

THE PHENOMENON OF KING PROCLAMATION AMONG THE HMONG*

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In history and traditional cultures of the ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, scientists have considered the Hmong ethnic minority a special community that has many unique characteristics historically and in the community lifestyle, all of which is expressed in the behavioral culture, the sense of community, ethnic psychology and even spiritual life. One of the aspects considered special is the phenomenon of “*xɔ̃ng vua*” (king proclamation) that took during a different era and different social situation. When assessing this phenomenon, some link it to actions leading to rioting or rebellion.

In recent years, in Southeast Asian mainland in general and Vietnam’s Hmong ethnic communities in particular, the Vang Chu (*Vangx Tsɔ̃r*) Movement spontaneously developed. Its start is said similar to the “king proclamation” phenomenon and has been examined from different angles. So what is the phenomenon of “king proclamation” among the Hmong? What is its nature? What is the link between this phenomenon and rebellions and the Vang Chu Movement at present? These will be the main topics discussed in this paper.

1. Overview of the Hmong

So far, most researchers studying the Hmong/Miao around the world have confirmed that this ethnic group was among the rulers of the Yellow River basin of China, more than 3,000 years ago, with a

highly developed wet rice civilization. They once had their own state and their written language. However, with the expansionism of the Han, they were forced to move out of their homeland and migrate to the southern region. For centuries, the Hmong ethnic group fought the Han to avoid the annihilation of their people and to win back their homeland. But their efforts ended in failure, resulting in their people being scattered throughout a strange land. To date, more than six million Hmong people, excluding those in Guizhou, are living in both big and small groups scattered primarily along the borders of five countries: Vietnam, Laos, China, Myanmar, Thailand as well as other countries worldwide (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1994).

The Hmong residential areas in Southeast Asia and Southern China are in the high mountains. The natural conditions there are very harsh. This is one of the factors making their economic life unstable. The Hmong often suffer from poverty, although they are very unyielding, industrious and diligent. However, deep down inside, the Hmong people are always proud of their glorious past and of their once very powerful kingdom with a king characterized by his deep religious beliefs. At the same time, they had a severe psychological inferiority complex with respect to their circumstances and their neighbors. These factors formed a

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conservative lifestyle for the Hmong. They sought to preserve their tradition and hardly accept outside influence. This lifestyle is a foundation, creating an intolerant purpose for the Hmong people that are demonstrated in their deep kinship and community driven relationship and even in their religious life.

The traditional society of the Hmong was patriarchal, strongly influenced by the kinship relationship and family clans. The family community comprises those who have the same “symbol” of religious belief, the so-called “sharing spirit.” They are bound together by strict customary laws and are subject to the administration of their family organization headed by the clan chief. Higher than the family organization is the village organization, comprised of several families living in the same residential area. The head of the village together with the family heads have built a self-ruled system and in fact, the orderly and “peaceful” operation of the village society is based on family clans. Further up is the regional organization, comprised of many villages in the same region. The regional head comes from the most powerful family in the region. He is in charge of the administration based on village regulations and family customary laws (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1987).

The traditional religious belief of the Hmong is the worship of multi-Gods. Under each roof of Hmong households, the ancestral altar and the place of worship the Home God and the Door God are the holiest places; next is the Garden God, the

Medicinal God, the Bed God, and the Pillar God - “the Home Spirit.” The worship of these gods has its own clear reason and is often explained by legends relating to the Hmong people’s lives (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1998).

The belief of the Hmong ethnic group often demonstrates the trend of links and ties, and bears many characteristics of Taoism. Agricultural rites are vague, instead there is a belief system reflecting community cohesiveness.

2. Events of “King Proclamation” in Hmong Ethnic Areas in Vietnam: Characteristics and Nature

In 1917, when the French attempted to march into Hmong areas in Northwestern Vietnam to impose its domination in this region, the Hmong people did not accept the new regime and followed Giang Sia Lu from Lai Chau province, who implemented a “king proclamation” and led a revolt against the French (Fieldwork data by the author in Lai Chau province, 1997). In July 1918, Vu Pa Chay from Pu Nhi commune, Dien Bien district, Lai Chau province also carried out a “king proclamation.” He called on the Hmong people to rise against French taxation of Hmong opium, in an attempt to monopolize the opium trade in Indochina and more than that to subdue the Hmong people to accept their domination. The “king proclamation” carried out by Pa Chay became the biggest uprising of the Hmong community at that time. The rebellion spread throughout the entire Northwestern region of Vietnam and the

upper region of Laos. All Hmong people in Vietnam's Northern mountainous areas headed by Vuong Chinh Duc from Dong Van Plateau (in Ha Giang province) responded to the call. The Hmong in Laos headed by Lo Bla Yao from Xieng Khoang province also supported the uprising. The French consolidated their forces to cope with the counter-attacks by the Hmong people headed by Vuong Chinh Duc and Lo Bla Yao and it took them three years to wipe out the "riot" movement launched by Pa Chay (Fieldwork data by the author in Lai Chau province, 1997).

