

## History of the Hmong – A Timeline

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### • Prehistory

There are conflicting stories about early Hmong history. Some evidence shows that the Hmong originated in Siberia, with pale or white skin and blonde hair. Oral history makes reference to frozen lakes and wearing furs. The language, however, is clearly linked to Chinese.

### • B.C. to 400 A.D.

The first firm historical accounts can be traced back to the Hmong in China. Many wars and uprisings were noted in early centuries. In response, the Hmong began constant movement within China to maintain freedom and preserve their culture. Some Chinese Dynasties welcomed the Hmong; most tried to enslave them. The term Hmong came into use, often translated as meaning free or free people. Folktales developed during this time and have been orally recited ever since, passing from generation to generation.

See *The Flood*, a Hmong folk tale about the emergence of the Hmong.

### • 400 - 900

A Hmong Kingdom was established in China with a hereditary monarchy. The kingdom included very organized villages and districts. Only the rulers and men voted. The Hmong were involved in Chinese rule until they were defeated by the Sung dynasty. They then returned to their nomadic existence.

### • 900

In different locations within China, the Hmong continued to fight and struggle for independence. This time also included many years of peace.

### • 1800

The Hmong were lured to northern Laos by rich, fertile land and the promise of freedom in the seclusion of the Laotian mountains. Ten villages were established in a few years.

### • 1815

Friendly relations were enjoyed with neighboring villages during this time. Opium was grown as the only cash crop.

### • 1893

Laos fell to French rule. Many Hmong supported the French, others did not.

### • 1940

France surrendered to the Nazis.

### • 1949

Laos gained independence. The national symbol of Laos, displayed on its flag, is that of a three-headed elephant with a white parasol on a five-step platform. The elephant signifies the three 16th century kingdoms of Laos; the parasol is a symbol of royalty; and the five steps of the platform stand for five commandments of Buddhism that outlaw: killing, stealing, lying, adultery, and abuse of alcohol.

### • 1950

Vang Pao, a famous Hmong military officer was assigned to spy for the French.

- **1960**

The American CIA spoke with Vang Pao to enlist his support in their fight against the Vietnamese communists. In return for Hmong assistance, they would provide arms, training, and food. The half million Hmong living in Laos at that time were organized solely by clans. Since there was no means of mass communication, Vang Pao trekked into the mountains to talk to the leaders. For their part, the Americans promised rice and salt, and vowed to end communist rule.

- **1964**

Vang Pao was named a General in the Royal Lao Army in 1964. About 30,000 Hmong people fought against the Vietnamese, being paid an average 10 cents a day and the promise of being taken care of by the U.S. government.

- **1975**

The war ended and the Americans pulled out of Southeast Asia. 17,000 Hmong soldiers were killed. 5,000 Hmong civilians perished as well. Vang Pao was ordered by the CIA to leave Laos. The Pathet Lao (communists) began re-educating Hmong - often in concentration camps. In retaliation for their support of the Americans, the communist Lao waged chemical warfare against the Hmong. Many Hmong fled for their lives to Thailand. 100,000 Hmong were killed.

- **1980**

Another 100,000 Hmong fled to Thailand. Some stayed in refugee camps up to ten years. Eventually, most were resettled in France and the U.S. Since the closing of the refugee camps in 1995, thousands have returned to Laos where there are continuing reports of torture and abuse. A few thousand Hmong people remain in Thailand.

- **Hmong in America: 2007**

According to the 2000 census, approximately 170,000 foreign-born Hmong live in the United States. Many more have arrived since then. Today, besides the foreign-born, there are second and third generation Hmong Americans. The majority reside in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Fresno, CA; and Milwaukee, WI.