

2004, Vol. 1, June

THE MONG AND THE HMONG

Paoze Thao, Ph.D. and Chimeng Yang, M.Ed.

(Rev. 8-31-2025)

The Mong came to the United States (U.S.) since 1975. Today, they live in almost every state in the U.S. and people still do not know who they are. Due to the lack of written information about the Mong, people always refer to them as Hmong. For this reason, this article is written to provide information, educate the public, discuss the rationale why they came to the United States, and clarify the misunderstanding and misconception about the Mong and the Hmong. In addition, this article is intended to inform and help the general public to know about the misinformation, miseducation, misrepresentation of the Mong and the consequences they face in the U.S. followed by suggestions for inclusion. The authors will shed light on the Mong and the Hmong, so that the Mong themselves, the general public, and service providers will have a true picture of the Mong people.

Mong Journal, Vol. 1, June 2004

It is estimated that over 80,000 Mong and Hmong refugees have arrived in the United States since 1975 as a direct consequence of the U.S. Secret War in Laos, which was a part of the Vietnam War. The influx was due to the United States withdrawing troops from Southeast Asia and the fall of the former Cambodian, Laotian, and Southern Vietnamese governments to the Communists in 1975 (Thao, 1999a). Since then, the Mong and the Hmong populations have doubled to 186,310 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Currently, the general public does not know the difference between the Mong and the Hmong people. Consequently, the Mong are lumped into the Hmong. This article is intended to provide information on the Mong and the Hmong and the rationale why they are in the United States today, to clarify the misunderstanding and misconception about the Mong and the Hmong, and to educate the general public about the misinformation, miseducation, misrepresentation of the Mong and the consequences they face in the United States followed by suggestions for inclusion and a conclusion. The authors will shed some light on the Mong and the Hmong, so that the Mong themselves, the general public and service providers will have a true picture of the Mong people.

The Mong and the Hmong are closely-knit ethnic people from Laos. They migrated from China, where they originated, in the eighteenth century and settled in Southeast Asia. Those in Laos assisted France during its colonial rule from 1893 to 1945 and the United States in its Secret War against the Communists during the Vietnam War between 1960 and 1975. Because of their constant massive migration from place to place and from country to country, the Mong and the Hmong have experienced a series of formative episodes: with the Chinese, with French

Colonialism, with the Vietnam conflict, and with the refugee camps in Thailand during their transition to resettlement in the United States and other western countries.

THE RATIONALE WHY THE MONG AND THE HMONG CAME TO THE U.S.

When the United States became involved in the Vietnam War, there was a lot of resistance against the Communists from the South Vietnamese's and the United States' troops. Because the United States' and the South Vietnamese's troops were deployed along the seventeenth parallel, it was difficult for the Communists to transport their troops, food, and ammunition to support their ground fighting squads in South Vietnam. For this reason, the Communists cut a new route to South Vietnam known as the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" zigzagging through Laos where the Mong and the Hmong lived. By sending troops and supplies to South Vietnam through the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, the Communists breached the Geneva Accords of 1962. It should be noted that the Communist North Vietnam and the U.S. were among the twelve countries that signed the Geneva Accords of 1962 to guarantee the neutrality of Laos. Therefore, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) approached General Vang Pao to form a special force known as the "U.S. Secret Army in Laos" to perform two missions. General Vang Pao was one of the few high-ranking Hmong military officers in the Lao Royal Army at that time.

General Vang Pao specified the two-fold missions of the U.S. Secret War in Laos during a keynote address in a New Year Celebration on November 29, 1980 in Des Moines, Iowa. The first mission was to strategically penetrate the Communist force to reduce their troops, ammunition, and food supply line along the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail. The second mission was to provide general and special rescue missions to downed American pilots. General P. Vang also confirmed the same information to one of the authors during a trip to Hamilton, Indiana to attend Edgar Pop Buell's funeral (personal communication, January 5-6, 1981).

When U.S. planes were shot down during bombing raids of North Vietnam, the pilots could either attempt to go east to the Gulf of Tonkin where they could be picked up by the U.S. Forces or they could fly west as far as possible to be rescued by the Mong and the Hmong commando units. Sometimes, the Mong and the Hmong sacrificed many lives just to save one downed American pilot. Each soldier of the U.S. Secret Army was paid two to three dollars a month for these dangerous missions. The American allies were treated with respect, dignity, and hospitality in the Mong and the Hmong homes. Even though the Mong and the Hmong were poor in terms of money, but they were rich in their accommodation, respect, and human dignity. As farmers, the Mong and the Hmong were self-sufficient because of their agricultural economy.

The U.S. intervention in Laos resulted in large-scale air operations over Northern Laos, especially in the province of Xieng Khouang, the home of thousands of the Mong and the Hmong. Branfman (1972) reported that over 25,000 missions were flown against the Plains of Jars ("*Plaines des Jarres*") from May 1964 through September 1969. Over 75,000 tons of bombs were dropped and over 50,000 airmen at distant bases were involved in the bombing.

Robbins (1978) asserted that the American airmen who fought this U.S. Secret War in Laos were known as "the Ravens" and that their stories during the Vietnam conflict were locked away in classified archives and would not be revealed until after the year 2000. Bruchett (1970)

reported that the tonnage of bombs dropped on Lao [Mong and Hmong] villages exceeded that dropped in any year on North Vietnam, more than on Nazi-occupied Europe in World War II.

Even though thousands of the Mong and the Hmong people were killed and wounded, and there are still remnants of enormous bomb craters at the Plains of Jars (“*Plaines des Jarres*”), the massive bombardment was kept secret from the world. If it had been publicized, the United States would have been known to breach the Geneva Accords of 1962 that guaranteed the neutrality of Laos. The province of Xieng Khouang, Laos might have been used as a testing ground for chemical warfare, first by the United States and later by the Soviet Union during their competition for the leading role in the arms race during the Cold War. After 1975, the Soviet Union used aerial attacks on the territories where the Mong and the Hmong lived, with gas rockets of different types -- yellow, green, or red -- that caused headaches, vomiting, diarrhea, dysentery, and death to people exposed to those gases. The Mong and the Hmong referred to this phenomenon as the "Yellow Rain." An editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* on June 17, 1992, noted that "Russian President Boris Yeltsin has explicitly confirmed that his Soviet predecessors were lying when they denied that the 1979 anthrax epidemic in Sverdlovsk was the result of an accident at a germ warfare installation and asks when we will learn the truth about the yellow rain reported by [the Mong and the Hmong] tribesmen in Laos" (*Wall Street Journal*, 1992, June 17). Hamilton-Merritt (1981, Aug) asserted that about 20,000 Mong and Hmong might have been exposed to poisonous gassing during the war. The United States Department of State documented over 13,000 people dead.

From 1960 to 1975, the numbers of the Mong and the Hmong casualties were enormous. Branfman (1972) estimated that ten percent or more of the population in the Northeast of Laos had either been killed or died due to war injuries that accounted for approximately 40,000 dead (p. 245). The Vietnam War was extremely detrimental to the Mong and the Hmong. Many innocent Mong and Hmong children, as young as twelve years old, were drafted and sometimes were forced to join the U.S. Secret Army in Laos to bear arms. Interestingly, there was no official record to indicate how many Mong and Hmong were killed in this fifteen-year war.

After the United States' troops withdrew from Southeast Asia, many Mong and Hmong in Laos were sent to the re-education camps (labor camps) and were persecuted for political reasons by the Communist government. Thousands of the Mong and the Hmong escaped to the jungle and found their way to Thailand to seek political asylum. In 1976, U.S. Congress recognized that the Mong and the Hmong were the U.S. Secret Army in Laos during the Vietnam War and authorized the State Department to admit their families as refugees to the United States. However, approximately 15,000–18,000 Mong and Hmong still remain in Wat Thum Krabork, Lopburi, Thailand since 1976 until 2004 when the United States government decided to bring them over to the United States.

CLARIFYING THE MISCONCEPTION ABOUT THE MONG AND THE HMONG

Since 1975, the spelling term “Hmong” has misrepresented and has overshadowed the Mong even though the ethnicity of the two groups consists of the Mong and the Hmong. The Mong and the Hmong have co-existed from time immemorial going back as far as the Mong and the Hmong could remember. There is still a dearth of literature on the Mong available to provide

information to the general public about the Mong. The following sections of this article are to provide the much-needed information to debunk the misunderstanding and misconception about the Mong and the Hmong. The misinformation, miseducation and misrepresentation as well as the consequences facing the Mong will be discussed in details, so that the Mong themselves, the general public and service providers will have a true picture of the Mong people.

