

## **An Assessment of the Hmong American New Year and Its Implications for Hmong-American Culture**

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### **Abstract**

This author attended the first day of the 2005-06 Hmong New Year in Fresno,<sup>1</sup> which was held during the week of December 26 to 31, 2005; and found it to be strongly influenced by commercial, political and informational/educational activities. This was the 30<sup>th</sup> annual Hmong New Year event celebrated in the United States and it appears to have developed itself into a unique Hmong American festival. It included many elements and traditions from the pre-1975 New Year of the Hmong of Laos. This includes the youth displaying their Hmong traditional costumes, the ball tossing, and the singing of traditional Hmong songs. On the other hand, this New Year event was also dominated by commercial, entertainment, political and informational/educational activities that appeared to be influenced by the American and Western concepts of the market economy, technology and freedom of expression. The Hmong New Year in the United States has become a festival that embraces two cultures, nurtured by the Hmong Diaspora and the long-time Hmong strengths of adaptability and flexibility.

### **Introduction**

This paper is divided into two parts. The first section involves an attempt to review and examine the Hmong American New Year and some of its changes and adaptations, with an emphasis on the Hmong adoption of American market concepts and technology, as well as the Hmong adaptation of the New Year to the general physical and social environment of the United States. The Hmong New Year occurs within the context of the Hmong Diaspora, which requires adaptability and flexibility among Hmong to survive in any environment.

The Hmong Diaspora experience includes, but is not limited to:

- having been forced to disperse to many foreign countries

- the maintenance of a collective memory about their homeland and ethnic consciousness
- the experiencing of a difficult relationship with host societies
- adapting to and a tolerance for pluralism
- community efforts to continuing to resist oppression (Yang, K., 2003: 294).

This paper, however, does not attempt to comprehensively document and interpret Hmong New Year rituals and their meanings, or the ramifications of these changes on Hmong American identity reconstruction.

The second part of the paper is the presentation of photos from the 2005-06 Fresno Hmong American New Year with the goal of visually highlighting some aspects of this festival's activities that are influenced by American culture and the large young Hmong population and their heritage. Some photos were selected from costumes of Hmong American women from the 1980s to the present. Hmong women choose to continue wearing Hmong costumes to the Hmong New Year celebration and their costumes have been gradually changing since the 1980s to the present time. The trend and patterns of changes in Hmong women's costumes reflect socio-economic change among Hmong-Americans and adaptation to life in the United States. However, changes in the New Year costumes among Hmong men do not appear to represent a similar pattern associated with their broader adaptation to the United States. For example, since the 1980s, Hmong men have been observed to mostly wear western suits to the Hmong New Year. This has been the case, except among a small proportion of young men, who dress in more traditional Hmong male costumes, which have not significantly changed over the years. This paper also includes a few photos that depict Hmong male costumes.

It is the hope of this author that this paper will encourage additional analyses of the Hmong American New Year, its cultural changes and adaptation, as well as its meaning and influence on the Hmong American identity. To this end, the paper with its limited scope does not attempt to exhaustively interpret the many changes and elements added to the Hmong American New Year. This paper is based on observations, the available literature and personal communication with key members of the Hmong American community.

### **The New Year Celebration of the Hmong of Laos**

Because the main focus of this paper is on the Hmong American New Year and its changes over the years, the following description of the Hmong New Year in Laos is only intended to be provided as background information; it is very brief, general and does not include the discussion of different New Year traditions among the many Hmong sub-clans, details of New Year rituals and activities, and the meanings of each activity.

The Hmong American New Year is built upon the annual New Year of the Hmong of Laos, which is their only major annual public celebration of the year. Yang Dao (1992:300) described the annual Hmong New Year in Laos as follows:

While the marriage and funeral are important events in maintaining the Hmong social bonds, it is the New Year that is the most exciting and colorful tradition. It is an annual reminder of Hmong cultural identity. With people gathering from all over, it serves to strengthen social ties, allows new ones to be forged, and provides widespread sharing of information about how best to survive and prosper in the mainstream. It also serves as a bridge between the past and the future.

