

Socio-cultural shifts in a Hmong Society in Northwestern Vietnam: A Case Study in Txheeb Siv Village, Phong Thổ District, Lai Châu Province

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Abstract This article examines the significant transformations of a homogeneous Hmong community by analyzing a case study of an upland hamlet called Txheeb Siv (Sin Suối Hồ in Vietnamese) in the Phong Thổ district of Lai Châu province, Vietnam. The findings concern changes in the village's authority, economic livelihoods, and cultural practices of Txheeb Siv villagers. Based on ethnographical fieldwork results, this research indicates that there are three kinds of authority coexisting in this village, including traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. Besides, there has been a significant shift in economic activity, highlighting the importance of both traditional farming and husbandry along with community-based tourism and trading. In terms of culture, Hmong villagers made changes in their food and house design while preserving the necessary traditional customs of the Hmong in their spiritual life and festivals. As such, this article assumes there are three key factors leading to such changes, including an overreaching Communist state policy, acute ethnic self-awareness, and the globalization of Christianity.

Keywords The Hmong; Txheeb Siv; Sin Suối Hồ; Lai Châu; Vietnam; Asian societies; Southeast Asia

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Introduction

The Hmong, also regarded as a subset of the “Miao” people in China, possess a culturally significant and dynamic migratory history in Asia. While scientific facts regarding the origins of the Hmong are still a subject of debate, many experts in ethnic studies maintain the belief that there once existed a Hmong state that is no longer in existence (Vang, 2008). Before giving in to the Qing’s armed forces and eventually migrating to Southeast Asia on a large scale in the 19th century (Culas & Michaud, 1997, p. 224), the first Hmong immigrants settled near the Sino-Vietnamese demarcation in the 17th century (Lee, 2015, pp. 78-79). Extensive research on Hmong transnational history in Vietnam covers several waves of Hmong immigration; experts generally agree on three major Hmong crusades to the Southeast Asian massif (Claudine, 1972). The Hmong largely inhabited Vietnam’s northwestern and northeastern highlands until the 18th century (Wiens, 1954). The most recent significant wave of Hmong immigration in Vietnam took place in the late 19th century when they settled around Điện Biên and infiltrated northern Laos (Vuong, 2005, p. 28). The latest census of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) indicates a total of 1.251.040 Hmong Vietnamese (Hung, 2022, p. 145; Wouter & Heneise, 2020, p. 433). Though they coexist, their clothing and dialects help one to identify different ethnic groups clearly. Among these groups are *Hmoob Dawb* (White Hmong), *Hmoob Leeg* (Flower Hmong), *Hmoob Dub* (Black Hmong), and *Hmoob Ntsuab* (Green Hmong) (Quincy, 1995).

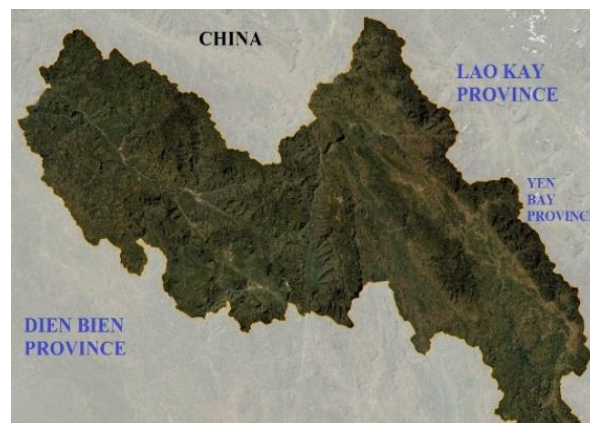


Figure 1 Satellite map of Lai Châu province, Northwestern Vietnam

Source: Dan dau tu (2024)



Figure 2 Satellite map of Phong Thổ District, Lai Châu Province, Vietnam

Source: Dan dau tu (2024)

This article examines specifically the Txheeb Siv case study to provide additional comprehensive data on the cultural development of the Hmong in modern Asian countries, similar to previous research. Past writers diligently analyzed and explained the Hmong people's traditional rituals and cultural customs in the context of globalization and external cultural influences. This process resulted in the evolution and enrichment of their identities over time. Located in a village at a high altitude, Txheeb Siv is a small village administered by Phong Thổ district, Lai Châu province, northwestern Vietnam (Figures 1 and 2). The village is approximately 30 kilometers far from Lai Châu capital, but only just encountered the first Kinh/Vietnamese man, as a member of the community in 2023, when he married a well-educated Hmong businesswoman. According to the data provided by the Txheeb Siv people committee in Phong Thổ district, Lai Châu province, in February 2024, the Hmong village census indicates that there are 145 households and a total of 749 Hmong individuals residing in Txheeb Siv (People Committee of Lai Chau province, 2020). They have received formal education from the Vietnamese Communist state and can maintain bilingualism in Vietnamese and Hmong in their daily communication. Various factors drive the sociocultural transformation of Txheeb Siv Hmong society, including Kinh's political intervention and administration, religious conversion, the spread of external knowledge, the Hmong people's growing awareness of their economic power, native culture, and the impact of the environmental landscape. As a typical community-based tourism hamlet, Txheeb Siv is highly vulnerable to sociocultural changes and can be assessed more quickly than neighboring villages.

The research study seeks to reexamine previous studies on the cultural transition of the Hmong people in northern Vietnam, with a specific focus on Txheeb Siv as a representative case of the sociocultural shift of the Hmong community. The study site has gained a reputation for being a highly successful example of community-based tourism, attracting many tourists from the local lowland area and foreign countries. Various factors, including political interference by Vietnamese authorities, globalization, religious conversion, and cultural exchanges, can lead to societal and cultural changes among the Hmong. This study discusses four aspects of this transformation: the evolution of authority, changes in economic living, shifts in material culture, and transformations in spiritual culture. Collectivist groups and village democracy specifically influenced the cultural beliefs and indigenous abilities of traditional Hmong people. However, the political intervention of Vietnamese individuals led to the erosion of the Hmong's traditional authority, causing gradual changes to their basic practices and significant societal disruptions. In addition, religious conversion leading to the essential principles of modern living also gives rise to cultural practices, causing people to modify their approach to cultural exchanges with traditional customs.

Literature review

The life of the Hmong in Vietnam is a topic of great controversy. From the very beginning, *Les races du Haut-Tonkin de Phong-Tho à Lang-Son* by Maurice Abadie provides a succinct overview of the Hmong in Phong Thổ, little-known tribes co-lived with Tai Dam groups, and a detailed description of the Hmong social hierarchical system and traditional authorities to manage the dispersed highland populations and set up smaller villages along the Sino-Vietnamese borderlines (Maurice, 1924, p. 63). One of the many authors pouring much ink on Hmong studies, Jean Michaud, created a collection of insightful materials on this population (Michaud, 1997, p. 119; Michaud, 2000, p. 337). While few scholars knew the history of the Hmong in the mountainous area of Tonkin during the Indochina War, Michaud's research thoroughly examines the history of European missionary activities for Catholicism and Protestantism to penetrate those communities (Culas & Michaud, 1997, p. 236). Vietnamese anthropological study hardly reveals the revolutionary involvement of the Hmong in the battles of Vietnam in Điện Biên Phủ and a subsequent chapter of their life. Only the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 brought about its enrichment. However, Vietnamese people still

regard the Hmong as a minority, and their culture is excluded from the mainstream of a diversified Vietnamese culture. Communists treat the Hmong as one of the ethnic minorities living in Vietnamese territories and equally as the other minority groups. Jean disagreed with Hanoi's response and initiated a delicate discussion among the Hmong (Michaud, 2009, p. 43). Likewise, he remained steadfast in his belief in the importance of Hmong traditional customs as well as their ability to govern with a strong kinship system and their keen ethnic self-awareness.

