

18XGEM

CULTURAL HMONG MAGAZINE

XYOO TSHIAB
**NEW YEAR
REFLECTIONS**

PRICELESS
MEMORIES

03
FEB
ISSUE

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Recently, I have noticed an increase in the number of Hmong magazines, and Asian publications, in general. Where once there was one or two magazines at the specialty Asian stores or Hmong cultural events, today the options seem to grow exponentially. Noticeably, a lot of them look like replicas of existing mainstream magazines. The influence of Western culture seems so pervasive that the only obvious difference is that all the models posing in the latest fashions on the glossy pages of these magazines are of Asian descent.

One thing is clear, Hmong (along with other Asian groups) are becoming increasingly familiar with mainstream media and are adapting it to suit their needs. Amid all of these new magazines, we believe that what sets 18XEEM apart is that the essence of our magazine is tradition, and that never goes out of style.

One day when I was feeling overwhelmed and disillusioned, a college professor told me to do the Zig-zag. I didn't get it at first, but he went on to explain, "When everyone is doing one thing, you do the opposite, and when everyone follows, change your path so that you will always stand apart." Interestingly, on two recent occasions, my father reminded me of this same concept (flip to the opposite side of this magazine if you are curious).

18XEEM is documenting life; preserving history; taking the ordinary and appreciating it for what it is; revealing the treasures of the unknown and the beauty of a culture. This year, our resolution is to celebrate our culture and the meaningfulness within our everyday. I hope you will enjoy this issue more than ever.

Sau npe,

Hlee Xiong
Editor-in-Chief



Wisconsin Hmong New Year - Labor Day Weekend

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Here I am at the Akron Hmong New Year promoting 18XEEM with one of my best friends, Tony!

Of all the articles in the Nov. issue, our readers enjoyed "Bridging the Gap" the most. Send us your feedback along with a photo to submit@18XEEM.com!

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18XEEM is published six times a year.

Reader's thoughts:

I went home for lunch and just received my 18XEEM magazine and I was so excited I took it to work with me and skimmed through it. I finally found a magazine that triumphs over all other Hmong magazines that I've ever picked up: a magazine that's worthy of my time. I've picked up a lot of other Hmong magazines and read through a handful of them and I've been really disappointed. I've been waiting for a magazine just like 18XEEM to be created; a magazine featuring who Hmong really are and how much we've accomplished in the short period of time we've been rediscovered by the world. Our stories and our culture have been buried for so long that even to this day, some people have never heard of the word Hmong. Thanks for shining a light over our culture for the world. I'm so proud of your work and will be sharing then with my co-workers who have no idea who or where Hmong people come from.

-Bao Xiong

P.S.
I love the layouts and pictures in the magazine.
Thank you for your time in reading my thoughts.

Thank you to everyone for the support! We read every letter sent to us –whether through airmail or email. We want to know what you think, so we can make this the best magazine ever! Send us your thoughts!

I recently received the November issue of 18XEEM and I love it! I love the layout, the colors, and the content and share it wholeheartedly with my students, family, and friends. Thanks for all the hard work. I appreciate it, as a reader, a woman, and a fellow Hmong. Ua Tsaug!

Best regards,
Padee

I am really amazed with your magazine; it has a lot of great information in it. I learned a lot of things that I didn't know before. Amazing!

-Soua Lao

I've received both issues of 18XEEM. And I love them! Thank you for your efforts in helping our communities move forward in other methods by expressing our culture, something that we need to hold onto. Currently, I'm working with some students who have limited information on our culture and traditions. I think this is a great way of engaging them into learning more about themselves and their roots. Continue doing what you are doing, it is definitely making a positive impact in our community nationwide.

-Blia Moua

I'm happy to inform you that I've finally received the magazine yesterday. I understand the foundations of a magazine are its subscribers and advertisers and you guys have done a great job to provide for the best for your customers. When I received the magazine last night, I couldn't close it until I read the whole thing from cover to cover. Great job and keep it coming, thanks!

-Youa Vang

I want to take a moment to compliment you on the wonderful work. Your compassion, creativity, and efforts to preserve and share the Hmong culture is phenomenal. It comes rare and is inspirational to 18XEEM, take the extra step to ensure the Hmong identity is known, as well as remembered.

Sincerely,
Mailee Chang



Priceless Memories

By Cha Cheng

Each year throughout the American Midwest, thousands of Hmong American hunters head to the wilderness in pursuit of North America's popular big game... the American Whitetail Deer. Named after its white tail, which rises when fleeing from danger, the Whitetail Deer has been an enjoyment to pursue and a passion of mine since I was 14 years old. In 2007, I handed down this passion to the next generation of young Hmong American hunters.

