However, when the relationship between the pastor and parishioner went awry, the pastor's words became authoritative, leaving the parishioner with no other alternative church in town to go to. The only option then was to move to another village, which was not a concern for the non-sedentary, indigenous Hmong. But as we shall see, this becomes a problem for the Hmong parishioners today.

### **The Inception and Evolution of Power and Authority in the Hmong Church**

Prior to the presence of Christian missionaries, the Hmong social and religious systems were one and the same but with differing persons in each role (social and religious) or area of jurisdiction. The same family could have a clan leader and another individual designated as the family shaman. Likewise, the Hmong church at its inception also integrated these two systems into one (the church) and assigned different individuals for the different roles or areas of jurisdiction (the elders in the social role and the pastor in the religious role). As such, the pastor did not have any power except to petition God to heal, but authority in the Hmong church at its inception reflected the consensus authority of the village. This applied to both clan leaders for the elders, as along with the limited authority of the pastors, reflecting that of the shamans. As with the village head and the clan leaders, when making decisions that would impact the parishioners' lives, the pastor would consult with the elders first on issues such as when to have the church's New Year celebration or the next church revival, (Yang 2008). Sarah Yang, who came to America at the age of twenty-seven in 1980, noted in an interview that the Hmong church in Laos did not have a lot of special events beyond Easter, Christmas, and New Year's celebrations (personal interview 2008). The simplicity of church life in Laos did not create

opportunities for clashes between clergy and laity as it does here in the United States, where churches are also concerned with Valentine's events, summer picnics, camping trips, mission conferences, expanding the church facility, purchasing property, and the hiring and firing of multiple pastoral staff.

In addition, the authority of the shaman at the inception of the Hmong church in Laos was transferred to the pastor. As a distant relative to a Hmong family, I was invited to their Thanksgiving dinner in 2002. The family waited an hour and a half for the pastor to bless the food. When it seemed as though the pastor might not be coming, they asked me to bless the food. "Since you're somewhat of a pastor, too, why don't you pray for us?" they asked. I did not understand the reasoning for this until I reflected on an interview I did in 2000 with one pastor on the Hmong system of beliefs. He said that the Hmong treated their pastors like they used to treat their shamans—a ceremony was not effective unless the specialist conducts it. Therefore, nothing happens until the pastor shows up, and only he has access to the spiritual world to make the request for blessings. Other animistic practices have also been transferred to the Hmong church. These include making a commitment to and throwing parties to thank God after God grants the person his or her prayer request, which mirrors the *fivyeem* and *paujyeem* practices in traditional Hmong animistic religion, where for the traditional Hmong the commitment and thanks would be to the spirits rather than God (Capps 1994:100). Likewise, ancestral retribution for a person's wrongdoing or negligence of an ancestral request mirrors God's wrath on individuals who have sinned (Capps 1994:160).

The other side of this integration of the Hmong religious and social systems into the church could be seen when I attended a church service on September 20, 2009. The elder announced that the church had gone to "pick up" a family from Arkansas. This had traditionally



been a responsibility of the social system where those of the family clan in one village sent some helpers to another village to bring them home. In doing so, the new family became a part of the extended family in the village—here, the church family rather than the clan family—along with all the benefits and obligations.

The evolution of both power and authority in the Hmong church can be seen in the historical and socio-economic development chart of Appendix A. The chart reveals that the larger context of the nation has a direct impact on the definition of power and authority in the church as does the denomination. It appears that the indigenous and pre-Christian contact context influenced the definition of power and authority at the inception of the church in the 1950s, with their lack of spiritual training forcing them to rely on missionaries. The early missionaries made definitive decisions on difficult issues such as what rituals and sacraments the people could practice. With a less-developed and weaker hierarchical structure and organization, individuals were free to choose how they practiced their religion or religions. In that case, authority was neither authoritative nor democratic; instead, it was consensus-based but only existed on the local level. Each village made its own judgment, as did each family within the village. Those families who differed looked for other close relatives who could assist them in their religious practices. In this non-sedentary context, migrating was no concern. The fusion-fission dynamics of village life helped to diffuse any additional tensions that would have come about.

Geographical or technological considerations contributed to the weakness of power and authority in the national church in Laos before its transplantation to the United States. Because of the geographical barriers and/or lack of technological development, the indigenous churches were distantly connected. The mountains and valleys of Laos separated them by many days'

walk. As they were more remote than they are today (without the modern conveniences of land and air travel, telephone, or internet), regional and national bodies of leadership were weaker or less influential, even unnecessary. Though there were districts, the local church selected its own leaders and learned from Hmong Bible college students or church elders, as there were no indigenous pastors at the time working with the missionaries. However, through the influences of French colonialism as well as American CIA or Royal Laotian military involvement, the definition of power and authority changed to being authoritarian (Appendix C, #3 and #4).

French colonial influence moved the church to adopt an authoritarian leadership. Pastor Cher Moua, who has worked with the Hmong for over twenty years, pointed this out in an interview in 2006. He stated that the French colonial structure of social order was integrated into the church through linguistic word borrowing. The authoritative words associated with leaders whose job was to maintain social order were borrowed by the church leadership, as were the authoritative rights of the words. Terms were borrowed because such concepts did not exist prior to the Hmong's conversion, so the closest term was from the national Laotian language, *Phubphuajqhoos*. In Laotian, *Phubphuajqhoos* was the authoritative term used for the title of the village head. It was influenced by the French authoritarian colonial social structure. Because of its ties with French colonial authority, when the authority of the *Phubphuajqhoos* was given to the village head elder, the more neutrally authoritative word *Thawj Tsaavxwm* or "first responsible elder" was changed to the more authoritative *Thawj Txwjlaug* or "first head elder." The Hmong term *Thawj Txwjlaug* was used simultaneously with the Laotian word *Phubphuajqhoom*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the French colonial authority also had been placed on the elder of the church. Though this was the case, in many churches in Laos, the authority given to the

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<sup>5</sup> The original Laotian spelling is *Phubphuajqhoos*, but Hmong has a different tone, hence *Phubphuajqhoom*.

*Thawj Txwjlaug* was still limited to only the social aspects of the church, and his authority was lower than it is today.

Power and authority during the Laotian colonial period was more of a military tactic for the French, who influenced the local authority of the Hmong. In the church, power and authority also became more authoritarian due to the borrowing of the authoritatively French colonial influenced Laotian term, *Phubphuajqhoos*, but this authoritarian stance changed once the Hmong came to the United States.

Adjusting to life in America in the late 1970s, the Hmong church adopted American democratic practices (Appendix C, #5). However, with the recent authoritarian stand of the president of the denomination and the District Superintendent of the Hmong District from 2003 to the present, some pastors and even church leaders and members are advocating a more authoritarian definition of both power and authority (Appendix C, #6). Still others favored a democratic definition of power and authority. Rationales were also used toward validating this authoritarian view, including the reason that “This is the Hmong way.”

### **Models of Hmong Church Governance**

Looking at the interviewee’s answers to my questions, there are three basic models of governance in the Hmong church today with a wide range of reasons for the support of either the democratic or authoritarian practice of governance in the Hmong church. The three basic models follow:

1. **The pastor-led model** is more authoritarian, where the pastor is to be the administrator telling the believers what needs to be done and how to get it done. Most of the time, the pastor is the chair of the Board, which consists of a number of elders elected by the members. However, the Board’s influence can be limited because the pastor is “the

professional on the board.” One pastor believes that as church administrator, he should be given the privilege of recommending or even assigning who the leaders should be.

The Elders can voice their concerns but the pastor gets the final say, and sometimes the elders only do what the pastor assigns them to do—no questions asked. The other church members have no leadership obligations except those which the pastor assigns. Those who endorse this model seem to emphasize the abuse of the elders and other church members along with clan alliances and loyalties. They also emphasize constituted authority.

2. **The elder-led model** can be authoritarian or democratic/congregational, where the elders of the church have a majority vote which will be the final authority. Here the pastor acts as one who is in charge of the “spiritual things” or religious customs such as preaching, praying, and making visits. Where the church goes and what events it participates in depend on the votes of the elders. The members also have no leadership obligations except those which the church Board assigns. The parishioner’s feedback, however, is usually addressed at the annual business meeting. Proponents for this model reason that the elders have the final say in major decisions such as the general direction of the church, while leaving other day-to-day decisions to the pastor and bringing major decisions to the congregation, such as the hiring or firing of a pastor. It should be noted that though the older board-led model no longer exists in the C&MA Constitution—where the elected elders and department representatives would all discuss and vote on agenda items—some local Hmong churches are still practicing this. The board-led model is one that is inclusive of representatives from the different ministries of the church along with the elders and pastor.

3. **The congregation-led model** is the most democratic and congregational<sup>6</sup>, where the congregation votes on almost every matter. The pastor only does as much as the congregation allows through their bylaws. The bylaws are submitted to be amended annually and are approved by those present at the annual business meeting. Those who endorse this model emphasized the abuse of the pastors and advocate for the annual business meeting, where the congregation is allowed to bring up and discuss issues in the church and make policies regarding how the pastor should carry out his duties for the coming year. That is also where the discussion and voting for major decisions take place, including the election of the elders.

Though there may be some instances of overlapping, these three remain the primary models of decision-making.

On the district level, the position of the District Superintendent is compared to that of the pastor. The District Executive Committee (DEXCOMM) is equivalent to the elders, and the congregational members are the conference delegates. Therefore, the models on the district level include 1) the D.S.-led model, 2) the DEXCOMM-led model, and 3) the delegate-led model. There are those who would advocate for the D.S.-led model, others for the DEXCOMM-led model, and still others for the delegate-led model.

### **Rationales for Models of Governance**

I have posited three models of church polity; however, only two of these were of main concern for the Hmong churches—the pastor-led model and the congregation-led model. This was basically because in churches which were pastor-led, the pastor had influence as to who would be on his board of elders—elders representing the pastor and his interests—whereas those

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<sup>6</sup> Democratic and congregational here refer to a system where all the members are involved with the decision-making process, where decisions are brought to the floor of the congregation to be voted on rather than decisions being made by the board or pastor without bringing them to the attention of the members.

churches that were congregation-led selected elders that supported their views and positions on decisions—elders representing the congregation and their interests. Therefore, either of these two extreme practices could exist within the structure of an elder-led model; hence, my analysis will only address these two as they seem to be essentially in opposition to one another and each one has a direct impact on the makeup and practices of the third (elder-led) model.

Considering the rationales from individuals on both sides of the debate, they both quoted from biblical texts, proving their point to be more biblical. In addition, both also advocated that they were more practical. Those who aligned with the authoritarian side would gather Scripture verses stating that the believers were to be submissive to those in authority. For example, God's charge to the Israelites to obey Moses and Joshua as they commanded was used to legitimize the pastor's authority. On the other end, those who aligned with the democratic side gathered from Scripture verses where the leaders (pastors and elders) were to be more considerate of those they were leading. For example, the passage from 1 Peter 5:1-3 was used to illustrate the congregation as God's flock and the pastor as the shepherd who should not be lording it over them, but be eager to serve.