The Hmong of Laos hold their New Year at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the first lunar calendar months. Each village, however, may celebrate during a different date or month to accommodate the situation of the village. Some of the situations that may affect the date that the event is typically held have historically included harvesting demands, deaths in the village, war or illness. As a result of these accommodations, some villages may celebrate earlier and others might delay until a later

month. Over all, the New Year celebration of the Hmong of Laos can fall between the months of November and January. The Hmong in Yunnan Province, China, however, hold their New Year celebration exactly at the end of the twelfth and at the beginning of the first lunar calendar months. To be precise, they celebrate their New Year on the same dates as the Han Chinese New Year or Vietnamese Tet. The Hmong/Miao in Guizhou and Hunan, on the other hand, celebrate their New Year in November and they call the Chinese New Year, “Han New Year.”<sup>2</sup> Although most of the New Year activities are very uniquely Hmong, some traditions of the Hmong New Year in Laos are similar to those of the Han Chinese and Vietnamese, such as refraining from speaking derogatorily, serving the best food and dressing in the best clothes during the first three days of the New Year (Ranard, 2004).

The origin of the Hmong New Year is as mysterious as the history of the Hmong. No one seems to know the exact origins of this tradition and why it has many traditions that are similar and also different from that of other ethnic groups. It is commonly believed that the Hmong<sup>3</sup> possess a history of 5000 years (Shi, 2004), so their New Year’s history may be just as old. These mysteries might have developed from the lack of recorded history and documents. “Why are we undocumented?” asked Mai Neng Moua (2002:6). No one seems to have the answer to this question, but speculation can be made that the Hmong experience of statelessness, being oppressed and the circumstances of the Diaspora might have been some of the factors. Additionally, a lack of recorded history is common among people of ethnic and minority backgrounds. In fact, Hmong ethnic identity has only been recognized in Southeast Asia over the last three decades; in the early 1970s in Laos, in Vietnam in 1975, and in Thailand during the post 1975 influx of Hmong refugees from Laos to that country (Lemoine, 2005:1).

The Hmong New Year in Laos is divided into three main events: the New Year's feast, the ritual ceremony of the transition from the old to the new year, and the celebration (Yang, K, 2003). These three events are briefly described as follows:

**The Feasting or Noj Tsiab** usually takes place before the end of the twelfth lunar calendar month, when the harvest is finished and foods are abundant. Each family takes turns to invite relatives and friends to the feasting. The family slaughters its New Year's pig or "npua tsiab" for the feasting. It is not only a time to enjoy the feast, but to visit with relatives, friends and loved ones to renew ties and social bonds. The feasting is also a time to offer food to ancestors and the spirits of the earth and sky to remember the ancestors and to express appreciation to the spirits for protecting the family throughout the year. The feast is also a time to reflect upon the passing year and prepare for the coming year.

**Lwm Sub - The Ritual Ceremony of the Transition from the Old Year to the New Year** is held on the afternoon of the last day of the old year. The ceremony begins with the Lwm Sub or chasing the bad omen away with the old year and welcoming the new year along with prosperity, good health, harmony, and longevity. The Lwm Sub takes place outside the house under a rope hanging from a torn tree. Extended family members circle the tree four times to symbolize the sending of the old year away with all bad omens, and then reversing the circle three times to welcome the New Year.<sup>4</sup> Usually, the oldest male of the extended family stands in the middle, besides the tree, holding a rooster to preside over and perform the ceremony. After the ceremony, the tree is taken away and family members return home to begin the soul calling ceremony and prepare for the New Year's dinner. All daily agricultural activities and work must be stopped from this point on. Before dinner, the ceremony of offering foods to the ancestors is made. This tradition, however, varies from family to family or from sub-clan to sub-clan; some sub-clans offer foods only in the morning of the first day of the New Year. Others do so at both the New Year's dinner and the breakfast of the first day of the New Year. Before going to bed, each

family member washes him or herself and parents make sure their children bathe to wash away bad luck and sickness and make themselves clean for the coming year. Elders will stay up for the night to wait for the New Year. When the roosters crow for the first time, young wives and their husbands go to the river to take the water of the New Year. “The youngsters rush to the oldest grandparents to wish them good health and longevity and, in return, to receive the blessings for success and happiness in the New Year” (Yang Dao, 1992:301).

**The New Year Celebration** starts on the morning of the first day of the new year and may last three or more days. Festivities of the New Year’s celebration include ball tossing, song contests, Qeej performances and sporting activities, such as top playing, kicking, and bull fighting. Yang Dao (1992: 301) described part of this celebration as follows:

As soon as the sun rises, Hmong girls appear, wearing their most elaborately embroidered new outfits – baggy pants, jackets tied with colorful cloth belts, embroidered skullcaps on their heads – and seem to just come from an ancient dynasty. These young people leave their family homes and make their way toward the common area of the village. The girls line up facing a row of boys, and begin to throw cloth balls back and forth, along with verses of complex extemporaneous courtship songs. Many visitors from other villages have come to join the pov pob [ball tossing] ritual, and the possibility of meeting one’s future husband or wife heightens the excitement.

