
2. **NEXT MEETING (428th)**: Tuesday, 23 January, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “Thai Forward Air Guides in Laos: their role in the 2nd Indochina War”. A Talk by Paul Carter.

3. **FIRST FEBRUARY MEETING (429th)**: Tuesday, 06 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “The great insect die-off: facing the challenge”. A Talk by Peter Davey

4. **SECOND FEBRUARY MEETING (430th)**: Tuesday, 20 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “Chiang Mai Burning Season: Collecting data, Understanding the Problem”. A Talk by Craig Houston.

5. **LIST OF FUTURE INTG MEETINGS.**

6. **INTG CONTACTS:** CONVENOR - SECRETARY - WEBSITE.

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1. **LAST MEETING (427th)**: Tuesday, 9 January, 2017

   “Hmong Songs of Memory: Secular and Sacred Music in Laos and Thailand”

   A Talk by Victoria Vorreiter

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1.1. **PRESENT**: Shela Breau, Tammy Burns, Jacqueline Cooper, Nicole Decourriere, Tom Dickson, Louis Gabaude, Jim Geier, Ruby Grierson, Oliver Hargreave, Terry Harkin, Reinhard Hohler, Sidney Jessup, Wannido Jiratha, Jeni King, Paul King, Marty Knight, Mary Knight, Bennett Lerner, Don Linder, Ramlah Magnusson, Gail McAllister, Michael McAllister, Basil McCall, John Melton, Narumit Hinsuiranan, Amy Miller, Patrick Morel, Debra Olson, Desmond Ondatjie, April Ou, Henri Pagau-Clarac, Geoff Pimlott, Kanchana SiFueangFang, Lorri Pimlott, Jume Sananikone, Tim Sawyers, Victor Schneeweiss, Markus Steeb, Susan Stem, Colin Stratford, Suriya Smutkupt, Rachel Stuckey, Marie Szalek, Lionel Szalek, Robert Sultan, Gary Suwannarat, Polly Szantor, Carolyn Thomas, Patrick Tunhapong, Barbara Weibel, Crystal Weston, Sandra Wright, Alvin Yoshinaga, Lena Young. Signed: 54; Counted: 70.
Hmong Origins

The Hmong (Hmoob) represent one of the major indigenous groups among the magnificent multiplicity of peoples inhabiting Southeast Asia. Over the millennia they have developed an astonishingly rich culture as they migrated from their source in the far reaches of Siberia into northern China, following along the mountains that flank its great rivers—the Yellow, Yangtze, Pearl, and Mekong—before finding sanctuary in the highlands of what are now known as Henan, Hubei, and Hunan Provinces. Here, the Hmong, known as the Miao in China, thrived and multiplied in great number until the Han Chinese spread into these areas from 20-220 A.D. with the intention of dominating the area. These ambitions provoked hundreds of years of conflicts between the two groups finally ending in the 1700’s when the fiercely independent Hmong were forced to travel further south to the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, where the majority currently lives. A number of Hmong groups, however, continued their sojourn, relocating to the Himalayan foothills of northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar, and, more recently, to the four corners of the world.

Hmong Identity

A traditional people living close to the earth—keenly attuned to the wheel of life, the rotations of sun and moon, the cycles of seasons, and the unending chain of ancestors—the Hmong have created a complex, all-encompassing belief system rooted in animism, whereby every entity in nature possesses a soul and the universe is organized by supernatural beings. Frequent rites, ceremonies, and festivals are performed throughout the year to maintain harmony between the world of man and the realm of spirits, to protect each Hmong person, family, and village from unseen malevolent beings and to supplicate and honor the benevolent spirits, souls, and ancestors that live among them.

The Hmong are a self-sustaining, agrarian people, working the land with traditional swidden techniques. Dry-cultivation rice and corn, along with smaller crops of vegetable and fruits are harvested on the sides of steep mountains where the Hmong build their villages, usually in seclusion from other ethnic groups. Pack ponies laden with provisions from harvest, hunting, or fishing can often be seen climbing switch-back paths. The Hmong further supplement their diet with the livestock they raise.

Households are composed of multi-generational, extended families related by descent and marriage. These are overseen by the chief male, appointed because of his experience and character. Special emphasis is placed on a hierarchy determined by age, with greatest respect bestowed on elders and siblings in order of seniority. Hmong society maintains a system of eighteen patrilineal clans, some of which are further divided. This clan system provides order to all social, political, economic, and religious interactions throughout each village and its wider community.