In 1986, my father and I shot our first deer, an experience that I didn't cherish until now. The deer was the average-size buck (antlered deer). It had 3 points on one side and 2 on the other, making it a 5-point buck. It was my father's first deer in America since leaving Laos in 1985. This was one memorable and special experience that I have never forgotten. Not only did I gain experience, I inherited patience, while spending hours waiting in the woods, and became more attentive in listening to the quietness in the dark.

Being in the woods with the guys became an annual ritual ever since my father and I caught that first big prize. In the months leading up to hunting season's opening day, my friends and family and I reminisce about the ones that got away the year before. In our minds, we'd fantasize about a 4-legged animal with a wide rack of antlered proportions.

During this time, we come up with any viable excuse to get off work early and alter our schedules to spend as much time as possible to go hunting. This sudden change of behavior is called Deer Stress Syndrome (or DSS, a term not to be taken seriously), and as the seasons pass, the sickness only worsens. Often times, hunters tell their families that they are simply "working late" when the truth is that they're probably packing their Hondas and SUVs with their equipment.



Left to Right: Jackson, Cha, Mike, Va Seng Lee (Mike's dad)

Two tragic events involving Hmong hunters in Wisconsin have led to the life sentencing of one Hmong hunter (2004) and the death of another (2007). In the response to the surge of racism and tension, aggravated by the mainstream media, 18XEEM decided to break from the negative coverage of these tragedies and, instead, explore the intimate relationship Hmong people have with the sport of hunting. In this way, we hope that 18XEEM is able to shed light on the personal side of these unfortunate stories and offer a perspective that is too often overlooked. The following is a personal narrative about the experience of young Hmong American enthusiasts who hold the sport of hunting in the highest regard as a form of bonding between family, friends, and generations.

The Big Buck Champ

Typically during our family's hunting season, 15 family members compete for our annual "Big Buck" contest. The rules are simple: every player pools in twenty dollars each and the person who catches the buck with the most points and widest antlers wins the coveted title of "Big Buck Champ" and the \$300! I'm fortunate and lucky to say I have taken that title since 1999.

I was really excited leading up to 2007's archery season, particularly with my nephew Michael Ly. Two seasons prior to this, my brothers and I contributed to an Archery fund for his birthday. We managed to equip this "Young Buck" Michael Ly with the necessary equipment to hunt Whitetail deer with a compound bow. We got him a start-up bow with a maximum draw weight of 40lbs. This means when Mike sees a deer and pulls back his string, he'll actually pull back 40lbs of resistance from his bow.

As Michael hones his archery skills, he'll progress and advance to 70lbs just like his uncles. As time progressed, we contributed arrows, broadheads and camouflage clothing to his Archery fund.

On the first Sunday in October, I shot and bagged a nice 8-point buck. The following Sunday, my younger brother Va Houa shot and bagged a 6-point buck from the same tree stand (a tree with a seat secured by ratchets and chains that is 15-25 feet off the ground which is used for hunting). Throughout the season, my other brother Jackson and I had scouted out some public land to strategize where to set up Mike and his dad. We had some very good locations that kept us all within 15 minutes of walking distance from each other. We were now going into the 3rd Sunday and Mike and his dad finally had some free time to hunt.

On Friday, October 19th Michael and my brother-in-law Va Seng Ly were anxious and set out to try and bag their first deer. I asked Mike where he wanted to sit.

Mike simply replied, "Your stand".

I replied, "Ok... but you might not see anything."

"I feel bad because my stand had people hunting in it three consecutive days already. People were leaving their scent everywhere and the deer already picked up on these alarming clues."

Mike just smiled and said, "It's ok."

As I had predicted, Mike and Va saw nothing at my stand. In the morning, it was the same. On Saturday afternoon, Mike's dad went and put up a new tree stand not far from it. He then baited the area with carrots and corn, close enough for an arrow shot, to attract the deer. Mike elected not to sit at the new location. Unfortunately, Mike and Va didn't see anything at my stand on Saturday evening either. Sunday morning came and I finally had the entire day off to hunt. I asked Mike where he wanted to go.

"Same place," he replied. So I walked to the new stand and climbed in. Around 8 am, two does (female deer) came in and started feeding on the bait in front of me. It was really nice to just watch them and enjoy the moment. I elected not to shoot unless a big buck came by. As I continued to sit under the cover of leaves and branches, I took pictures of the deer with my cell phone. Eventually they left after 45 minutes, and I climbed down. When I met Mike back at the parking lot, I asked him if he saw anything.