Interviewees noted that moral corruption and abuse have also contributed to the breakdown of those on the other side of the debate. These included pastors, elders, and church members. Those advocating for authoritarian governance cited incidents of abuse and moral corruption from church members and elders. Church members would select elders on the board who were more popular, whether due to their standing in the community, their financial wealth, or clan/family relationships. These included utilizing the clan structure to their own advantage and utilizing the bureaucratic system to limit the agenda of others or push their own. On the other hand, those who were democratic pointed out how pastors abused their authority and how

they had become morally corrupt. Pastors would request large checks in the hundreds of dollars written without prior approval from congregations which were small and poor (by Hmong standards).

Though interviewees were accusing the opposition, there were elements of truth to both sides of the debate; hence, abuse and moral corruption exist on both or all levels of leadership. The interviews indicated that abuse of authority and moral corruption were related to pride and “worldliness” of church leaders, pastors, and members who would try to take advantage of the situation to benefit themselves or their own group within the church. As stated by interviewees above, economic progress also ushered in greed, hunger for power, and corruption on both sides. With an increase in wealth among parishioners, higher salaries with their easy accessibility (inexpensive routes to the pastorship and lowered standards) for pastors were also readily available. The Hmong social (or kinship) structure also created the opportunity for this kind of abuse and schism. In addition, there was no accountability for any side—the pastor, the congregation, or the elders. The parishioners would make burdensome rules to “tie the pastor down.” Regardless of who was in charge, the interests of those with economic power among parishioners lingered over the heads of church elders and pastors in their meetings and decisions. On the other extreme, the pastors were being overlooked. Deficiencies and struggles in their ministerial practices went unnoticed. As a result, pastors were bogged down with responsibilities that limited them, they could easily take advantage of others, or they would make mistakes and get away with it. Likewise, parishioners were taking advantage of their rights to speak. It can become a vicious cycle between the two. Training for pastors as traditionally done with the Theological Education by Extension (T.E.E.) is slowly becoming ineffective in a contemporary context, being created for an indigenous context and being administered by the

Hmong District with its minimal standards. In addition, the screening process for pastors was virtually nonexistent, and an accountability system did not exist for church members or leaders.

Finally, those advocating an authoritarian definition did so on the grounds that this tradition is the “Hmong way.” Examples of this can be seen in the messages during the 2006 Hmong District Conference. Of course, selected biblical passages were also used as a justification. Though some would legitimize their authoritative actions by saying it is “the Hmong way,” it seemed only a supporting reason for the inner frustration of some of the Hmong leaders who were the driving force behind these dramatic changes. All the above socio-cultural and technological dynamics were involved in bringing the church to embrace the authoritarian model. The larger denominational and societal context only gave them a way to do so. Ideals that influenced these larger contexts may have been the emphasis toward a CEO model of leadership, which will be explained below. Their past colonial and military influenced traditions of power and authority in an illiterate society were labeled as “the Hmong way” to legitimize present and future actions. This reason was used regardless of the fact that the socioeconomic and technological context had changed, demanding a different way of doing things. The truth is the Hmong church has only reverted back to the older model of being authoritative, which only began recently, whether with the missionaries, during the colonial influence, or military involvement. Meanwhile, those advocating for a democratic definition are unable to refute the argument of the “Hmong way” although many would not agree to an authoritarian leadership. These individuals would argue that the leadership should be considerate of those they are serving.



### **Factors toward the Authoritarian Definition of Leadership**

Regardless of one's stance and rationale, multiple factors were involved in moving the Hmong church toward an authoritarian definition of leadership. These include technological developments, economic developments for both the clergy and laity coupled with the lack of adequate ministerial training and accountability, the presence of socio-economic diversity, educational developments, and religious developments. I will examine each of these in more detail.

In the United States, technological developments have allowed the national Hmong church to be more organized and even to congregate more often for regional and national meetings and conferences. The telephone, rental cars, airlines, and the Internet have facilitated mass communication and corporate decisions. This also allows for a stronger central governing body. For example, the annual conference of the Hmong District includes a business session that discusses district-wide bylaws and policies on an annual basis. The Hmong District is divided into seven districts in the United States. Some regions within the district have incorporated their own bylaws as well, with their own annual regional conferences and business meetings. These meetings are made possible through the medium of technology in the United States, whereas it would not have been on this level in Laos. Mass communication has brought the words of the D.S. into the living rooms of parishioners. With a click of a button, announcements, conferences, sermons or messages, and policy changes can be shared and obtained without leaving one's home or even walking to the mail box. In his inaugural address in 2006, the D.S. announced his desire to move the district main office from Colorado Springs, CO, to St. Paul, MN. Where this would have been an issue brought up for discussion in the District Annual Meeting, the D.S. felt it was necessary to make his wish known up front. The District Update

newsletter has also been made available for download on the Hmong District's website.

Through the medium of technology, decisions made by the District can have immediate effects.

Instead of packing their things and moving to another city as they would have done in Laos (with the villages) during discontent with the leadership, economic development in the United States has forced many families and groups to remain in their current residences. If they are unhappy with the decisions of the leader or who the leader is, they either cause problems for the leader, are involved minimally such as for the worship service only, or do not even show up at all. Paul Xang Yang noted that there was more migration in the 1980s because the Hmong in Kansas City were mostly on state assistance and almost all of them rented (personal communication, 2007). He especially noted a false accusation made against one elected elder in 1982 that led half the Hmong in Kansas City (out of a total of 700) to migrate to other parts of the United States, for example, California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. A clash between definitions of authority came about during this time as the accuser was himself a military leader and had been a church elder the previous year, while the accused, an educator in Laos, seemed to have won the head elder position by a majority of the popular vote. He was accused of soliciting for votes. Without stable jobs, being on state assistance, and not owning homes, secondary migration was typical. With only one church in each city, there was really nowhere else to go if one wanted to retain "a good standing before God" as a faithful church attendee. The only option then was to leave, and this option was very feasible during this time period considering their socioeconomic condition.

Thirty years later, this mass migration for religious reasons would not be practical. In the late 1980s, and more so in the 1990s, the different factions in the church were forced to work together. By this time, the Hmong had become more sedentary, having stable jobs and owning

homes, but they were still not wealthy enough to start their own churches, nor was this an acceptable practice. In this predicament, one group (specifically a clan group) would step down from participating and allow the other group to take over, depending on who was on the Church Board (Yang 2008). For example, a person from the Xiong clan would tend to nominate and vote for individuals who were Xions regardless of their qualifications or abilities to perform the responsibilities. Likewise, when a Xiong was elected, those of other clans like the Her or Yang clan would not support his vote or his term in office. Smaller clans or minority clans would also unite together in the church as they had done in village social life. The fusion-fission dynamic of the villages was not possible so other tactics were utilized in order to diffuse tensions.

Now that many of them have become wealthier, the different groups within the churches in America are able to start their own churches. As the socioeconomic level increase, starting new churches have become more feasible. They have become more financially independent, with each group renting their own facility and maintaining their own utilities. Many times, they are able to rent worship facilities for a reduced price from other sympathetic churches. The Hmong have also become more sedentary, being established in the community with their employment, children's education, and family and community ties. Therefore, differences now can be settled not through migration, reconciliation, or letting another group take over while decreasing support, but by starting new churches. One leader in the newest Hmong church in Kansas City said, "This is what we have to do [start a new church]. Otherwise, things *will* get worse."

Economic development in America has also given rise to easier access to the pastorate. Individuals can vie for the pastoral career and prestige in the Hmong church merely by going through the Theological Education by Extension (T.E.E.) training material while continuing their

current employment at a lot lower cost than as a traditional college student who would have to worry about room and board along with a higher tuition rate from a private school. Sarah Yang, a recent T.E.E. graduate, mentioned that her tuition was paid for by the District. Without an attendance policy or proper academic standards, these satellite studies may not be credible. In one instance, a pastor who had received his license was reported to have only attended for the first time on the Thursday of a one-week course, only to ask the other students what the answers were (Yang 2008). Regardless of his performance, he passed his licensing exam with no problem. Of course, the coordinator in charge of licensing pastors was also his brother-in-law—a fellow clansman of his wife's. A couple of graduates have shared with me about one instructor who did not really know what he was teaching about. When I asked him, he stated that no degree was required to teach T.E.E. The only requirement was that he had received his own license and could read English even though he had no prior experience with the material. Without the proper standards, the ministerial training program is licensing unqualified individuals into authoritative positions in the church. At the Hmong District conference upon sharing about my thesis, one district licensing committee member affirmed that the committee has passed individuals who were unqualified. Then the committee member shared his frustration with me over how others on the committee had pressured him to pass and not discourage the candidate since it was not typical to turn candidates down. The economic development of the Hmong in the United States and technological development of T.E.E. along with a minimal screening process allowed many to become church ministers and leaders more easily. However, in the Hmong context, combined with lowered standards of the Hmong District, the program is also a quick and inexpensive way to the pastorship, regardless of one's character or one's "calling." In regard to the interviewing process, one informant in his early thirties responded,

“Considering what I had to do to get that license, I don’t even deserve it!” Though I have found only one C&MA college in the United States confident enough to accept T.E.E. courses transferrable for credit (though only a certain percentage), it is generally considered inadequate for the pastorship.

Interviewees brought out the point that many pastors only want to be pastors for financial gain, so commercialism also has contributed to abuse and moral corruption. Many pastors go into the ministry for personal gain—whether finances or prestige. Rather than being a vocation, the ministry has become a job or career that one can choose to go into. As a science that can be studied, taught, and trained for, it seems almost anyone can qualify as a pastor in the Hmong church.

In addition to the pastors, some interviewees pointed out that congregational members who are wealthier have more authority than those less well off. As a result, those who were economically marginalized felt they did not have the right to say anything. Meanwhile, the pastor and the wealthier church members benefitted from each other reciprocally through financial gifts and favors.

In terms of ministerial accountability, the Hmong district is an ethnic district. As such, it does not have the same standard as a geographic district. In an e-mail correspondence with a C&MA church planting consultant who works closely with the Hmong, as an ethnic or Foreign District under the Intercultural Ministries department of the denomination, the district’s standards are intentionally lowered. This includes requirements of the pastors as well. These increases in assistance and the lowered standards have made accessibility to the pastorship easier.

To make matters more complicated and though well intended, the District Superintendent of the Hmong District in the late 1990s encouraged pastors to pursue terminal degrees, however, without any criteria. As a result, Hmong pastors decided to take the most inexpensive means that would be most practical to them—distance learning to obtain doctorate degrees in ministry (D.Min. rather than theology or PhD). Though trained in ministerial skills, these pastors seemed to lack the biblical, theological, and philosophical background needed to make their own determination on the “biblical” structure of governance and to address contemporary theological issues. In my interviews, these individuals emphasized biblical support for where they stood, but somehow they were unable to identify specifically where in the Scriptures the support was located.