The Hmong of Southeast Asia are composed of numerous groups and subgroups, speaking a range of regional languages. The four major dialects correspond to the largest of these groups, so named by the primary color of
their garments—the White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb); Blue or Green Hmong (Hmoob Ntsuab); Striped Hmong (Hmoob Txaij); and Black Hmong (Hmoob Dub). Despite such diversity of vernacular and customs, the Hmong find commonality in the shared tenets that permeate their songs, stories, and ceremonies.

**Hmong Language**
The Hmong language is tonal in nature, with a complex phonology based on eight tones. Each word construct, therefore, can have as many as eight distinct meanings, depending on whether the spoken pitch is high, medium, low, rising, falling, breathy, extended, or ended abruptly in a guttural stop. This gives the Hmong language a singsong quality, as its sonically fluctuating nature embodies qualities of tone, rhythm, and timbre found in music.

**Hmong Music**
Throughout the ages, the Hmong have performed secular and sacred ceremonies to observe momentous occasions. The medium propelling these rites is music, which springs from a vast repository of songs, chants, invocations, and instrumental pieces that chart the human experience. Enacted by the keepers of the bardic tradition—the master Hmong musicians, shamans, clan leaders, ritual specialists, matriarchs and patriarchs—this vibrant soundscape pervades daily life as it does sacred observances. For a culture that historically has no literary heritage, oral tradition, driven by music, stories, myths, and ceremonies, also serves as the most enduring channel for transmitting everything the Hmong know about their inner and outer lives—their history, spiritual beliefs, code of conduct, life lessons, earthly and sacred practices, and emotional experiences—linking the first ancestors with present generations and beyond.

**Hmong Vocal Music**
Given that the Hmong language is based on tonal inflection, displaying qualities of intonation, cadence, and modulation, it is not surprising that vocal music is considered “sung poetry,” a lyrical extension of speech. The Hmong have developed a vast repertoire of vocal music based on the traditional narratives, imagery, and musical forms of past generations.

Hmong men and women perform lengthy ballads, *kwv txhiaj*, a genre that includes a wide variety of styles displaying distinctive melodies and rhyming verses based on archaic poetry, which differentiate one from another. These are individually named and specially sung during secular occasions—life-cycle and seasonal rites, courtship, personal expression, and communal gatherings. Other genres of song are performed for rites that observe pivotal initiations—wedding songs, *zaj tshoob*, celebrate the union of a couple, while funeral songs, *zaj qhuab ke*, lead the deceased’s souls on their path to the spirit world. The sacred and historical songs that drive ancestor rites and shamanic ceremonies employ very different musical characteristics, appropriate to specific needs and occasions.
No matter the theme, style, or purpose, Hmong vocal music is performed solo and by memory; is rooted in a pentatonic scale; employs regular rhythms; and follows a format using cadenced word pairing and exchange.

Hmong Instrumental Music

In accordance with Hmong musical tradition, melodic instruments made of bamboo, reed, plants, wood, hide, and brass—mouth harp, ncas; leaf, nplooj; fiddle, nkauj laus ncas; side-blown flute, raj ntsaws; end-blown flute, raj pum liv; folk clarinet, raj lev les; free-reed pipe, raj nplaim; and multiple free-reed pipes, qeej—are expressly played to communicate prose based on Hmong vernacular, thereby acting as a surrogate language. This is so because the flow of their tones is able to replicate the patterns, contours, and sensibility of speech, so that “verses” played by musical instruments serve not as a melody that accompanies lyrics, but as the lyrics themselves.

The fundamental musical line and the ethereal overtones of the mouth harp, ncas, and the organ-like polyphony of the qeej, “gheng” free-reed pipes, for example, can imitate vowels and consonants to such a high degree that, when shaped phonetically to the flow of speech, they seem to “sing” meaningful verse. In this way, performers and listeners—be it couples courting through call-and-response exchanges over hours and days or a master musician performing rites for a gathering of family and friends—are able to share a concealed coded language, which unfolds extemporaneously, discreetly revealing personal thoughts, feelings, counsel, and intentions.

The Hmong have also developed a rich tradition of percussion instruments that are played solely for sacred occasions. Made of horn, metal, wood, and hide, the timbre of these instruments projects such resonant vibration as to move the core of each person as well as to reach the distant summit of the supernatural world, for music is the language of the spirits.