"Nope," he said.

I was positive he would enjoy my mentorship and reflect upon it someday, as much as I had cherished those moments back in my younger days with my father.

"Look at the pictures in my cell phone." I told him.

"Wow!" was his reply. A whole new attitude emerged from him. Instantly, it reminded all of us of why we enjoyed hunting so much. It was the resurgence of dedication and patience I was looking for.

Later that afternoon, Mike, his dad, my brother Jackson and I geared up for an unforgettable adventure. As Mike and I walked into the open field, I was very optimistic about the possibility of him finally getting his first deer. I replayed the morning experience of seeing the two does in my head and decided to reserve that location just for Mike's big moment. I was positive he would enjoy my mentorship and reflect upon it someday, as much as I had cherished those moments back in my younger days with my father. (Although my dad keeps busy with his treadmill, Hmong movies, and his close friends... our family is uneasy with the idea of a 63-year old man climbing up a tree. Thankfully, my father and I still spent time together hunting during the firearm season. And yes, we were successful in getting another 5-point buck for a keepsake.)

Mike and I finally made our way to our separation point in the field. I smiled at him and said, "Leave your phone on vibrate and only call me if you shoot a deer or fall out of your stand." We punched knuckles for good luck and walked away from each other, forming a wide "V" in the field.

I had a great feeling that Mike would call me shortly after dark with news that he finally got his deer. The wind was perfect; peace and serenity were my companions. At that moment, I was thinking about how this year was much better than last year, not just with regards to hunting but life in general... and then my phone vibrated. Sure enough, it was Mike. I answered loudly and asked, "What, are you ok?" I had the fear that perhaps he fell out of the tree.

A confused voice answered, "Uncle Cha, I can't find my stand." I sighed with relief and gave him the best

directions that I could with landmarks, trails, pine trees, fields and the bait pile. Then Mike reassured me he would be fine.

Curious to see if Mike had found his stand, I tried calling him shortly after, but he didn't answer. Now, I was really worried about him. What if he did fall out of his tree? At 6 pm I received a return call from Mike. I frantically picked up and asked if he was ok. To my surprise, he told me he shot two deer. I smiled and climbed down to go meet him. When I got there, there was an arrow sticking in the ground covered with little deer blood. Mike explained that he missed the first shot and that two deer took off. They waited in the distance for half an hour, and eventually one returned to feed on the carrots. With another opportunity, Mike pulled back and released an arrow right behind the shoulder bone. The arrow went straight through and stuck to the ground.

By this time, it was barely visible in the woods. Mike's dad and Jackson met up with us to help track the deer. Within an hour we had covered almost a mile. Still with decent signs, we continued on. As we came to a walking path, Mike's dad unexpectedly shone the light right onto the deer. It was lying in the middle of the trail, but quickly jumped up and took off. Jackson followed quickly and the rest of us followed behind. We finally lost the blood trail and started shining our lights in all different directions. Surprisingly, it was five feet from where we were standing for about five minutes. The deer got up and tumbled into a thick patch of brush. Jackson and I could tell that the deer was about done. We took it home, and after taking some pictures, we cleaned the deer up for packaging. To our amazement, the deer had been shot in the liver.

Much of the night had been uneventful, but patience and persistence had allowed us to experience the brilliant unpredictability of nature. The time spent with Mike was very reminiscent of my time with my father. This was the passion my father passed on to us all so that we could continue the Hmong heritage through "young bucks" like Mike.

As Mike headed home with an indescribable glow of accomplishment, the chain of events humbled me. Every year presents itself with challenges both large and small, yet every year unfolds the unexpected discoveries of life... something essential to feeling happy. ◀

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New Year Reflections

Each year we focus on the New Year celebration, and the days leading up to it. But what happens when everyone heads back home? Do we reflect enough on the events that have happened, take the good things, learn from them, and prepare ourselves for a better year?

If we decided to reflect and aspire to learn from the past year, then this year, we might say something like, "The upcoming year will be better because we'll fix this, try harder at that, or be a little different in this or that way." But instead, as the years progress, traditions are lost, people forget and become busy with other commitments, and those who are present to celebrate the new year stand around wearing their blue jeans and white shirts under black jackets, waiting for something... but nothing ever comes their way. As the new generation, we should take the initiative to learn from every experience and opportunity so that we can continue our traditions with meaningful interactions. At the same time, we should also learn to critique our customs so that we can improve them for future generations.