Hmong girls and boys are strictly prohibited from talking or even meeting each other in public, so the ball tossing ritual is the only opportunity in which they can dress in their best outfits to meet, talk, sing songs and throw balls in public. Although the above mentioned activities are allowed, showing signs of love and affection, such as holding hands and kissing and hugging in public are not. Although ball tossing among Hmong youth is a common New Year activity among the Hmong of Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, this tradition is not practiced among the Hmong in China. Moreover, there appear to be no oral stories or historical accounts of the origins of ball tossing and why this tradition is only practiced by the Hmong in Southeast Asia. As a result, the history of ball tossing is, like

other Hmong New Year activities, unknown. Because the Hmong in China do not have this tradition, speculation can be made that the ball tossing tradition may have been added to the Hmong New Year activities after they left China to Thailand, Vietnam and Laos more than 200 years ago.

### **Hmong American New Year**

The first wave of Hmong refugees, who arrived in the United States in 1975, celebrated their first Hmong American New Year in December 1975. Since then, the Hmong American community has continuously celebrated their New Year in the United States, and their New Year, like the Hmong themselves, has gradually evolved and adapted. After three decades, the Hmong American New Year has changed and developed into a unique festival. The 2005-06 Fresno Hmong American New Year celebration in Fresno represents the New Year festivities of many large Hmong American communities throughout the country. The Fresno festival included many aspects of the traditional Hmong New Year in Laos and many activities that display the influences of American culture, technology and a market economy.

The 2005-06 Fresno Hmong New Year appeared to also be influenced by the very young demographic structure of the Hmong American population and the preferences of Hmong-American community leaders. The U.S. 2000 Census revealed that the median age of Hmong Americans was 16.1-years-old compared with 35.3-years-old for the entire population of the United States (Pfeifer and Lee, 2004). The majority of Hmong Americans today are under the age of 20; they play a major role in shaping Hmong American festivities and, in general, Hmong American life. The Hmong American community leadership has also evolved and developed throughout the last three decades. By the early 1990s, Hmong American leaders had developed into three major types. Olney (1993), who studied Hmong American leadership up to this period, identified these three types as (1) the older, traditional leaders; (2) the middle-aged, “middle-of-the-road” leaders; and (3) the younger, modernized leaders. Those who organized the 2005-06 Fresno Hmong American New Year appeared to be from the older-traditional leader

group, though the struggle between this group and the middle-aged, “middle-of-the-road” leaders had been known to exist previously.

In the early 1990s, disputes occurred between the Fresno Lao Family Community Board of Directors and its Executive Director, Anthony Vang. Members of the Board at the time were the older-traditional leaders, and Anthony Vang, was one of the middle aged, “middle of the road” leaders (Calkins, 1991). Vang left Lao Family to found the Fresno Center for New Americans, which is now the largest Hmong Mutual Assistance Association in Fresno. The fight between the older leaders and the middle aged leaders continued into the mid-1990s, and the Hmong New Year became the center of those conflicts. For example, a group of more than 60 people protested the Hmong National Council which was in charge of the New Year (Pulaski, 1994). The Board of the Hmong National Council was, at the time, led by the middle-aged, middle-of-the-road leaders. The fight continued, and as a result, the older-traditional leaders formed the Hmong International Council, which, later, organized its own New Year. Consequently, there were two Hmong New Years in Fresno during the 1990s (Bruner, 1996). Bruner listed finances, leadership issues and jealousies as factors causing this dispute. As the middle and younger leaders became more preoccupied with other leadership roles and their day jobs by the end of the 1990s, the organization of the Fresno Hmong New Year primarily returned to the older-traditional leaders. Although the leadership of the 2005-06 Fresno New Year appeared to rest in the domain of the older leaders, the other two types of leaders did still participate and take advantage of the event. For example, the middle-aged leaders came to the New Year to meet friends and do business. Some of the younger leaders also came to the New Year to advertise their businesses and political campaigns. An example of a younger leader present at the 2005-06 New Year involved the campaign of Blong Xiong for a seat on the City Council of Fresno. It appears that, after 30 years in the United States, the leadership of the Hmong American community is shifting toward a multi-generational system, which is the basic foundation of democracy.

