

Acknowledgements for the Hmong Across Borders Conference at the University of Minnesota, October 4-5, 2013.

By

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Abstract

This short article presents brief information about the funders, institutions and funders that made the successful Hmong Across Borders conference that was held at the University of Minnesota in October 2013 possible.

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On October 4-5, 2013, the “Hmong Across Borders” Conference successfully convened on the campus of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. This was the second conference organized by the Consortium for Hmong Studies, a partnership between the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin—Madison. Since the conference, Chiang Mai University has also become a partner of the Consortium. Funds from our 2013 conference came from the Henry Luce Foundation, the University of Minnesota’s Imagine Fund for Special Events, the Asian American Studies program, the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), the Immigration History Research Center and Archives (IHRC), and other individuals. The Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin—Madison provided staff and advertising support for our conference and for the Consortium.

We had three keynote speakers, Prasit Leepreecha, Gayle Morrison, and Bruce Downing, whose areas of specialization are representative of the dynamism of the field. The first Hmong Thai to obtain a doctorate in the United States, Leepreecha has an international reputation as an expert on the Hmong of Thailand, and he is currently a professor of Anthropology at Chiang Mai University. He opened the conference with a broad talk, included in this volume, about the socio-political and national boundaries, and intellectual influences that impacted Hmong identity through space and time. On the other hand, Gayle Morrison, an author and independent scholar of the Hmong, gave a talk about her research experiences for her newest book on Jerry "Hog" Daniels, *Hog's Exit*. She also did a reading of the book at the IAS as part of our preconference program. Daniels was the CIA operative who worked closely with General Vang Pao at Long Cheng during the Secret War period. Our closing keynote was Bruce Downing who spoke about his experiences launching the very first research efforts on the Hmong here at the University of Minnesota back in the 1980s. Downing has been a longtime observer of the Hmong community, both in Minnesota and in the southern states. We were extremely fortunate to include Downing because he helped pioneered the field of Hmong studies. Moreover, he brought tremendous continuity to our conference because he was among those who organized the very first two conferences on the Hmong on this very campus back in 1981 and 1983, both of which resulted in publications, *The Hmong in the West* and *The Hmong in Transition*. This is precisely the continuity we, organizers of the conference, wanted to emphasize, highlighting that the labor to nurture the field continues and the spirit is alive. The multiplicity of panel subjects

from around the globe provides proof of a growing, emerging discipline. Downing's talk is also included in this volume.

The conference was a success. We brought together scholars who have been active in the Hmong Studies Consortium (<http://hmongstudies.wisc.edu/>), and attracted presenters and attendees throughout the U.S. and Asia. We are tremendously grateful for the support of our presenters and attendees who traveled here from around the globe. The Twin Cities is home to the largest urban Hmong population in the U.S. and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, contains one of the largest undergraduate Hmong American student populations, being topped perhaps only by a few other schools in the region. Appropriately, Provost Karen Hanson gave the opening welcome remarks to our attendees. Yang Dao, a retired faculty member of the University of Minnesota also generously offered his time to welcome everyone. Yang Cheng Vang, a top ritual expert of the Hmong despite his young age, played the *qeej* bamboo instrument as an opening event. He and Yang Dao told great stories during the banquet. Ann Waltner and the staff at the Institute for Advanced Study, Karen Kinoshita, Susannah Smith, Sharon Fischlowitz, and others, were instrumental in assisting with multiple aspects of the conference logistics, including setting up the website to publicize the conference events. Our conference website, which contains videos of the presentations, can still be accessed at: <http://ias.umn.edu/2013/10/04/hmong-across-borders-program/>.

The Asian American Studies program has also been quite generous. Lisa Park and Saymoukda Vongsay provided tremendous support for the conference by recruiting student volunteers and helping with program printing and conference

registration. Erika Lee of the IHRC helped me with the Imagine grant proposal. Mai See Thao, a doctoral candidate in Anthropology and recipient of our Consortium dissertation fellowship, also rallied graduate and undergraduate student volunteers. My conference co-chair, Kari Smalkoski who was a Hmong studies dissertation fellow (funded by the Luce Foundation) at the IAS was a lifesaver. She stepped in to help organize panels and aided in many aspects of the programming. Ian Baird provided much feedback throughout the planning process. Ian will lead the next conference at UW—Madison in spring 2015.

Finally, Mark Pfeifer of the Hmong Cultural Center and the Hmong Studies Journal and Pa Der Vang of St. Catherine's University helped to bring to fruition this conference volume. Thank you to everyone for your generous support.

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