The increased economic accessibility to the pastorship and lowered ministerial standards have ushered in a wave of pastors who may not be competent in dealing with ministerial and theological issues when given the authority. These pastors have brought various interpretations of the Scriptures into the church. License is given with minimal regard to one’s qualifications, and ordination is done with very minimal supervision. Pastors are choosing sides when there are schisms in the church, rather than staying neutral regardless of the accusation. The legitimacy of their autocracy granted by the Constitution has given way to these biblical rationales they are presenting. They are also interpreting and preaching different theologies and interpretations that do not align with the denomination—nor are some even Protestant, let alone evangelical. For example, Matthew 16:19, where Jesus gives Peter the keys to Heaven, was used to emphasize and legitimize one pastor’s authority. This is a primary verse used by the Catholic Church to validate the Pope’s authority. It is a verse that many evangelical Protestants are opposed to when used in the context of validating the pastor’s full authority. One local pastor preached that God

sent Moses to the people of Israel and because the Israelites did not listen to Moses, God punished them. He concluded, “It was God who sent me to you!” A week later, he preached that God sent Joshua to the people of Israel and because the Israelites did not listen to Joshua either, they were punished, again claiming that God had sent him to the church and so they should listen to him. Prior to this, the pastor’s role was associated with that of the shaman’s priestly role—going to God on behalf of the people. These sermons, as with those of the Hmong District, claim what western historians call the “divine right” of the pastor as he associates himself with the prophetic role of the *Siv Yig* or *saub* prophets—legitimizing their autocratic authority based on “affectual faith” (that which is revelatory) (Weber 1968:36).

Although giving the pastor this kind of authority may be more possible in the context of a geographic district, the Hmong district does not have the structure in place to keep the pastor accountable. According to my friend, one who may feel a call into the ministry in the geographic districts (versus ethnic ones like the Hmong District) is given responsibility over a church until he has proven himself under a seasoned senior C&MA pastor. This would require two years of apprenticeship directly under that pastor after he receives his license. The license is only a license to practice. At the end of those two years, the senior pastor will assess the pastoral candidate. Only when he passes the assessment can he be ordained and allowed to pastor a church on his own. Even when he has become ordained, he continues to be mentored by the district. Monthly calls are made to check on the new pastor, and periodic visits are made every two to three months. Again, the District Superintendent and his staff are considered the pastor of the pastors in his district.

For the Hmong District, a pastor is given a church once he obtains his license and is rarely checked on unless an allegation is made against him. Even with that, the church board

(which the pastor is a part of and to which he has been made chair, according to the C&MA Constitution in 2007 under Article VI, A5-3) needs to be the party making the request. If the accusation is against the pastor, he and his sympathizers on the board do not have to make the request.

To avoid these ministerial pitfalls, the C&MA denomination in the United States has adopted a number of filtering and support systems. For the Hmong in Laos, along with the indigenous context in Laos, more natural filtering systems were in place (particularly socio-economic barriers). This included the finances necessary to obtain a degree or certificate as well as a willingness to live in poverty. Thus, one would have to really think twice before making a commitment to be a pastor. It was unnecessary to screen a pastor once he obtained his license. Now in the United States, these filtering systems have become necessary and need to be intentional. A filtering process that churches in the United States have learned to emphasize is the incoming pastor's "calling," which will be explained in the conclusion. A support system has been implemented through pastoral coaching programs. In addition to requiring working under a seasoned ordained pastor, this is a mentoring program to teach and help newly-ordained ministers, pastors, and church planters be accountable to their prospective ministries. As of today, nothing to this extent has been implemented in the Hmong District. As a result, the Hmong churches have adopted some measures of training but without the proper advanced training or accountability necessary to avoid the situations mentioned above.

In addition, educational development has allowed parishioners to be more aware of the dynamics of leadership and biblical interpretation. Issues include topics such as church policy concerns that the leader is not abiding by the policy or that there are those who do not agree with sermon styles, points, and applications. Now having higher ministerial and organizational



expectations for their leaders, the parishioners are beginning to question the practices and teachings of the pastors and elders.

At the same time and as a result, parishioners are becoming more literate in the Bible and biblical interpretations as well as leadership and ministerial practices. Sometimes, the parishioner is better trained than the pastor or leader himself. These educated and/or trained lay parishioners are mainly previous graduates of the T.E.E. program though there may also be Bible college graduates. This situation has been dealt with by the District by limiting T.E.E. certification only to those planning to enter the pastorship. This resolution was announced at the Annual Meeting of the District in 2007. Regardless, the T.E.E. program may still be insufficient for the churches of today.

In looking at the socio-economic makeup of the church and its correlation with the views of power and authority, the Hmong church is going through a transition along the three socio-economic levels—lower class, middle class, and upper class. Through the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, H. Gerald Colbert composed a church "planting" (or establishing) guide called the *Church Planter Network Resource*. Though intended for new churches, this resource has been insightful to understanding the socio-economic factors affecting the definition of power and authority in Hmong churches in America.

Colbert states that those in the upper classes tend to prefer an authoritarian leadership, while those in the middle-class category have a combination decision-making polity but would prefer a more democratic leadership. In Laos, each village was composed of a homogenous group in the same socio-economic level, where almost every family was be on the same level. Without the diversity of various socio-economic groups, this setting allowed everyone to agree on a form of governance. In America, families are on various socio-economic levels. These

differences eventually clash in redefining governance in the Hmong church. This is true of the pastor, elders, and congregation members.

One example to validate this study is the case with the Hmong C&MA church in Kansas City, KS. The First Hmong C&MA church was operating under a pastor who believed that the pastor should be given the authority to tell the church what to do. He disregarded the church policy and set up a structure that would allow him to have more authority—a “church administrator” position appointed through whom the church would have to go to make any major changes. The individual in this position was also a close relative of his. Nou Fong Her is one who had been a long time member of the church when it was in Khoua Pang Houa. At the age of ninety-seven, as the brother of my great-grandfather, he said that he has never seen anything like it since his conversion in 1953 (personal communication 2009). He emphasized that there had been up to this point a give and take relationship between the board and the pastor. Others disgruntled with the pastor met and encouraged their supporters to attend the annual meeting that November. Unfortunately for the pastor, the majority of the board members voted on that day to support the opposition. A close ally of the District Superintendent, he was administratively removed from the church by the end of December to be the education department director in the district.

In January of 2007, a group of one hundred Hmong families (of course large, extended families) from the First Hmong C&MA Church decided to meet on their own. Elders, department leaders, and other members who were elected by the members of First Hmong in December were missing on the first Sunday of January 2007. These individuals had decided to start their own church. The families that left shared a common philosophy of leadership—that of being authoritarian; i.e., the pastor should have the ultimate authority in church decisions. They

were the supporters of the pastor with a high degree who asked that he be given more authority. One can see that those who left tended to be either of the higher or the lower socio-economic scale, including business owners, city or state employees, renters, and plant managers, while those who stayed were either in the middle of the scale or if they were wealthier, they had personal issues with the dissenting group. This division further divided extended family groups, including brothers and sisters who had their own nuclear families. Upon their leaving, the church struggled financially while the new church was ready to purchase a building and hired a pastor in a matter of a few months. The first church eventually was barely able to sustain itself, as board members were asking for donations of pens, papers, and pencils for classes. Members felt divided as they had to choose which church to be members of. The two have not made attempts to visit each other though they have been forced to work together on different occasions such as weddings and funerals. In these cases, one church is the organizer depending on the membership of the deceased or groom and the other as supporter such as taking care of an evening service for their four- to five-day funeral.

Related to this, many pastors in the Hmong District who have received their doctorate degree, with no consideration of where they received it from, tend to be more authoritarian. This may be due to the lack of education among the elders—though they are still holding very tightly to their positions of power and authority. However, it also can be attributed to the indiscreet training of the pastors. Inexpensive and unconventional means of obtaining a doctorate would lend themselves to other styles of leadership that the denomination may not traditionally have embraced—specifically, the authoritative style of leadership. The “progressive” Christian Hmong in America look highly upon these individuals as authoritarian with regard to how they handle the church regardless of their training, theology, or philosophy of leadership. More

authority is frequently given to the pastor if he has a higher degree. For example, before the church in Kansas City split, those at First Hmong boasted about the high degree of their pastor as a rationale to permit him to make unilateral decisions, only later to be disappointed with the decisions he made. Eventually, the pastor left and the church split. In a recent conversation, a church member at First Hmong stated with regret, “We do not want someone with a high degree. We just want someone who will love the people.”

To complicate things even more, generational differences have contributed to the frustration between those of different models of church governance. In a society where culture remains more constant throughout one’s lifetime, individuals in power can continue their position indefinitely. However, considering that American culture is different from Hmong culture in Laos, with its ever-changing and diverse subcultural groups, it should be imperative that subgroups, such as those among the younger and more educated generation, contribute to the decision-making process, but this is usually not the case. The elders continue to hold onto their positions while the younger generation faces frustrations. As a guest speaker in March of 2009 at the First Hmong C&MA Church in Kansas City, KS, I witnessed one young man who oversaw the Alliance Men’s Ministries in the district exhorting the men and elders in a Sunday School class on this very issue.

In the United States, the decision of where a church stands seems to hinge on whether parishioners value progress and relationships. “Progress,” for the Kansas City Hmong, emphasizes self-improvement, such as becoming a better church spiritually, morally, “biblically,” in terms of ministry, etc. And “relationships” refers to the idea of being inclusive, sometimes to the point of lowering standards and letting the bureaucratic process slow down progress. Applied to the Hmong church, “progress” means that pastors and lay leaders have to

provide educational programs and ministry opportunities so that parishioners can grow more “mature in their faith.” Confirming this, one pastor made his annual report at an Annual Business Meeting for a local church, making a distinction between those who “loved the church,” and those who “loved God’s work.” Those who loved God’s work were described as leaders who participated and gave more than others to the church. These were considered progressive Christians.

Many Hmong Christians equate a progressive church with one that is not holding onto traditional Hmong culture, those who certain pastors and church leaders deemed “un-Christian.” Sometimes this is taken to the extent that bylaws are put in place to limit membership to only those who are “true Christians” who are not holding onto “animistic practices,” even if they have made a decision to become Christians. Losing one’s membership is something unheard of in the history of the Hmong church where church membership was for anyone who had made a decision to *lawb Dlaab* or “do away with the spirits.” As we have seen, the church has come to replace the clan and its *Kevcai Dlaab* (“animistic ways”, lit. “way of the spirits”), taking over the wedding and funeral ceremonies, but without church membership, many would not have a social system to carry on family weddings and funerals.

The emphasis toward becoming a progressive “true church” is not only limited to the local church. In 2007, an edict was sent out via the District newsletter, *The District Update*, stating that all who were still practicing animistic traditions “must be dealt with” by the local church elders. Before, this may have been a concern but was left to the family or church to deal with. Now, it is intolerable to many churches as well as the district. Thus, to choose “spiritual progress” would sever relationships—not just within the church but even among family or clan members.

In a state of perceived emergency, in this case “spiritual emergency,” whether in the local church or on a district or national level because of “spiritual stagnancy” either by the leader or parishioners, it is only inevitable that the ultimate authority be given to someone whom the supporters can trust such as the pastor—not much different from the concept of “martial law.” While this “emergency” may be true to some extent, the problem is further complicated when those under care (such as the parishioners or the church delegates for the district) are unaware of these matters. While the progressive group sees a need to become a “true church” and isolate themselves from others, there are some who are considering the relationships that would be severed and make efforts to involve everyone before making decisions. Applied to our subject here, those who are more progressive are willing to relinquish their rights in order to let “the professional” make the decisions so that everyone can become “true believers,” advocating an authoritarian definition of leadership. On the other hand, those who are more relational would be willing to let the bureaucratic process weigh everyone else down so that everyone can have the same understanding and participate in the decision—a democratic definition.