In the past, the Chinese, their neighbors, and Western scholars had used several terms to refer to the Mong and the Hmong. The term '*Miao*,' loosely translated as 'barbarian,' was historically used by the Chinese (Pollard, 1909; Hudspeth, 1939; Bernatzik, 1947; Arlotto, 1972). This term is related to the Annamese word, '*Meau*' transliterating for cat. '*Mong-tse*' was also used by the Old Chinese historical work *Schudjing*, which compared the Mong and Hmong languages to the howling or cry of the hyena. Terrien explained the meaning of the Chinese character for '*Meau*,' transliterating a cat's head. When agricultural activities are involved, the term '*Meau*' in Chinese character, consists of two parts: '*Miao*' for 'plant' and the bottom part '*tse*' for 'field;' whereas '*tse*' is translated as an ethnicity. As a result, '*Meau-tse*' means the 'son of the soil, the farmers, who do not belong to the Great Nation.' Schotter referred in the Chinese Kweichow province to designate '*Meau*' as all non-Han people (Bernatzik, 1947, p. 7). The Lao and the Thai call the Mong and the Hmong by the term '*Meo*.' As a consequence, other researchers have used the spelling of '*Meo*' as called by their hosts, the Lao and the Thai (Savina, 1924; Barney & Smalley, 1953; Binney, 1968; Haudricourt, 1972). However, all the terms mentioned above have negative connotations. The Mong prefer to be called "Mong" and the Hmong prefer to be called "Hmong" referring themselves as to two classless egalitarian groups.

The Mong and the Hmong are an ethnic minority originated from China. Culturally and linguistically, they are classified into two groups. One group is the "*Mong Leng*" (*Moob Leeg*). Westerners also know the *Mong* as "Blue Mong." Another group is the "*Hmong*" (*Hmoob Dawb*). Westerners also know the *Hmong* as "White Hmong." The *Mong* always identify themselves as Mong, spelled "M-o-n-g" with the initial "M," and the *Hmong* always identify themselves as Hmong, spelled "H-m-o-n-g" with the initial "H." Moreover, the other classification of the Mong and the Hmong (e.g. Black Mong, Striped Hmong, etc.) is based on the colors of their costumes, but linguistically and culturally they all fall under the Mong and the Hmong groups. The Mong speak the Mong language, and likewise the Hmong speak the Hmong language. The Mong and the Hmong languages have co-existed at the same level for centuries. The linguistic difference between the Mong and the Hmong languages may be compared to the difference between the Lao and the Thai languages.

TRADITIONAL MONG AND HMONG COSTUMES

With respect to the difference between the costumes of the Mong and the Hmong, traditional Mong males wear loose black pants folded across the waist secured by a cloth (in ceremonial occasions, this cloth normally comes in red color) in lieu of a belt. Mong pants are very "full in length, having narrow opening for the ankles with a wide crotch falling mid-way between the calves and the ankles" (Lewis & Lewis, 1984, p. 114). The front of the Mong shirt covers all the way to the side with buttons. The back of the Mong shirt has a cloth with embroidery, called "*lub laug*" in Mong. The length of the shirt leaves a bare midriff.

In contrast, Hmong pants are less full than the Mong's with a higher crotch closer to the thigh. The front of the Hmong shirt has buttons straight from the neck to the waist. The length of the Hmong shirt covers to the waist, but does not have a cloth with embroidery on the back compared to the Mong. Traditional Mong and Hmong males wear their costumes with decorated silver necklaces and moneybags (*naabnyaj*) ornamented with silver coins.

Compared to their male counterparts, Mong women's attire consists of a skirt, a blouse (Thao, 2002e), and a colorful *shae* (*sev*) (similar to an apron but longer in length). The blouse of the Mong women opens at the front with beautiful handmade embroidery and appliqué strips of multiple colors to each side. In the back, it has a larger embroidery cloth connected to the collar of the shirt and left hanging with the embroidery side in the reverse position; the embroidery is not seen. Mong women wear knee-length pleated skirts of hand-woven hemp covered with different designed batik patterns drawn with beeswax and indigo dye. The bottom of the skirt is a strip of cloth bordered with bright-colored cross-stitch embroidery and appliqué of various colors in creative and unique styles. Despite the Mong women's additional familial responsibility, it normally takes a Mong woman the whole year to complete her handmade skirt. Along with the skirts, Mong women wear a colorful cloth with beautiful handmade embroidery and appliqué, called the "*shae*" (*sev*). The *shae* (*sev*) covers the skirt in the front and leggings. It is connected to two long red cloths. In addition, Mong women also cover their legs with black cloths, called "*chrong*" (*nrhoob*).

In contrast, the majority of the Hmong women wear black or blue pants and black blouses with blue strip on each side of the front. They also wear two *shae*, one in the front and one in the back, with their pants. Each *shae* connects to two long red or green nylon cloths. Some Hmong women wear blouses with stripes in black, blue or white sleeves. This is the reason why some Hmong have been called "striped Hmong" based on the colors of their costumes. There are some Hmong women who wear white skirts with *shae* covering in the front and leggings.

Both Mong and Hmong women wear their costumes with decorated silver necklaces and moneybags ornamented with silver coins and cover their heads with headpieces in many different styles.

LINGUISTIC MUTUALLY INTELLIGIBILITY AND UNINTELLIGIBILITY OF THE MONG AND THE HMONG LANGUAGES

As mentioned previously, our people have been culturally and linguistically classified into two groups. One group is the "**Mong**" (*Moob Leeg*) who always identify themselves as **Mong**, spelled "M-o-n-g" with the initial "M" and another group is the "**Hmong**" (*Hmoob Dawb*) who always identify themselves as **Hmong**, spelled "H-m-o-n-g" with the initial "H." The Mong is not a subgroup of the Hmong. Both groups have lived and have co-existed for centuries on an equal basis; other classification of the Mong and the Hmong (e.g. Black Mong, Striped Hmong, etc.) is based on the colors of their costumes; however, culturally and linguistically, they all fall under the Mong and the Hmong groups. The population of the Mong and the Hmong groups is substantially comparable in terms of numbers in the United States (Lyman, 1974; Thao, 1999a, 1999b & 2000), but in Asia the Mong are the majority.

The Mong speak, read, and write the Mong language and the Hmong speak, read, and write the Hmong language. These linguistic similarities and differences between the Mong and the Hmong languages may be compared to the linguistic similarities and differences of the Lao and the Thai languages. “Mong” was derived from the Mong word “Moob,” and “Hmong” was derived from the Hmong word “Hmoob.” These two spelling terms “Mong” and “Hmong” refer to the people as well as their languages. However, the Mong and the Hmong are from the same ethnic group. Due to the misinformation and miseducation, the Mong have been lumped into the Hmong language group which is a truly misrepresentation of the Mong language group. This misrepresentation has marginalized the Mong language.

Both groups use the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) writing system developed by missionaries in the 1950s. The Mong RPA writing system was created based on the Mong language and culture and likewise the Hmong RPA writing system was created based on the Hmong language and culture. The two RPA writing systems are *phonemic-based*. Although many consonants and vowels are the same, the Mong RPA writing system cannot write the Hmong language and the Hmong RPA writing system cannot write the Mong language.

The Mong language has 55 consonantal phonemes, consisting of 16 single consonants, 21 double consonantal blends, 14 triple consonantal blends, 4 quadruple consonantal blends, 14 monophthongs (single vowels), 4-5 diphthongs, and 8 tones; Whereas the Hmong language has 57 consonantal phonemes, consisting of 17 single consonants, 22 double consonantal blends, 13 triple consonantal blends, and 3 quadruple consonantal blends, 13 monophthongs, 5 diphthongs and 8 tones.