However, recent scholarship on the Hmong people and their dynamics in northern Vietnam over the past few decades has provided a comprehensive picture of modern Hmong communities striving to achieve religious harmony through long-term religious conversion, authorities, economic livelihoods, and cultural activities. The Hmong people's decision to reject their traditional beliefs and convert to Christianity raises questions about their attempts to reconcile traditional preservation with the new rituals of a foreign religion. This decision has resulted in internal and external conflict between the Hmong people, the Communist regime, and their faith in their well-established traditions (Tam, 2015, p. 292). Tam Ngo also investigated an intimate link between the goal of worldwide Protestantism and the religious acceptance of the Hmong in this religion. Tam paid scholarly attention to the complex politics of religion, noting Vietnamese-Hmong political relationships, a direct correlation between local communities and global forces, Vietnamese socialism and Hmong transnationalism, and the evangelical expansion of Protestantism in the context of globalization (Tam, 2016). In the Hmong language, people refer to it as *Kev Cai Tshiab*. The Hmong's conversion to Protestantism was notable due to their fervent preaching, which inspired optimism about the eradication of poverty. Seb Rumsby's research articles primarily focus on the Christianization of the Hmong and the elevating role of Hmong Christian elites. These articles demonstrate that the Hmong face significant challenges in becoming Christian converts, particularly when react to political and economic complexity within their communities, and when local authorities attempt to enforce Protestantism. Hmong pastors developed into evangelical pioneers, raising their religious prestige to guide community members to trust in Jesus Christ. This also leads to a diversity of Hmong authorities in the modern social scene, with Hmong preachers competing with each other in terms of social status within Hmong societies. This scenario is also associated with a thriving economy (Rumsby, 2021, p. 57), mental stability, and shifting social hierarchies of Hmong authority in Northwestern provinces of Vietnam (Rumsby, 2021, p. 707).

During the execution of this research project, Vietnam was home to numerous independent Vietnamese-speaking academics and state-employed analysts who observed the Hmong highlanders. They meticulously documented their observations and made valuable recommendations for Vietnamese local authorities, aimed at enhancing the Hmong's quality of life and tackling their severe famine and impoverishment. These ethnographic investigations primarily focused on the Hmong's multifaceted identities, economic activities, cultural preservation, and religious conversions (Vietnamese Institute of Ethnic Studies, 1978; Giang & Lam, 1979; Cu & Hoang, 1994; Chu & Tran, 2005; Be, 1984). Under the direction of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, which operates with the strategy of the Vietnamese Communist Party, the Vietnamese Institute of Ethnography has guided such research projects. Vưong Duy Quang produced a significant volume of in-depth research on the Hmong religious conversion to hanker for this goal (Vuong, 2005; Vuong, 1987; Vuong, 1994; Vuong, 2003). Sporadic publications provide an adequate understanding of village structure, society, and kinship system, such as (Nguyen, 2000; Ho, 2012; Pham, 2014) inflated the significance of a robust kinship system and gave an insightful recommendation concerning local authorities of Kinh's policies (Ly, 2017; Nguyen, 2008; Nguyen, 2016). Even though these studies gave a lot of information and a methodical look at Hmong people and their social status, Vietnamese anthropologists continued to view Hmong communities in Vietnam as typical examples of backwardness, illiteracy, and being subjected to Kinh's ethnic policies and such works did not see eyes to eyes with the Hmong's

perspectives on their native history and culture. Vietnamese anthropologists also did not try to understand how Hmong people naturally exercise their power and interact with their natural and social surroundings.

In general, these aforementioned works facilitated the integration of Hmong themes in Vietnamese and Anglophone scholarship. Jean Michaud is well-known for his comprehensive research on political, social, and cultural shifts, exploring several factors such as geographical location, ethnic policies, and interracial interactions. Seb Rumsby and Tam Ngo, however, were deeply interested in a significant religious conversion of the Hmong people in Vietnam, specifically from their traditional beliefs to Christianity. These two authors also examined the impact of this religion on Hmong cultural and social activities in their daily lives. Anthropologists studying in Vietnam have offered readers a credible analysis of the Hmong people's perspective and provided detailed explanations of their strong sense of ethnic identity, highlighting their significant ability to preserve their culture. However, researchers who speak the Kinh language expressed an unfavorable opinion of the Hmong people since their studies only backed the policy-making process of the SRV and the creation of what they call *khối đại đoàn kết dân tộc* (national solidarity blocs in English). Research on Hmong communities in northeastern Vietnam does not provide concrete information regarding the factors influencing the transformation of Hmong village spaces and the Hmong people's efforts to save their indigenous culture. The previous researchers attempted to extract the primary attributes of cultural transformations among the Hmong in Vietnam. However, they could not comprehensively analyze a particular Hmong subgroup in a particular geographic area to shed light on similarities and differences in each Hmong group in terms of their cultural social, and cultural evolution as well as their reactions to such changes.

Methodological considerations

Sociocultural change refers to the gradual and ongoing transformation of social and cultural norms, values, and practices within a society or culture. Darwin soon explained the importance of cultural evolution, which features the cultural assimilation of other cultures into a particular culture, which leads to the gradual extinction of "lower" cultures (Darwin, 2003, p. 90). Morgan's (1877) and Tylor's (1871) also elaborated on the evolution of humans from savagery and barbarism to civilization in their studies. Across the decades and even centuries, scientists have continued to debate and refine various social-cultural change theories, incorporating new insights and empirical findings. Scott (2018) underlined the need for institutional factors, such as organizational culture, social norms, and power dynamics, in shaping sociocultural changes (Scott, 2018). Meanwhile, Parsons (1951) returned to the venerable structural functionalist approach, arguing that we can understand socio-cultural change by analyzing social systems' functional requirements and institutions' role in maintaining social order (Parsons, 1951). Social and cultural norms of a community may be changed, expanded, and established based on various factors, including technological advancements, demographic shifts, economic changes, and environmental considerations (Bashiru, 2010). Attitudes toward multifaceted aspects, such as gender roles, radical equality, cultural practices and traditions, language and communication, family structures and relationships, education, and training changed. In the era of globalization, both majorities and minorities are undergoing significant changes in various aspects. As a result, these groups embrace new cultural identities and adapt to new environments, thereby enhancing their indigenous culture. The shift may lead to an increase in social justice and equality, social cohesiveness and inclusivity, economic behaviors, authority structures, and cultural traditions. Various elements also greatly influence the stateless community, the Hmong, thus enabling their changes in socio-cultural behavior.

A half-year ethnographic field study conducted in Txheeb Siv village between February 2024 and June 2024 yields this research. I identified myself to them as a Kinh anthropologist eager for

Hmong experiences in Christianity and community-based tourist business as soon as I got formal authorization from Txheeb Siv authority and villagers. Apart from *Tshav ntauv* (Chí Sàng), *Tsoob huj* (Chung Hò), *Yij tshoob* (Dền Sàng), and *Tshaij muaj phub* (Sàng Mã Pờ), this community lies at the height of 1500m above sea level (Lai Chau People Council and Committee, 2023). When I arrived in Txheeb Siv, the magnificent highland town opened like a canvas of fantastic splendor. Since the road to the village center is board and asphalted, it is not difficult to get to the site more quickly than in other adjacent towns. Although some young Hmong people dress in Kinh garments for convenience, most Hmong people prefer clothing themselves with Hmong traditional outfits in daily life. Since the husband is the sole Kinh resident in the village married a Hmong woman and operated their homestay and coffee shop, I lived in a small bungalow run by this couple. Txheeb Siv is a classic community-based hamlet, however, its villagers still work in agricultural areas, which differs from other livelihoods like tourism and trade.