In summary, there are many reasons as to this sudden and drastic change in the definition of power and authority in the Hmong church. First and foremost is the frustration experienced by many church leaders due to the political bureaucracies in the church. These include clan politics (clan power), those who give large donations to the church (economic power), past military leaders (military power), and even Bible college and T.E.E. students and graduates (expertise power). The lack of education in the past and the accessibility of ministerial education in the present led many uneducated Hmong elders to allow a young, highly educated pastor to do as he saw fit. Easier access to ministerial education through readily available distance and online

education, as well as the financial affordability and economic well-being of lay persons, has also contributed to the influx of individuals studying for the pastorate regardless of their motivations.

Under the Intercultural Ministries, the Hmong District has been exempt from the higher standards that are evident in other geographical districts. This has opened the door even wider for individuals to obtain their license and practice the ministry in America regardless of their qualifications and training. On a district level, the new District Superintendent has previously come from a foreign and indigenous field where the practice was authoritarian. The door opened for this “movement” as the C&MA denomination begins to shift its polity of denominational, district, and church governance from a largely democratic (and seemingly bureaucratic) process to an authoritarian decision-making process. As the Hmong District Bylaw is basically a translation of the C&MA constitution, it, too, worked into its context this new polity of denominational and local church governance. This became an opportunity for denominational and church leaders to do as they saw fit as it also became of point of debate. The need for control of Hmong cultural traditions among Christians (borrowed from their previous animistic practices) also fueled the need to become more authoritarian as these practices were perceived as “not biblical” and “getting out of hand.” These practices included the use of alcoholic drinks at marriage ceremonies, demanding that a groom get on his knees in a bowing manner to pay respect to certain individuals (both the living and deceased), and other borrowed animistic ritual items such as carrying an umbrella to ask for the bride’s hand, tying the umbrella with a certain cloth, or bringing cigarettes and passing them out as a sign of respect for the bride’s family. As with many movements, these changes came about not necessarily just from a single factor but from a multiplicity of factors as they contributed to this shift of tradition.

### **The Larger Context of Power and Authority**

It seems those advocating a more authoritarian definition of power and authority are using certain past traditions and tying them to ethnic identity to legitimize the authoritarian style of governance that they would prefer. However, the historical data gathered from the interviews and the chart of time periods point to the reality that in each phase of the history of the Hmong church and its different definitions, past traditions were arbitrarily invented out of necessity and with the available elements. The missionized Hmong church allowed the missionaries to dictate many of the decisions because they did not have the literacy or biblical training to make such decisions. The national Hmong church had to become self-sufficient and pulled away from its own social and religious systems into Christian practices and beliefs. The Vietnam War church had a need for structure and being swidden agricultural without educated or professional parishioners, the only available leaders were the military leaders. In the United States, the Hmong church had to submit itself to the constitution of the C&MA denomination. Today, the Hmong church feels it needs to redefine its tradition of leadership in order to bypass a lot of the bureaucratic hindrances to becoming a progressive church. The invention and reinvention of the traditions of power and authority in the Hmong church have changed dramatically throughout its lifetime.

Meanwhile, there was really no set “Hmong way” of power and authority in the church, these initially being invented in the mid-1950s. Prior to that time, the Hmong traditionally practiced the indigenous consensus definition for social concerns, while power only came from the spiritual realm and authority was limited in traditional Hmong religious practices. Regional or district governments were weak due to geographic barriers along with the lack of technological developments. The subsequent developments of technology in the United States as



mentioned above now have allowed those in authority to influence or define local churches and leaders.

Looking at Appendix A, the tradition of governance of the church in each time period has been directly influenced by the larger context. In the indigenous context, a consensus was possible with only a small number of household heads. During the Pre-Vietnam War period with the French Colonial and the Vietnam War influence, authoritative leadership was evident in the church. Then in the Post-War period in America during the late 70s, 80s and 90s, a democratic definition of governance permeated the church. Now in contemporary America, with the C&MA national office, or Headquarters, becoming more authoritarian with the executive type of leadership and after 25 years of democratic bureaucracy, Hmong church leaders are resorting to an authoritative definition of governance. What this demonstrates is that as long as there is some direct relationship between the Hmong church and its larger context, the definition of power and authority in the larger context will have a profound impact on the Hmong church. Likewise, the church in general has followed this same pattern along with other non-profit and governmental organizations, though this generalization would have to be reserved for additional research. In our context, this research reveals that, with a direct relationship between the microcosmic (or more subordinate) system and the macrocosmic (or more dominant) system, the definition of power and authority of the smaller system will also be affected by that of the larger whether it be an indigenous consensus, missionized indigenous, military (colonial), democratic, or corporate business definitions.

Designating something as a person's or ethnic group's "way" would imply that the same ethnic group is not involved with any other practices. However, as I have revealed, the practices of the Hmong in the past have changed and do vary from group to group and from time to time.

In the church this is particularly true along socio-economic lines. Reflecting the case of the Hmong church in Kansas City seen above, Appendix E reveals that congregations with members receiving an annual income of \$100,000 or more with higher than average graduate degrees and those with less than \$25,000 are more authoritarian, while those with members receiving an average income between \$25,000 and \$100,000 are more democratic. A successful church planter and state convention executive director for the Southern Baptist Convention, Bill Tinsley points out, “Even though the people of a community, region, or nation speak the same language and maintain the same culture, they experience differences in income, education, and profession” (Tinsley 1996:112). Tinsley (id.) points out that these differences are evident in the general subculture of each church, hence the need to be mindful of these subcultures when planting churches.

The definition of power and authority shifts along with the philosophy of leadership of the larger society, especially in those smaller and subordinate societies with a direct relationship with the larger, more dominant society such as military assignments, colonial designations, or constitutional allegiance. The question to consider is, “In this society, who will be the responsible party in bearing the consequences of the decision in the organization?” If the responsibility of leadership falls in the hands of the people, the democratic definition does prevail. If the responsibility is in the elected officials, the definition would be more board-based. Otherwise, if the responsibility falls on the director or D.S., it is the D.S. who should have the final word. Considering this, “the Hmong way” of power and authority would shift along with the philosophy of leadership of the larger society. The indigenous church reflects the consensus philosophy of leadership though mixed with the authority of the pastor in religious matters. The colonial and military church reflected the philosophy of leadership of its time, just like that of the

Hmong church in America in the past. Likewise, American democracy was reflected in the church as it first settled in America, as it does with the emphasis toward performance in the CEO model today, (which will be explained in the following paragraph). The clash in the Hmong church occurred when the people in the district attributed the responsibility to themselves or their delegates, but the D.S. would designate himself as the responsible person. Each believed that if the responsibility fell on him or her then he or she should have the final say.

As a macrocosm of the local church, the district and denomination reflect the dynamic of the leadership feeling tied down by policies and bureaucracies. At this level, the President is like the pastor, and the national Board of Directors is like the local board, while the General Assembly delegates are like the church members. In an interview with Dan Wetzel, Assistant Vice President and Leader of Development and Administration for the C&MA, he stated that the organization has increased authority to the Board of Directors at the expense of the General Assembly (C&MA national meeting). He stated that this process began fifteen to twenty years ago with a large influence coming from the corporate world. He called this the movement of the church to a CEO model. This movement is evident in the constitution as numerous contradictions exist as to how the C&MA defined its stand in denominational polity and in how its leadership is structured and selected. I would term this model the corporate model. As the Hmong District was going through a transition in its polity of governance, this same process was at work in its regional and local church structures. Through this process of transitioning from a delegate model to a corporate model, Wetzel urged caution. He had a solution that really appealed to me, and I believe it would be a prudent guide for the church. He suggested that the General Council (or congregation as opposed to the pastor and elders) address policy issues.

There needs to be an established guideline where “the Board of Directors has to play but can’t go outside.” He continues:

“The Board of Directors should set the parameter for the president—not telling the president how to handle the administration but they should hold him accountable. The General Council should hold the Board of Directors accountable—to instruct, approve/disapprove, have reports, etc. This also includes the importance of committee structure—a place where we review what’s been done. It is balancing the voice of all parties involved.”

With this, he emphasizes the “relational base of authority,” which advocates a leadership authority that grows out of “a walk with Christ and a relationship with people.”

I believe Wetzel is correct in his analysis and recommendations. One can see the shift in many nonprofit organizations from a board-run organization to one where the Director has become the Executive Director/CEO. This same model is evident among others in the non-profit sector as the director or CEO has the authority to hire and fire his own staff. This is an emphasis toward a corporate model of leadership. Wetzel’s “relational base of authority” is really no different from the authority that the C&MA’s founder, A. B. Simpson, practiced—one that is guided by a relationship with God and focused on what God would want rather than what he himself or anyone else wanted but with a relationship with people.

### **Authoritative Texts in Defining Power and Authority**

Authoritative texts need to be handled with care because they can be easily taken out of context for personal gain. In the interviews, two of the middle-aged pastors who advocate for an authoritative tradition received their degrees from a charismatic non-traditional school, which is more authoritative.

From my own research on the “biblical” view of power and authority, I believe there is no set “biblical view” when it comes to practice. Even in the Bible, this tradition has been reinvented throughout its accounts. Looking at the Israelite priestly structure of the Old

Testament, the cultural and socioeconomic context aligns very well with that of the Hmong in Laos. Like the Hmong in Laos, the Israelites early in the Old Testament were most likely illiterate, being an oral society. On the other hand, the structure of Judaism with the synagogue and Sanhedrin in the New Testament is one that is more representational, while that of early Christianity seems more democratic, reflecting the cultural and socioeconomic development of its time. The Bible seems to imply that any of these were forms of theocracy contextualized according to their prospective socio-cultural contexts.

Likewise, the cultural and socioeconomic context of the New Testament is very similar to that of the Hmong church in America. Even in the New Testament church, unlike the authoritative definition today, there were times when Paul had to assert his authority but never in a forceful way. Instead, there were times when the whole congregation came together to seek a theocratic decision from God—something that did not happen in the Old Testament. In Acts 13 at the church at Antioch, it is stated, “While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’”—that is, to become missionaries (NASB 1995). On the other hand, when it came to a theological issue or one having to do with religious practice, the apostles and church elders were said to have met to discuss a solution, as they did in Acts 15. In yet another instance, Jesus himself was said to have selected his own disciples. As a result, the Scripture is filled with texts that support all sides of the debate. It also gives examples as to deciphering the decisions needed to be made in the church. That is according to whether it is more a ministerial issue (having to do with ministry) as in Acts 13 or a more theological issue (having to do with theoretical and religious traditions) as exemplified in Acts 15, or both with Jesus’ selections in Mark 13:13-19. Nevertheless, one model in the Bible was practiced with the consideration that the other exists

and was correctly practiced in its own context. In these examples, the congregation made their decision in the presence of the leaders (Acts 13), the apostles and the church representatives discussed theological issues considering the frustration of the Gentile Christians (Acts 15), and Jesus considered the desire of each disciple using his own standards (Mark 13). We know that one did not criticize the other, though both seemed to be on opposite extremes, unlike the church today. In fact, New Testament writers seem to validate each in their prospective context (Acts 2:14-21; Hebrews 1:1-2).