Figure 1. Comparison of the Consonants between the Mong and the Hmong

	Single Consonants	Double Consonantal Blend	Triple Consonantal Blend	Quadruple consonantal Blends	Total
Mong	16	21	14	4	55
Hmong	17	22	13	3	57

Table 1. Mong/Hmong Consonant Phonemes

Points of articulation / Manners of Articulation		Labial		Dental		Alveolar			Palatal		Velar		Glottal
		bi- labial	labio- lateral release	labio- dental	apico dental	apico alveol- ar lateral	apico alveolar affricate	apico post alveolar	palatal	palatal affricate release	velar	back velar	glottal
Stops	vl. un- aspirated	p	pl		t	(d)	ts		c	tx	k	q	ʔ
	vd. aspirated	ph	plh		th	(dh)	tsh	rh	ch	txh	kh	qh	
Affric- ates	vl. un- aspirat- ed					dl**		r					
	vd. aspirated					dlh**							
	vd* pre-nasal unaspirated	np	npl		nt	ndl**	nts	nr	nc	ntx	nk	nq	
	vd. pre- nasal aspirated	nph	nplh		nth	ndlh**	ntsh	nrh	nch	ntxh	nkh	nqh	
Fricat- ives	vl.			f			x		s	xy			h
	vd.			v					z				
nasal	vl.	(hm)	(hml)		(hn)					(hmv)			
	vd.	m	ml		n					ny	ng* [ŋ]		
Liquid	vl.				hl								
	vd.				l								
Glides				w***					y				

Adapted and compiled by the author.

Sources:

Ratliff, M.S. (1986). *The morphological functions of tone in white Hmong* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global.

Smalley, W. A. (1976). The problems of consonantal and tone: Hmong (Meo, Miao). In W.A. Smalley (ed). *Phonemes and orthography: Language planning in ten minority languages of Thailand*, pp. 85-123. (Pacific Linguistics Series C. No. 43). Canberra: Australian National University.

Remarks: * vl. stands for voiceless and vd. for voiced.

** Mong Literacy Volunteer, Inc. (1980, Sept 13). Minutes of meeting, Sept. 13, 1980. The big meeting adopted **phoneme spelling change" from [tl], [tlh], [ntl], [ntlh], and [ŋ] → [dl], [dlh], [ndl], [ndlh], and voted to accept [ŋ] sound, but used ng for the grapheme. Joliet, IL: Mong Literacy Volunteer, Inc.

*** Phoneme addition proposed by Rev. Xeng Pao Thao in consultation with Dr. George Linwood Barney. Original () are phonemes used only with white Hmong (Hmong). However, no official adoption has been made yet.

Figure 2. Comparison of the Vowels between the Mong and the Hmong

	Monophthongs	Diphthongs	Total
Mong	14	4-5	19
Hmong	13	5	18

Table 2. Mong/Hmong Vowel Phonemes (Adapted from Thao, 2023, p. 131)

	Front		Central		Back	
	Unrounded	Rounded	Un-rounded	Rounded	Un-rounded	Rounded
High	/i/	/w/				/u/
Middle (Nasal)	/e/ /ee/ [eŋ]		/ə/			/o/ /oo/[oŋ]
Low (Nasal)					/a/ /aa/[aŋ]	

Note: Not all the vowel phonemes are displayed in Table 2

Mong language consists of sixteen (16) vowel phonemes. See the breakdown of the 10 monophthongs and six diphthongs:

- a) Nine-Ten (9-10) monophthongs: six (6) oral monophthongs and three (3) nasal monophthongs:
- Six oral monophthongs: /i/, /e/, /w/, /u/, /o/, /a/, (/ə/ (rarely used))
 - Three (3) nasal monophthongs: /ee/[eŋ], /aa/[aŋ]*, and /oo/[oŋ] (note: used by Mong only)
- b) Six (6) diphthongs:
- Three (3) open diphthongs: /ia/**, /ua/, and /uə/ (note: ** used by Hmong and some Mong from the province of Sayabury coming from Laos only)
 - Three (3) close diphthongs: /ai/, /aw/, and /au/

Note: * Used by Mong ** Used by Hmong

In the 1950s, one of the most challenging aspects for the co-founders of the RPA system, in particular for Barney and Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*), was the tone markers. See [the link to the Chart](#). This is one of the features that distinguish Mong/Hmong from English; that is its tones. There are 8 tones in the Mong/Hmong language (See Table 3 below for more details).

Table 3. Comparison of the Tone Markers between the Mong and the Hmong

<u>RPA Symbol</u>	<u>Mong</u>	<u>Hmong</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
- b high	<i>cuab_</i> <i>tib</i>	<i>cuab</i> <i>tib</i>	trap to pile up
- j high falling	<i>cuaj</i> <i>tij</i>	<i>cuaj</i> <i>tij</i>	number nine older siblings
- v mid-rising	<i>cuav</i> <i>tiv</i>	<i>cuav</i> <i>tiv</i>	counterfeit to resist, to oppose, to opt against
-mid	<i>cua-</i> <i>ti-</i>	<i>cua-</i> <i>ti-</i>	wind near
- s mid low	<i>cuas</i> <i>tis</i>	<i>cuas</i> <i>tis</i>	father of son's wife wing, to name
- g mid low breathy	<i>cuag_</i> <i>tig</i>	<i>cuag_</i> <i>tig</i>	<i>to reach</i> to tum, to reverse, to spin around
- m low glottalized	<i>cuam</i> <i>tim</i>	<i>cuam</i> <i>tim</i>	to press together because of
- d predictable variant of /-m/	- <i>tid</i>	- <i>tid</i>	- there, over there

Though these two RPA systems are closed, they are distinctive in both the pronunciation and written forms. Due to its *phonemic-based* construction, if a passage is written in Mong, it is completely written in Mong language and can only be read in Mong. If a passage is written in Hmong, it is completely in Hmong and can only be read in Hmong. This is the reason as to why the original Mong and Hmong primers were developed in two versions, one in Mong and another in Hmong. In addition, the Bible, hymnal books, and other Christian literacy materials have been translated and have been published into two versions as well. Moreover, the Mong language writes with monosyllabic words as well as polysyllabic words; whereas the Hmong language writes with monosyllabic words.

LINGUISTIC SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

In terms of linguistic mutual intelligibility between the Mong and the Hmong, Smalley (1994) observed that their lexicons “seem to be completely different” (p. 24) and “do not seem to correspond with each other at all” (pp. 98-99). The linguistic similarities and differences between Mong and Hmong (See Tables 4, 5, and 6 respectively) may be compared to the linguistic similarities and differences between Lao and Thai (See Table 4).

Table 4
Samples of Lexical Similarities between the Mong and the Hmong

Mong	Hmong	English
Has	hais	speak
Moog	mus	go
Nam	niam	mother
Lab	liab	red or monkey
Paab	pab	help
Suavdlawg	sawv daws	everybody

Table 5
Samples of Lexical Differences between the Mong and the Hmong

Mong	Hmong	English
dlaim choj	daim pam	blanket
Ntsab	txhuv	rice
Pujnyaaj	phauj	aunt
Laug	hlob	uncle (father’s older brother)
Paamdlev	pum hub	mint

Table 6
 Samples of the Same Words with Completely Different Meaning between the Mong and the Hmong

Mong	English	Hmong	English
txav	cut	txav	move
sab	liver, high	sab	tired, exhausted
pav	talk	pav	tie
tav	complete	tav	rib
av	mirror	av	soil

Table 7
 Samples of Lexical Similarities and Differences between the Lao and the Thai

Lao	Thai	English
pai sai ?	pai nai ?	go where?
tum soom	soom tum	papaya salad
khoy	poom (male) & chanh (female)	I (first person)
hak	rak	love
vao	pood	speak

Several researchers also noted that the differences in the majority of the Mong and the Hmong lexicons lie in their pronunciation and their written forms. These pronunciations and writing differences between the Mong (Mong) and the Hmong (Hmong) are fairly consistent throughout the sounds, sound segments and/or sound combinations. They can be predictably matched by their counterpart corresponding sounds and written words between the Mong (Mong) and the Hmong (Hmong) (Purnell, 1970; Smalley, 1976 & 1994). Table 5 illustrates a systematic sound correspondence and written forms between the Mong and the Hmong languages.