When we asked some youngsters dressed in traditional and not-so-traditional Hmong clothing why they were ball-tossing at the Hmong New Year Festivals, the response was, "Our parents want to watch us, so we are doing it for them", or "**Peb yeej ib txue pov pob, ces txhua xyoo peb pov pob xwb**" (which translates to, It's a tradition that we observe every year, so we just do it). Not a lot of youth these days know the real meaning behind the ball-tossing game. We asked a 77 year-old man where the ball-tossing game originated, and this was his response:

"Ball-tossing is a way to interact and enjoy one another's presence. It is a way to tingle our hearts and soul. When a young girl finds a suitable guy, she tosses her ball at him; if he catches and throws it back, he has accepted her invitation to Pov Pob. In the 'old' days, it wasn't ball tossing with a yellow tennis ball, it was with a kaus nab. Kaus nab is fabric mended and sewn into a ball (prepared days in advance by unmarried daughters hoping to find a soul mate). Throwing the kaus nab is an opportunity to interact through poetry or to hais kwv txhiaj. This interaction is like innocent love growing in the eyes of our parents. From this, we learn whether the person we are tossing the kaus nab with is suitable to become our future spouse." ◀

"Pov Pob yog ib qhov kev lom zem ua peb ua thaum ub. Nws yog peb txoj kev deev siab deev ntsws. Thaum twg ib tug txhais nrhiav tau ib tug tub hluas zoo tom tshav pob, nws pov nws lub pob rau tus tub hluas ntawd; yog tus tub hluas txhais lub pob, txais tau hais tias nws txaus siab nrog tus ntxhais pov pob. Tsis tas li ntawd, peb tsis yog pov pob, pev pov kaus nab. Kaus nab yog ib lub pov ua peb muab ntau xaws. Yog peb pov lub kaus nab no, peb hais kwv txhiaj thiab sib tham hais lus zoo zoo, nws yog ib txoj kev deev siab deev ntsws peb thiaj xaiv tau txij tau nkawm raws li peb niam thiab peb txiv txoj kev xav."

Pe Tsiab

The Hmong look forward to celebrating the New Year more than anything else. Every year, the Hmong New Year Festival is celebrated throughout the world, this is the only time they can rest and celebrate their heritage. In the old country or '**lub tebchaws qub**' (a term Hmong refer to as in the mountains of Laos prior to the Vietnam War), the days consisted of hard labor and farming. Every morning, hours before the sunrise, the Hmong would pack their garden tools and walk miles into the fields to work until dusk. During the harvesting season, they made sure they would gather enough food to celebrate the coming of the New Year, or the 30th of the last month in the year. In Hmong, this is referred to as '**Noj Tsiab Peb Caug**' – literally translated as Eating the New 30th. Families and friends would come together to celebrate and feast for several days.

But prior to the first day of the New Year celebration, the Hmong would conduct a ceremony known as '**Pe Tsiab**' to show respect for the elders (today, this ceremony is less commonly practiced

among Hmong). The ceremony is performed as a special request to the ancestors of the family to bring luck and good fortune to the family in the years to come. **Pe Tsiab** is usually conducted by the second surviving generation in the family -the ones who traditionally lead the younger generation in keeping the Hmong culture alive.

The ceremony begins with shooting two shots into the air and lighting incense outside of the home. This indicates that the ceremony has begun, and the New Year is officially here. The children will then serve two boiled chickens as a gift to their parents. While kneeling, they request that the old year be thrown out with all sickness and bad luck; that the elders and ancestors will send wealth and fortune to the entire family and that the New Year will only bring happiness to all.

The parents, in turn, serve wine to their children, praising them and acknowledging their request. Their wine represents an approval to bestow luck and fortune to the family in the New Year. If done correctly, **Pe Tsiab** must be performed each New Year for three consecutive years. It is customary for the children to serve chicken the first two years, and complete their offering after the third year with the sacrificing and serving of a pig.

After the third year, the children will decide whether or not to do the ceremony again. If their request for wealth and good fortune is fulfilled, or the family is content with their life, the ceremony will not be necessary again. The children may also choose to wait for their own offspring to re-initiate the ceremony, once they have become the second surviving generation. ◀

Want to learn about something specific? Email your thoughts to submit@18XEEM.com

A Visual Map of Hmong Around The World

A map that represents the Hmong diaspora in the world, current known dates of the Hmong New Year celebration, and other interesting facts.

According to the U.S. Census (2000) and the ACS Survey (2005), Minnesota's Hmong population is estimated at 46,352. The New Year is celebrated in both St. Paul (Thanksgiving holiday) and Minneapolis (weekend before Christmas)



Since 1975, the New Year celebration has been held in Fresno, CA. Annual attendance averages over 100,000 with attendees traveling from out-of-state and other parts of the world, including Southeast Asia and Europe –making it the largest international event of its kind.