When analyzing the Scriptures and in defining spiritual power in relation to ecclesiastical authority, the answer to the question “Who is God’s representative?” would depend on the socio-cultural context of the denomination or local church. In one context like the Old Testament examples above, God’s representative would be the denominational president, missionary, or regional director or, here, the District Superintendent of the C&MA district (D.S.) may be the only one who would be qualified. Or in another context like those in the New Testament, God’s representative(s) would be the denominational board/council, representatives/delegates, or every member of that denomination. Still in varying subcultural contexts, it may be the pastor only, elders/board/council only (or with the pastor), or all the members. Then in terms of varying situational contexts, one may be preferable to the other. For example, for theological issues, the licensed or ordained pastors would be consulted, while for ministerial and administrative issues, representation would include all those who are members of the church or denomination.

Looking at the development and definitions of leadership in the Hmong church at its inception with the missionaries, during its attempt for independence from missionary support, as it wavers through the Vietnam War, resettlement, and adaptation to democracy in the United States, and the current CEO model of today, it is safe to say that the definitions of power and

authority in the Hmong church have undergone a number of changes. There is no doubt that technological, socio-political, and socio-economic factors (or the lack of them) from the larger society and within itself have influenced the church's definition during each period as it seeks to redefine itself. Opposing groups within the church have contributed to the definitions as they compete to define or redefine power and authority in the Hmong church. Each proponent brings new textual authority in to legitimize its practice—including denominational, district, and local constitutions, along with the Bible. And each new definition reveals that the Hmong church is not independent from its previous experience, nor is it exempt from the larger society in which it finds itself.

## CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I will revisit the hypotheses which appeared in Chapter 1 regarding “the Hmong way” and discuss the invention of tradition in the Hmong church. Before these can be answered, one would have to know what exactly is meant by “the Hmong Way.” Answering this can be ascertained from the analysis of the history of the Hmong church.

### **Is There a Hmong Way?**

First, my hypothesis is that there is no set “Hmong way.” From examining the invention of tradition in terms of power and authority in the Hmong church, we can see some of the dynamics of this changing tradition. The tradition of power and authority in the church tends to swing back and forth between being authoritative and consensus or democratic, depending on the changing historical context of each time period as the missionized church, the Laotian national church, the Vietnam War church, the early Hmong American church, and the millennial Hmong church.

What is deemed as “tradition” here is nothing more than a rationalization for a new and, for many, a very needed type of leadership to “move things forward.” Since the church and an indigenous definition never existed prior to the presence of missionaries in Laos, the indigenous tradition of power and authority in the church had to have derived from somewhere else. I have demonstrated this as a combination of the previous social and religious systems. As a fledgling church with little literacy and no biblical knowledge in a swidden agricultural society, an authoritarian definition of church governance was necessary. However, as the church has grown and encountered other outside influences, it has changed its model of church governance. Each definition has its own motivations and is based on or runs contrary to the previous or current



context. With their motivations setting the direction, authoritarian texts are used, selected, or interpreted to validate those motives.

As a result, the Hmong traditions of power and authority in the church have been defined and redefined from their inception to today. They change with each different and larger socio-political, economic, historical, and educational context, as well as with each development or influence within those contexts. Thus, traditions of power and authority are not static phenomena. Rather, tradition is dynamic and evolving (or revolving, reverting, or reinventing) within the ever-changing contexts. With an ever-increasing number of technological developments, saturated by mass communication, and facilitated by mass transportation, traditions are changing more frequently now than before, hence affirming the constructionist view of tradition more so now than in the past. Ernest Gellner attributes the need to invent tradition to the industrialization and nationalism that comes about from the formation of nations, whether as a nation-state or one of many nations within a state (Gellner 1983:101). For the Hmong church, the traditions of power and authority had to be defined from its inception, has been redefined throughout its development, is being redefined today, and will continue to evolve in future contexts and with historical socio-cultural developments. The reversion to the authoritarian definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church is being promoted by those in the leadership as “the Hmong way”—the way in which they believe the church should progress (or in this case regress). Some of those in leadership are doing so because they feel frustrated with the bureaucratic stagnation that came with a complicated democratic process. Others feel they have to take matters into their own hands in order to obtain integrity in the church as true Christians who should carry out their marriages, funerals, and other traditions in a

Christian manner. Still others may be legitimizing their authority for financial and other personal gains.

### **What Was the Hmong Way in Laos Prior to Missionary Involvement?**

My second hypothesis is that the Hmong in Laos prior to the mid-twentieth century practiced a consensus tradition of power and authority. To answer the above question, we would have to ask, “What exactly is ‘the Hmong way?’” Prior to the church, the Hmong practiced consensus governance in their socio-political system through the clan, and they practiced limited authoritative tradition within their religious system of animism—specifically, the shaman’s power depended on the spirits’ will and the authority of his prescriptions were only recommendations among the prescriptions of other shamans. But, again, tradition is only consistent with the immediate context and developments because the tradition of religious authority can change from one variety to another and from one time to another even within the same religious system. Therefore, one cannot set any tradition of power or authority as “the Hmong way,” “the American way,” or any other “way.”

“Traditions are neither genuine nor spurious, for if genuine tradition refers to the pristine and immutable heritage of the past, then all genuine traditions are spurious. But if, as we have argued, tradition is always defined in the present, then all spurious traditions are genuine” (Handler and Linnekin 1984:288). For each time period, the church has defined and redefined its tradition of power and authority according to its present context; hence, each new tradition in the Hmong church is genuine. Tradition and culture “constantly undergo reworking, redefinition and reformulation such that the image of the past can often be understood in terms of the political and other agendas of the present” (Hanson 1997:195). Traditions of power and authority to have been defined in the present wherever “the present” exists. Lamont Lindstrom

describes it as “to read the present in terms of the past by writing the past in terms of the present” (1982:317). Therefore, interpretation of the past is not detached from the current and previous socio-historical experiences nor is it independent from the larger socio-cultural context. This was evident in the Hmong church in its inception, development and current position.

For the Hmong who were in Laos and currently in the United States, though they have a long tradition of power and authority among kin (social) and animistic (religious) lines, the church came to be only a little over half a century ago in 1950 in Laos. In the same way, traditions in power and authority in the context of the Hmong church have been quite nebulous and unbounded. The Hmong church has forgo the tremendous influence of conversion to Christianity from Hmong animism, that of French colonialism, and Vietnam War Military involvement, along with American democracy as refugees, and the move toward a corporate type of structure in America as many have become educated and socioeconomically advanced. Thus, classifying “the Hmong way” as authoritarian in the church would be pretentious when there is no practical and consistent definition.

### **Is the Authoritarian Definition Only A Reaction to the Previous Democratic Bureaucracy?**

My third hypothesis is that my current authoritarian definitions of power and authority are a reaction to twenty-five years of bureaucracy in the United States. To address this, one would have to understand the factors involved in defining and redefining the definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church. The first obvious factor is the greater socio-political context. Appendix A reveals how the greater socio-political context can influence the model of governance in the Hmong church. Again, we see the political as well as socio-economic influences on each successive definition throughout the Hmong church’s historical development. These are the period of the Hmong church’s inception, during the period of colonial and military

influence, as well as during the post-war period and in corporate America today. Appendix E, on the other hand, reveals the dynamics of how education or socio-economic developments can influence a group's (or subgroup's) choice of definitions in power and authority. Again, those who are either in the lower or higher level of socio-economic status prefer a more authoritarian definition while those in the middle level vary. Next, political factions and bureaucracies in the church with their stagnant progress in achieving ministerial plans and developments have caused some in the Hmong church to revert to a more authoritarian style of governance. These factions include the Hmong clan structure, the elderly patriarch or matriarch, and those who are strong financial contributors. The socio-economic and political influence of the entire denomination and society then gave way for this change in definition to more authoritarian governance in the Hmong District and churches. In summary, this research has proven that my third hypothesis is true, but there is more to it than I had anticipated.

Feinberg, writing on the "Politics of Culture in the Pacific Islands," stated that islanders, "...like people everywhere, are shaped by their surroundings. They draw on their experience to fashion and refashion concepts of tradition, transforming and re-valorizing vital practices and concepts in the process" (1995:94). The Hmong church throughout history and today clearly demonstrates this claim.

### **Is an Authoritarian Definition of Power Only a Reinvention of the Past?**

My final hypothesis that the authoritarian definition of power is only a reinvention of the past has also been proven true. As Appendix A indicates, the Hmong church resorted to authoritarian definitions of power and authority during the missionized church and Vietnam War church periods due to the lack of education and knowledge of the Scripture as previously they had been animists practicing swidden agriculture, as well as due to colonial and military

influences. It moved away from these definitions as it became nationalized and when it settled in the United States. Now in the millennial Hmong church, the Hmong leaders are reverting back to the authoritative definition of the Vietnam War era, claiming it is “the Hmong way.” Church factions and moral corruption in leadership have pushed the church to redefine church leadership. Despite their claims, looking beyond the authoritarian military and colonial influence, the church practiced a consensus leadership that considered all the household heads and, hence, every family member.

What can we learn from this? Definitions are ever changing. Even certain traditions can be changed multiple times in a lifetime by those in opposition and within the same group. Applied to societies in a rapidly changing global context such as the Hmong, the term “tradition” by itself does not suffice; hence, it begs the question, “Which tradition?” Globalization and technological as well as socioeconomic developments allow for the existence of multiple contexts and therefore varieties of a particular tradition. In general, the Hmong have traditional indigenous social and religious traditions, which contain elements transferred into the church. Specifically in the Hmong church, we can refer to the various traditions of power and authority in the following ways: the missionized church tradition; the nationalized church tradition, the military-influenced Hmong church tradition, the early American democratic Hmong church tradition, or the contemporary CEO-based Hmong church tradition of today. Considering the colonial tradition, church tradition, etc., “the Hmong way” of explaining power and authority become nebulous and irrelevant unless a qualifier is added to specify which Hmong way—“the indigenous Hmong way,” “the early Hmong church way,” “the militarized Hmong way,” and so on. Therefore, definitions are ever-changing and many times, as in the case of the millennial Hmong church, those in power reach to certain points in the past to legitimate their own present

definition, sometimes tying a group's identity to a certain way of practicing the tradition.

However, knowing the changing nature of traditions in a contemporary and global society, the context and qualifiers are necessary to specify which definition.

### **What Criteria Determine the “Right” Way?**

I do acknowledge the fact that there are times when one definition of power or authority is necessary over the others. At times, relationships are and should be important, but at other times, progress is needed as well. Whichever decision a group decides to make, it should consider those from both sides within the group. For example, those emphasizing progress would implement an authoritarian definition of leadership but consider the relationships involved and vice versa. These two opposing phenomena can be seen at work in such movements as the Catholic Church, where the authority comes from the top down, and in the Baptist Church movement, where everyone is asked for a vote on almost every church decision. For the Hmong, the question is whether the pastor or the congregation should have the authority be given the authority. The selection and decisions of elders can be seen as reflecting either one of these two definitions. However, I believe that a well-balanced, insightful, well-communicated, and patient leadership should take priority and is important for unity in heart and mind. Otherwise, those on one end will perceive those on the other end with exaggeration and try to steer the church to the other extreme. One group valuing progress may combine resources and be willing to submit themselves to those in authority. Meanwhile, the other group valuing relationships emphasizes inclusivity for all involved. When one is unwilling to give, the other pulls the opposite way more abruptly. Sometimes irreconcilable differences are inevitable. Nevertheless, at least the two parties can sit down and consider the argument of the other before going their own separate ways.