In 1957, a number of events of "king proclamation" took place in many areas throughout Vietnam's Northwestern region. The most typical ones were the cases of Vang Chong Lu from Pa Tan commune, Sin Ho district; Vang A Khu from Phi Nhu commune, Dien Bien district; Giang A Chu from Khuon Ha commune, Phong Tho district, Lai Chau province; and Vu Thi Di from Doan Ket commune, Moc Chau district, Son La province... In 1967, Ho A Tru from Xa Nhe commune, Tua Chua district, Lai Chau province also implemented a "king proclamation" (Fieldwork data by the author in Son La, 1984 and Lai Chau, 1986). In July 1918, Lao Cai province witnessed the case of Giang San from Lao Chai commune, Sa Pa district who performed a "king proclamation." In 1938, there was another case in which a man from Chau family implemented a "king proclamation" in Su Ma Tung commune, Muong Khuong district. In 1953, Thao A Bau, also from Sa Pa district performed a "king proclamation" (Tran Huu

Son, 1996). These are only some of the instances in which the Hmong people in Vietnam performed a "king proclamation" since the early 20th century. Reviewing these events, we can see their most typical characteristics, include:

First, in those events, those proclaiming never claimed to be actual kings (*Vangx* or *Phuôz teik*, *Hua tai*). They always placed themselves in the position which is both lower and closer to the Hmong King. Giang Sia Lu and Ho A Tru called themselves "sons of the king" (*Phuôz teik lénhx tuz* or *Tuz phuôz teik*). Vu Pa Chay or Vang Chong Lu who considered himself "the one who acts upon the king's order" (*Tux txir*). Vu Thi Di and Giang A Tru saw themselves as "executors" (*Tuz kheir*). Meanwhile, Vang A Khu called himself the "communicator" (*Tuz chaos s[ư]v*) of king.

Kings in "king proclamations" were unreal but they were defined to be powerful, talented and charismatic which make Hmong people trust and support. In the case of Giang Sia Lu, the Hmong people from Lai Chau knew of their king as a charismatic person, whoever followed the son of king (meaning Giang Sia Lu) to fight the French would be given an incantation and would never die. If hit by bullets, no bloodshed was seen and French bullets would drop like leaves. The Hmong King also could teach them how to make guns as big as bead-trees, causing the French to panic. In the "king proclamation" led by Pa Chay, the Hmong King could turn plants and grass into swords and spears; big stones into buffaloes and

cows and small stones into pigs and chickens. Even in 1967 when Ho A Tru performed a “king proclamation,” the Hmong King was said to be one who had many planes, tanks and arms and ammunitions. It can be said that king is an invisible figure rigged with a religious halo that is deeply characterized by magic Taoism and superstition. He is both a human and a saint who can meet all the needs of the Hmong people. In another words, the king is a symbol possessing all super powers and he who expresses the aspirations and expectations of the Hmong ethnic group.

Second, the procedure of a “king proclamation” was not lengthy, but was so holy and supernatural that made participants sink in a stimulant and illusive atmosphere. In some specific cases, “the one who is commanded” by or “the one who acts” upon the king’s order always spread the news saying that “the Hmong King” is coming (or the Hmong King will arrive), and tell people how to prepare to welcome king or to go to see king.