The author has observed the development of the Hmong American New Year since the late 1970s and over this time identified several trends that appear to be characteristics of the 2005-06 Fresno Hmong New Year and those of other communities. These trends are listed and briefly discussed below:



**A Dividing of the Hmong New Year Festivities into Private and Public Celebrations has become a new tradition in the United States.** The private family New Year rituals take place at home at the end of the twelfth and first lunar calendar months for non-Christian Hmong. This includes the feasting, lwm sub and food offering to the ancestors. According to Pastor Cher Teng Vang<sup>5</sup>, Christian Hmong may hold private feasts at home with Christian songs and blessings. Some churches also hold New Year feasts for members and their friends<sup>6</sup>. Church events usually take place during the weekend, and not on the exact day of the first day of the lunar calendar. Some extended families, and clans, including Christian clan members, hold their New Year's feast at a hotel or restaurant. For example, the Yangs in Sacramento held their 2005-06 New Year Feast at the Holiday Banquet in November 2005 and the Vues held theirs on the following day at the same restaurant. These celebrations and rituals are mostly held in private, so participants are mostly family members. In general, Christian Hmong do not participate in the ceremony of Lwm Sub and food offerings to the ancestors and spirits. The public celebration is the community event that is known to everyone as the Hmong New Year celebration, which includes the ball tossing and commercial, informational/educational and political activities. Both Non-Christian and Christian Hmong attend the public celebration, which is held a month before or after the private celebration, depending on the availability of the location.

**The dates of the Hmong American Public New Year Celebration are strongly influenced by American holidays and the size and location of the local Hmong American community.** Larger Hmong communities tend to set their New Year celebrations around American holidays. For example, the Hmong in Fresno, the second largest community in the country, hold their New Year celebration between Christmas and the American New Year to maximize the participation of Hmong from all over the country. The Fresno Hmong American New Year, then, forces Hmong from other communities in California to not hold their New Year during the Christmas holidays, so they can attend the very large Fresno Hmong New Year. Consequently, the Hmong in Chico hold their New Year in October, those who live in Stockton hold theirs in the middle of November, the Sacramento Hmong hold theirs over the Thanksgiving holiday,

and those in Merced, the middle of December. This arrangement provides the Hmong Americans in central California with three major advantages. First, it allows for Hmong to use American holidays to celebrate the Hmong New Year. Secondly, the arrangement makes it possible for maximum participation at all events. It provides an opportunity for smaller communities to attend the New Years of the larger communities, such as those in Fresno, and vice versa. These arrangements allow the New Year to continue to be an event that a large number of Hmong can attend and renew their Hmong identity with the hope of preserving the best of their cultural heritage.

**Whether to Hold an Indoor or Outdoor Celebration is determined by the climate/weather.** The Hmong in California tend to hold their New Year celebrations outdoors, such as at public parks and county fairgrounds because of the warm weather and the absence of snow. The Hmong communities in colder climates tend to hold their New Year celebrations indoors. For example, the Hmong in the Twin Cities of Minnesota hold their New Year celebrations indoors, in the Metrodome in Minneapolis and the River Centre in St. Paul.

**Commercial, Informational/Educational and Political Activities are concentrated at Hmong American new year events that attract large numbers of participants.** Examples of these events are the Hmong American New Years in Fresno, Sacramento, and the Twin Cities. During the 2005-06 Hmong New Year in Fresno, this author found commercial booths ranging from Hmong herbal medicines to Hmong vegetables, from car sale exhibitions to clothes, from video/audio services to photography, from roller coaster to train rides, and food ranging from ice cream to donuts, and from fried chicken to noodle soup. Foods at the Fresno Hmong New Year also represent Hmong adaptation to the multicultural America. This author found tacos, curios, Thai and Chinese foods, papaya salad, Lao khao poun, Hmong smoked pork, sausage, and sticky rice. The information/educational booths varied from those sponsored by the Mormon Church to financial lending services, from health care to life insurance and from Hmong student clubs to university student recruitment. As noted above, the Blong Xiong campaign for the District One seat in the Fresno City Council also had a booth at the Fresno Hmong New Year celebration. The candidate was in front of his

campaign's booth to introduce himself and greet new year participants. Not far away was the platform built for the New Year opening ceremony. On the platform were former Major General Vang Pao, a dozen former Hmong military officers and invited guests from the local government. Surrounding the platform were hundreds of people who stood to listen to speaker after speaker. Most of the participants of the New Year were either attending other activities, such as ball tossing, shopping, eating or talking, or taking pictures with family members and friends. Far away from the platform were a half dozen middle-aged Hmong men and women with some of their children taking turns taking pictures of each other. One of these individuals was a dentist and others were also well known Hmong American professionals in the Central Valley. They represented middle-aged, middle-of-the-road leaders. They came to the New Year, mostly to find their friends and loved ones and to renew social bonds. It was interesting to see the older leaders speak at the platform, the middle-aged leaders were looking for friends and relatives, and the younger leaders campaigned for political office in the alley. Each one of these groups seemed to have different leadership functions and roles.