What can we say then? Definitions of power and authority change from time to time and place to place. One definition may be appropriate in one context or group and not in another. As seen with the Hmong, a group unaware of the leadership dynamics such as an illiterate society, specialized groups (as in the case of Christian missionaries, Jews in the Old Testament, Jesus and his disciples in the Gospels, the apostles and the burgeoning church in the book of Acts, or as seen in upper-class churches), or in a state of emergency to get things done would accept an authoritarian definition. On the other hand, literate groups or those aware of leadership dynamics as with the churches in the United States would ask to have input in the decision of the leadership.

Considering this, I believe there is no set “way” of leadership for any particular society or group. What is the appropriate “Hmong way” for one context may be ineffective or detrimental in another context. “The Hmong way” yesterday cannot remain in existence in today’s context but will demand a new definition to accommodate a new context, so it will also be with tomorrow’s context, sometimes reverting to past definitions. Likewise, what is the “right way” of defining power or authority on a denominational or national level may not be appropriate for those on the local level, so constitutional changes on a national level should take into consideration the context of the local and ethnic churches. This leads me to my summary of the research.

### **The Hmong Church and the Invention of Tradition**

Hobsbawm argues that the invention of tradition occurs most frequently during periods of rapid social change (Hobsbawm 1983:4). Going from an indigenous third world country to a colonial, military, modern and then post-modern society, the Hmong church has definitely gone through some rapid social change. The function of these invented traditions of power and

authority in the Hmong church is to legitimize “relations of authority” and to establish “social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities” (Hobsbawn 1983:9). In times of necessary cohesion, such as during the colonial period and today in its attempt to move the Hmong church forward, leaders within the district have utilized their position of authority as a means to legitimize their “relations of authority” and to establish “social cohesion” within the district.

### **Summary of Research Conclusions**

Looking at the traditional practices of the Hmong social and religious systems and their practices prior to outside influences in Laos, “the Hmong way,” or its traditional indigenous practice, was primarily a consensus of those involved but with the alternative of migrating for those who disagreed. This practice has inevitably changed due to the socio-economic and historical development of the church with its increase in literacy among parishioners and the clergy, economic advancement, and outside socio-political influences. Therefore, one cannot say that any one way is “the Hmong way” and that the Hmong cannot practice the tradition in any other way. For those in authority to make such a statement would only be presumptuous, if not ignorant that tradition is not stagnant but dynamically evolving with changing contexts, being invented and reinvented.

However, those in leadership are given the power and authority to influence and carry out the definition of power and authority for those under their care, considering how the larger context will impact the people. They are the gatekeepers of all that may come in. Those advocating for more authority such as some pastors and the Hmong district leadership who advocates for a pastor-led or D.S.-led model would say, then, that those in authority have the power and authority to define power and authority. Others in the larger society such as the



denomination would say that they should define power and authority for the Hmong District. Others among the particular group like the churches advocating for a congregational-led model would say that defining power and authority belongs to the people. Then there is the power and authority of the representatives—either of the people or of the hierarchy—who would advocate for the representatives to do so. Still, there are those in the church who say that God ultimately has the power and authority to define power and authority. This research has revealed the existence of all these agents of definition. I believe it could be one, a combination, or all of these together, depending on the context in which the church finds itself. The answer to the question, “Who’s the boss when East meets West in the church” in defining traditions of power and authority, the power(s) that be, referring to any and sometimes a combination of the above powers.

Of importance to this research, what “the Hmong way” is in one context may evolve to be the other extreme in another context. As the world changes ever so rapidly and globalization for indigenous peoples has become unavoidable, different socio-political contexts and agents will inevitably come in contact with each other among the different local, denominational, national, and global powers—as with the Hmong church. These contacts have defined and redefined the “Hmong way” of power and authority as it finds itself in a variety of contexts. As a result, definitions of power and authority in the Hmong church have changed according to its socio-cultural, historical, and political context and they *will* continue to do so.

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## APPENDIX A

### Socioeconomic Developments and Changing Political Traditions in the Hmong Church

Period	Governance Model/Definition	Economic Development	Influenced Ideologies and Forces	Reasons for Definition	Inter-Dependency	Textual Authority	Motivations for Ministry?	Obstacles in Ministry
<b>1. Missionized Church</b>	Consensus under Authority of Missionaries	Swidden Agriculture	Hmong social and religious systems	Evangelistic and inclusivity	Reciprocal but democratic	None—previous oral traditions from missionaries	Total commitment despite large obstacles	Geographical, educational, and economic
<b>2. Pre-Vietnam War</b>	Consensus	Swidden Agricultural	Hmong social and religious systems	Inclusivity	Reciprocal but democratic	None—previous oral traditions from missionaries	Total commitment despite large obstacles	Geographical, educational, and economic
<b>3. Vietnam War Church</b>	Authoritarian	Swidden Agriculture	Military Leaders and Integration of French Colonialism	Control of the church in turmoil	Reciprocal but authoritarian	Bible mixed with previous oral traditions from missionaries	Power and prestige	Geographical and political (military) but educational and economic to some degree
<b>4. New American Church</b>	Democratic	Industrialism	U.S. Democracy	Being considerate and inclusive	Independent but democratic	Bible and Older C&MA Manual	Power and prestige with commitment	Geographical and political (military)
<b>5. Millennial Church</b>	Authoritarian	Industrialism	U.S. and C&MA Executive Leadership	Religious/spiritual progress and control	Independent but authoritarian	New C&MA Manual and biblical interpretation	Monetary assistance with power and prestige	Cost of TEE program or college education

## APPENDIX B

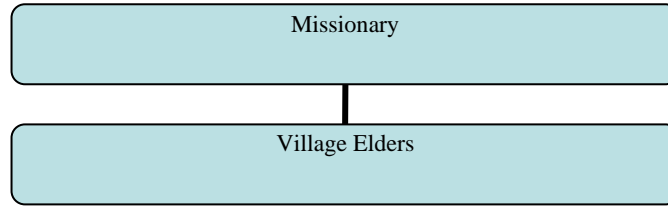
### Hmong Leadership Attainment in Transition

<b>Context of Hmong Society</b>	<b>Highest Leadership Position</b>	<b>Mode of Survival</b>	<b>Method of Selection</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Example of Person</b>
<b>Indigenous</b>	Locally, the Eldest Capable Male	Swidden agriculture	Birth Order	Duration of life experience	Locally, the Eldest Capable Male
<b>Chinese Imperialism</b>	Kiatong/ "Little king"/Lord	Swidden agriculture	Appointed during the Ming Emperor and then Inherited	Duration of life experience--Age and sibling order (Eldest Male Heir)	Kiatong Lo Bliayao
<b>French Colonial</b>	Minister	Swidden agriculture	Selected by the French Colonist to be Elected by Community	Educational training and/or relationship with those in authority	Touby Lyfong
<b>Military</b>	General/Other Military Ranks	Swidden agriculture and Warfare	Appointed by the King or National Leader	Military achievement and/or relationship with those in authority	General Vang Pao
<b>Contemporary in USA</b>	President	Capitalistic	Election from Members	Specialized leadership training or skills	Paul Lo President of HND

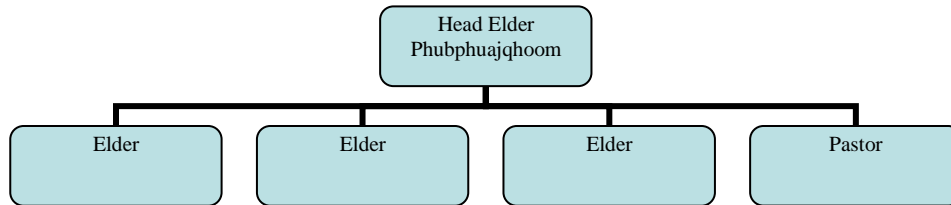
### APPENDIX C

#### HMONG CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

1) Missionized Hmong Church Leadership Board  
(Elected Elders Under Missionary’s Guided Authority)

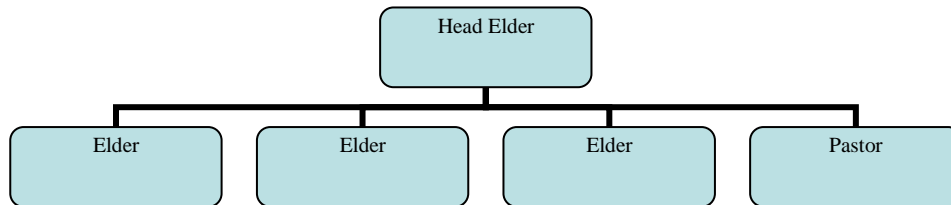


2) Laotian Hmong Church Leadership Board  
(Elected Elders Under Head Elder’s Facilitation—Head Elder Has Most Votes)



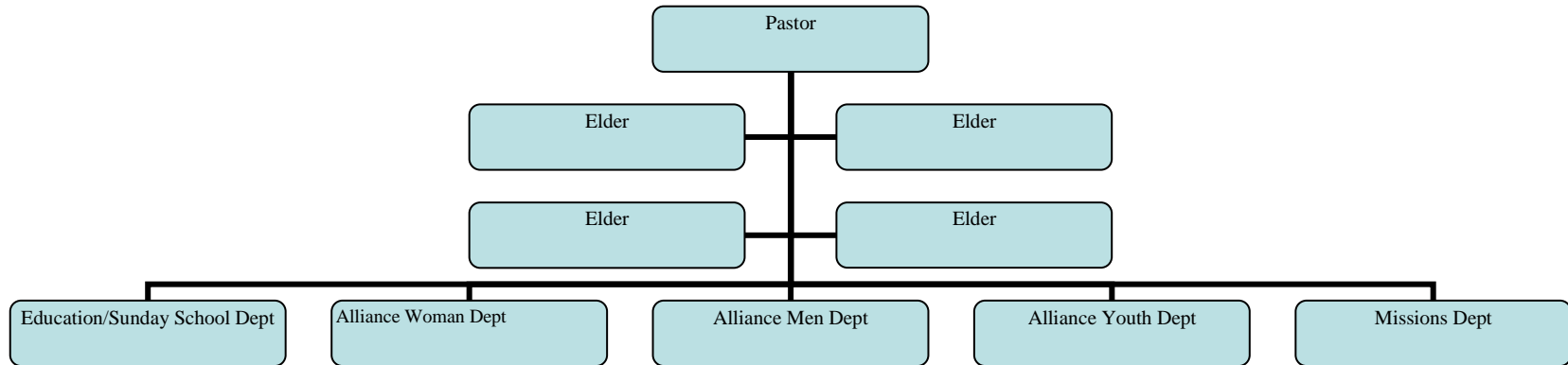
Note: The pastor is appointed to the village by the Laotian Hmong headquarters (L.E.C.).

3) Colonial and Military Influenced Hmong Church Leadership Board  
(Elected Elders Under Head Elder’s Authority—Head Elder Has Most Votes)



4) Americanized Hmong Church Leadership Board

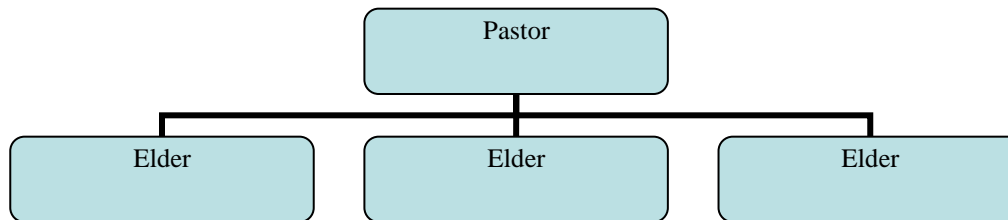
(Pastor and Elders Voted in by Congregation while Department Representatives Voted in by All Members in Departments Under Authority of the Annual Business Meeting and the Bylaws and Policies set by the Meeting)



Note: Each department head represents concerns and contributions from his/her department.