Michigan Hmong New Year, Nov. 2007



Wisconsin Hmong New Year Sept. 2007

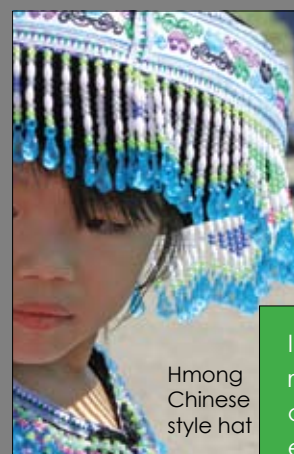


Canada Hmong New Year

In February of 2007, twenty-two Hmong refugees in Thailand were sent to live in the Netherlands. Yes, we are also wondering what the heck they are doing there and when they celebrate the New Year!



Oh, the famous French coins! This is where it all started...



Hmong Chinese style hat

In China, the Hmong population is growing: roughly 8 Million (as a result of Hmong being classified as Miao, which also includes other ethnic groups). This number has also been recorded inaccurately as 3 million, 6 million, and roughly 7 million.



Phonesavanh, Xieng Khouang, Laos, Dec 29, 2007

The Hmong population in Thailand is roughly 150,000. Most villages celebrate the New Year during January, with an attendance of over 2,000 near Chiang Mai. Not only do the Hmong pov pob (play ball tossing), but they also bring their best bulls to compete in the bullfights!



Javouhey is the largest of the Hmong villages in French Guiana, with 1,100 people. In Cacao, a large warehouse-like structure is used for community functions such as town meetings, weddings, and the New Year celebration.
Hmong Resettlement in French Guiana by Patrick F. Clarkin, Ph.D., Hmong Studies Journal, 2005, 6: 1-27.



North Carolina - Mr. HSP Pageant Contestants



Australia Hmong New Year, Dec. 26, 2006

Admission prices? Loud music blaring from all directions? Food? Organization?
 Multiple New Years celebrations? What's your pet peeve about Hmong New Year?
 If you had a chance to change something about the event, what would it be?

The Hmong New Year is celebrated at different times of the year throughout the world. In some cases, we believe it's unfortunate because it creates a disconnect between people, but at the same time, we feel that it was inevitable, since Hmong have dispersed around the world and, over the years, have adapted traditional practices in different ways. It's hard to find a designated date to celebrate the New Year; it's even harder to get thousands of people together in one location. 18XEEM did an online survey to get a better understanding of how people felt towards the Hmong New Year festivals. Here are some of the responses. To see the responses in more detail or to send us your own input, log on to <http://18XEEM.com/newyearsurvey>

Khaub Ncaws Hmoob

By Vanida Xiong

The night before,
 I watched her pull out miraculous clothing
 for my sisters and I, us four;
 I watched my mother unpack ancient luggage,
 Oh, the garments inside, they were so luxurious.
 Every textile, carefully hand-made and woven by woman or man,
 Overseas or even by patient Amiables who sat at home,
 Who crafted such pieces of fine art
 from the core of their heart's dome.
 My mother always took the time to make the most special pieces;
 It resulted in weeks to years, of many countless hours.
 There's just no way I can be cooled off,
 I was perspiring from excitement I never thought of.

I ran my fingers across rich embroideries and beads.
 I watched her pull out miraculous clothing for my five brothers,
 And also made sure everyone was out of their beds -
 So early the next morning, it bothers.
 Yet, we were too excited to even worry.
 Carefully but quickly, we adorned ourselves with our Culture,
 Wrapped up in what kept us preserved to always tarry,
 Our belongings we so will cherish forevermore.

The night before,
 I watched her pull out miraculous clothing,
 past morning 'til four.
 Oh, the garments inside, they were so luxurious.
 Our mother finely clothed us in such
 art to be the Arts.
 Carefully but quickly, we adorned ourselves with our Culture,
 Wrapped up in what kept us preserved to always tarry,
 Our belongings we so will cherish forevermore.

We prepared to attend the large gathering
 of once a New Year to ball toss.
 So old how one day we'll grow to be,
 But never once will the few of us ever cease to greet the Albatross
 Of what it takes to be who we are meant to be.
 We stared into the mirror to see our reflections,
 Smiling and not blinking
 At what defines us at no limitations,
 Khaub ncaws Hmoob.