Vang Chong Lu and Vang A Khu told the Hmong people: “It will be dark for three days and three nights and when the sun rises, water will overflow and flood the whole world and the Hmong King will appear...” Vang A Khu instructed each family to make a wooden boat as big as a feeding trough so that when the floodwater came, the whole family would get on board the boat to fly into the sky to follow the king. Vang Chong Lu and Vu Thi Di advised people to practice flying so as to be able to welcome the king. Vang Chong Lu placed a big bamboo tree in

his yard and asked people to climb up the tree to practice flying. Meanwhile, Vu Thi Di took the villagers to a high mountain, tied two flat baskets to a person’s two arms in order to “fly” down the mountain. On the contrary, Ho A Tru made the Hmong people in the whole Xa Nhe commune, Tua Chua district wait for the king anxiously by slaughtering buffaloes, cows, pigs and chickens... He asked people to abstain from eating meat of animals with white feathers; men were gathered to practice martial arts and shooting while women were dancing and singing. Everyone prepared beautiful clothes made of linen to be worn to welcome the king. In particular, in the “king proclamation” led by Giang Sia Lu and Pa Chay, the Hmong people in Lai Chau province, both men and women, proudly marched forward under the fire of the French with strong faith that “the Hmong King gives them strength, making French arms and ammunition fail to pierce their bodies.” The French called them “crazy Hmong” (*Hmôngz vɔ̃v*) and considered Pa Chay an eccentric man or insane man.

Third, the attraction of such “king proclamation” events is the goal the Hmong people long for, that is the image of “the Hmong King who is coming,” or “the Hmong King will turn up” and is linked to the belief that “the Hmong people will live a happy life.” In the “king proclamation” by Vang A Khu or Vang Chong Lu, the Hmong people expected the emergence of the Hmong King and follow him to fly to the “happy sky” without misery. In contrast, when Vu Thi Di and Giang A Chu led a “king proclamation,” they hoped that with

the Hmong King's arrival, they did not have to do anything but still had food to eat. Then, trees will provide them with rice from their top, maize from their trunk and beans from their roots. Whenever rice grains are ripped, the trees will bring them to their home. More than that, those who followed Ho A Tru in his "king proclamation" anxiously expected the king to arrive to become "a new type of man" who will lead a new life full of happiness. Back to the case of Giang Sia Lu and Vu Pa Chay, a question is posed: why did the Hmong people in the Northwest Vietnam and the Hmong people in the upper region of Laos accept to follow in the fight against the French? One of the most important factors driving the Hmong people to brave danger and risk their lives is that they trusted what Giang Sia Lu and Pa Chay had told them and believed them only by defeating the French, could they welcome the Hmong King.

So, what is the nature of the phenomenon of "king proclamation" among the Hmong people?

The concept of "*xɔ̃ng vua*" (king proclamation) of the Hmong ethnic group is called *Sor Vangx* or sometimes *Sor Phuôz teik* (*Hua tai*, *Phua tai*). It is an action in scientific circles identified as a "messianic movement" which has often taken place in ethnic groups or groups of people who feel something missing in their consciousness. Indications of this behavior are rather diverse. The Kho Mu (Kammu) people in Laos had a movement of "*xɔ̃ng chɔ̃ng*" (Chuong proclamation), and the indigenous people in the Central Highlands had a

movement of "*xẵm brẵm*," both are comparable to the *Sor Vangx* phenomenon of the Hmong. It is needed to differentiate that, although they all mean "messianic," the causes and nature of each event and in each ethnic group are different. For the Hmong, the cause is not only because of spiritual factors but also of the depth of history and the special ethnic psychology. Their complex and inferiority in face of their circumstances and neighboring ethnic groups mixed with their consciousness of "looking back" to their glorious past and their expectations for a better life have dug deep into the emptiness of their inner most thoughts. They believe that one day a savior from the nation will appear. He must be a king or a ringleader who is supernaturally endowed, and can turn trees and grasses into arms and ammunition, rice and maize, etc. That person will bring a happy life for their ethnic group. This is the foundation for a number of "king proclamation" events that took place in the Hmong ethnic areas in Vietnam in particular and Southern China and Southeast Asian mainland in general.

Through the characteristics drawn from the "king proclamation" events mentioned above, we can clearly see that this is a phenomenon mixed between actual actions and specific persons and the imaginary and unreal notions in which human expectations are shown. For this reason, "king proclamation" bears both secular and religious characteristics. In terms of nature, it is a normal event taking place in the social life of the Hmong in different periods of time. However, in many cases, some people or powers abused the belief

achieve their own successes, thus making the issue complicated. That's why the action has created such controversial assessment and opinions. At the same time, it has also been linked to strong concepts such as rioting, instigating of disturbances, uprising, pirating and rebellion, etc. For example, prior to the August 1945 Revolution, the French considered Hmong "king proclamation" events against them "riots;" while we called them uprisings or insurrections.¹ Further back, the "king proclamation" of the Hmong people in 1734 and 1795 in the Movement of *Thai Binh Thien Quoc* (peaceful heavenly kingdom) against the Qing Dynasty were considered rebellions by the Chinese Feudalist Court and were bloodily suppressed. Meanwhile, historians now call them insurrections.