5) Current Hmong-American Church Leadership Board

(Pastor Sent by the District with Elders Elected by the Congregation, Operating Under the Authority of the Pastor or Board of Elders)

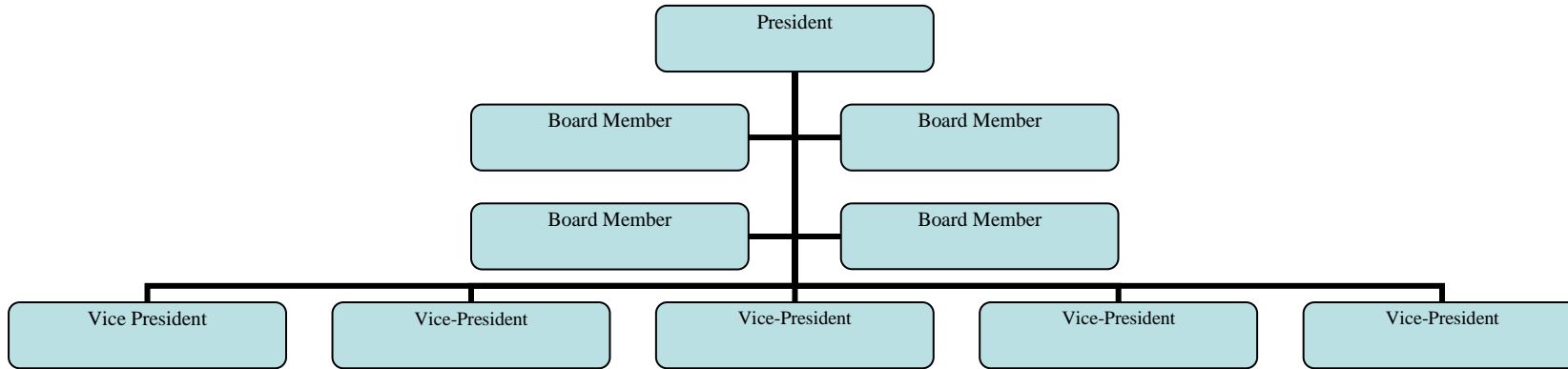


Note: The pastor is appointed by the Hmong District to the church. Department Heads now operates as staff members under the Church Leadership Board, except the Director of Alliance Men and Director of Alliance Women’s Ministries who are under and appointed by the pastor to be confirmed by the board. Also the Bylaws are changed to reflect the authority that exists in the church.



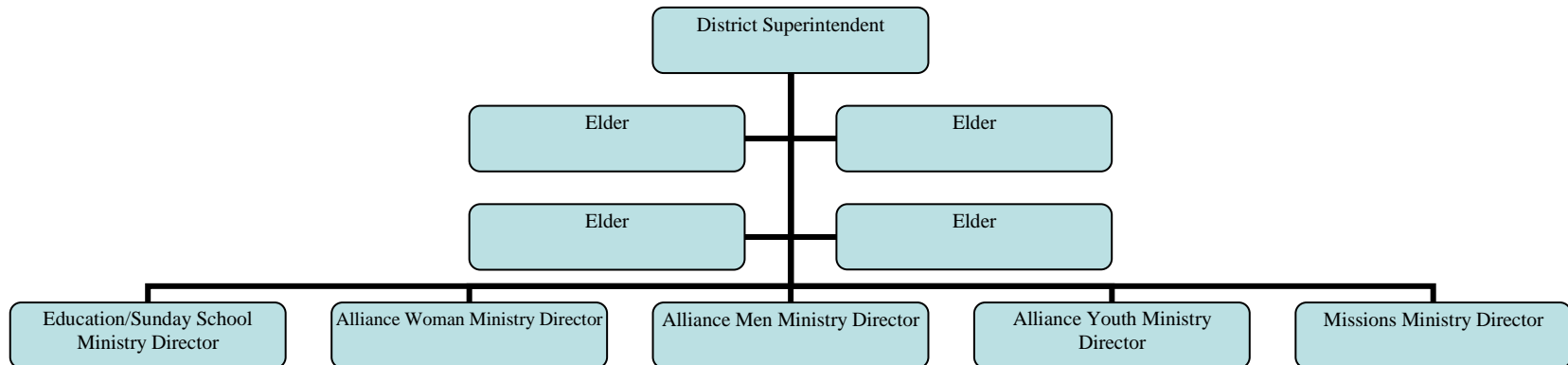
### C&MA

#### Board Members and Ministry Vice-Presidents



### Hmong District

#### District Executive Committee & ministry directors



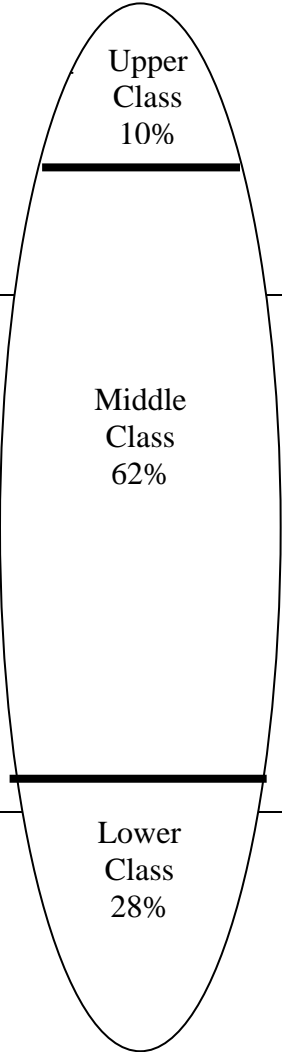
## APPENDIX D

### Appointments and Accountability in Hmong Church Leadership

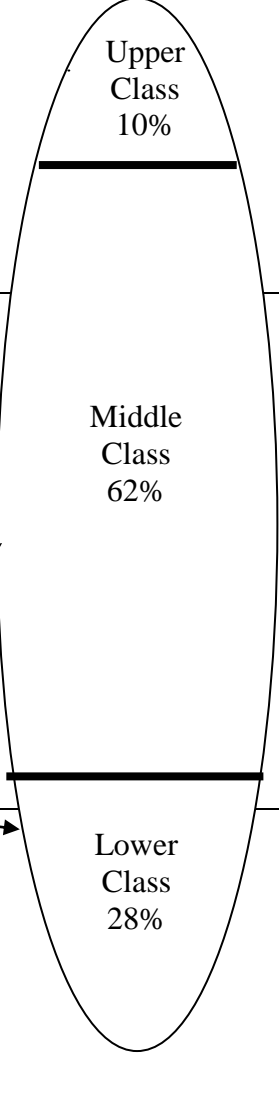
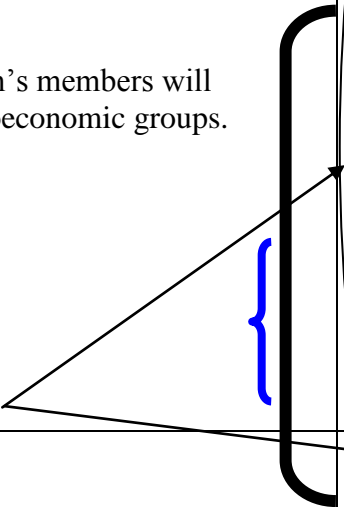
<b>Church</b>	<b>Leadership Model/Definition</b>	<b>Leadership Board</b>	<b>Pastor's Appointment</b>	<b>Elder's Appointments</b>	<b>Department Director Appointments</b>	<b>Leadership Board's Accountability</b>
<b>1. Missionized Church</b>	Authoritarian from Missionary	Village Elders under Missionary	Non-existent (assumed by Village Head)	Voted on by the Congregation	Non-existent (assumed by Board of Elders)	To the missionaries and church members
<b>2. Laotian Church</b>	Consensus or Congregational from Village Head	Village Elders with Head Elder and Sometimes Pastor	Appointed by LEC Headquarters	Voted on by the Congregation	Non-existent (assumed by Board of Elders)	To the church members
<b>3. Vietnam War</b>	Authoritarian from Head Elder	Village Elders with Pastor under Head Elder	Appointed by LEC Headquarters	Voted on by the Congregation	Non-existent (assumed by Board of Elders)	To the church members and itself
<b>4. Early Resettlement in America</b>	Democratic from Church's Annual Meeting	Pastor, Board of Elders, and Department Directors	Voted on by congregation	Voted on by the Congregation	Voted on by Members of each department	To the church members and departments
<b>5. Millennial Hmong Church Today</b>	Authoritarian from Board of Elders or Pastor under the Hmong District	Pastor and Board of Elders	Appointed by the Hmong District	Voted on by the Congregation (Some pastors asking to appoint)	Appointed by the Pastor to be Confirmed by the Board	To the church members but essentially to itself

APPENDIX E

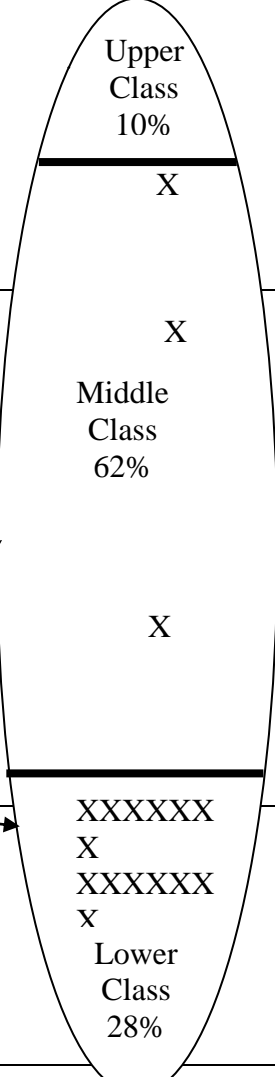

Socioeconomics in Culture and Church from Church Planter Network Resource by H. Gerald Colbert for North American Mission Board

Trust	Power	Decision Making	Congregating and Worship Styles	Population Size and Divisions	Income and Education
Low trust level, skeptical	Have power and comfortable with use. Accept others with power from money, education, expertise	Frequently made in top down basis, usually a council, board or presbytery. Pastor accorded authority until proven untrustworthy	Small gatherings preferred. Usually 100 +/- Services tend to be shorter, more scholarly, orderly, liturgical, high value of excellence.	 <p>Upper Class 10%</p> <p>Middle Class 62%</p> <p>Lower Class 28%</p>	\$100,000 + 10% Higher than average graduate degrees, value education
		Variety of decision making styles: democratic, to hierarchy to judicatory.	Willingness to gather in larger groups. Churches range in size from mini to mega and variety of worship expressions in organization, planning, and content.		\$25-\$100,000 62% Edu. ranges from high school to advanced degrees, values education as means for economic and social mobility
Low trust level, frequently taken advantage of, feel at mercy of government, business, employers	Little to no power in life. Distrustful of those w/ power. Feel that power is used on/against them.	Decision tends to be bottom-up, made by vote after long discussions. Not uncommon for one to have bigger vote. Pastor tends to have little authority.	Small gatherings preferred. 50 or less attendance. Services tend to be more relational in nature, emotional in moods and longer.		\$25,000 > 28% Distrustful of education and those with education.