The ritual paraphernalia performed during healing ceremonies, ua neeb—buffalo divination horns, kuam; ring rattles, tswb neeb; sistrum rattles, txiab neeb; and gong, nruas neeb—are crucial for a shaman to both call back an invalid’s souls that have wandered in the human world and to retrieve them, while in trance, when the souls have traveled further into the spirit world. These instruments drive the rite as they accompany the shaman who chants a lengthy poetic narrative which reveals—like the great epic poems of preliterate societies of lore: the Ramayana, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Metamorphoses, the Iliad, the Odyssey—a heroic quest, replete with a perilous journey in
exotic locations, a formidable mission, prescribed tasks, challenges, obstacles, victory (or possibly defeat), and a cast of larger-than-life mythic characters of good and evil spirits. Through sacred chant, ritual percussion instruments, and devotional acts, a shaman attempts to return a patient’s souls to his body so he may heal, thereby restoring the delicate balance between the human and spirit world.

During last rites, the deep, throbbing tones of the bass funerary drum, nruas tuag, with its regular pulse and driving mixed rhythms, accompany the melodic refrains of the qeej reed pipes, now performed using distinctly sacred tunes, text, and dance-like gestures, to lead the deceased’s three souls to their different destinations. In the arc of life, Hmong rhythm and blues animate a person’s last rites as they echo in the spirit world.

Conclusion

The cultural, spiritual, and practical lessons amassed by Hmong elders, master musicians, spirit intermediaries and ritual specialists represent thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and wisdom—the collective unconscious uniquely shaping the Hmong worldview—that have been passed down through the ages by oral tradition. Now however, the music, rituals, and customs that harmonize the inner and outer life of the Hmong are transforming, regrettably even vanishing, as wise patriarchs and matriarchs pass away and young generations adapt to an ever-changing modern world.

It is hoped that the Hmong Songs of Memory archival project contributes to the efforts of others, serving as a reminder and touchstone of the extraordinary cultural legacy the Hmong have created and sustained since time immemorial.

Victoria Vorreiter
Hmong Songs of Memory
Book, Film, and Exhibition
www.TribalMusicAsia.com
2. Next Meeting (428th)

Tuesday, 23 January, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai

“Thai Forward Air Guides in Laos: their role in the 2nd Indochina War”

A Talk by Paul Carter

The Talk: Thai Forward Air Guides (FAGs) were CIA contract employees who coordinated battlefield operations in support of Thai and allied forces in the secret war in Laos. Their story has never been written in the English language. Paul Carter’s 21-year U.S. Army career and five war zone deployments provided him not only the background and experience to document this history, but gave the Forward Air Guides confidence that sharing their stories would result in a skillful study. Thai Forward Air Guides’ primary duties were to coordinate U.S. aircraft activities, and liaison between the Thai military and CIA. In 1970, Thailand was embarking on its largest military expeditionary effort in modern times, sending large numbers of troops into Laos. This was a joint fight with the CIA, but there was a problem. Large numbers of Thai forces required an effective means to control U.S. airstrikes, reconnaissance and medical evacuations. In response, the CIA recruited over 100 Thai military-aged males, their only qualification being to speak English. They went to a U.S. military course of 10-14 days and were immediately deployed to battlefields in Laos. It was an anomaly of warfare likely never to be replicated, where foreign civilians were given a modicum of military training and placed on a battlefield to coordinate U.S. airstrikes. Mr. Carter’s lecture will focus on who the Thai Forward Air Guides were, their motivations, their training and activities in Laos, as well as efforts to gain post-war recognition and alumni activities today.

The Speaker: Mr. Paul Carter is a doctoral candidate at Chulalongkorn University. He holds a Master’s degree in Thai Studies from Chulalongkorn University, with a thesis on “Thai Forward Air Guides in Laos during the Second Indochina War”. He is a retired U.S. Army intelligence officer, having served in Afghanistan with the 82D Airborne Division in 2002-2003. He subsequently spent seven years at the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington D.C., focusing on Iran and Iraq. In 2007-2011, he was deployed to Iraq’s combat zones for four tours, providing critical information to U.S. forces while informing U.S. national policy makers on Iraqi trends and developments. In 2013, the U.S. Office Director of National Intelligence awarded him the U.S. President’s Daily Brief Professional Recognition Award for co-authoring 14 U.S. Presidential Daily Briefs from 2011-2014 on Middle East topics vital to U.S. national security. Mr. Carter is also a special lecturer each year on Cross Cultural Communications at Mahidol University, International Business class.