There are two major research methods I utilized throughout my ethnographic fieldwork. The first technique is participant observation (Victoria, 1987, p. 14). This method fundamentally consists of living among the natives, collecting and recording data, and acquiring the natives' point of view (Bronislaw, 1922, pp. 20-22). I stayed at the temporary residence, walked around the village, and watched the everyday Hmong activities. Unlike most Kinh households, Hmong people greeted me kindly and welcomed me to visit their houses. Showing me their large bags of rice in their storage rooms, they told me about their family history, economic activities, and boastful work output. Seventy percent of Txheeb Siv villagers are Hmong Protestants, who spoke with me about how they practiced Protestantism and held God to be accurate. Given a non-Kinh/Vietnamese village, helped by a native bilingual villager, a young Hmong speaker with excellent fluency in the Kinh language to help translate the native stories into the Vietnamese language, I completely understood the Hmong's sharing. I avoided using Google Translate, considering that most elderly Hmong might not use their mother tongue in a written form, especially since the Romanized Hmong language was only widely introduced to the Hmong in 1953. To enable me to interact more amiably with native people, I also asked my friend and other young villagers to teach me simple spoken Hmong. Apart from that, I participated in the Hmong New Year celebration, donned traditional Hmong attire every day, and attended weekly Protestant services in the village center chapel.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with Hmong people to gather additional information concerning their social and cultural changes (David, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were adopted to establish an initial rapport with the investigated community (Russell, 2006, p. 213). However, the questions were well-prepared, allowing both interviewers and interviewees to consistently pursue this method's target (David, 2000). Regarding official respondents, four groups were selected. The first category is the village head and deputy, showing their sagacity in village policies, history, and citizens. In Lai Châu province, the head serves as a bridge between the Hmong people and Kinh authorities so that he may disseminate political objectives to citizens and facilitate the dissemination of ideas between residents and non-native officials. Pastors, familiar with the cultural traditions of the Hmong people, are the second group of interviewees; their religious reputation aids them in achieving a higher social status within this community. The third category is comprised of the Hmong unconverted who followed their polytheistic views. Finally, the fourth group comprises Hmong Protestants who see God as a single divine deity. These Hmong informants offered me their complete permission to participate in official interviews and gave me much detail regarding their credibility as Christians and how Protestantism impacted their families and laid their real-life background. Although I used both Vietnamese and Hmong languages for the interviews, I preferred the Hmong language. Every interview lasts between sixty and ninety minutes. Community members' interviews stayed short, just covering one quarter.

Following official interviews, a complete process of recording, compiling, and organizing documents was undertaken. I wrote down ethnographic information and collected recorded files throughout my interviews. Then, I reviewed my notes and listened to the records multiple times. To preserve the anonymity of sources and rigorously adhere to professional duty, I coded informants' information concerning their names, titles, and ages.

To buttress my conclusions and analysis, I consulted with past studies, official figures, publications, and non-academic pieces during anthropological writing. Regrettably, the absence of Hmong endogenous script about their everyday life and historical narrative in Hmong archives results in a deficiency in textual analysis (Culas & Michaud, 1997, p. 224). Despite not creating archives, the Hmong in Txheeb Siv deeply engaged in my conversation so that their histories and contemporaries could be withdrawn. Based on their stories, I assume that significant changes happened in village governance, livelihoods, and cultural norms.

Research results

The shift of authority

Authority refers to the power to influence others, which can stem from various factors such as expertise, experience, knowledge, and social status (Bealey, 1999, pp. 22-23). In most societies, types of authorities advance from the original authority of traditional societies to a legal-rational authority. Max Weber (1978) outlined three types of authority that adapt to human advancement and society: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and legal-rational authority (Weber, 1978). Traditional authority springs from conventional ideas and societal regulations on human ethics and behaviors. Therefore, society must mold it into appropriate forms for someone using the power as either a supernatural force or a bloodline family. Apart from that, charismatic authority emphasizes the need for particular leaders of their exceptional hegemony and the following of their leadership by the people. On the other hand, rational-legal power consists of the exercising of formal legality and requires great respect for legally defined order. These conceptions of power are like the evolution of human civilization from prehistoric to modern times.

Hmong people in Vietnam have built, demolished, and established these types of authority. Before the dawn of Communists' power in Vietnam, the Hmong people established locked villages, called zos, which means "village" in English. Each community elected a village head to rule villagers by their power and oral customary laws (Ngo, 2002, p. 284). A dearth of written evidence on the Hmong's daily lives challenges a better understanding of their inside societies and cultural practices. Communists broke traditional authority and imposed Vietnamese legal-rational authority on Hmong communities as soon as they gained control in northern Vietnam in 1954. Thus, the Hmong people are forced to follow national Vietnamese legislation, but the village head still exists and connects the Hmong people with the formal authority of Vietnamese people. Even charismatic power is now commonly found in Hmong societies in northwestern Vietnam.

The native village chief was essential to the Hmong people in a traditional Hmong society, and he also kept close ties between the Hmong and the feudal system. Apart from this, the authorities hired a village administrator to assist the native chief; this individual also strictly controlled village operations (Figure 3). Traditional Hmong people also showed their respect to village seniors, who revived the customs and history of their communities, and shamans, who were able to interact with Hmong ancestors, and other supernatural entities. Important rites and rituals, including marriages, burials, and harvest celebrations, also fall under their purview. Though the modern society of the Hmong in Txheeb Siv rejected this social structure, the residual effect of ancient authority still permeates the present village authority. Hmong in Txheeb Siv has three different kinds of power, which combine what Max Weber describes. Notably, residents choose a village administrator for a

five-year term. At least two nominees are assigned; the poll’s winner takes on the position of village head while the other candidate serves as the deputy village administrator (Figure 4).

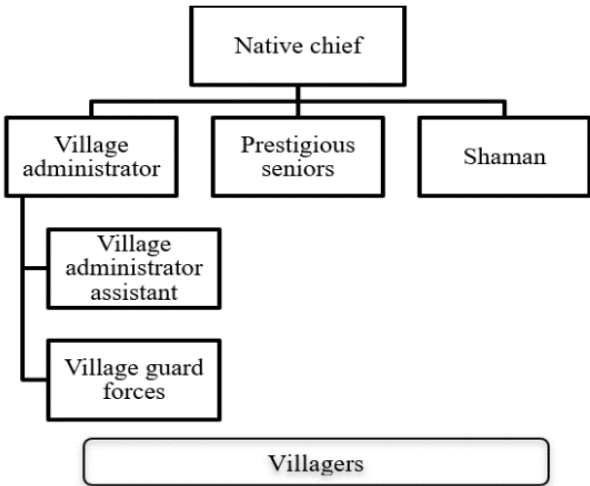


Figure 3 Traditional village social strata of the Hmong community in Northwestern Vietnam.
Source: Dam and Phung (2010; pp. 25-30)

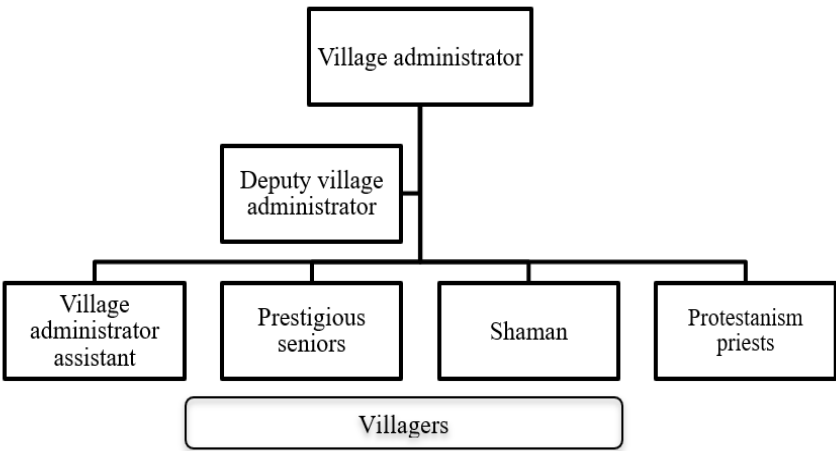


Figure 4 Village social strata of Hmong society in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu
Source: Author field trip (2024)