In contrast with the Fresno Hmong New Year, most Hmong American conferences and educational achievement celebrations have speakers from the middle-aged and younger leader groups. The fact that the older leaders lead the New Year and the well educated and younger leaders lead the conferences and other functions, in addition to the evidence that all three types of leaders attended the New Year indicates a move toward diversity in leadership. Consequently, this development might serve to nurture the development of a more democratic leadership system. This development is within the arguments of Lt. Col. Tou T. Yang, one of the first young military officers to reach such a rank, who has stated, "Without controversy and debate, there is no generation of ideas and thus there is no progress. On the other hand, a division without an acceptable compromise can cause the destruction of a community" (Yang, K. 2005: 251).

**Costumes of Hmong Youth vary from year to year.** During the early years, Hmong youth dressed in costumes brought from Thailand and Laos or similar to those of the Hmong in Laos. In the 1980s, their most popular costumes came from China (Yang, K., 2005), and in the 1990s their most popular costumes came from other Asian ethnic

groups, such as the Puyi in China, while those after 2000 were a combination of many of the above, and their own creativity. The presentation below of photos taken from the New Year reveal some of these costumes, especially among Hmong women. The changes in Hmong women's costumes reflect their creativity, freedom of expression, adaptation to life in the United States along with the availability of additional resources, and increased new knowledge about the Hmong and other ethnic groups in Asia. This development also falls within the context of the Diaspora; these Hmong-Americans continue to have a tie with the ancestral homeland, while trying to adapt to the new country. Lynch, Detzner, and Eicher (1995 and 1996) have explored some of the symbolic dimensions of Hmong-American female New Year costumes in earlier work.

**The Participants of the Public New Year of 2005-06 tended to come from the older and younger generation.** Very few Hmong American professionals attended the event. Those who were invited to sit on the stage and make speeches tended to be other than the highly educated Hmong professionals, which appeared to be opposite of Hmong National and Women Conferences, which primarily draw participants and speakers from among the younger and highly educated Hmong.

**The Ball Tossing is no longer an activity only for the young.** Although some Hmong youth continue to take part in such activities, about half of those who engaged in ball tossing during the 2005-06 Hmong New Year in Fresno were the middle-aged and included many widowers and divorcees.

**The Admission Fee or Admission Free is determined by the size of the Hmong community and leaders of the event.** Smaller Hmong communities tend to hold their New Year in public parks and members of the community tend to pay for the event, so the admission is generally free of charge. On the other hand, the 2005-06 Fresno Hmong New Year charged an admission fee of three dollars per person and a parking fee ranging from five to seven dollars.

**Cultural Norms and Behavior of attending Youth tend to change over the years.** Unlike the Hmong youth in Laos, Hmong American youth who came to the Hmong Fresno New Year felt very free to hold hands, and kiss and hug in public. Moreover, no one seemed to mind and make an issue out of this public display of affection. These behaviors indicate the participants' level of adaptation to Western

culture. Time appears to be of the essence here; the longer the Hmong have been in the United States, the more they are comfortable with Western culture and behavior, including the showing of affection, sexual expression and other intimate relationships. On the other hand, it is also an indication that some aspects of Hmong traditional norms and values are gradually fading away.

The photos below illustrate some of the activities of the 2005-06 Fresno Hmong New Year. Some of these reflect the overall Hmong adaptation of life in the United States. Others reflect the Hmong experience with the Diaspora. Over all, the Hmong American New Year highlights the Hmong sense of adaptability as Hmong-Americans preserve some of their heritage while learning and borrowing from others. Above all, the New Year is a time for Hmong to reflect upon the past and prepare for the future.

Costumes of Hmong men at the Hmong American New Year (from 1990s to the present)



Left: popular male costumes of the early 1990s. Right: Hmong male costumes in 2003. No pattern of change is observable. Both of these two men wear male costumes that are similar to those of the Hmong in Xieng Khouang province in the 1970s.



Left: A Hmong man in a western suit (1982). Right: One man with a Hmong vest, the other wears a western suit. There is a noticeable change in how they wear western suits.