Table 8

Sound and Written Correspondence between the Mong and the Hmong Languages

<u>Corresponding Sounds and Written Forms</u>	English Meaning	Mong (Mong)	Hmong (Hmong)
<u>Consonants</u>	Mong/Hmong	/m/ <i>Moob</i>	/hm/ <i>Hmoob</i>
	heavy	/ny/ <i>nyaav</i>	/hny/ <i>hnyav</i>
	a bag	/n/ <i>naab</i>	/hn/ <i>hnab</i>
	water	/dl/ <i>dlej</i>	/d/ <i>dej</i>
	to run	/dlh/ <i>dlha</i>	/dh/ <i>dhia</i>
	to break	/ndl/ <i>ndlais</i>	/nt/ <i>ntais</i>
	the sound of a boiling rice porridge	/ndlh/ <i>ndlhijndlhuj</i>	/nth/ <i>nthijnthuj</i>
<u>Irregular consonants</u>	to respect	/f/ <i>fwm</i>	/h/ <i>hwm</i>
<u>Vowels</u>	a foreigner	/aa/ <i>maab</i>	/a/ <i>mab</i>
	a woman's dress	/a/ <i>taabtab</i>	/ia/ <i>tabiab</i>
<u>Irregular vowel sound</u>	to say	/a/ <i>has</i>	/ai/ <i>hais</i>
	a female	/u/ <i>puj</i>	/o/ <i>poj (pog)</i>
	to cause	/ua/ <i>kuas</i>	/o/ <i>kom</i>
	to go	/oo/ <i>moog</i>	/u/ <i>mus</i>
<u>Tone</u>	a horse	/-- g/ <i>neeg</i>	/-- s/ <i>nees</i>

Besides culture, the difference between the Mong and the Hmong languages has been one of the two major characteristics that have impacted the acquisition of the Mong and the Hmong children, their level of comprehension, and application of languages on a daily basis (Park & Chi, 1999, p. 236-262).

“Green Hmong or Green Mong,” “*Hmong Njua*” or “*Hmoob Ntsuab or Moob Ntsuab*” are other terms by which the Hmong (White Hmong) and Westerners call the Mong. These terms have negative connotations. Those identified by the terms aforementioned in this paragraph find these aforementioned terms objectionable and offensive, and are intimidated by their use. According to Mong elders and religious leaders, Green Hmong/Mong was a subgroup of the Hmong/Mong group who anachronistically practiced a cult of cannibalism. It is believed that this particular group may no longer practice this cult should they still be in existence.

DERIVATION OF THE SPELLING TERMS “MONG” AND “HMONG”

Drs. George Linwood Barney, William A. Smalley, and Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*) who co-founded the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) writing system for both the Mong and the Hmong in the 1950s introduced the two spelling terms “Mong” derived from the Mong word “*Moob*” and “Hmong” derived from the Hmong word “*Hmoob*.” They designated the spelling term “Mong” to represent the Mong (*Moob Leeg*) because this term derived from the Mong (“*Moob Leeg*”) language and it truly reflects and represents the Mong group. They also designated the spelling term “Hmong” to represent the Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb*) group because this term derived from the Hmong (“*Hmoob Dawb*”) language and it truly reflects and represents the Hmong group. They did not designate the term “Mong” or “Hmong” as an ethnic term to represent both groups. Given this, two slightly different RPA systems were developed. Dr. George Linwood Barney developed the RPA System for Mong and Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*) developed the RPA system for Hmong with the assistance from Dr. William A. Smalley on the tone markers from both Dr. George Linwood Barney and Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*).

Therefore, Dr. William A. Smalley had used the term “Hmong/Mong” to represent both Hmong and Mong during our correspondences with him. Dr. William Smalley reaffirmed this designation on December 22, 1991 and on August 21, 1997. When referring to both the Hmong and the Mong, Dr. William Smalley used the terms “Hmong/Mong” side-by-side (Smalley, personal communication, Dec 24, 1991 & Smalley, personal communication, Aug 21, 1997).

On August 20, 1997, there was an inquiry from tmoua@juno.com (Toua Moua) with regard to HLOG Post #123 Hmong Primer, I quote:

I don't think that Smalley, Bertrais, and Barney knew or aware that there were two group[s] and speaking slightly different at the time they developed the Hmong language. Another side is that they thought we the Hmong could resolve the different. I also think that they didn't spend enough time to research about the Hmong and depended upon those primers who help them and those primers didn't concern much about the two different dialects.

One question I would like to ask is that, can we add or modify the original to meet the needs and interests of the Hmong if necessary? I just find out that a consonant and vowel need to be added. Example: When the shaman (the neeb “PLRWG THOIB” (T. Moua, personal communication, Aug 20, 1997).

On August 21, 1997, Dr. William A. Smalley responded to this inquiry with a cc. to the author as following, I quote:

When we agreed on the RPA, we were well aware that there were two major Hmong/Mong dialects. (I use the difference in spelling so as not to offend many Mong Leeg who feel strongly about it.) Barney was working in Mong Leeg and Bertrais in Hmong. Soon after, however, Barney left Laos, and then the Lao government decreed that minority language was to be written in any script but Lao. Barney's mission (Christian and Missionary Alliance) *obeyed the ruling, but fortunately (from today's perspective) Bertrais did not.* All of the initial published material was therefore in Hmong Daw.

I am convinced that from a linguistic point of view both dialects could use the same writing, but unfortunately no linguist familiar with both dialects was present to guide the early stages, so it looks like the RPA *writes only Hmong Daw. This was not my intention.* However, politically among the Hmong/Mong, it is now probably too late not to have two partially different systems

I am sure that by now primers have been developed in the form of the RPA which some Mong Leeg use to reflect their dialect more closely, as they see it (William A. Smalley, personal communication, cc. copy to P. Thao, Aug 21, 1997).

Since Dr. William A. Smalley did not respond to the third inquiry posed by Toua Moua on the shaman (the neeb “PLRWG THOIB”) whether a consonant and vowel needed to be added, as a linguist, there is no need to add any more consonant and a vowel to his inquiry since the word “PLRWG THOIB” is an exclamation, so neither consonant nor a vowel are to be added to the RPA system.

Returning back to the issue of the two spelling terms “Hmong/Mong” or “Mong/Hmong” that are used and appear side-by-side, the meaning includes both groups. These two spelling terms “Mong” and “Hmong” will need to be used side-by-side when referring to both groups in order to show the inclusion of the two groups until a neutral spelling term is coined that will be acceptable for use as an ethnic spelling term “**Mhong**” (“*tug tsuj*”) to show a unified true representation of the Mong and of the Hmong, but Dr. William A. Smalley indicated at the Mhong Language Council on August 12, 1982 at the University of Minnesota, that the RPA was developed with absolutely symmetrical, is a perfect system, and was not subject to spelling reform, except for a minor addition of miniscule like the consonant [ng]. When the term “Hmong” is used, it specifically refers to the Hmong group only. Likewise, when the term “Mong” is used, it specifically refers to the Mong group.

Recently, in the United States, the use of the term “Hmong” for both the Mong and the Hmong has become a topic of discussion. Mong speakers point out that the term “Hmong,” spelled “H-m-o-n-g,” is a Hmong Daw word whose equivalent term in Mong is “Mong,” spelled “M-o-n-g.” The term “Hmong” therefore represents only the Hmong (Hmong Daw) and does not represent the Mong (the Mong Leng), who retain a distinguishable language and culture. Alternative spelling terms, such as “Mong/Hmong,” “Hmong/Mong,” the “Mong” and the “Hmong,” or the “Mhong” were suggested, each with its own linguistic justification, authentic and indigenous self-identification and by principles. These terms have been proposed by Mong Americans who want to be inclusive, to maintain their language and culture and to preserve the harmony and balance of the two groups.

The spelling term “**Mhong**” is not a misspelling, but is a neutral spelling term coined and agreed upon by the twelve-committee members (six members from the Mong community and six members from the Hmong community) of the Mhong Language Council appointed by General Vang Pao and met at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis on August 12-14, 1982, through the sponsorship of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C. The role of the Council was to conduct studies to standardize the Mong and the Hmong languages. Through the committee's experience of literary search, the committee agreed that it was necessary to change the consonantal phoneme from /hm/ to /mh/ and the spelling terms “Hmong” and “Mong” to “Mhong” as an ethnic spelling term to represent both the Mong and the Hmong (Thao & Robson, 1982; Bliatout, et al, 1988, p. 74; Thao, 1999a, p. 4; & Park & Chi, 1999, p. 238). Those who support the continued use of the term “Hmong” argue that it does by convention to include both groups and downplay the differences in custom and speech between the two.

