

The passing of a Hmong Pioneer:

**Nhiavu Lobliayao (Nyiaj Vws Lauj Npliaj Yob),
1915-1999**

Kou Yang

[1] Nhiavu Lobliayao died on June 16, 1999, in Nong Het, Xieng Khouang, Laos. He had been ill off and on since October 1998, and was reportedly paralyzed before his death.

[2]

Nhiavu was a prominent member of the Lao Revolutionary Party and a key player during the war years (from the late 1940's to the 1970's). In the 1980's, Nhiavu Lobliayao was an alternate Politburo member of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (a.k.a. : Phak Pasason Lao, or Lao Communist Party). He ranked 21st in the Central Committee of the party; he probably held that rank since 1970's when the party was still operated secretly behind the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front). In the 1980's, he was also named head of the Office of Nationalities. During the war years, he was reputed to be much closer to the core of the decision-making body of the Lao Revolutionary Party than his half-brother, Faydang Lo Bliayao. Faydang, who was not even a member of the party, was a figurehead for the Hmong on the side of the Pathet Lao.

[3]

Nhiavu was born in Nong Het, Xieng Khouang, Laos ca. 1915 to

Kaitong Lo Bliayao and his second wife, May Yang (Maiv Yaj). Nhiavue was the only son of May Yang who also had four daughters with Lo Bliayao. He was a half-brother of Faydang and Chong Tou. Nhiavu was the last son of Lo Bliayao to have lived until 1999.

[4]

Like most other sons of Lo Bliayao, Nhiavu attended school in Xieng Khouang for a few years, and was literate in the Lao language. He grew up in a princely fashion with a comfortable life on the wealth and power of his father. When Kaitong Lo Bliayao died in December 1933, the eldest son, Chong Tou (born to the first wife) had already assumed the title of Tasseng of Keng Khouei. Because of Chong Tou's poor health, and lack of education and support from his brothers (mainly, Faydang and Nhiavu), Chong Tou was unable to effectively run the office of Tasseng of Keng Khouei. The office slid into the hands of the Ly clan, and later to Chong Tou's nephew, Touby Lyfoung who had a tenth grade education. Touby was a very well educated person in Laos at the time he became Tasseng of Keng Khouei. Thus, he became the first Hmong Tasseng who could speak, think, and act Lao and French.



[5]

Touby's uncle, Faydang, was disappointed with the changing of leadership from the Lo to the Ly clan. His unhappiness with this change, in addition to the old conflict between Bliayao (Faydang's father) and Ly Foung (Touby's father) led to the division of the Hmong in Nong Het into many factions. The conflict went beyond the two families; it became a problem for the Hmong from the 1940's to the 1970's.

[6]

In 1945, the Japanese briefly occupied Laos, which had up to that time still been under French colonial rule. Faydang,

the uncle, was friendly to the Japanese and Touby, the nephew, was an ally of the French. Soon after the Japanese left Laos in 1945, the French unleashed their soldiers. Faydang was pushed and pulled to join the Vietminh and Lao Issara. Touby, on the other hand, moved on to be involved in the local, provincial and national affairs of the Royal Lao Government.

[7]

During the initial conflict between Faydang and Touby, Nhiavu and Chong Tou were friendly to Touby and Touby's clan. There were no sign that Nhiavu might take sides in the conflict. However, in 1945, he followed Faydang to Vietnam to join the Vietminh and Lao Issara. Perhaps, being a younger half-brother of Faydang, Nhiavu felt obligated to follow Faydang. The conflict at the time became out of hand and spread throughout the two clans: the Ly the Lo. After joining the Vietminh and Lao Issara, Nhiavu became a political cadre and Faydang became the figurehead for the Hmong on the side of the Lao Issara. Subsequently, Nhiavu became a political cadre of the Neo Lao Hak Sat, and it was suspected that Nhiavu had been a member of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party since it was secretly formed by Kaysone Phomvihane in the 1950s.

Nhiavu Lobliayao posing with one of his sons. He had three wives, many children and grandchildren.



[8]

During the long struggle of the war years, Nhiavu encountered many life threatening situations, including being arrested and physically abused. He survived and was reputed to be one of the most influential Hmong persons on the side of the Pathet Lao during the period from the 1950's to the 1970's. Unlike his half-brother Faydang, Nhiavu was a

disciplined socialist and party member. Faydang was a Hmong politician and businessman who talked to anyone and was an easygoing person.

[9]

Nhiavu Lobliayao had a stroke in October 1998, and was ill off and on prior to his death on June 16, 1999. Reportedly, he was confined to a wheelchair long before he returned to Nong Het, from Vientiane. Presumably, he knew that his life was coming to an end and he wanted to die in Nong Het, his birthplace and the burial site of his parents.

[10]

Nhiavu had three wives, and many children and grandchildren. He outlived his first and second wives. He had survived through the war to die during a time of peace. He spent much of his life outside of his birthplace, Nong Het, but he had come home at the end, to die in Nong Het. He left behind a legacy of revolutionary struggle. He also left many lessons for the Hmong of the succeeding generations to learn. In his own words, "war has no winner."

[11]

Nhiavu Lobliayao made many contributions directly and indirectly to the revolution in Laos and to the development of the Hmong, especially those on the side of the Pathet Lao. His passing marks a turning point in a new era; perhaps an era of healing the wounds of the old conflict. Several years ago, he confided to one of his grand nephews that, "We all, the left and the right, have made mistakes and many people have lost their lives from these mistakes. No one really wins, everyone suffers from the war."

[12]

A few years ago, an old friend and old enemy of Nhiavu had

written to him, inviting Nhiavu to visit him in America. Nhiavu declined the invitation, but was in a conciliatory mood. One member of his extended family has asked Nhiavu to visit the family in America and he said he will come to America whenever the political climate permits. He never did, but the spirit of Hmong brotherhood has already started many years ago. Many Hmong Americans visited Nhiavu in Nong Het and in Vientiane. His nephew, Zong Chay Lobliayao, visited America in the early part of 1999. The process of healing has already begun.

[Photos by Dan Moua, used with permission.]

Kou Yang is an Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at California State University, Stanislaus. He earned his Ed.D. in 1995, from California State University, Fresno, and University of California at Davis. "Nhiavu Lobliayao" is an excerpt from Dr. Kou Yang's forthcoming book: *The Hmong of the 20th Century: the Pioneers*.

[top of page](#)
