

*Review of Mobility, Globalization and Development of the Hmong: Selected Essays of Nicholas Tapp* by Mark Pfeifer, *Hmong Studies Journal*, Volume 24(2022) 1-5.

*Review of Mobility, Globalization and Development of the Hmong: Selected Essays of Nicholas Tapp. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2018.*

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**Abstract**

This article provides a review of *Mobility, Globalization and Development of the Hmong: Selected Essays of Nicholas Tapp*.

**Keywords:** Hmong, Miao, Transnationalism

This compilation provides a valuable overview of the research and writings of the late Dr. Nicholas Tapp. Dr. Tapp was an important figure in Hmong Studies from the 1970s until his passing in 2015. Dr. Tapp was also a longtime editorial board member of the Hmong Studies Journal. This collection is not a complete overview of Dr. Tapp's entire career. The primary but not exclusive focus is the final two decades of his work and his writings related to Hmong in China and transnationalism among Hmong diaspora communities. Some of Tapp's earlier work on Hmong in Thailand is also represented here. In sum total, the volume presents an essential overview of the varied contributions Dr. Tapp made to the advancement of Hmong Studies.

The book is divided into the follow thematic sections highlighting Tapp's writings on the varied topics of Religion and Ritual, Identity and Power, National Project and Responses, Diaspora and Globalization. The work concludes with an Appendix as well as a Bibliography of

the works of Nicholas Tapp. The Appendix includes a reprinting of “Perspectives on Hmong Studies.” A speech Tapp gave at Hmong Studies conference in 2010, a version of which was also published in *Hmong Studies Journal*, Volume 11, the same year.

To give the reader an idea of the contents of this book, it will be useful to summarize some of the articles included in each thematic section. The *Religion and Ritual* section begins with a seminal 1989 article Tapp authored titled “Hmong Religion.” This piece provides an overview of the structure and key features of Hmong traditional religion including both internal and external influences from Hmong and Chinese culture as well as a summary of key Hmong spirits and the workings of Hmong Shamanism. “Buddhism and the Hmong: A Case Study in Social Adjustment” is a 1986 paper that examines the impact of Thai Buddhism upon the Hmong. “The Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong” is an article from 1989 in which Tapp intertwines historical and topical data to assess what the adoption of Christianity has meant to the Hmong in Southeast Asia. Finally, “Of Grasshoppers, Caterpillars, and Beans: A Historical Perspective on Hmong Messianism” from 2015 makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the recurrence of Messianism in Hmong culture and in different historical contexts.

The *Identity and Power* section of the book begins with “I am the Tiger You Fear: The Power of Popular Folk Traditions to Express Moral Conceptions of Authority” a 2010 article that explores a Miao folktale and raises questions about the understanding of cultural otherness, and the nature of religious expression in relation to concealment, rather than communication of identity among minority communities in Chinese society. “Cultural Accommodations in Southwest China: The “Han Miao” and Problems in the Ethnography of the Hmong” is a seminal article Tapp wrote in 2002 that assesses some key problems of Hmong ethnography, inquiring

why color terms were used for some groups of Hmong, as well as subdivisions of them along with their historical relationship to the Han majority in China as well as some other ethnic minority groups in Southwest China. “The Ambiguity of ‘Self’: Romantics in the Marketplace” is a 2010 essay in which Tapp, using the inspiration of certain issues in the ethnography of the Hmong, examines some aspects of the divided modern self in its comparative crosscultural application as he reconsiders the early theses of Daniel Bell, and others on the romantic ethos, or “self”, which has assumed to inform the emergence of a consumerist society. “Religious Issues in China’s Rural Development: The Importance of Ethnic Minorities” from 2014, provides an exploration of ethnic minority religion and its renewal in China with specific reference to the ethnography of the Hmong and a shared interest in geomancy and ancestor worship with the Han majority, to demonstrate that minority religious issues can reflect broader religious issues in China.

The next section of the book is *National Project and Responses*. “In Defence of the Archaic: A Reconsideration of the 1950s Ethnic Classification Project in China” from 2002 makes the case for a new understanding of the Chinese ethnic classification project of the 1950s, which Tapp suggests may be too easily understood as an exercise in colonizing representations. Tapp calls for a new ethnography of the classification project itself with particular attention paid to local influences. “Romanticism in China? – Its Implications for Minority Images and Aspirations” was originally published in 2008. This article examines the general issue of romanticism in China in the past, while also entertaining the question that a “romantic undercurrent of sensibility” may have informed images of otherness associated with ethnic minority communities, such as the Hmong, while also contributing to the perceptions of self among minorities in China themselves. “Fallow Management of the Borderlands of Southwest

China: The Case of *Cunninghamia lanceolata*” from 2007 argues that the use of *Cunninghamia* management systems shows a possible evolution away from swidden systems, to more integrated composite swiddening ecosystems in which crops, livestock, and trees together contribute to rural livelihoods.

The next section *Diaspora and Globalization* begins with “Qha Ke (Guiding the Way) From the Hmong Ntsu of China, 1943” which was originally published in the *Hmong Studies Journal* in 2008. The piece provides the English translation and text of Ruey Yih-Fu’s 1943 collected version of the Qhuab Ke, or Song of Opening the Way, sung at a Hmong funeral in China. This song is an essential component of traditional Hmong funerals. Tapp notes the significance of Ruey’s article, as he notes “It appears to be one of the earliest and most original versions of Qhuab Ke we have.” (p. 275). “Miao Migrants to Shanghai: Multilocality, Invisibility and Ethnicity” was published by Tapp in 2014. In this article, the case study of a Miao minority family in Shanghai is presented as Tapp posits that what remains important to them in the urban locale is not their formal ethnic affiliation (minzu) so much as a sub-ethnic identity of connectedness and intimacy, which is importantly related to kinship and place. As noted, the Appendix includes “Perspectives on Hmong Studies: Speech by Dr. Nicholas Tapp” originally published in 2010 in the *Hmong Studies Journal*. The speech discusses how the author became involved in Hmong Studies and his assessment of several key issues confronting Hmong culture and Hmong populations around the world including issues with terminology and Hmong identity and outsider understanding of Hmong rituals including those used in Shamanism.

Dr. Nicholas Tapp made essential contributions over many decades to the anthropological study of Hmong culture and issues affecting Hmong diaspora communities in China, Southeast

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Asia and the United States. This book collecting many of his writings adds significantly to the Hmong Studies literature.