

comprehensive and widely distributed publication on change and continuity in Iu Mien metaphysical ideas and ritual practices in urban North America; the other (in light of Moore-Howard's comments on the overall success of the Iu Mien's adaptation to the Californian milieu) is a comparative study of the adaptive abilities of Iu Mien, Hmong, and Lowland Lao in urban North America.

The author probably never intended her book to be reviewed in a scholarly journal of this nature. I hope, nonetheless, that I have presented sufficient material to suggest its academic importance. Its practical value is surely self-evident.

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MUNDAHL, JOHN, DAVE MOORE, and YEE CHANG, Coordinators. *A Free People: Our Stories, Our Voices, Our Dreams*. Minneapolis: Hmong Cultural Awareness Project, 1994. 143 pages. Map, figs., photographic plates. Soft cover n.p.; ISBN 0-9641869-0-X.

"It's pretty easy being a Hmong kid in America because I think life's easier here than in Thailand or Laos" (125). "For me it's pretty easy being a Hmong kid in America because I don't feel different from other people or cultures. I get pretty equally treated by other people" (125). "I think being a Hmong kid in America is good. Sometimes it can be bad, too" (125). "It's hard living in America as a Hmong boy" (126). "Growing up in urban America is very hard, especially for Hmong youth" (130). "It is difficult to be a Hmong kid in America because I'm caught between two cultures.... Two things I hate about America are that you have to follow their dumb laws, and people in America don't like us because we're Hmong.... I think we shouldn't be in this stupid country" (125).

It seems the feelings of Hmong youth in their adopted (or, for some, native) land run from love to hatred and just about everything in between!

The Hmong diaspora in the United States has generated a considerable scholarly and popular literature, most of it the work of non-Hmong writers. The importance of the small book reviewed here lies precisely in the fact that it is almost exclusively the work of the Hmong themselves. Moreover, it also represents, in the words of the book's subtitle, the "stories, voices and dreams" of a crucially important Hmong generation, the first to be schooled in the American public education system. In the final analysis, whether this culture, nurtured in the mountains of southwest China and northern Southeast Asia, can survive in such an alien (and often alienating) world as that of urban North America will depend on whether or not these young men and women will cherish their "Hmongness," while yet succeeding in the American cultural melting pot.

*A Free People* is a popular work inspired by Dave Moore, a former public school teacher and leader of a Hmong boy scout troop in Minneapolis (there are now some 20,000 Hmong in Minnesota). This nicely-illustrated book (with many photographs of Hmong, their festivals and their handiwork in Southeast Asia and in America) has been published primarily for the benefit of young Hmong themselves. But it is for this very reason that I recommend it to scholars of Hmong society, culture, and folklore, as well as to all who are concerned for Southeast Asian highland peoples in the modern world. It is a fascinating view from inside

the culture, as its youth, either uprooted from Southeast Asia (Hmong villages in Laos and refugee camps in Thailand) or born in the United States of uprooted parents, struggle with what it means to be Hmong and to be American.

The book tackles three major aspects of the Hmong experience: the traditional world of the Hmong in Southeast Asia; the interruption of this world by war and subsequent incarceration in the sociocultural limbo of Thai refugee camps; and, finally, the extraordinary new social and cultural experience of life in America.

The first part of the work, "Hmong Culture" (chs. 1–10), containing brief accounts of Hmong history, religion, language, music, ceremonies, etc. and selections of Hmong folklore, is unlikely to provide the specialist with anything new, though the fact that these writings are by the Hmong themselves must surely be of interest. Included in this section is a short but fascinating account (35–38) of a young American Hmong's first visit to a Hmong village in the hills of north Thailand, where he attended the funeral of an important elder.

There was a feeling I could not immediately describe as I looked around and saw how isolated the village was from the world I knew, the world of four-lane highways, electricity, and fast-food restaurants.... Streets did not exist in the way we know them in the U.S.... There were no telephone or light poles. Houses were simple, built of trees from the nearby forest without blueprints or nails.

But then, following the "culture shock," the realization that

there was something warm, comforting, and rich about the way in which these people lived and died, and I will never forget that. They lived independently from the rest of society. They were self-sufficient. There was no outside law dictating the limits of their way of life. They were free to celebrate the passing of a great man in the way their culture had taught them.

Though the "independence" and "self-sufficiency," even for an isolated upland village in north Thailand, are romanticized, the implicit contrast with Hmong society in North America is noteworthy.

Part 2, "War and Exodus," retraces an already well-known period of modern Hmong history, but, again, it possesses the immediacy of the participants' own, in this case very American-English, words. For example, one boy describes life in the infamous Ban Vinai refugee camp:

I just play around. Hang out. My mom sells stuff, sells vegetables. So I just hang around the market. Just play all day. Just roam around. It's a pretty big place, so there's always new things to see. Just look for stuff....

There was a lot of sickness. A lot of death, too....

The cemetery was spooky because people were buried there all the time. Sometimes I got really scared just walking near the place....

A lot of bad things happen in the camp...robbery, beating, and murder. When there are so many people together, a lot of things can happen.... I guess there were all kinds of illegal things going on.

The Thai guards...control everything, and get mad whenever they want. They order people around and people do what they say because they have guns. If somebody got into trouble with the guards, they have to have money to pay them, or be taken away.

The place really is a prison. (96–99)

And then follows what, to this reviewer's mind, is the most telling observation of all:

Even in America people still have the sense that they are still in a camp. The old folks have it the most. In this country, because of the language barrier, because of the different culture, they feel they are locked in and have no way out.

For himself, the youthful informant concludes, "In America, I have to learn how to get out of the camp psychology."

Part 3, "Life in America" (the source of the extracts with which I began this review), is doubtless the most interesting from the specialist's viewpoint. It includes, besides many vivid words by Hmong youth themselves, a perceptive essay, "Caught between Cultures," by the principal coordinator for this volume, Dave Moore, who remarks, among other things, that

the [Hmong] elders do not always understand the inherent contradiction between the American student-life with its demands on a person's time and energy, and the "good Hmong" life-style with its [own special] demands. The result is that the Hmong youth constantly finds himself in situations in which he has to decide whether to respond as a Hmong or as an American. (122)

Insofar as this insightful little book helps young Hmong face this dilemma with patience and sympathy, rather than with haste and anger, it will surely have fulfilled its manifest function. But it is for its latent function—its provision of a vivid glimpse into the lives of the youth of an uprooted Southeast Asian mountain people—that I recommend *A Free People* to the readers of this scholarly journal.

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#### THAILAND

GESICK, LORRAINE M. *In the Land of Lady White Blood: Southern Thailand and the Meaning of History*. Studies on Southeast Asia 18. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995. viii + 98 pages. Maps, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. Paper US\$12.00; ISBN 0-87727-717-6.

"This book is an attempt to uncover, through the examination of a group of manuscripts and the communities that preserved them, the historical sensibility of rural southern Thailand from the seventeenth century to the present," says Gesick, who calls this attempt "ethnographic history" (1).

In order to make clear what this "historical sensibility" is, Gesick examines two kinds of texts found among these manuscripts. In chapter 3 she turns her attention to the text of an official decree (*tamra*) by the king of Ayutthaya in 1698 to the Pa Kaeo monks of Bang Kaeo in Phatthalung. According to Gesick, the *tamra* were regarded as receptacles of the king's voice, and thus as something sacred. The *tamra* of 1698 emerges as an extremely complex document, for within it is the 1610 *tamra* of the former king, within which is another text (a letter by Phra Phanarat), within which are *tamra* of even earlier kings, within which are