Costumes Hmong youth clothing worn to the New Year ball tossing from 1980s to present.



Three very popular costumes of the late 1970s and early 1980s belong to the Hmong in Xieng Khouang, Luang Prabang and Sam Neua as shown in these three photos (Left to right).





1980: The woman's head piece has already been modified.



1991: This head piece evolved from Hmong Sam Neua and the necklace is from Hmong Xieng Khouang.



Hmong Chinese costumes  
were very popular at New  
Years in the 1990s.







Head piece, necklace, pony tail, shirt and cell phone – all come from different times and parts of the globe. New trends....



Left: Another sample of costumes from many ethnic groups: note that the necklace and earring are not typically Hmong.

Right: The costumes of this non-Hmong woman are those worn by the Hmong in Xieng Khouang, without major modifications.



2002: Examples of Borrowings from other ethnic groups.



Post 2000: This photo is an example of creativity and the combination of costumes from the Hmong of different areas of northern Laos.

Below are photos of cultural, commercial and other activities from the 2005-06 Hmong Fresno New Year.



Admission Charge





Here they come – old and young.



Into the Fairgrounds.



Keeping the old tradition – the Ball Tossing of the young. Most women wear Hmong costumes, but very few men wear them.



Creating new traditions – The ball tossing of the middle-aged.



Checking out the shops.



Hmong female clothes on sale.

No men's clothes on display .







The Video Corner.



Herbal medicine area.



The food section.



Toyota Corporation came to the Hmong New Year as well.





The University Recruitment Alley.



The booth of the Hmong Student Inter-Collegiate Coalition.





Blong Xiong, Candidate for the District One seat of the Fresno City Council, stands in front of his campaign booth to greet New Year's attendees. Behind him is the map of Fresno City, showing the district he wanted to represent.



New traditions - The rides have just begun...



Behind grandma's back.



Behind no one's back.





Privacy: Koj thiab Kuv - Toi et Moi.



The future begins today.



Technology is a girls' best friend.







Born in America.



Multi-cultural Food Preferences: Hmong children love nachos, too

## Conclusion

This paper and the accompanying photo essay attempt to present some aspects of the changes Hmong Americans have made to their New Year, focusing on a few trends and patterns, such as the dates, places, public forms of celebration and the female New Year costumes. Over all, this article has provided a general overview of the patterns of changes and accommodations Hmong Americans have made to their New Year. It is hoped that the trends noted here will stimulate additional, more detailed research into issues including the implications of changes in the Hmong New Year for Hmong-American identity reconstruction and elements of transnationalism within the Hmong diaspora.

The author also would like to note that culture is not static; it changes, evolves and adapts over time and responds to new socio-economic, technological and political environments. The changes and accommodations the Hmong incorporate into their Hmong American New Year are part of their continuing acculturation and adaptation. Adaptation is not new to the Hmong. For example, more than 200 years ago, to adjust and adapt to Southeast Asia, Hmong immigrants gave up many of their New Year traditions and adopted or created others to accommodate to their surrounding socio-economic environment. They replaced chopsticks with spoons during the New Year's feast, while also adding ball tossing. This adaptability continues into the United States, except that the change here is faster and more dramatic as well as more apparent and visible. The American culture, technology, economy and political system are more powerful and influential than any the Hmong have previously interfaced with. Moreover, Hmong Americans are no longer a people of remote isolation, so more changes are likely. Marginality might be a more appropriate term to describe the status of Hmong Americans. They are between two cultures.

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<sup>2</sup>. According to Zhang Xiao, a Professor of Guizhou University and Researcher of the Cultural Institute of the Guizhou Social Science Academy (Personal Communication, 2 November 2006).

<sup>3</sup>. It is commonly believed in China that the Hmong is a sub-group of the Miao, a broad term that includes several sub-groups, such as Hmu, Qoshiong, Hmong and Ah Mhao.

<sup>4</sup> The number of times circling around the three varies from family to family. According to Yong Va Yang and Lou Vang (Personal Communication, October 24, 2006), some families circle four times to send the old year a way, and other circle seven times. To welcome the new year, some families circle three times and others circle seven times, depending upon family traditions.

<sup>5</sup> Cher Teng Vang is the Pastor of Modesto Hmong Church, which belongs to the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination (Personal Communication, October 24, 2006)

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that there is diversity within the Hmong Christian community. Hmong are now members of many Christian dominations, including the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, Jehovah Witness, Nab Ntsaab, the Mormons as well as Catholics and others.