Hmong Tapestries

By Linda Vang

Hmong threads of needles
 Tending patches in tapestries
 Woven into colorful patterns
 Like green or pink rice patties
 Served down generations of stories
 As though it were soup or chili
 Made for an unspoken bowl
 Deep in a battle of poetry
 Tamed from the scars in history
 Scratched by long days sewing

Every country should celebrate the New Year in the same period - Xieng Khouang, Laos

...Oh, have better equipment set up for the stage! You can never hear anyone! - La Crosse, WI

Stop the drama that arises when Hmong folks get together. Someone's always got something to say.- Canada

Less politics means less greed means better Hmong New Year. - Fresno CA

Entertainers should turn down their music or movie sounds because they're always competing to have their booth volume the highest and that's bad for the ears. I also hope people would take care of their children more so we wouldn't have so many lost children, which always breaks my heart. If the youth are coming to just start a fight then they should take it somewhere else cause it's our time to be happy and see our old friends, current friends, and relatives. I just wish people would understand the great feeling of a New Year for everyone is united together. - Sacramento, California.

I wish the New Year would focus on more traditional things like the ball tossing, folk singing, traditional Hmong dancing, and Hmong arts. - Schofield, WI

Hmong people are social people. Having multiple New Year events allow us to be more social and have a better connection across the country. - Robbinsdale, MN

Thov kom Hmoob hlub Hmoob. - Sacramento, CA

No more Heidi or Indian dances. It's not part of the traditional dances. It should not be under the traditional dance competition. There are too many Heidi dances and it's out of control. Laotian dances are not Hmong either. - MN

Everyone should be dressed in Hmong for at least one day - Milwaukee, WI

...and the young folks should ball toss instead of just walking around because it's a Hmong New Year. - Detroit, MI



NEW BREED

Who is New Breed?

New Breed is Yeng Vang, lead vocalist and guitarist, Xai Vang, on keyboards, and Houa Vang on bass and vocals. We are a Hmong Rock/Alternative/Pop band from Oroville, California and we have been making music for about six years and currently have 3 albums out, including our newest release Los Txog Hnub No.

Where did the name come from?

The name New Breed represents something NEW and DIFFERENT that will bring both the younger and older generations together.

What inspires you to make music?

Inspiration comes from our personal experiences as well as other people's experiences that we have come to know. Also, being able to make a difference, not only in yourself, but in others.

Who are some of your influences?

Some of our influences include U2, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Linkin Park, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Santana, Tswb Siv Yis, Phoog Ywg Band, Loso and Guns N Roses.

How do listeners react to your music?

We hear from our listeners that our lyrics are very meaningful and that they can relate to them in terms of dealing with relationships and success in life. Our fans also tell us that the way we play our music is very distinctive.

Your songs are written and sung in Hmong –are you hoping to write songs in English? Why or why not?

We only have songs in Hmong at the moment, but we are hoping to write songs in English in the future. Our primary objective is to produce music for the Hmong community, who are becoming more accustomed to the English language. We also feel that writing songs in English will help Non-Hmong listeners in understanding our music aspirations and appreciate Hmong musicians.

How do you think being Hmong affects you as musicians?

As Hmong individuals, it's not easy to be in the music business. Not only do we have to focus on our music, but also focus on family, school, work, etc. It would be great to make a living out of just creating music, but it's hard for such things to happen in the Hmong community. Ultimately, it comes down to having the dedication in order to reach your goals as a musician.

How do your lyrics relate to issues in the Hmong community?

We wrote a special song titled "Suab Ntsuag Tsov Rog" to remember our struggling Hmong people in the jungles of Laos. Although their voice couldn't be heard, we'd like to think that the song we wrote was their voice. In that aspect, a lot of people were able to relate to our lyrics.

What is your ultimate goal as artists?

Our ultimate goal is to carry our Hmong voice and culture forward through our lyrics so that it will not be forgotten. It's true that everything is changing and we're moving along with the changes, but at the same time, we still want to retain our identity as Hmong. ◀

THE ART OF TAXIDERMISTRY

By Cha Cheng

It's gratifying to know that another fellow Hmong American has the passion and artistic abilities to showcase so many memories for Hmong American hunters. Although the season may come only once a year, in the months before the season opens, many hunters relive a dream come true by admiring the trophy mounted on the wall in their home.

Art is not always what we traditionally think of it as.

In fact, art comes in many different forms. It is broad in its medium and canvas. Art is as subjective as it is objective. It is the use of "skill and imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*) For centuries, art has been a preservation of culture, of events, and of things. Art is an individual's own passion of expression.