In our opinion, whatever labels the action of "king proclamation" by the Hmong are given; its original nature always exists and has never changed. Thus, it must be seen as a historical factor, which has existed and could possibly occur again as long as its cause does not disappear for good.

3. From "King Proclamation" to the Vang Chu Movement in the Hmong Ethnic Areas in Recent Years

In 1987, a number of events took place in areas inhabited by the Hmong in Vietnam, which were similar to the above-mentioned "king proclamation" phenomenon. This movement began in Yen Huong commune, Ham Yen district, Tuyen Quang province when Dao Dinh Hoang

and Duong Van Minh, two white Hmong men began a revolt. They called on the white Hmong to follow Vang Chu after listening to a foreign radio station broadcast, in Hmong language, spreading news about Vang Chu and a bright future for those Hmong who follow Vang Chu. They claimed to be Vang Chu's men and rigged a welcome gate and hung streamers written in both Vietnamese and Han scripts to welcome Vang Chu. Following the radio broadcast, they spread the news saying that Vang Chu will rid the Hmong ethnic group of misery and that whoever follows Vang Chu will have a happy life, without work but still with food to eat; and that whoever does not want to welcome Vang Chu will be eaten by tigers or washed away by floodwater. A tense and puzzled atmosphere then prevailed on the Hmong community. In such a situation, Dao Dinh Hoang and Duong Van Minh told people that whoever follows Vang Chu must register their names, deposit money, hand over tobacco and red fabrics, give up the worship of ancestors, "Home God" and "Door God" and practice flying, waiting for the day when Vang Chu comes back to take them to the sky. Listening to Dao Dinh Hoang and Duong Van Minh, many Hmong families from Ham Yen district gave up production, slaughtered animals, registered their names and gave money to Hoang and Minh to follow Vang Chu and waited for Vang Chu to come (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1999).

From the Hmong group in Ham Yen district who followed Vang Chu, the movement quickly spread to all Hmong

¹ Similar to the "king proclamation" by Giang Sia Lu in 1917 and Vu Pa Chay in 1918 in Lai Chau province.

areas in Tuyen Quang province. Lau A Pao, a flowery Hmong from Hung Loi commune, Yen Son district also claimed to be Vang Chu's man. Pao called on the flowery Hmong tribe to register their names and deposit money to follow Vang Chu. He also instructed families how to drive away "ancestors' spirits" from their home by using three stems of straw grass in order to welcome Vang Chu. Lau A Pao spread the news that on the 19th of November 1989, a rebellion will be staged and families should slaughter all their domestic animals to wait for the day to fly into the sky. The flowery Hmong in Tuyen Quang province believed Pao and raised millions of VND for him. Most interesting is that Pao and other activists mobilized the Hmong people to buy radio sets to listen to Vang Chu's teachings. The Hmong people changed their daily habits, and stopped eating blood pudding and drinking wine. Whenever someone died, they did not organize a funeral but buried the dead body immediately. His or her tomb was placed with a cross so that Vang Chu could easily identify it. The dead body was often buried shallow so as to fly easily into the sky. During the Hmong New Year Festival or weddings, they no longer made offerings to ancestors. They only ate chicken and pork and drink sugar water instead of wine. Festivals no longer existed in the Hmong community and musical instruments such as *khen*, flutes and lip flutes were destroyed as they were assumed to be related to "ghosts." Extremists told the Hmong that Vang Chu is the supreme power and whoever believes in him is not allowed to believe in any other spirits and that in 2000, the earth will explode, floods will take over all land and

Vang Chu will come back for those who follow him taking them to the sky to enjoy a happy life. They asked the Hmong people to congregate in groups of five to seven families every weekday morning for self-criticism to see whether any mistakes had been made against Vang Chu (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1999).