“ Every five years, our village hosts a general election. At least we selected two esteemed and seasoned people with great approval from my neighbors. We vote freely for someone who merits that post. It is not too significant, though, that the other person also appoints the deputy village chief. Two leaders in our village bear great responsibility for important decisions and historic events. Besides, they enable us to cable local officials about our pertinent concerns. ” (interview with a 48-year-old Hmong male, in Txheeb Siv village, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

Likewise, in Txheeb Siv, senior citizens and a shaman still have great value. Older Hmong people have long been the custodians of traditional knowledge and abilities, including farming techniques, and are said to have a close relationship with important village rites and events. They also help to preserve Hmong culture and educate the next generations about their beliefs, history, and practices (Tran, 1996, p. 34). However, modern Hmong seniors no longer regularly attend important events and maintain their continuous presence to offer helpful advice for the village so that they could promote community cohesion and guarantee the welfare of every resident (Liu, Eggleston, & Min, 2017). The shaman, a pillar of Hmong society, has evolved dramatically and many Hmong people no longer see shamans as significant or pertinent in Txheeb Siv.

“Usually, senior citizens show up for our meetings and important events. Thanks to their direction and advice, they are quite useful for village officials and residents. Occasionally, we find ourselves uncertain about the planning of a celebration or the necessary steps to take. Fortunately, we do have them. Regarding a shaman, I do not believe he is relevant to our modern existence. We invite him to visit our house and perform his ritual on the occasion of the Lunar New Year, but not at other times. Instead of seeking shaman, we now visit the hospital for medical therapy.” (interview with a 34-year-old Hmong female, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

Protestantism pastors have a special role, especially in the Hmong’s spiritual life in Txheeb Siv. Originally brought to this village in 1992 via the Hmong Radio Program of the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), Hmong people here engaged in a significant religious dialogue driven by the radio in terms of the God belief, missionary activities, and the future of the Hmong under the guidance of Jesus Christ. Consequently, 70% of villagers were exposed to Christian teachings and a group of pastors appeared in the village. (Ngo, 2002, pp. 100-101). Even if a pastor is one of the residents, this individual represents a spiritual leader of Hmong Christians and possesses supreme power among Christian organizations in vast areas of northwestern Vietnam highland (Nguyen 2009, p. 26). Pastors take responsibility for sermons, pastoral care, counseling, sacraments including baptism and communion, and daily church operations in the community. Along with leading worship sessions and helping with community outreach and service efforts, this person also teaches and interprets the Bible scriptures.

“I am glad to pray for God, thus we have to follow the basic rites of a Protestant. God bless me. Our pastor obviously guides us greatly in our lives, teaches us about God, and helps us to lead our rituals.” (interview with a 22-year-old Hmong woman, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

In Txheeb Siv, three distinct types of power exist simultaneously. Currently, Hmong people here adhere to the Vietnamese legal system of governance and acknowledge their identity as Hmong Vietnamese individuals. The exertion of legal pressure confers legal authority. While community members may not explicitly acknowledge the presence of this system in their organizational style and political beliefs, conventional and charismatic power coexist alongside Hmong society in Txheeb Siv. The Hmong unconverted seek the guidance of their village leader, whereas Hmong converts treat the roles of pastors and village leaders as equal. A Hmong community typically comprises households characterized by the homogeneity of kinship ties. The elders, shaman, and village head have crucial responsibilities in the village administration and managing interpersonal connections in moderation. Despite the diminishing significance of shamans and the elderly, contemporary Hmong culture in Txheeb Siv still partly upholds traditional authority since the village head plays a crucial role in

communal governance. Due to the influence of missionaries and the expansion of Christianity, Hmong individuals in this area now have a greater involvement in pastoral roles. Consequently, charismatic power is also evident in Hmong society inside the Txheeb Siv hamlet.

The diversity of economic livelihoods

The Hmong people have subsistence agriculture, cattle farming, and trading-based traditional economy. Many Vietnamese and Anglophone works show that the Hmong are enormously dependent on farming with terrace, permanent agriculture, and nomadic agriculture based on tradition. (Chu & Tran, 2005, pp. 19-21). Also, they are known as farmers of self-sufficient and nature-based economies with little commercialization (Ha, 2021, p. 133). Principally, Hmong livelihoods are the instruments individuals make a living, such as through agriculture, trade, and wage employment (Forsyth & Michaud, 2011, p. 6). In a practical sense, the Hmong also pursue their livelihoods to monitor and improve their quality of life, and they gain access to a trade network with other ethnic groups in a specific region. Nevertheless, the expansion of the market economy exemplifies the Hmong's ability to overcome significant economic and social adversities and revitalize their own culture.

“Since the majority of the people in my village relied on settled, nomadic, and flowering opium poppies, my hometown used to be under poverty. Fortunately, since 1995, we have altered our attitudes and turned our attention to making use of resources to increase our house income and give up our social vices. As of right now, our new way of life satisfies us. Our life is fresh.” (interview with a 65-year-old Hmong male, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

The inhabitants of Txheeb Siv implemented a radical economic reform and transformed the local economy by integrating agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism. More precisely, at least 20 Hmong households are engaged in community-based tourism, providing homestay lodgings and managing coffee shops. (VOVWorld, 2022). The diversity of the Hmong economy in Txheeb Siv is evident as they blend traditional and modern economic practices to manipulate the local market effectively.



Figure 5: Black cardamom cultivation in Txheeb Siv.

Source: Lai Chau People Council and Committee (2023).

Still, Txheeb Siv's underlying inclination is the commercialization process that offers a framework for increasing income and launching goods into the market to meet local culture's wants (Rogers, Lambert, & Knemeyer, 2004, p. 43). Designed as a community-based tourism town, the

residents changed their way of life to meet commercialization's demands and primarily increase their revenue. Local village goods are gathered at a weekly market to be sold to Kinh, foreign guests, and local inhabitants (Figure 6). This rebirth of native culture invites visitors' attention to immerse themselves in aboriginal culture in one of the most iconic Asiatic ancient villages with the increase of local markets. Under these circumstances, the self-sufficient economy nevertheless has a tonic effect on the Hmong, which increases their willingness in their economic management instead of imposing a grip on their economic progress. Apart from this, villagers focus on cultivating black cardamom (Figure 5) and extending the market to lowland regions for business needs.



Figure 6: Hmong village market in Txheeb Siv

Source: Lai Chau People Council and Committee (2023).

“More than half of Hmong households cultivate black cardamom, and each one makes at least one quintal year. The pricing always stays constant at 120- 130 thousand Vietnam Dong. A few producers may make several tons of this fruit, and the income considerably rises to over 40 thousand USD annually.” (interview with a 49-year-old Hmong male, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 23, 2024)

Establishing new means of earning a living for the Hmong community has substantially enhanced their capacity to generate financial gains from their production. By preserving historical knowledge, individuals have discovered strategies to achieve economic thriving and stability, aligning their determination to eliminate poverty with the support of the Vietnamese government. Despite little modernization, certain aspects of the traditional Hmong economy continue to blossom alongside contemporary economic systems in Txheeb Siv. Many Hmong households depend on agriculture to augment their earnings by cultivating profitable crops, rather than engaging in tourism activities centered around their town. In order to support their families and communities, they cultivate their food, primarily consisting of rice, corn, and other crops. Hmong people keep various animals, including water buffalo, cows, pigs, chickens, and goats. Considering that these traditions ensure their financial prosperity, it is evident that Hmong individuals continue to rely heavily on traditional livelihoods. This economic activity highlights a dichotomy within the Hmong civilization. While individuals may be receptive to embracing contemporary lives to combat poverty, there remains a sense of skepticism regarding potential monetary setbacks associated with establishing a business (Rumsby, 2021).