In fact, the spelling term “Hmong” was used in literature in 1974 (Garrett, 1974 & Yang, 1975) and was not based on sound academic disciplines, such as linguistics, particularly phonology. Phonologically, in the articulation of [h] sound, there is no obstruction of the airstreams in the oral cavity (a pair of bracket [] is used to denote phonetic symbols in phonetics). The sound [h] is classified as a voiceless glottal and is used as a consonant by itself or as a glide combining with other sounds. With the articulation of the sound [h] in English, there is an aspiration of a small puff of air that occurs immediately following the articulation of the oral stops /p/, /t/, and /k/ (a pair of slashes // is used for phonemic representation) if they are syllable initial preceding a stressed vowel as in pin [p^h], tick [t^h], and kin [k^h] and thereby are aspirated voiceless stops. If these three oral stops (sounds) occur after syllable initial /s/, as in spin [p], stick [t], and skin [k], they are unaspirated voiceless stops. The pairs of sounds [p] and [p^h], [t] and [t^h], [k] and [k^h] are the allophones (the predictable phonetic variants) of the same phonemes /p/, /t/, and /k/, respectively.

Because of this, linguists generally consider this aspiration a minor aspect in the American English phonology, meaning that aspiration does not change the overall phonemic representation of the phonemes /p/, /t/, /k/ within the broader phonological context (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993, Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 1998; Fromkin et al, 2003; Fromkin et al, 2017). By the same token, in Mong phonology, there are four pairs of nasal sounds used between the Mong and the Hmong that share the same aspiration feature as in English. These pairs of sounds consist of:

<u>Mong</u>	<u>Hmong</u>
[m]	[hm]
[ml]	[hml]
[n]	[hn]
[ny]	[hny]

The Mong use the full voiced nasals [m], [ml], [n], and [ny]; whereas the Hmong articulate devoiced or voiceless nasals [hm], [hn], [hml], and [hny]. Compared to English, though the graphemes of these pairs of sounds are spelled differently by the Mong and the Hmong, they are the predictable phonetic variants or the allophones of the same phonemes /m/, /ml/, /n/, /ny/, respectively. Thus, the aspiration feature for these four pairs of sounds does not change the overall phonemic representation of those phonemes in Mong. For this reason, the spelling term “**Mong**” is the correct term and it is the term that truly represents the Mong.

The decision to use the spelling term “Mong” is not new. In fact, the spelling term “Mong” (Lyman, 1962, 1968, 1969) existed even before the spelling term “Hmong” (Garrett, 1974; Yang, 1975). The spelling term “Mong” has long been existed and has been used at the turn of the century. Researchers and scholars have used the spelling term “Mong” in their writings and publications (Lyman, 1962, 1968, 1969, 1974, & 1979; Xiong et al, 1983; Thao, 1994, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Thao, 1995c & 1996d; Thoj, 1981, n.d.; Xiong, 1981; Thoj & Xyooj, 1984;

Yang, 1999; Thao, 2002e, and see the websites for Vietnam Image de la Communaute de Groupes Ethniques, n.d.; Nhan Dang, n.d.; Vietnam Project, n.d. in the reference section). The spelling term “Mong” is firmly supported by linguistics and from perspectives of historical and comparative methodology of linguistics. Even though the term “Mong” has not been used widely compared to the term “Hmong,” the Mong have called themselves Mong and have used this spelling term “Mong” to represent them.

Furthermore, when the non-Hmong hear the word “Hmong” for the first time, they tend to spell the term “Hmong” with the initial spelling “M” as in “Mong” rather than the initial “H” for “Hmong.” In other languages, such as Lao and Thai, the Mong and the Hmong ethnic name is written with the letter “M,” as in “Mong,” but was never written with an “H” in Lao and Thai.

In addition, on July 22, 1995, in Denver, Colorado, Chee Yang, Colonel 'Bill' F. Bilodeaux, Christine Cook, and the American Tribute Committee with the cooperation from Colonel Frank Bales, Generals Harry C. Aderholt, Jim Hall, Steve Ritchie, Art Cornelius, the Mong and the Hmong veterans paid special tribute to the 40,000 Mong and Hmong soldiers who died during the Vietnam War as part of the U.S. Secret Army in Laos and to the 15,000 Mong and Hmong soldiers who were wounded in the line of duty between 1961 and 1975. This tribute was to commemorate them for the first time in the history of the United States. A symbolic (letter) “M” was posted on the hill in the background of the stage and one of the generals stated that this symbolic “M” represented the “Mong” people. Colonel Hang Sao accepted the Medal of Honor on behalf of the Mong and the Hmong soldiers who fought and died in this war (Thao, Videotapes, 1995 & 1996). For all the above reasons, the term “Mong” can be used as an ethnic term to encompass both the Mong and the Hmong.

Although the Mong population is substantially comparable in terms of numbers in the United States, of the majority in Thailand (100,000), of the majority in Vietnam (600,000) and of several millions in Mainland China (See the websites for Vietnam Image de la Communaute de Groupes Ethniques, n.d.; Nhan Dang, n.d.; Vietnam Project, n.d. in the reference section), many Hmong and others still put pressure on the Mong to give up their identity, their culture and their language, and to become the “Hmong.” They impose the term “Hmong” on the Mong. In fact, the Mong and the Hmong can be culturally and linguistically compared to the Thai and the Lao as the authors discussed previously (See Table 4). It is like someone saying to the Thai that they are not Thai, and that they must give up their identity to become Lao.

CONSEQUENCES FACED BY THE MONG

Due to the lack of knowledge, the misinformation and miseducation about the Mong and the Hmong, the spelling term “Hmong” has been widely used by the general public, particularly in the United States, to represent both the Mong and the Hmong. This is a truly misrepresentation of the Mong, evidenced by the already huge disparity between the educational programs, material development, informational materials, and services in the various public and private entities, local school districts, colleges and universities in the various States in the United States between the Mong and the Hmong. As a consequence, resources and funding have not been allocated to address the needs of the Mong. When data are collected for funding purposes, the Mong are included in the Hmong counts; however, when funds are received, they are usually

used to benefit the Hmong. Through the use of State and Federal funds (taxpayers' money), curricula, informational materials, tests, and literature have been developed and have been translated into the Hmong language to serve the Hmong-speaking population. None of the materials have been developed and have been translated into the Mong language to serve the Mong-speaking population. Based on these evidences, the spelling term "Hmong" does not represent and does not include the Mong.

Back in Laos, more Hmong had the opportunities to receive formal education, so they had more political influence in the Lao government. Many of them knew French and some of them already learned English in Laos and in the refugee camps in Thailand. When they came to the United States, many have worked for the school systems, social service agencies and private sectors. They have educated the systems, Western scholars, and the American public about the Hmong, but neglected the Mong. Due to their lack of knowledge about the Mong, public and private organizations in all sectors, the systems, scholars, the Hmong and some Mong believe that there is only one group, namely the Hmong. Many Hmong professionals have educated the general public that the term "Hmong" represents the Mong, but the fact is that the term "Hmong" only represents the Hmong and does not represent the Mong. As a consequence, the spelling term "Hmong" has been widely used by the Hmong, Western scholars, and the general public, particularly in the United States to refer to both the Hmong and the Mong. However, in reality and in practice, the spelling term "Hmong" does not represent the Mong for the following rationale:

1. When the original Hmong primer, *Phau xyaum nyeem ntawv Hmoob*, was developed, Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*) developed only in Hmong for the Hmong. The Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) was developed in complete form for the Mong with the hope that Dr. George Linwood Barney would develop the primer for the Mong. Due to the linguistic differences between the Mong and the Hmong, it was decided that George Linwood Barney would need to develop the Mong primer for the Mong, but he returned to the United States.

In 1972, Xeng Djoua Xiong recalled that Father Yves Bertrais (*Txivplig Nyiaj Pov*) realized that the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) system was decreed by the Lao government and was prohibited to use in Laos, he received some funding from some Asian foundation in Bangkok to publish 100,000 *Phau xyaum nyeem ntawv Hmoob* (Hmong Daw Primer) and distributed to all the Hmong and Mong students in the dormitory in Simuang, Vientiane, Laos to teach all the Hmong and Mong in the countryside, so the Romanized Popular Alphabet (System) will remain. Anybody who promoted the RPA system would be arrested as well (Djoua X. Xiong's letter to Dr. Vang Shur Vangyi, Hmong Council, Inc., Education Committee, Fresno, California, personal communication, Dec 12, 1991; Confirmed by D.J. Xiong, personal communication, July 28, 2025). Therefore, Father Bertrais informed the Mong students that they needed to develop their own primer (X.D. Xyooj, personal communication, Dec 12, 1991; William A. Smalley, personal communication, Dec 22, 1991 & William A. Smalley, Aug 21, 1997).