Also in 1987, the news about Vang Chu suddenly spread in Hang Xung village, Phi Nhu commune, Dien Bien district, Lai Chau province, saying that he was scheduled to arrive. A person who directly spread the news was Hang Tru Va, who claimed to be a follower of Vang Chu. From Hang Xung village, the news about Vang Chu spread to the entire commune of Phi Nhu and to the two neighboring communes of Na Tau and Muong Muon (also in Dien Bien district). At the same time, the Hmong people were advised to listen to foreign radio broadcasts in the Hmong language to listen to Vang Chu's teachings. Since then, a rush to buy radio sets and batteries to listen to foreign radio broadcasts and their advices developed among the Hmong community. Listening to the radio, Hang Tru Va and other activists disseminated the news: "In 2000 Vang Chu will appear. He will make the earth flat and the Hmong people will no longer have to live on high mountains..." "Everyone has to prepare to welcome Vang Chu; Everyone has to practice flying to welcome Vang Chu;" "Vang Chu is a supernatural man; Vang Chu is the largest "Ghost" in Heaven; whoever follows Vang Chu will not have to be afraid of any other evil spirits..." and "Vang Chu will create maize plants giving everyone seven ears each, rice to come home

by themselves and the Hmong people don't have to work to have food to eat." He will help families drive away the "Home God" and "ancestral spirit" by spraying three drops of water onto the wall of the ancestral altar in order to welcome Vang Chu. Hang Tru Va persuaded people, saying that each drop of water weighed a ton and thus no spirit could stand it. From 1989 to 1991, the Vang Chu Movement began to develop in the districts of Sin Ho, Phong Tho, Muong Lay and Muong Te. From 1992 to 1994, the community of Vang Chu followers expanded to other districts such as Tuan Giao and Tua Chua. Finally, all 8 districts of Lai Chau province were under the influence of Vang Chu (Fieldwork data by the author in Lai Chau province, 1997).

In Son La province, in 1987, Thao Ba Hu (alias Thao Van Ho) from Chieng Cang Commune, Song Ma district, after listening to foreign radio broadcasts disseminated the news about Vang Chu saying that he will appear. Hu called on the Hmong people to follow Vang Chu towards a happy life. He also persuaded Thao Ba Nenh from Muong Sai commune to spread the news that Vang Chu was in fact the Hmong King, and that the Hmong King would change the life of the Hmong if everyone practiced flying to follow Vang Chu. From the two communes in Song Ma district, the movement quickly spread to two other districts of Mai Son and Muong La. By 1993, 2,000 Hmong people from 12 communes in 5 districts were loyal followers of Vang Chu and by 1996, the figure rose to more than 3,000 people from 24 communes in 7 districts in the entire province (Fieldwork data by the author in Son La province, 1999).

The news of Vang Chu came to Hmong ethnic areas in Lao Cai province a bit later. Like in the provinces of Tuyen Quang, Lai Chau and Son La, in February 1990, news was spread, upsetting Hmong people from Tan Tien and Tan Duong communes in Bao Yen District and Lung Phin and Ta Van Chu in Bac Ha district. The Hmong people told each other that there would be torrential rains, flooding everywhere; and that Vang Chu would come to their rescue. Whoever wants to be saved by Vang Chu had to pray for Vang Chu and prepare to welcome him. Hmong families who got radio sets started to listen to foreign radio broadcasts in Hmong language. By July 1990, the news about the arrival of Vang Chu had spread everywhere in Bao Yen, Bao Thang and Bac Ha districts. Sung Seo Pao from Dong Tien Commune Cooperative, Tan Thinh commune, Bac Quang district, Ha Giang province went to Bao Yen district to spread the news saying: "Whoever fails to organize a welcoming ceremony for Vang Chu will be eaten by tigers or washed away by floodwater. Whoever follows Vang Chu will live a happy life..." He also said that on the 15th of July when it is dark, Vang Chu would arrive. If he does not turn up on that day, he will certainly come on the 20th of July. Also in this period of time, on the 11th of July 1990, rumors were spread among the Hmong in Phong Nien commune, Bao Thang district that by 2000, the earth will explode, everyone will die; there will appear brawny men whose heads can make full rotations. On the 6th of June 1990, people from Than Uyen district received the news that the Hmong King will appear. He will fly from Laos to Vietnam on

board a red-tail plane. The Hmong King has a radio station and his own army. At the instruction of “Vang Chu’s followers,” the Hmong in districts of Bao Yen, Bao Thang and Bac Ha competed with each to liquidate all their family assets at the market in order to get money to buy tobacco and red fabrics, and registered their names to follow Vang Chu. They also bought radio sets to listen to news broadcasts about the king and his teachings. Those families who registered their names and deposited money dismantled ancestral altars. They constructed a pillar in their home to worship Vang Chu. Many families stuck paper crosses on their walls where the altars dedicated to ancestors and Home God were placed. The Vang Chu Movement also spread to other communes in the districts of Muong Khuong, Bat Xat, and Than Uyen and to some sections of the Dao (Iu Mien) people. The Hmong people considered this their “new path” a path that all Hmong people had to follow to change their lives (Fieldwork data by the author in Lao Cai province, 1995).