“Though small numbers, I mostly raise pigs, ducks, and chickens. We do not have a big area for large-scale breeding; hence, every roof hosts a few animals. We transport less than normal to the closest market for sale when we breed less. The head of the community also counsels against extensive breeding to preserve village cleanliness. Others have buffalo as well (Figure 8). We also tend to rice and corn. We pick thirty packages of corn and forty packages of rice on average annually. We just sow rice once in May or June. Usually, we embroider paj ntaub during our free time, but occasionally we think about selling it.” (interview with a 35-year-old Hmong female, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 23, 2024)



Figure 7: A Hmong lady is doing embroidery in front of her house

Source: Author field trip (2024)



Figure 8: Buffalo for farming, but few households own this

Source: Author field trip (2024)

Overall, Txheeb Siv has experienced a significant economic transformation, leading to a robust job market and the potential for increased spending. Currently, a minimum of 20 Hmong households are engaged in community-based tourism to generate income, hence expanding the participation of households in this industry. However, the modernization of society does not imply that traditional ways have been devalued. The homes of the Hmong community rely less on external markets, ensuring economic self-reliance and mitigating economic instability. By adhering to their traditional way of life, they can safeguard specific skills and pass them down to future generations. Traditional farming plays a critical role in ensuring livelihoods and maintaining economic stability. In addition to providing the Hmong community in Txheeb Siv with a stronger economic foundation, this economic shift has also played a part in safeguarding their cultural heritage.

Culture changes

Material culture is the worth of artifacts, tangible items, and technological developments produced and applied by a society or community. It also reflects the complexity of society and a friendly relationship between material culture and spiritual culture, and it is considered a manifestation of organized symbolic behaviors inside a social reflection (Tilley, 2012, pp. 67-75). Due to numerous cultural interactions, education, aesthetics enhancement, and identity preservation, the Hmong people living in Vietnam have reflected a profound change in their material culture. The Hmong still preserve their material culture in some aspects of textiles, architecture, and foodways. However, they know how to change each aspect to adapt to modern lifestyles and utilize these cultural products in combination with tourism promotion.

Cuisine culture underscores the importance of unique culinary traditions specific to a particular area, closely intertwined with its historical, geographical, climatic, and social background. While there are no written recipes for Hmong cuisine, an intergenerational oral form of this technique possibly lurks in their collective intelligence (Cha, 2010). Historically, the Hmong have been farmers who cultivated their food using traditional cooking methods. Hmong cuisine consists of various dishes in their country, with variations likely across regions (Scripter & Yang, 2009). According to past anthropological research, the Hmong usually consume two meals a day- rice, meat, and veggies. The Hmong prepare their daily cake from glutinous rice and smoke any leftover meat. Kinh lowlanders often remember Hmong highlanders preparing *kua qej neeg* (horse tongue soup) and *mov kuam* (steamed corn powder). On Hmong dining tables, meat, egg, and vegetable dishes remain favorites, nonetheless. Although they do not maintain secret culinary methods, Txheeb Siv villagers understand that the Hmong have modified Kinh recipes and flavors. These results confirm the theory of a unique gastronomic adaptation by Hmong people in their native nations.

“Our daily lives no longer involve cooking kua qej neeg (horse tongue soup) and mov kuam (steamed corn powder). Usually, we make rice before dinner together with either raw meat or eggs, veggies, and soup (Figure 9). We need more energy for labor and to stay warm in winter, hence I think we cook with somewhat more spice and salt than the Kinh people. Some of the village homes still smoke raw meat under their fireplace; we still hang maize for animals and decoration.” (interview with a 33-year-old Hmong female, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

Apart from that, house design also varies in room layout and orientation. Traditionally, the unfavorable climate conditions in northwestern Vietnam urge Hmong people to build strong and solidly anchored dwellings (Chu & Tran, 2005, pp. 37-41). Essential changes in this community include increased access to resources such as running water, power, better insulation, and technology. While residents replace traditional materials like bamboo wood and thatch with modern options such

as concrete, brick, and corrugated iron sheet roofing. They also build walls from dirt to enhance warmth in winter and coolness in summer. However, Txheeb Siv residents choose traditional designs over Kinh architectural forms. Usually consisting of three chambers with different uses: living room, bedroom, and kitchen, along with a steeply pitched roof, and wooden beams, Hmong houses in Txheeb Siv display traditional Hmong aesthetics and renovated architecture. Some Hmong homes now have beautiful entrances, vibrant paint, and detailed carvings.



Figure 9: A typical daily meal of a Hmong family

Source: Author field trip (2024)



Figure 10: Corn is hung on the ceiling of the kitchen to pick up for feeding animals

Source: Author field trip (2024)



Figure 11 A storage becomes an inside room of the house.

Source: Author field trip (2024)



Figure 12 The living room of a Hmong house

Source: Author field trip (2024)

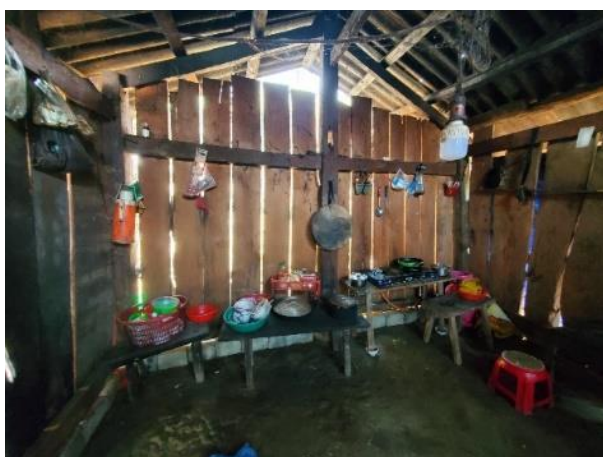


Figure 13 The kitchen of a Hmong house

Source: Author field trip (2024)

Traditionally, builders typically construct a house with wood and bamboo. The thatched roof is made from bamboo or grass (Le & Nguyen, 2018, p. 80). The houses are built on steep hillsides to inhibit the danger of natural disasters such as inundation and to capture cool breezes. In contrast to traditional Hmong architectural design in other villages, where the cooking area is usually located in the center of the house, with a central fireplace for cooking and warmth, Txheeb Siv villagers place the kitchen in a separate room outside the house. This gives family members more space for cooking and eating (Figure 13).

Additionally, the interior of a Hmong house is divided into three separate areas for sleeping, cooking, and living. Guests cannot enter through the main gate due to a long-standing belief in house ghost permission (interview with a 24-year-old Hmong male in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 26, 2024). The sleeping area is typically situated on one side of the house and is slightly higher than other parts of the house. In Txheeb Siv houses, Hmong residents put their sleeping area near a storage space or even store their agricultural products inside the bedroom (Figure 11). The living area functions as either eating or sociability, which also showcases house owners' hospitality, wealth, and family history (Figure 12).

The religious area is positioned at the center of the living room and features an altar for Hmong Shamanistic practices. However, Hmong Protestants do not spend sacred areas in their house (interview with a 24-year-old Hmong male in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 26, 2024). On the façade, villagers maintain their cultural identities by incorporating intricate wood carvings and decorative motifs, often showing traditional Hmong symbols and patterns. The houses are adorned with vibrant fabrics and textiles, putting a cultural emphasis on craftsmanship and artistry. Unlike traditional Hmong houses, the architecture of Hmong Protestants' homes does not have a prominent pillar near the main gate as they are under the guard of Jesus Christ.