Taxidermy, the art of preserving wildlife, is one such passion for Tong Chai Lee of Warren, MI. When asked how he got involved with taxidermy, Tong Chai replied, "It was expensive to wall mount my son's walleye." (A walleye is a sporting fish resembling a perch that when mature averages 7-10lbs.) At \$12.00 an inch, the 20 inch fish costs as much as a week's worth of pay. When Tong Chai imagined that he could do it himself, and perhaps be much better at it, he started to learn how to preserve Whitetail Deer.

Amazingly in just 3 short years, Tong Chai's labor of love and eye for detail allowed him to showcase the Trophy Whitetail Deer mounts that now adorn the walls of his living room. A small shack next to his garage houses his small studio table and tools.

His artwork hangs courageously above blue sofas, remarkably real life-like with marble glass eyes, begging for attention. Standing in his living room, I immediately asked if he shot all of the deer.

He humbly replied, "No, they are only there for inspiration and study."

Tong Chai is a typical blue-collar worker in Southeast Michigan. During the week, he is an iron welder for an industrial plant. As an iron welder, his attention to detail and his hand and eye coordination skill makes it a smooth transition to go from his work environment into his small taxidermy shop. On the stone walls of his shop, pictures of his wife and their children are pinned haphazardly in one section above his table. A wooden shelf –built with his own tools and hands, is filled with various chemical bottles and stacks of magazines. Stashed on the highest shelf are unmounted squirrel's made of foamcore –indications of smaller projects that Tong Chai hopes to complete in the months to come. This is the place where Tong Chai spends his evenings after a long day of work.

In the world of taxidermy, wall mounts for a whitetail deer range anywhere from \$275.00 to \$500.00 depending on the name of the taxidermist. At an astonishing \$150.00, a deer mounted by Tong Chai is like the days of paying 0.99 cents for a gallon of gas! He has expressed that his enthusiasm for taxidermy is coupled with a passion 'to help a fellow Hmong out' and that he has no intention of making a living out of it. So far his efforts have led him to mount nearly 10 trophy-worthy deer in his community.



Tong Chai may be contacted @ 586-907-4395.

Tong Chai's 8 Simple Steps:

Step 1. Winning the trophy. The most important: Bag a buck (antlered deer) worthy of displaying in your home. For some, the trophy could be their first deer. For more avid hunters, it definitely has to be a 6-point buck or better. And for trophy hunters, a perfect 10-point buck (as in my case). Keep in mind, some people hunt many years before they even get a trophy of this caliber.

The hunter decides on the position and style of a mold (the deer mold can be facing straight, turning its head left or right, crouched, looking up, having the mouth open or closed, ears back or forward, etc.). A Styrofoam mold is ordered according to the hunter's specifications.

Step 2. Preparation. Prep the deer by skinning or "cape" the hide from the middle of the deer up to the base of the jawbone of the deer in one piece. Be very careful to not cut an accidental hole in the hide. Securely seal it in a trash bag and place it in the freezer until delivery.

Step 3. Skinning. Once in Tong Chai's hands, he meticulously skins it from the skull and cleans the hide free of left over fat and meat. At this particular point, he saws off the antlers (if any) and stores it away until needed.

Step 4. De-moisturizing. The hide is washed and salted to dry. This phase of the process completely eliminates moisture from the hide to prevent it from "rotting".

Step 5. Soaking the Hide. The hide is then soaked in a special chemical solution that helps break down the hide further. This phase exposes the hide in its natural white color.

Step 6. Tanning Leather. After a month or so, the hide is now ready to be tanned into nice leather.

Step 7. Application on Mold. The cape is slowly applied onto the mold and secured with glue. The life-like eyes are inserted, the nose is textured and additional airbrushing may touch up any remaining details.

Step 8. The Drying Period. This last step allows the hide to naturally conform or fit to the mold. This is the most exciting step for most hunters. Shortly after, the time has come to pick up the trophy and take it home. ◀

The Roots of Hmong History



Tombstone of King Chi You

We often stumble across people in our everyday lives, who are curious to know who we [the Hmong] are, where we come from, and above all, what it means to be Hmong? And to make things a little bit more complicated for ourselves, we start by explaining how we arrived here from Thailand and previously, from Laos. We go on and on about how we were the ethnic group that fought in the Secret War during the Vietnam War era with the CIA, and how the Americans promised to bring us here to America. As we finish explaining our history, we wonder whether or not the person understood anything we said. Is he or she any closer to understanding what Hmong is? We probably just confused the person or maybe, if we told the story correctly, the person might walk away with some grasp of what brought us to the United States. Yet, we failed to share with them the root of the Hmong people.