2. In their book entitled *Handbook for teaching Hmong-speaking students*, in B. T. Bliatout, B.T. Downing, J. Lewis & D. Yang (1988) indicated that the Mong people prefer the name

“*Moob Leeg*” (Mong) and the spelling “*Moob*” rather than “*Hmoob*” and “Mong” rather than “Hmong” (p. 58). Again, B.T. Bliatout and D. Yang are Hmong and B.T. Downing and J. Lewis are Western scholars.

3. George L. Barney wrote a Foreword for *Kevcai siv lug Moob* [Foundations of Mong language] (Thao, 1997). Barney used the spelling term “Mong” to represent the Mong.
4. Rev. & Mrs. Mac Sawyer (personal communication, May 29, 2003) who had been missionaries to Laos from 1950-1975 provided an electronic mail about the two distinct tribes among the “Mong” known as the Blue Mong and the White Hmong.
5. Using the spelling term “Hmong” to claim as an inclusive term to represent the Mong is truly a misrepresentation of the Mong. As a consequence of the misrepresentation and the lack of knowledge about the Mong, public and private entities in all sectors have spent State and Federal funds to serve the Hmong and not the Mong as previously discussed. The Mong had been marginalized during the U.S. Secret War in Laos and today they continue to be marginalized in the United States. Marginalization of the Mong is likely to get worse in the future if the wrong term “Hmong” continues to be used to represent the Mong.
6. The spelling terms “Hmong/Mong” was used by Dr. William A. Smalley to be inclusive of both the Hmong and the Mong populations as previously discussed above. Smalley further indicated in his last electronic mail message to the authors that,

Unfortunately, no linguist familiar with both dialects was present to guide the early stages, so it looks like the RPA writes only Hmong Daw. This was not my intention. However, politically among the Hmong/ Mong it is now probably too late not to have two partially different systems (William A. Smalley, personal communication, Aug 21, 1997).

7. Linguists have studied many different languages and every language stands firmly based on principles of academic disciplines, such as linguistics and the indigenous epistemology of the people or how the people who speak those languages identify themselves (Gegeo, 1998, Fall; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 1999, March; and Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, Fall). Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (1999) argued that, “the foundation of a people’s identities and cultural authenticity is their culturally shared indigenous epistemology, embodied in and expressed through their heritage language” (p. 22). The Mong use the spelling term “Mong” to represent themselves and they identify this term as their identity. Moreover, whether or not the term “Mong” has been widely used and known to the general public, the Mong identify themselves with this term. Therefore, the Mong argue with strong conviction that the correct term “Mong” be used for them and not the superimposed term “Hmong.”
8. The spelling term “Mong” has gained its momentum in Vietnam. Hoang and Phan (2024) wrote an article on, “The representation of the Mong ethnic group in the Vietnamese TV drama series “*Mua Xuan O Lai*.”
9. Moreover, Taichimeng Cha is a Mong scholar in the U.S. with a near native level of language proficiency in Chinese traveled extensively to Southeast Asia and East Asia for five years, including Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Mongolia, and studied Chinese at the Yunnan

University, but spent the majority of his time in the Mainland China to conduct research in the field by collecting data from the Mong in China themselves and their history through “combination of historical data and traditional Mong perspectives” (Cha, 2013, Preface, p. i) as the primary sources to “present the truth about the Mong people and their historical data and traditional Mong perspectives” (Cha, 2013, Preface, p. I; personal communication, June 7, 2025). Cha (2013) argued that, the current spelling term, “Hmong” which is widely used in Southeast Asia and in the West today by researchers and the community pointed the Mong into “Miao” a part of the Man (Maab). Most of the studies and literature that have been done, pointed the Hmong to be the direct descendants of the San Miao [“San Miao country which later became Jing, Yi, Chu, Yue, Ba, Dong Yi, and Shu,” p. 10]. According to Cha (2013), “the term Man (Maab) is used interchangeably with Manyi in his text. And despite past literatures defined Man or Miaoman to be Southern Man (Nanman)” (p. 10), they included “the Yi and [Bai] Yue groups in many occasions” (p. 10). Cha (2013) stated that:

.. the newer transliteration “Hmong” was defined to be derived from Miao as their main ancestral name. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, translating software, and so forth translated “Hmong” into Miao, and “Hmong” is currently being recognized around the world for being direct descendants from San Miao, the Southern Man people. “Hmong” was not derived from Miao but from H’Mong which is Mong (Cha, 2022). Electronic version of *Mong China history and heritage preservation* (Cha, 2022, Dec 23), p. 365).

Through the use of extensive review of plethora of Chinese historical records and qualitative research method, including surveys, fieldwork, and ethnographic interviews with Mong participants in villages in the mountains in Mainland China in various geographical areas, Cha (2013) concluded in his book, *Mong China history and heritage preservation*, that “Mong” is the correct spelling term to be used for both groups, the Mong and the Hmong, because the term “Mong” directly traces them and points them to “belonging to the Mong ancestors” (p. 10). Cha’s research was also accompanied by a video, *Mong history documentary* [Video] (Cha, 2013) pointing out that the Mong are not the Man people of San Miao.

Cha’s new results and findings from his research shed new light into the field of Mong studies to the debate on what the spelling term should be used as the true spelling to represent our collective groups of people. The authors also want to caution readers that, during Mao Zedong’s cultural revolution (1966-1976) to keep Maoist ideology of revolution alive, Mao’s “violent Cultural Revolution sought to reshape cultural and educational sought to reshape educational thought and structures” (p. 370), so he mobilized his Red Guards Army to “harassing administrators, professors and teachers” (p. 370) and “had sacked libraries searching for objectionable books and a few acquisition for nearly a decade” (p. 371) and burnt many Chinese books on traditional and historical elements from the Chinese society in the street. Gutek (1986) asserted that, “Mao Zedong encouraged children to denounce the traditional authority of elders and teachers as counter revolution” (p. 358). As a consequence, many historical Chinese books were burnt. After Mao Zedong’s passing away, history in the Mainland China had to be rewritten with the official knowledge that conformed to the Communist party’s ideology. To be more specific, the new written history pointed the Hmong to be the direct descendants of the San Miao [“San Miao country which

later became Jing, Yi, Chu, Yue, Ba, Dong Yi, and Shu,” p. 10], meaning that the Miao are not direct descendants of the Mong, but that of the Manyi.

This is similar the “Battle of Ideas” that took place in Cuba, a socialist country. Fidel Castro, leader of Cuba from 1959-2008, who had “an equally strong belief in promoting a specific discourse at the expense of others” (Breilid, 2007, p. 626) that there is an “official knowledge” (Apple, 1993), implying that there is “only certain ways of understanding the world” (Breilid,2007, p. 626). will be the correct spelling for “Hmong” or “Mong.” and cemented what spelling term to be used as the standard one to truly represent our collective people once and for all. By holding on to the correct spelling term “Mong,” we should be able to trace our history back to our correct heritage.

After reviewing Cha’s study (Cha, 2022), he obtained many primary sources of data from contemporary from the Mong in China during 2007-2012 that deserves some attention from researchers. A lot of essential historical documents were burnt during Mao-Tse Tung’s Cultural Revolution

In sum, to put to end to the debate on the term, no matter how far some have been gone to the opposite direction, with all due respect, it is not too late to turn back and correct it with constructive feedback for the welfare for all. In fact, the Mong and the Hmong have co-existed and have lived shoulder to shoulder on an equal basis at the turn of the century and it is ethically, morally and fundamentally wrong for anyone to dictate any of our group any less, on who they are or who they should call themselves.

SUGGESTIONS

To the authors, the Mong and the Hmong value and embrace diversity, inclusion, unification, and not division, and not separation, inclusiveness and equal representation. The goal of the Mong and the Hmong is for both groups to be together and to have a mutual respect with dignity for each other. For this reason, one of the following options has been suggested to be used as the correct and inclusive term to represent the two groups: a) the “Mong/Hmong” or “Hmong/Mong;” b) the “Mong” and the “Hmong;” and c) the “Mhong.”