Religion considerably influences an ethnic group's social structure, social status, and worldview (Desantiago, 2020). The Hmong residents in Vietnam also pass into a rich history of traditional religious beliefs, and these traditional religions mirror their intricate worldview and cultural and social interactions. Ancestor worshiping is paramount to daily religious practices, while Shamanism, Totemism, and Animism also divine the Hmong community's thoughts and create an intimate connection between humans and their spiritual world (Tran, 1996, p. 33). Additionally, an acute sense of family and kinship cohesion limits the influences of foreign religions, allowing the Hmong people to maintain their independence and autonomy while fostering perfect ethnic self-awareness. Nevertheless, Protestantism ignited a mass religious conversion among the Hmong and this evolution led to harmonious growth so that the new belief could enrich native cultures on the grounds of traditional practices.

Table 1 The differences between traditional Hmong believers and Hmong protestants in Txheeb Siv village.

Traditional belief	Protestantism
Believing a system of spirits	Believing God
Ancestor worshipping and a system of spirits	Paying tribute to God
Ancestor worshipping altar	No altar displayed
Annual death anniversary	No anniversary found
Life cycle occasions are organized over a long duration	Life cycle occasions are organized in a short duration
Shaman is regarded	God and the Bible are highly regarded

Source: Author's field trip in Txheeb Siv (2024)

About 30% of Txheeb Siv villagers follow Shamanism, Totemism, and Animism. They merit a system of spirits that saves them from diseases and mental suffering. This system of ghosts is also believed to prevent evil omens and bring wealth and well-being to villagers. These include the *Xim*

kaab (house ghost), *Ncij dlaab* (pillar house ghost), *Qhov rooj dlaab* (door ghost), *Dlaab qhov txug* (kitchen ghost), *Dlaab qhov cub* (fireplace ghost). Villagers also participate in the *Gaum Toj*, also known as *Noj Peb Caug Xyoo Tshiab* (Hmong New Year festival), typically celebrated in January or February every year. This festival signifies the start of the new year, and it is a time for family reunions, traditional attire fashion, and traditional food cooking based on the Hmong calendar. It is dedicated to the goddess of fertility bringing the Hmong community together for dancing and traditional games. This custom is different from the Hmong New Year celebration in other areas, as Hmong people also organize their New Year festivals in late November each year at the same time as Westerners celebrate Thanksgiving. This custom is accordingly influenced by the timing of Vietnamese people in Vietnamese New Year.

By contrast, Hmong Protestants follow weekly religious activities of Christianity. Converts meet at the village chapel every Sunday and participate in the Prayer, a fundamental part of Protestant worship activities. People interact with God during the Prayer by saying thanks for His bounties, atonement, guidance, and protection requests. Furthermore, since the Bible is considered the inspired word of God, Hmong Protestant churches sometimes conduct Bible readings on Thursdays. Village residents also include praise and worship music in their events all year long. During several religious holidays, including Christmas, the Passion of Christ, Easter, the Assumption, the Festival of Weeks, or Pentecost, this music can feature singing hymns, gospel songs, or modern Christian music (Nguyen, 2009, p. 25).

“Protestantism in Txheeb Siv has at least three eras of missionary activity, although a broad acceptance only started in 2015. Baptism has been embraced by more and more Hmong people, who have also become our brothers. Bible values helped us discover our path to embrace a new way of life and create fresh income sources. I do not think that we have given up our cultural identity. Whenever asked, we help with village activities, celebrations, and daily tasks. Though we engage in two different ways depending on our beliefs, Protestants also help non-protestant villages in wedding or obsequial ceremonies.” (interview with a 45-year-old Hmong pastor, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, February 22, 2024)

In Txheeb Siv, a religious difference does not produce a clear departure in customs. Previous studies by Vietnamese writers indicated that Hmong Protestants had radically changed their beliefs, which resulted in a loss of native culture and a decrease in traditional rules, perhaps potentially having detrimental effects on preserving Hmong culture (Vuong, 2005; Nguyen, 2009). Still, it turns out that Txheeb Siv does not have that worsening scenario. The religious conversion of the Hmong has produced a favorable interaction between new identities and old customs in their cultural trip. They have reached a consensus on cultural customs and show tolerance toward variations.

“Not among my family are Protestant adherents. However, I have seen that our present practices differ somewhat significantly from those of prior decades. We used to conduct wife abduction, for instance, whereby a couple in love would have the man “catch” the woman to become their wife, therefore insuring she was not compelled to wed someone she did not love and enabling the guy to wed the lady he loved. But since our quality of living has risen and we are more educated, this habit is rare nowadays. Besides, the required dowry is far less than it used to be.” (interview with a 34-year-old Hmong female, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, May 11, 2024)

Generally speaking, a cultural transition has resulted in an apparent alteration in the group using fresh ideas, sound methods, and solid systems of authority, economy, and external cultures to assist the evolved society. Consequently, people have created new rules about cultural practices and realized the need to renovate conventional ways and embrace new behaviors so that Hmong people could pave their way for modern lifestyle and societal evolution. As a consequence, the Hmong people of Txheeb Siv know how to change their material culture in order that their cultural products accommodate the needs of economic growth and modern lifestyles. In terms of spiritual culture, Txheeb Siv villagers mostly practice Christianity, blending their traditional spiritual practices with Christian ideas and ceremonies. Most Hmong Christians have embraced more Westernized Christian customs, while others still follow traditional animistic rites, including offering sacrifices to ancestors and spirits. This important change may not be entirely ascribed to Christianity but to an ethnic self-awareness meant to fit new and appropriate modern practices.

Factors of changes

Political involvement of Kinh people

As soon as Vietnam was politically under the autocratic regime of the Communists in 1976, the SRV focused on the ethnic situation and adopted many solutions to alleviate impoverishment and bridge economic and educational disparities between highlanders and lowlanders. The Communist government also designed ethnic programs that brought teachers and experts to mountainous areas to reduce illiteracy in ethnic groups and propose economic initiatives to enhance the quality of life (Vietnam Communist Party, 2021). Based on the Vietnam Communist Party's guidance, the SRV formulated a consistent policy that all ethnic groups are treated equally, and that racism is strongly opposed to guarantee equal development among ethnic groups (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021, p. 8). Examining current Vietnamese Communist policies on ethnic matters, Hanoi kept seeing non-Kinh communities as groupings of backwardness with very high degrees of poverty and ignorance. The SRV provided formal education, but the ethnic economy is still sluggish in approaching modern livelihoods, leading these communities to fight for better social advancement. Communists, in general, still regard the Hmong affairs as a delicate topic. The Party condemns other political dissenting groups that distorted its policies on ethnic affairs, even while it recognizes the necessity for cultural diversity and lets ethnic groups promote their native culture. This is the Party conspiracy to establish an underlying Vietnamese ethnocentrism through government agencies and center Kinh culture as the mainstream of Vietnamese civilizations.

In 1978, the SRV ethnic affairs agency classified Hmong/Hmoob as “Mèo” in the Vietnamese language (Vietnamese Institute of Ethnic Studies, 1978). It enacted several laws and policies to protect the rights of ethnic minorities, including their cultural, religious, and linguistic rights (Hoang, Pham, & Nguyen, 2022, p. 7). In Lai Châu province, decisions regarding economic growth and education also consider eliminating illiteracy among the Hmong people and designing programs for cultural preservation and education (Bui & Nguyen, 2023, p. 141). Implementing a school system in this village, along with the dedication of Kinh-speaking educators to deliver formal education to the Hmong community, has resulted in a notable reduction in illiteracy rates. An increasing number of villagers have acquired a prominent level of proficiency in the Kinh language, enabling improved communication with Vietnamese authorities. The Lai Châu authority facilitates the management of the Hmong village by providing support to the village head, who acts as an intermediary between the inhabitants and the government. The village head, usually a former village administrator, maintains a considerable influence in exerting control over locals to ensure compliance with government mandates. Undoubtedly, the Kinh community's political engagement has resulted in a greater allocation of funds to enhance infrastructure, education, and healthcare facilities in the hamlet.