Socioeconomics in the Church (Continued)

Trust	Power	Decision Making	Congregating	Population Size and Divisions	Income and Education
					
			<p>Typically 80 to 90% of church's members will come from 3 contiguous socioeconomic groups.</p> <p>Of that number, 70-80% will be from middle group.</p> <p>The remaining 10 to 20% will</p>		<p>The other 10 to 20% of members will be scattered from among the remaining six socioeconomic groups.</p>
			<p>be from the other two groups.</p>	<p>Lower Class 28%</p>	

Socioeconomics in the Church: This is how the socioeconomic distribution might look in a church with twenty families.

Trust	Power	Decision Making	Congregating	Population Size and Divisions	Income and Education
				 <p>Upper Class 10%</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>Middle Class 62%</p> <p>X</p> <p>XXXXXX X XXXXXX X</p> <p>Lower Class 28%</p>	
			<p>Typically 80 to 90% of church's members will come from 3 contiguous socioeconomic groups.</p> <p>Of that number, 70-80% will be from middle group.</p> <p>The remaining 10 to 20% will</p>		<p>The other 10 to 20% of members will be scattered from among the remaining six socioeconomic groups.</p>
			<p>be from the other two groups.</p>		

APPENDIX F

### Socioeconomic Developments and Influences of Definitions of Power and Authority

Period	Governance Model/Definition	Economic Development	Influenced Ideologies and Forces	Reasons for Definition	Inter-Dependency	Textual Authority	Motivations for Ministry	Obstacles in Ministry
<b>1. Chinese</b>	Patrimonial clan-based	Swidden agriculture	Local: Indigenous lifestyle Regional: Chinese imperialism	To integrate the Hmong into Chinese kingdom without force	Indigenous interdependency	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
<b>2. Missionized Church</b>	Consensus pastor-elders	Swidden agriculture	Local: Indigenous lifestyle National: Missionary expertise	Lack of literacy, Biblical knowledge, and Biblical text	Indigenous interdependency	Interpretations of missionaries	Sharing the gospel with other villages	Lack education, finances and accessibility to training
<b>3. Vietnam War Church</b>	Authoritative head elder led	Swidden agriculture Then refugee camps	Vietnam War & French colonialism	The need for control in the church and lack of alternatives to military leaders	Dependency on civilian aids through Hmong military leaders	Interpretations by national leaders under watch of missionaries	Sharing the gospel with other civilians	Finances and accessibility to training
<b>4. Early American Church</b>	Democratic pastor-elders	Blue collar	C&MA Constitution	Coming under the democratic rule of the C&MA	More independent families but still socially interdependent	C&MA Constitution based on the Bible	The need for more pastors in the resettled churches	Finances and accessibility to training
<b>5. Current Millennial Church</b>	Authoritative pastor led	Blue & white collar	Commercialism	Frustrations over factions in the church	Very independent families and groups	C&MA Constitution and interpretations of pastors from non-C&MA schools	Easy access to a career (vs. a vocation), respectful position, and church divisions demand pastors	Convenient and inexpensive at-home study program

## APPENDIX G

For linguistic purposes of enunciating the Hmong terms written in Hmong in this research, I am adding the following three charts—the Hmong consonants, vowels and tonal matrixes. This is due to the fact that the charts I have seen have been insufficient or too technical. I made the following three charts for a Hmong language primer in 2003. Since then I have updated it to include standard API descriptions. These are arranged according to phonemic characteristics—such as the consonant matrix is arranged according to each consonant base and additional consonants (double, triple, and quadruple)—rather than being based on the place or manner of articulation—as Paoze Thao has it in his text, *Kevcai Siv Lug Moob* (Foundations of Mong Language) (1997:13). However, API articulations are also given for enunciation purposes.

## APPENDIX G (Cont.)

### 1) Hmong Consonants Matrix

By Xf. Wayne Yang 2003 (Updated 2009)

There are 61 Consonants Total

Single Consonants (17)			Double Consonants (24)				Triple Consonants (16)				Quad Cons. (4)
Cons. Base	API Sym- bol	API Place & Manner of Articulation	Pre- nasalized	Pre- aspirated	Post- aspirated	Others	Pre- nasalized	Pre- aspirated	Post- aspirated	Pre- nasalized & Post- aspirated	Pre- nasalized & Post- aspirated
			/n_/	/h_/	/_h/	/_l/ /t_ /x_/	/n_l/ /nt_/	/hm_ /hn_ /t_h/	/_lh/ /t_h/	/n_h/	/n_lh/ /nt_h/
c	ɕ	Voiced Palatal Plosive & Approximant	nc		ch		ndl		dlh	nch	ndlh
d	d	Alveolar Plosive			dh	dl					
f	f	Voiceless Labiodental Fricative									
(g) <sup>7</sup>	(g)	(Voiced Velar Plosive)	ng								
h	h	Voiceless Glottal Fricative				hl				nkh	
k	k	Voiceless Velar Plosive	nk		kh						
l	l	Alveolar Lateral Approximant									
m	m	Bilabial Nasal		hm		ml		hml			
n	n	Alveolar Nasal		hn				hny			
p	p	Voiceless Bilabial Plosive Epiglottal	np		ph	pl	npl		plh	nph	nplh
q	ʔ	Plosive	nq		qh					nqh	
r	dʒ.l	Voiced Alveolar Plosive <sup>8</sup>	nr		rh					nrh	
s	ʃ	Voiceless Retroflex Fricative				ts	nts		tsh		ntsh
t	t	Voiceless Alveolar Plosive	nt		th					nth	
v	v	Voiced Labiodental Fricative									
x	s	Voiceless Alveolar Fricative									
y	j	Palatal Approximant	ny			tx	ntx				ntxh
z	z	Voiced Retroflex Fricative				xy			txh		

For pronunciation, see White Hmong-English Dictionary by Ernest Heimbach (1979:444-446).

<sup>7</sup> The /g/ is not included as an official single consonant. However, it is written here in parenthesis because it is the base consonant for the double consonant /ng/.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with a voiced alveolar plosive and ending with an alveolar approximant.



## APPENDIX G (Cont.)

## 2) Hmong Vowels Matrix

There are 14 total.

By Wayne Yang 2003 (Updated 2009)

AHD and API

Single		Double Nasalized ( _ng)		Diphthongs /_a/			Diphthongs /a_/				
	ADH	API		ADH	API	/_a/ (2)	ADH	API	/a_/ (3)	ADH	API
a	ə	ɑ	aa	(ãN)	ã						
e	ě	ɛ	ee	(ēN)	ē						
i	ē	ɪ				ia	(ē <sup>ə</sup> )	ɪɑ	ai	ə	ɑɪ
o	ô	ɔ	oo	(ôN)	ô						
u	ō	u				ua	(ə <sup>ə</sup> )	oɑ	au	ou	ɑu
w	Short ō	ɨ							aw	œ	ʒɨ

For help with pronunciation, see White Hmong-English Dictionary by Ernest Heimbach (1979:444-446).

## APPENDIX G (Cont.)

## 3) Hmong Tones Matrix

By Wayne Yang  
2003 (Updated 2009)

There are 8 tones.

Musical Tones		Slur Tones		Noise Tones	
Tone Letter Notation	Tone Description	Tone Letter Notation	Tone Description	Tone Letter Notation	Tone Description
<b>b</b>	Highest musical tone (Pronounced like the musical solfege syllable Mi)	<b>v</b>	Mid rising slur tone (Pronounced like "Huh!?!")	<b>j</b>	High noise tone (Pronounced like a high knocking noise or the tone in yelling the word "Hey!")
<b>(none)</b>	Medium high musical one (Pronounced like the musical solfege syllable Re)	<b>d</b>	Low dip-high rising slur tone (Pronounced like a rising vowel tone at the end of a question)	<b>m</b>	Low noise tone (Pronounced like a low thumping noise or the tone in saying the syllable "-py" in the word "happy")  Note: this tone can also be a low musical tone (Pronounced like the musical solfege syllable Sol in a lower octave)
<b>s</b>	Middle musical tone (Pronounced like the musical solfege syllable Do)				
<b>g</b>	Breathy middle musical tone (Pronounced like the musical solfege syllable Do aspirated)				

## TERMS

(Hmong terms are Blue Hmong; for an explanation of the transliteration system, please see Appendix G)

C&MA – Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination.

DEXCOM – District Board of Elders of C&MA districts.

Dlaab xwm kaab – protecting beneficial spirit that stays with the descendants to protect them from other malicious foreign spirits.

D.S. – District Superintendent or president of the particular district under the C&MA

Fivyeem – a commitment or personal contractual agreement to the spirits that the individual will do something in return if the spirits grants his or her wish.

Haiv Hmoob – The global Hmong family.

Hau Zog –Village head.

Kiatong – regional clan-based chief or “life king” who is over a clan which may span across a region and overlap other kiatongs.

Kwvtij – extended and patrilineal clan family, including all those with the same surname.

LEC = Lao Evangelical Church, the national church of Laos comprising of different ethnic groups, though mostly Hmong as a result of the work of the C&MA among the Hmong, Khmu and Laotian in Xieng Kouang and Luang Prabang.

Luang Prabang Province – Province in NW Laos where Edward Roffe started the first mission.

Meejkoob – marriage broker.

Nai npaab – village head.

Ntsuj Dluab – shadowing spirit out of three souls.

Ntxwj Nyoog – devil’s personal name.

OMF – Overseas Missions Fellowship, a mission-sending Protestant organization, formerly called China Inland Missions begun by James Hudson Taylor in 1865.

Paujyeem – In traditional Hmong religion, the ceremony to thank the spirits after the spirits have granted the wishes of the individual (based on the personal contractual agreement the person made with the spirits prior to the granted request).

Phubphuajqhoom – The Laotian equivalence to Thawj Txwjlaug.

Plig thawj thab – incarnate soul out of three souls.

Pu Shee or Puj Sis – first woman.

Qha Kev – “one showing the way.”

Saub = the Hmong’s proper name for God.

Saub prophets = those individuals who claims to be called by God to send a message to the Hmong. Also called Siv Yig.

She Lee Kong or Sis Lis Qoos – The first man.

Siv Yig or Shee Yee – The first spiritual healer or shaman sent from God to heal humans. This is also a term to refer to individuals alleging to have been sent by God as *saub* prophets

Tas xaam – district representative

T.E.E. – Theological Education by Extension for indigenous leadership, particularly here for those Hmong pastors who elect to be trained at home to become pastors of Hmong churches

Teev ntawv – secretary.

Thawj Tsaavxwm – “first responsible elder”

Thawj Txwjlaug – “First head elder”

Tswv neeg – extended family

Txiv Neeb – Hmong spiritual healer or shaman

*Vaajtswv*, literally “Ruler King”—the author believes this is a cognate of the Mandarin word for emperor, *Huangdi*

Xieng Khouang Province – The province in the Northwest of Laos where the Hmong revival with Moua Yia and the Andrianoffs took place.

Yawm Saub – The personal name of God, lit. ‘Grandfather Shao,’ and also connotes an ancestral forefather.

Zog - Village