In light of this, if someone only uses the spelling term “Hmong” to encompass the Mong and the Hmong, this is truly a misrepresentation of the Mong as he or she in principle privileges, the Hmong over the Mong. If the individuals hold influential positions, whether in the public or private sectors, there will be serious repercussions for the Mong in terms of policy and program implementation. As a consequence, the Mong Americans will not be recognized for who they are. They will continue to be marginalized and will not receive equal treatment and equal access to resources and information. This is discriminatory by default pursuant to the United States Constitution under the 14th Amendment - Equal protection of 1868, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1994; Gutek, 1992; Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995), the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1974 (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995), the Lau mandates of 1974 (*Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974; Pulliam & Van Patten, 1994; Gutek, 1992), and *Castenada vs. Picard* in 1981 (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995).

Using the spelling term “Hmong” as the mainstream term to include the Mong as a subgroup of the Hmong is not acceptable. The issue of giving up the Mong identity is non-negotiable. The two spelling terms, the “Mong” and the “Hmong,” have to be used side-by-side. The Mong have the strong conviction that it is morally and ethically wrong to ask the Mong to give up their Mong identity, language, and culture in the interest of being subsumed under the Hmong.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article provides information on the Mong and the Hmong, explains the rationale why they are in the United States, clarifies the misunderstanding and the misconception about them, discusses issues regarding the misinformation, miseducation and misrepresentation of the Mong, and probes the consequences facing the Mong in the United States followed by suggestions for inclusion.

The ethnicity of the Mong and the Hmong consists of the Mong and the Hmong Daw. The Mong always identify themselves as Mong (*Moob*), spelled “Mong” and the Hmong Daw always identify themselves as Hmong (*Hmoob*), spelled “Hmong.” The Mong and the Hmong have co-existed at the same level at the turn of the century. The Mong are not a subgroup of the Hmong and the spelling term “Mong” or “Hmong” is not an ethnic term to represent both the Mong and the Hmong groups. Furthermore, the Hmong language is not the Mong language.

It is a given fact that culturally and linguistically the Mong and the Hmong are classified into two groups and the two spelling terms “Mong” and “Hmong” go above and beyond simply the spellings in printed media and academic publication because each term represents a group of people with distinguishable culture and language. For this reason, everyone needs to use the right term to represent the right group of people on all matters, on an equal basis at all levels including laws, policies, implementation of programs with respect to equal access to resources, information and services. For example, curricula, informational materials, tests, literature need to be developed and translated into both Mong and Hmong to serve the two populations.

The Mong language and culture are very important to the Mong people because they are central to the Mong’s identity as fundamental human rights (Coulombe, 1993; Phillipson, 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1994). Therefore, the Mong language and culture must not be subsumed under the Hmong’s.

Readers need to understand that the Mong are Mong and the Hmong are Hmong. Again, The Mong are not a subgroup of the Hmong. Everyone should learn more about the Mong and the Hmong and provide a true picture of them to the general public and service providers rather than a distorted picture of the Mong and the Hmong people. The terms “Mong” and “Hmong” refer to the people as well as their languages. Readers are advised that the terms “Green Hmong or Green Mong,” “*Hmong Njua*” or “*Hmoob Ntsuab or Moob Ntsuab*” must be dropped because they have negative connotations. When the two terms “Mong/Hmong” or “Hmong/Mong” or the “Mong” and the “Hmong” are used side-by-side, they represent both groups. The term “Mhong” may be used to represent both groups.

The Mong stand firmly by their principles. As Mong Americans, the issues around the term “Mong” go beyond simply the spelling. They take these issues very seriously as they involve the culture, language and identity of the Mong people. The approach taken by people who do not have knowledge about the Mong people to subsume the Mong under the general heading or label “Hmong” is tantamount to not only making the Mong a subgroup of the Hmong but also the beginning of the cultural and linguistic dissolution of Mong society. As Mong, they have survived for over five thousand years and they continue to develop and advance as part of the global society. Therefore, their commitment is to making sure that the Mong are correctly represented in society, printed media, and academic publications. Both of the Mong and Hmong groups need recognize that there is “diversity within unity” (Banks et al, 2001) in our ethnic group.

The authors hope that “the Mong” and “the Hmong” will stand firm and unity on the principle of equal access and equity and for social justice in education for our community to preserve, maintain, sustain, and support our language, culture, and beliefs which are a big part of our identity, so that “our present is the present of the past, and our future will be the future of our present” so we could achieve what the Latin words say, “*E-Pluribus Unum: Out of many one.*”

The authors wish to acknowledge Dr. David Welchman Gegeo at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), Taichimeng Cha, Dr. Yer J. Thao at Portland State University, Dr. Chai C. Moua at Merced and Fresno City Colleges, Mr. Tom Hang, a High School Teacher at Merced Union High School District, and Dr. Lue N. Thao, Chief Financial Officer at Community Health Center of the Central Coast for reading this article in its entirety, providing critical input, and offering invaluable insights. The authors are indebted to their contributions. However, their contributions do not suggest endorsement of any conclusions nor do they infer any interpretation, or judgment on the readers, but the arguments, interpretation, and suggestions in this article are the authors’ responsibility.

***Paoze Thao, Ph.D.** is Professor of Linguistics and Education, Liberal Studies Department, College of Education at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). His areas of expertise include Comparative International Education, History of Education, Policy Studies, Applied Linguistics, Mong Linguistics and Teaching English and French as a Second Language. He speaks, reads, and writes Mong/Hmong, Lao, Thai, French and English.*

***Chimeng Yang, M.Ed.** is a School Administrator in Sacramento, California. His areas of expertise include Bilingual Cross-cultural Education, Administration and Policy Studies and Teaching Mong and Hmong in the Bilingual Education Program. He speaks, reads, and writes, Mong, Hmong, Lao, Thai and English.*

References

- Arlotto, A. (1972). *Introduction to historical linguistics*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.
- Apple, M. W. (1993, Winter). [The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense?](#) *Teachers College Record*, 95(2), 222-241.
- Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W.D., Irvine, J. J., Nieto, S., Schofield, J.W. & Stephan, W.S. (2001, Nov). [Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society](#), *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(3), 1-25.
- Barney, G.L. & Smalley, W. A. (1953). Third report on Meo (Miao): Orthography and grammar. Mimeo.
- Bernatzik, H.A. (1947). *Akha and Miao*. New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files.
- Binney, G. A. (1968). *The social and economic organization of the two White Meo communities in Thailand*. Washington, D.C.: Advanced Research Program Agency.
- Bliatout, B.; Downing, B.; Lewis, J. & Yang, D. (1988). *Handbook for teaching Hmong-speaking students*. Folsom, CA: Folsom Cordova Unified School District, Southeast Asia Community Resource Center.
- Branfman, F. (1972). *Voices from the plains of jars: Life under an air war*. Harper Colophon Books.
- Breidlid, A. (2007, Oct). [Education in Cuba – an alternative educational discourse: Lessons to be learned?](#) *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 37 (5), 617-634.
- Bruchett, W.G. (1970). *The second Indochinese war: Cambodia and Laos*. International Publishers.
- Castenada v. Pickard*, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981). In L.T. Diaz-Rico & K. Z. Weed. (1995). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: A complete K-12 reference guide*. Allyn & Bacon.
Retrieved May 27, 2004 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.tesol.org/pubs/articles/2002/tm12-4-03.html>
<http://www.maec.org/pdf/lyons.pdf>
<http://www.whittedclearlyaw.com/CM/Publications/publications29.asp>
- Cha, T. (2013). [Mong China history and heritage preservation](#). China Gold Printing Group. Courtesy by the author for download the electronic version for free (Rev. as of Dec 23, 2022) perhaps with some donation to Mongheritage.org at [Mong Heritage.org](http://MongHeritage.org) and click on history.:
- Cha, T. (2013). [Mong history documentary](#) [Video]. Presenting Mong history from the perspective of the Mong based on historical records.