3. First February 2018 Meeting (429th)

Tuesday, 06 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai

“The great insect die-off: facing the challenge”

A Talk by Peter Davey

The Talk: This talk touches on the negative impact mankind is having on invertebrates globally and the dire consequences for the food chains that underpin the natural world we take for granted. There is a need for global awareness of the ongoing demise of the environment and actions taken by local groups worldwide. The talk will mention the work of a Foundation created in Hungary to bring back from the brink herb-rich
grassland habitat that supports a broad diversity of moth and butterfly species. It will focus on a five-year research initiative underway in a Slovenian National Park. It identifies, records and maps moth species that survive there, and flags species discovered critically endangered so that Slovenian authorities can undertake habitat management.

The Speaker: Peter Davey was born with a butterfly net in his hand; his father was an old school, now politically incorrect, collector of butterflies in England. Peter has retained a passion for the natural world throughout his life - as an amateur Lepidopterist. Over ten years ago, he helped create a moth network in the county of Dorset in the UK. He moved to Hungary five years ago, where, together with a Hungarian ecologist, he instituted a Foundation focused on acquiring and managing grassland habitats to support endangered butterfly and moth species. It also provides expertise and research resources to the National Parks in both Hungary and Slovenia. As there is no nature to conserve during the harsh east European winter, he spends four months here in Chiang Mai enjoying retirement and being amongst many friends, chiefly within the social circle of the Chiang Mai Hiking group.

4. Second February 2018 Meeting (430th)

Tuesday, 20 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai

“Chiang Mai Burning Season: Collecting data, Understanding the Problem”

A Talk by Craig Houston

The Talk: Each year the citizens of Chiang Mai and Northern Thailand are exposed to dangerous levels of air pollution during the annual burning season. The arrival of the smoke sparks an annual debate about whether the problem is getting better or worse, when is the best time to leave the city, which parts of the city experience the worst of the burning, and what can be done to protect your health. This talk will answer all of these questions and share the exciting advances in low cost sensor technology that are enabling us to build a much more detailed picture of the problem. We will include a live demonstration of the air pollution sensor we are using to create a citizens’ air monitoring network in Northern Thailand.

The Speaker: Craig Houston holds a Masters Degree in Aeronautical Engineering and spent the last decade working on renewable energy projects in the UK, Spain, Mexico, and China. He now lives in Chiang Mai and focuses his time on building data visualizations and web applications in the fields of renewable energy, cities, and the environment. Craig was recently awarded the Secretary of State's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad for his work on air pollution. He got his first taste of air pollution living in Beijing, and, after the arrival of his son in Chiang Mai, decided to work on understanding the air pollution problem in Northern Thailand.

5. List of Future INTG Meetings

Tuesday, 23 January, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “Thai Forward Air Guides in Laos: their role in the 2nd Indochina War”. A Talk by Paul Carter.

Tuesday, 06 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “The great insect die-off: facing the challenge”. A Talk by Peter Davey.
Tuesday, 20 February, 2018, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai: “Chiang Mai Burning Season: Collecting data, Understanding the Problem”. A Talk by Craig Houston.

6. INTG CONTACTS : Convenor - Secretary - Website

1) Convenor : Rebecca Weldon : e-mail : <rebecca.weldon@gmail.com>. Mobile : 087 193 67 67.
2) Secretary : Louis Gabaude : e-mail : <gabaudel@yahoo.com>. Mobile : 087 188 50 99.
3) INTG Webdoctor : Clarence Shettlesworth : e-mail : <nugentsr@gmail.com>. Mobile : 0610509996.
4) INTG Website : http://www.intgchiangmai.com.

Chiang Mai Flower Festival, 2013/02/02
Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
1984-2017 = 33 years of Talks!

2nd Indochina War:
Thai Forward Air Guides in Laos

A Talk by Paul Carter
Tuesday, 23 January 2018, 7:30 pm
At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road (Opposite EFEO)
THE GREAT INSECT DIE-OFF:

FACING THE CHALLENGE

A Talk by Peter Davey

Tuesday, 6 February 2018, 7:30 pm

At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road (Opposite EFEO)
Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
1984-2017 = 33 years of Talks!

Chiang Mai
Burning Season
Data & Problem

A Talk by Craig Houston
Tuesday, 20 February 2018, 7:30 pm
At The Alliance Française - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road (Opposite EFEO)