However, this phenomenon obscures the distinction between politics and culture. The Hmong people are required to appoint a village chief who is both intellectual and clever and operates on a Vietnamese Hmong bilingualism. This individual must be considered and receive the general approval of the Lai Châu authority when it comes to political intervention by the Kinh people. The Kinh people's discreet political actions are intended to mitigate potential conflicts and misunderstandings between the Vietnamese and Hmong people in terms of Vietnamese cultural assimilation and overwhelming political intervention. This covert policy intentionally and directly erodes the autonomy of the Hmong and the democracy of the village. However, villagers have to achieve political harmony with local authorities to foster the local economy maintain their daily life stability, and practice Christianity. Until now, a comprehensive plan for the preservation of Hmong culture persists in the Communist Party of Vietnam (Online Vietnam Communist Party Newspaper, 2023).

The government's promotion of economic expansion is noteworthy; however, the absence of discreet measures may impede the preservation of Hmong identities in the presence of growing governmental intervention. Despite the village's receptiveness to increased governmental intervention and the dominance of the Kinh culture in the region, the Txheeb Siv villagers consciously maintain their ancestral culture. The government has not yet implemented Hmong language education or initiatives to promote Hmong native culture in its educational programs, trying to teach them the Vietnamese language and offering formal Vietnamese education to them instead. When determining illiteracy rates, the Party based on their Vietnamese language proficiency. As such, Hmong people could only communicate the Hmong language in an informal setting and attempt to prevent the likelihood of cultural loss. Hmong agility in a bilingual environment of Hmong and Kinh, while still adhering to Hmong customs, guarantees cultural preservation and prevents the government from imposing Kinh culture through their current policies on ethnic minorities policy in Lai Châu.

Ethnic self-awareness of the Hmong

Ethnic self-awareness plays a critical role in determining social status and the ethnic makeup of a community (Kim-Ju & Liem, 2003, p. 289). Members of an ethnic group who share identities, dialects, cultures, and behaviors possess a strong sense of pride in their heritage, which inspires them to preserve and pass it down from generation to generation. The villagers of Txheeb Siv may not fully understand the village's origins or the process by which it was relocated to its current location; however, they demonstrate adaptability and resilience in their efforts to preserve their native identities. They have established a robust community by establishing villages home to numerous Hmong families who share a common kinship (Ha, 2021, p. 132).

In Txheeb Siv, the assumption that Hmong villages remain autonomous, independent, and locked is only partially accurate. The Lai Châu authority has prioritized infrastructure enhancement in this village to attract tourists. This initiative has facilitated improved communication between Txheeb Siv villagers and Kinh lowlanders. Ironically, this advantage has not resulted in a significant cultural disparity between the Hmong and other ethnic groups. Berry (1990) identified four elements of changes in ethnic cultures and their capacity for adaptability: assimilation, separation, integration or biculturalism, and marginality (Berry, 1990, pp. 232-253). The Hmong maintain their integration into "the national" culture of the country where they settle while protecting their cultural roots. The villagers' interaction with a larger cultural and educational environment demonstrates a healthy relationship between their culture and "the host" culture (Rogoff, 1990).

The Hmong in Txheeb Siv actively explore their ethnicity, their distinctiveness, and attitudes toward the Kinh ethnic majority. In daily social interactions, the Hmong speak the Kinh language for business but speak their mother tongue in informal conversations (Tam, 2015). The Hmong people engage in various economic pursuits to sustain their livelihoods. Villagers embark on tourism by establishing homestays, restaurants, and other services catering to tourists. Nevertheless, certain

households demonstrate a cautious approach towards traditional means of sustenance, subsistence farming, for example. The Hmong community continues cultivating profitable crops, creating intricate embroidery, and participating in agricultural activities to enhance agricultural output and household earnings. Christianity's introduction into Txheeb Siv cast new light on new economic livelihoods that enhanced their standard of living. Nevertheless, many Hmong individuals in Txheeb Siv persist in agricultural activities as traditional livelihoods inculcated into their minds and shaped Hmong identities. Although there has been an increase in the variety of new sources of income in tourism, subsistence farming continues to be a practical means of supplementing their earnings. When asked about the existence of agricultural and farming sectors in a community-based tourism village like Txheeb Siv, a Hmong man replied:

“Christianity has awakened us to search for a different kind of economy in which we run companies and give up opium trade and usage. We started doing embroidery trading after pastors' advice, so shifting our emphasis from agriculture to encourage children to attend school. Still, this is hardly a whole strategy for running a profitable company. We could not fight for it among the Kinh people. Many households so still depend on farming and agriculture.” (interview with a 33-year-old Hmong female, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, June 23, 2024)

Although under the governance of the Kinh authorities, the Hmong community in Txheeb Siv has successfully preserved its social structures by placing significant importance on safeguarding their cultural identity. Villagers attempt to glorify the power of the village head, the senior, and Christian pastors. Their self-awareness of a strong kinship system and solid social solidarity helps promote Hmong ways of social organization, build internal support, and preserve cultural settings. The locals of Txheeb Siv firmly follow the instructions of the village leader, who forbids Hmong individuals from building houses in the Kinh style, for instance. The Hmong people still uphold their culinary customs at important celebrations, and Hmong embellishments remain widespread (interview with a 24-year-old Hmong male, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, June 23, 2024). Although the majority of villagers became converts or got exposed to Kinh culture, they nonetheless actively pin their hope on the power of their native culture and promote it as a representative of Hmong history and culture.

The globalization of Christianity

Globalization has much influence over the culture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam (Tomlinson, 2007, p. 352). Once seen as a manifestation of “Americanization” or “Westernization,” this phenomenon has shown to be both widespread and noteworthy in every domain it approaches. Cultural artifacts, concepts, and customs are disseminated and traded between countries, enabling technological, transportation, and communication progress. Regrettably, this also presents a significant obstacle to ethnic minorities, who sometimes face a dilemma between cultural preservation and modern lifestyle adaptation. Religious persecution lasted from the start of Protestantism in Vietnam in 1911 until before the 1986 open-door policy (Nguyen, 2024, p. 187). However, it was not until 1995 that Protestantism was introduced to Hmong villagers in Txheeb Siv. The Hmong called it “Ntseeg Yexus.” The religion did not begin from the missionary of lowland pastors, but thanks to the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), the message of Pentecostalism spread from one hamlet to another. Over several decades, the population of Hmong Christians in Vietnam became larger and now stands at 1.4 million converts. (Rumsby, 2021, p. 701). Consequently, this religion leads to a significant religious and cultural metamorphosis within the Hmong. No foreign missionaries visited northern Vietnam to enlighten the Hmong people with the Bible and baptize them. Nevertheless, it

was the radio and Hmong local pastors, who played a pivotal role in enabling a mass religious conversion and deeming Christianity as a pathway to alleviate their impoverishment.

During an interview with a famous pastor in Txheeb Siv, three significant historical shifts were revealed that have shaped the development and widespread adoption of Christianity in the village. The first phase spanned from 1995 to 2005, followed by a transitional phase of 10 years (2005-2015) that focused on individualism, education, and personal salvation. The Vietnamese government officially supported this phase, creating a favorable environment for Hmong converts. Since 2015, the proportion of local Protestants in the village has grown by 70% of the total population (interview with a 45-year-old Hmong pastor, in Txheeb Siv, Phong Thổ, Lai Châu, May 31, 2024).