- Civil Rights Act of 1964 - Title VI* – Protects against discrimination. In J.D. Pulliam & Van Patten, J. (1994). *History of education in America* (6th ed). Merrill. In G.L. Gutek (1992). *Education and schooling in America* (3rd ed). Allyn and Bacon; & In L.T. Diaz-Rico & K. Z. Weed. (1995). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: A complete K-12 reference guide*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Coulombe, P.A. (1993). Language rights, individual and communal. *Language problems and language planning* 17, 140-152.
- Diaz-Rico, L.T. & Weed, K.Z. (1995). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: A complete K-12 reference guide*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1974 (20 USC Sec. 1703). In J.D. Pulliam & Van Patten, J. (1994). *History of education in America*. 6th Ed. Englewood, NJ: Merrill; Also, in L.T. Diaz-Rico & K. Z. Weed. (1995). *The crosscultural, language, and academic development handbook: A complete K-12 reference guide*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Retrieved May 27, 2004 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.maec.org/laws/eo.html>
- Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1993). *An introduction to language* (5th ed). Harcourt Brace College Publishing.
- Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1998). *An introduction to language* (6th ed). Harcourt Brace College Publishing.
- Fromkin, V.; Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2003). *Introduction to language* (7th ed). Heinle.
- Garrett, W.E. (1974, Jan). [The Hmong of Laos: No place to run](#). *National Geographic*, 78-111.
- Gegeo, D.W. (1998, Fall). Indigenous knowledge and empowerment: Rural development examined from within. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 10(2), 289-315.
- Gegeo, D.W. & Watson-Gegeo, K.A. (1999, March). Adult education, language change, and issues of identity and authenticity in Kwara'ae (Solomon Islands). *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(1), 22-36.
- Gegeo, D.W. (2002, Fall). Whose knowledge? Epistemological collision in Solomon Islands community development. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 14(2), 377-409.
- Gutec, G.L. (1992). *Education and schooling in America* (3rd ed). Allyn and Bacon.
- Guy, G. R. (2013, Jun). [The cognitive coherence of sociolects: How do speakers handle multiple sociolinguistic variables?](#) *Journal of Pragmatics*, 52, 63-71.
- Hamilton-Merritt, J. (1981, Aug). Tragic legacy from Laos. *The Reader's Digest*, 96-100.

- Haudricourt, A. G. (1972). *Problèmes de phonologie diachronique*. Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Hoang, T.L. & Phan, T.V.Q. (2024). The representation of the Mong ethnic group in the Vietnamese TV drama series “Mua Xuan O Lai. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 40(4), 90-112.
- Hudspeth, W.H. (1939). *Stone-gateway and the flowery Miao*. London: Cargate Press.
- Lau vs. Nichols (1974). In J.D. Pulliam & Van Patten, J. (1994). *History of education in America* (6th ed): Merrill. In G.L. Gutek (1992). *Education and schooling in America*. 3rd Ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. Retrieved May 27, 2004 from the World Wide Web:
<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&navby=case&vol=414&invol=563>
<http://www.helpforschools.com/ELLKBase/legal/LauvsNichols.shtml>
<http://www.stanford.edu/~hakuta/LAU/IAPolicy/IA1aLauvNichols.htm>
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/lau.htm>
- Lewis, P. & Lewis, E. (1984). *People of the Golden Triangle*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd.
- Lyman, T.A. (1962). *The Mong Njua: A Meo (Miao) tribe of northern Thailand*. Notes on General Characteristics (unpublished).
- Lyman, T.A. (1970, March). The “Mong” of Thailand vs. The “Hmong” of Laos, A Preliminary Research Sketch. *Asia Aakhane: Southeast Asian Survey* 2(3), 26-28.
- Lyman, T.A. (1976). *Dictionary of Mong Njua, A Miao (Meo) language of Southeast Asia*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Lyman, T. A. (1976). *Ethno-zoology of the Green Miao (Mong Njua) of Naan province, Northern Thailand*. Napa, CA: Graphics Department, Napa College.
- Lyman, T.A. (1979). *Grammar of Mong Njua (Green Miao): A descriptive linguistic study*. Published by the Author. William Geddes.
- O’Grady, W. & Dobrovolsky, M. (1997). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction*. New York: St. Martin Press.
- O’Grady, W.; Archibald, J.; Aronoff, M.; & Rees-Miller, J. (2001). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction*. 4th Ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin.

- Phillipson, R. (1989). Human rights and the delegitimization of dominant languages. Paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Minority Languages, Ljouwert/ Leeuwarden, June.
- Pollard, S. (1909). *The history of the Miao*. London: Henry Hooks.
- Pulliam, J.D. & Van Patten, J. (1994). *History of education in America*. 6th Ed. Englewood, NJ: Merrill.
- Robbins, C. (1978). *The ravens: The men who flew in America's secret war in Laos*. New York: Crown Publisher, Inc.
- Savina, F.M. (1924). *Histoire des Miao*. Paris: Société des Missions Etrangères.
- Smalley, W. A. (1994). *Linguistic diversity and national unity: Language ecology in Thailand*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. & Phillipson, R. (1994). *Linguistic human rights: Overcoming linguistic discrimination*. Eds. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Thao, C. and Robson, B. (1982). Interim Report of the Mhong Language Council Conference August 12-14, 1982. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Thao, P. (1994). Mong resettlement in the Chicago area (1978-1987): Educational implications. Ph.D. Dissertation, Loyola University of Chicago.
- Thao, P. (1997). *Kevcai siv lug Moob [Foundations of Mong language]*. Marina, CA: PT Publishing.
- Thao, P. (1999a). *Mong education at the crossroads*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Thao, P. (1999b). Mong linguistic awareness for classroom teachers. In C. P. Park and M. M. Chi (Eds.). *Asian-American Education: Prospects and Challenges* (pp. 237-262). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Thao, P. (2000). *Keebkwm Moob/Hmoob ntseeg Yexus [Mong/Hmong Christian history: 1950-2000]*. Thornton, CO: Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.
- Thao, S. (1995c). *Ncu txug txajntsig Moob I [Commemoration of Mong veterans I]*. Video-recording. Fresno, CA: ST Universal Studio.
- Thao, S. (1996d). *Ncu txug txajntsig Moob II [Commemoration of Mong Veterans II]*. Video-recording. Fresno, CA: ST Universal Studio.

- Thao, Y. J. (2002e). The voices of Mong elders: Living, knowing, teaching, and learning within an oral tradition. Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University.
- Thoj, Ph. (n.d.). *Kwvhuam kaabtshoob kevjug Moob [Courtship stories and bride price]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, Ph. and Xyooj, X. D. (n.d.). *Lug nruag txa [Transformation folk tales]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, Ph. and Xyooj, X. N. (n.d.). *Lug nruag tsuv [Tiger folktales]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, Ph. (1982). *Paaj lug Moob [Mong parables]*. Iowa City: Published by the Author.
- Thoj, Ph. et al. (1981). *Lugnruag dlaab [Ghost folktales]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy.
- Thoj, Ph. & Xyooj, X. N. (1984). *Kawm ntawv Moob phoo 2 [Primer Mong Book 2]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, X. P. (1983). *Paajlug Moob [Mong proverbs]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, X. P. and Xyooj, X. N. (1984). *Phoo/Phau kawm koom Moob Leeg/Hmoob Dawb [Mong/Hmong primer]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Thoj, X. P. (1982). *Phoo qha siv lu lug meej hab tsi meej [How to use Mong minimal pairs]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- United States Constitution. Retrieved May 27, 2004 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html>
<http://www.midnightbeach.com/jon/US-Constitution.htm>
http://www.constitution.org/afterte_.htm#amd14.2
<http://www.usconstitution.net/const.txt>
- Vietnam Image de la Communauté de 54 Groupes Ethniques. (n.d.). Les Mong. Retrieved May 16, 2004 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.vncuisine.com/54DANTOC/mong.html>,
- Vietnam Project. (n.d.). The Mong. Retrieved May 16, 2004 from the World Wide:
<http://www.undp.org.vn/projects/vie96010/cemma/54eg/Mong.htm>
- _____. (1992, June 17). On the yellow rain. *Wall Street Journal*, Sec. A., p. 16, col. 1.

- Xiong, L.; Xiong, J.; and Xiong, N. L. (1983). *English-Mong-English dictionary*. Milwaukee, WI: Hetrick Printing, Inc.
- Xyooj, X. N. and Thoj, T. K. (1981). *Kawm ntawv Moob phoo I [Mong Primer Book 1]*. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.
- Xyooj, X. N. (1989, May). Txooj Moob huv nplajteb [The Mong in the world]. *Txooj Moob*. Vol. 4. Winfield, IL: Mong Volunteer Literacy, Inc.,
- Yang, C. (1999). Parent-child conflict within the Mong/Hmong family. M.A. Thesis, California State University, Sacramento.
- Yang, D. (1975). *Les Hmong du Laos face au développement*. Vientiane, Laos: Edition Siasavath.
- Yule, G. (1985). *The study of language*. 2nd Ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.