According to Chinese legends, the San Miao were the natives of China, and today are known as Hmong, or Miao, and in some cases, Mien, H'mong, and even Mong. Five thousand years ago, the great king that ruled China was Chi You, also known as "Txiv Yawg" to the Hmong (San Miao). Legends say that Chi You was a very powerful king who could not be defeated. Although his enemies tried to kill him many times (and thought they had killed him), he did not die. It was believed that he had two gems from a dragon that protected him.

Chi You wanted nothing more than peace for his people. He saw that many men married several wives, took advantage of them and physically abused them. Chi You did not like the idea of polygamy nor did he like the idea of having a mistress. He would punish anyone that practiced polygamy and abused his wife.

One day, a young gentleman who loved his girlfriend dearly, decided to take his younger brother with him to bow with him before her family. The young gentleman wanted his girlfriend's hand in marriage, and this was his way of proving his love to the family. When King Chi You heard of this, he disapproved of it because he felt it had violated his laws. By bowing to another person, it offended the King's status. He wanted to punish the gentleman, but eventually forgave him.

Despite his anger, Hmong continued to practice this gesture of kneeling before the new bride's family. They ignored Chi You's request because they felt he was too strict. Even his highest commander thought his laws were too strict, and did not want to accept them.

His commander decided to go to Han Di and Yan Di—two great kings of Chinese descent, for their assistance. Because of land, jealousy and power, they too did not like Chi You and tried many times to kill him. Fifty-two times they fought with King Chi You and failed. Each time they killed Chi You, he miraculously came back alive. Chi You's highest commander was the only one who knew how to kill Chi You, which he discreetly shared with Han Di and Yan Di.

One morning, Chi You was told by his commander that there was a wedding taking place nearby and that the family had invited Chi You, as an honored guest. He accepted the invitation, and decided to attend the wedding. When King Chi You arrived, there was no wedding—he had been set up. Chi You's commander immediately moved to the side of Han Di and Yan Di, who were both present with their army. They had surrounded the area and were accompanied by five cows. The only way that Chi You's life could ever be taken, was to be torn apart by five cows, each tied to his limbs, and one to his neck. Upon seeing the cows, Chi You realized that he had been betrayed by his own people.

At this moment, Chi You sadly spoke to the crowd, cursing his own people to live unstable lives, for they were the ones to bring him down. He declared that they would never become leaders and if they did, they would turn against one another and kill each other. No one would be prosperous because of their self-centered and coldhearted ways. The Hmong would live in misery. He had wanted nothing more than for his people to live peacefully, and was willing to do what he could to protect them. Yet they refused to accept his love and protection. He did not want to see evil circulate throughout the world, nor did he want to continue fighting. He vowed that this time, he would not return.

After Chi You completed his speech, four of the cows were tied to each of his four limbs, and the last remaining cow's rope was tied around his neck. When the cows pulled in all different directions, his body was torn apart and he then died.

Han Di, Yan Di, and the commander were all afraid that King Chi You would come back. To prevent this from happening, they buried each piece of his body far away from one another. His head was buried along with his horse in the East, where the sun rises; his torso was buried 25 kilometers away from his head, and his limbs were buried in the West where the sun sets (30 kilometers away from his head).

After King Chi You was killed, the Hmong re-established their land, and became known as the San Miao State. The government lasted for 837 years, then was overthrown by the Chinese. Afterwards, the Hmong scattered throughout the world, starting in parts of southern China, and moving towards Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. ◀

For more information on this story, contact Bangzhong Wu (Vue) directly at 559-779-3398 or write to P. O. Box 2324, Fresno, CA 93745.



July of 1998, First Annual 5,000 Years Cultural Festival.

Determined to find the roots of Hmong history, Bangzhong Vue found himself at the site King Chi You's tombstone in 1995. He became the first Hmong person ever to visit the place where the legend of King Chi You unfolded. Bangzhoua kneeled before King Chi You asking for forgiveness on behalf of all the Hmong throughout the world. He asked King Chi You to send help, luck and fortune to all.

Vue claims to have captured King Chi You's face on his camera (see photo below), while photographing pictures of Chi You's grave area. Bangzhong Vue is also the co-founder of the Chi You, Han Di and Yan Di Ancestors Hall Museum in Zhuolu City in China, which was completed in 1997. In July of 1998, thousands of people from all over the world came together for the opening of the museum and the First Annual 5,000 Years Cultural Festival. Many people came to see the tombstone of King Chi You, bringing food and burning incense to show their respects.

Video still of "The First 5000 Years" by Bangzhong Wu



The only way that Chi You's life could ever be taken, was to be torn by five cows, each tied to his limbs, and one to his neck.