Christianity is critical in refashioning the Hmong people's sociocultural aspects in Txheeb Siv. Christians in this community discern the importance of education, especially in rural areas with limited access to education (VOVWorld, 2022). A modest Christian church has been erected in Txheeb Siv, functioning as a weekly meeting place for the congregation. Individuals possess the means to acquire Bibles, whether in physical form or through digital means on their smartphones, enabling them to keep to the guidance provided by pastors. The church also serves as a location for artistic performances during major Christian festivities. Hmong Christians in Txheeb Siv beseech divine guidance, seeking the education of villages in the virtues of filial piety and charity. Christian ideas and beliefs include the importance of personal salvation, the authority of the Bible, and the notion of heaven and hell (Tam, 2016). These beliefs have shaped the Hmong people's manner of life, decision-making, and social interactions. The proliferation of Christianity also prompts a restructuring of social institutions in Txheeb Siv. The village head now possesses major influence in significant matters and ceremonies. Simultaneously, the village pastors also share power with the village head. Pastors are villagers, but exercising power in Christian rituals in the village, particularly instructing Hmong Christians on demonstrating their allegiance and devotion to Jesus Christ. The village head, who sometimes is a Christian, also performs a subordinate role in such events. The power of shamans formerly the Hmong people's spiritual guardians, has significantly diminished. In Txheeb Siv, there is a lack of active shamans. However, on rare occasions, those who do not follow the Christian faith may undertake the services of a shaman from a different village or remote location, usually only when a Hmong child is born.

Additionally, my pastor acquaintance acknowledged that Christianity had influenced the modernization of his village's lifestyles and livelihoods. He confirmed that the noteworthy influence of Christianity on the Hmong people in Txheeb Siv is evident in the dramatic departure from opium, backward rituals, and inappropriate demeanors, as a villager who witnessed the historical evolution of his hometown, listened to the God, became a follower, and subsequently became a prestigious pastor. Hmong Christians established an outward-facing commercial economy by transitioning from a subsistence economy. Traditional handicrafts, commerce, and business operations also center this economy. This watershed is not the ramification of political leverage provided by the Kinh authority or adaptation to the Kinh economy and exposure to foreign cultures. Nevertheless, Christianity was the catalyst. The Hmong people, renowned for their adaptability, resilience, and community-oriented nature, readily embraced Christianity, which rekindled their aspirations to establish contemporary lifestyles and increase family income.

Non-Christian Hmong individuals are also captivated by contemporary ways of living. In a discussion with Vaaj Haam, a young Hmong woman who does not practice Christianity, I discovered that she and her family made efforts to become involved in the economic activities in the hamlet. Non-Christians prioritize livestock rearing, farming, and agriculture above engaging in tourism-related commercial activities. However, they ventured into Hmong embroidery and transported their goods to lowland areas for trade. Non-Christian individuals also adhere to the guidance of the village leader, whether religious followers or not. Their reactions to village head recommendations show their

capacity to adapt to the Christian way of thinking, which is probably helpful to their integration into modern lifestyles as a common phenomenon in a community-based tourism village like Txheeb Siv. In the past, the role of the shaman used to associate with his communication with the spirits of deceased family members and ancestors so that he could bestow good fortune onto the family. In Txheeb Siv, however, the expansion of Christianity aligning with modern lifestyles challenged the role of shamans and the Hmong people started to cease the involvement of shamans in their cultural practices. In light of Christianity, both converts and non-converts in Txheeb Siv strive to reconcile their traditional beliefs with Christianity in terms of the exercise of authority, economic livelihoods, and cultural transformation.

Conclusions, Research Limitations, and Academic Recommendations

The main thesis of this essay posits that Hmong village sociocultural shifts are evident in Txheeb Siv hamlet. Built as a typical community-based tourism village, Txheeb Siv villagers underwent significant changes in how they organized their society and how they fostered the local economy followed by cultural changes. Compared to other Hmong societies, it is assumed that such sociocultural changes become clear and noticeable in the Txheeb Siv society. This case study research added more depth to current literature on Hmong studies and extended previous arguments on current Hmong societies in Vietnam.

Based on the results of ethnographical fieldwork, I focused on critical alternations in terms of village governance, economic activities, and material and spiritual culture in Txheeb Siv. In this village, there are three types of authority as Max Weber (1978) explained, because villagers respect the role of the village head and the elderly as traditional, the role of pastors as a representative of charismatic authority, and a rational-legal authority as followed by Communist power in Lai Châu. In addition, alternative sources of income, such as tourism and trading coexist with traditional farming and husbandry, such as rearing livestock such as cattle, pigs, and chickens to produce meat, dairy products, and other essential goods. Besides, Txheeb Siv villagers exhibit a change in material culture so that their culinary culture and house design showed flexibility in adapting to local cuisine and renovated architecture in turn. Although 70% of the Hmong population in Txheeb Siv became converts, this situation does not cause culture loss. People seek harmonious ways to reconcile traditional and modern lifestyles to make Hmong culture survive and revive amid external interventions in Vietnamese politics and culture. Thus, I argue that three factors probably mobilized Hmong sociocultural changes in Txheeb Siv, including the proactive engagement of Vietnamese governmental policy, Hmong ethnic self-awareness, and the expansion of Christianity.

The limitation of this research effort is that it was not conducted in a vast geographical region encompassing Hmong societies in many areas of northern Vietnam, thereby limiting the generalizability of its findings. It is recommended that forthcoming studies focus on examining the socio-cultural changes occurring in the Hmong population in northern Vietnam and aim to identify the commonalities and variations across those groups and determine which additional factors result in their behavioral changes in society and culture. Furthermore, it is crucial to utilize a quantitative approach to assess the impact of credentials, professional background, expertise, linguistic/cultural abilities, and potential biases (such as gender, age, and social class) on Hmong cultural practices, education, and behaviors in Vietnam. This report also explores several facets of changes; hence another study must be undertaken to provide further insights into a specific area of this transformation. This article examines the causal factors behind sociocultural changes among the Hmong in a specific administrative unit. It is necessary that there will have more articles on policy formulation and administrative guidance viewed from the perspective of the Hmong community rather than only on the viewpoint of the SRV administration to make those policies viable and efficient in the implementation.

Acknowledgments

The remarkable and beautiful days spent in Txheeb Siv during the ethnographic field trip will never fade. My cultural identification was set aside momentarily to fully absorb the indigenous culture distinct from the Kinh/Vietnamese culture. It became evident that, like the Kinh/Vietnamese people, the Hmong have a strong sense of their origins, identities, history, and culture. I drafted this article as I wanted to begin a new raft of Hmong studies in Vietnam viewed from Hmong people rather than adopted by Kinh/Vietnamese ethnocentrism. My lovely Hmong friends, particularly a Hmong family that kindly gave me shelter, food, and contact with Hmong people during my ethnographical fieldwork from February to June 2024, deserve great gratitude. It is also extended to the Hmong pastors in Lai Châu province for their kind hospitality during coffee meetings to discuss their Hmong community and Protestantism and for providing me with insightful comments, although they are occupied by homestay activities and missionary in surrounding provinces of northern Vietnam. Also, thanks are also due to a young Hmong pastor, E-ly-gia, a friend for translating Hmong language materials and agreeing to be an interview subject. Without their massive help, this project would not have been feasible. At last, I would like to thank the *Asia Social Issues* editorial team for taking the necessary time and effort to process this manuscript. I would like to take this opportunity and sincerely appreciate all reviewers' valuable comments and suggestions, which helped me in improving the quality of the paper.

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