



Analysis of a Hmong Mythical Figure: Chi You (Txiv Yawg)

Choua Xiong ❖ Dr. Ezra Zeitler & Dr. Kelly Wonder ❖ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Background

This research exploration is a part of the China Hmong History research project that was conducted by eight UW-Eau Claire (UWEC) students and two UWEC professors in Yunnan Province, China during the summer of 2012. On this trip, our research focused on analyzing the validity and complex story of the Hmong mythical king Chi You (Txiv Yawg). Hmong diaspora and transnational situation has created a search for "the Homeland" and the story of Chi You has offered a sense of "origin" for the Hmong people (Yang 2009). Because the history of the Hmong has been passed down orally, scholars and Hmong communities' continuous debate on the validity of Chi You's origin story (Lemoine 2008). It is important to recognize that Chi You is nationally recognized as the Miao king and not the Hmong king.

Chi You as the Hmong King



Chi You statue in Ya's home in Khom Faav.
Photo in courtesy of Becky Vang (2012).

According to numerous scholars, the consistent story of Chi You is as followed:

The story of Chi You begins some 4,700 years ago, when Chi You was the great ruler of a strong and powerful kingdom, Jiuli (Kuj Cuab Cuaq Lig), located along the Yangtze River. The Chinese Yellow Emperor, Huang Di, saw Chi You's excellent achievements and declared war. After countless losses, Huang Di joined forces with his rival Yan Di.

Huang Di and Yan Di forces were powerful enough to kill Chi You in the famous *Battle of Zhuolu* (current day He Bei). After Chi You's death, many Miao strategized their escape southward into southern China (Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guangxi).

(Thao 2006, Cha 2010, Yang, Z. 1998, Yang, K. 2009, Xiong, Y.P. 1997).

Methods & Participants

The researcher employed a participant-observation method to collect qualitative data. Participant-observation was conducted as follows:

- ❖ Researcher engaged in informal conversation about the validity of Chi You with informants through focus groups and personal interviews.
- ❖ Participants were asked to tell the story of Chi You in groups or individually.
- ❖ Participants shared their knowledge on Chi You and the significance of Chi You's role in their Hmong history.
- ❖ Observations of participants' living resources, educational demographics, and community involvement were considered when asking participants questions.
- ❖ When participants were not questioned, I observed their homes for statues or alters and visual display for their relations to Chi You.

Participants:

- ❖ 10 out of 16 communities were questioned through interviews or focus groups.
- ❖ 7 communities were observed.
- ❖ The number of people in each community varied from place to place because some places we saw a couple of households and others only one.

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Interview with Hmong Chinese. Photo in courtesy of Ezra Zeitler (2012).



Chi You altar in the Yunnan Ethnic Minority Park.
Photo in courtesy of Crystal Vang (2012).



Huas Tais Hmoob (Hmong King) dance performed by Hmong Xi in Tan Zi Zhai.
Photo in courtesy of Kelly Wonder (2012).

Findings

Generally the interviews and focus groups did not show any significance in validating the story of Chi You as the Hmong king.

Out of the 16 communities interviewed:

- ❖ 11/16 communities shows no acknowledgement or acknowledgements about Chi You as the Hmong king.
- ❖ 11 communities **did not give any clues to validate** Chi You's role in their lives.
- ❖ 7 of the focus groups showed a common acknowledgment of Chi You:
 - ❖ **Xyooj-Yaj from Kunming**
 - ❖ "Chi You **does not exist as the Hmong's king**, but we acknowledged Chi You as the Miao king"
 - ❖ **Thoj-Lis-Xyooj from Qian Jin**
 - ❖ Similar story which includes the southern China migration into southern
 - ❖ **Hawj Muas from Taj Sawv Toob**
 - ❖ "Chi You is a king that all of Miao has claimed as their king for years. There is no reason for us to deny him".
 - ❖ May not necessary hold a strong attachment to Chi You.
 - ❖ **Vaj-Xyooj from Paj Tawg Lag (Wen Shan)**
 - ❖ Sang a traditional song echoing the above story.
 - ❖ Commented that this is a "painful" Hmong story to share.
 - ❖ **Hmong Xi from Tan Zi Zhai**
 - ❖ Performed a dance mentioning Chi You's kingdom and migration.
 - ❖ Did not verbally talk about the story of Chi You or show much evident of Chi You's existence in their village.
 - ❖ **Yaj from Khom Faav**
 - ❖ Has a statue of Chi You in bronze.
 - ❖ Did not reveal any verbal story about except "Chi You looked like this."
 - ❖ **Miao Village in Yunnan Ethnic Minority Park, Kunming**
 - ❖ Also has a statue of Chi You in the museum.

Discussion

In conclusion, I found that the majority of interviewees did not provide any evidence that validate the story of Chi You. While many people claim that Chi You is a recognized king, they did not express any connection to him. When participants were questioned about Hmong's origin they said Hmong always lived in China; there are no references to a time or place. The myth of Chi You still remains a mystery. Twuihwal Smith (2012) suggests that there is an underlying institutional power that western imperialism has on indigenous communities. To complicate this debate, it is possible that the idea of a hierarchy existence (e.g. having a king) may be a western idea rather than a Hmong philosophy; however, this topic needs further exploration.

Some of the **limitations** to this research are as followed:

- ❖ Environmental and Political Influences
 - ❖ Government's reinforcement of generating income for economic purposes – in practicing an intensive agriculture.
 - ❖ Many commented that they do not have the luxury of learning and teaching about the Hmong history because they have to be in the fields.
- ❖ Exposure to Hmong Americans and Tourism
 - ❖ Exposure may create a preconceived mindset when interacting with us.
- ❖ Language barrier
 - ❖ Different Hmong dialects spoken in different regions of Yunnan Province (Hmong Dawb, Hmong Njua, Hmong Xi, and Hmong Sua).
- ❖ Focus groups are studied only in Yunnan province
 - ❖ Data and result may not apply or correlate with Hmong in Guizhou, Gaungxi or Sichuan.

Through this research, we acknowledge that the knowledge sharing system in Hmong communities operates on a trust system. This implies that more in-depth research and a longer stay period may generate better and more authentic relationships and trust. With these relationships, researchers will be able to obtain necessary observations and participants. Hmong scholars are highly encouraged to stay longer in Hmong villages to analyze the validity of this origin story.

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