By 1992, in Ha Giang province, 17 out of 19 communes in Bac Quang district, Ta Si Choan in Hoang Su Phi district, Na Ma in Xin Man district, and Bach Ngoc in Vi Xuyen district had Hmong people following Vang Chu. Immediately afterward, the Hmong from Thuong Tan and Phien Luong communes, Bac Me district followed them suit. However, not until April 1997, 17 Hmong families from Sung Thai commune, Yen Minh district, for the first time, declared to follow Vang Chu officially marking the presence of this

phenomenon in Dong Van Plateau, the native land of the Hmong in Vietnam. Here, Vang Chu’s followers disseminated the news that only by following Vang Chu the Hmong could become new humankind and have a new, happy life (See also Vuong Duy Quang, 1998).

So what is the Vang Chu religion? How does the event relate to the phenomenon “king proclamation”?

What happened in many Hmong areas in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam demonstrates that the Vang Chu Movement started very similarly to the “king proclamation” events in the Hmong society. At first, news spread about Vang Chu’s arrival and initiators as well as the activists claimed to be Vang Chu’s men under the form of “being commanded” by Vang Chu, and “the communicator” of Vang Chu. And like the “king proclamation,” the news about Vang Chu’s coming was continuously spread in an illusive atmosphere, prophesizing that “In 2000, the earth will explode, everywhere will be flooded...” that “Largely built men will appear with heads that make full rotations;” that “All domestic animals have to be slaughtered to wait for Vang Chu” as well as “people have to practice flying to follow Vang Chu,” etc. Finally, the Hmong people were given promises together with many directives and threats: “You must follow Vang Chu; only he can save the Hmong from misery;” “Whoever does not follow Vang Chu remains archaic and will continue to suffer misery. Whoever follows Vang Chu will become a modern man, have a new and very

happy life;” “Following Vang Chu, one has to give up worship of the “Home God” and “Ancestral Sprit,” “People are not allowed to eat red or black rice,” etc. Then, instead of actions of welcoming the king in “king proclamation,” the Hmong ethnic group was instructed to receive Vang Chu’s teachings so that later on when following Vang Chu they will enjoy a happy life (See also Dang Nghiem Van, Vuong Duy Quang, 1998).

It can be said that Vang Chu – a central figure existing through the formation and development of this phenomenon is a concept that never existed in the traditional culture of the Hmong. It is really a new symbol put together by pieces of legends, spirit and ethnic psychology. To be more precise, based on the traditional concept of *Vangx* (king), a new image was introduced that is *Vangx Tsɔ̄r* (master king) or *Vangx Tsɔ̄r Ntux* (Heavenly King) to call the Supreme Being such as Christ, causing the Hmong easily confuse that belief with their legendary king. At the same time, the choice to follow Vang Chu also swindled, making the Hmong think that following Vang Chu is just like following the phenomenon of “king proclamation,” thus blindly accepted it.

Furthermore, if the goal of the “king proclamation” was always expected by the Hmong as the “Hmong King appearing thus resulting in a happy life the Hmong people,” in the Vang Chu Movement, the Hmong were given similar promises and expectations with the Vang Chu Movement in that “Vang Chu will appear to change the life of the Hmong,” or “the Hmong will

follow Vang Chu to the bright sky to a life with no misery,” That is the similar attraction between the two phenomena, motivating a strong response from the Hmong farmers.

We can now say that the phenomenon of “king proclamation” in the Hmong ethnic group has been misused under a completely different angle. It has been fully exploited in order to *lead the Hmong ethnic group to a new religious phenomenon*.

4. Comments and Conclusion

Thus far, neither historians nor ethnologists can confirm when the phenomenon of “king proclamation” started in the history of the Hmong. It is known to have existed for centuries and occurred in most of the Hmong ethnic areas in Southeast Asia and South China. In addition to such the “king proclamations” among the Hmong people that occurred in Vietnam as discussed in this paper; some authors have reported the same events in Laos and Thailand. The most notable is the book “Sovereignty and rebellion: the White Hmong of Northern Thailand” by N. Tapp (1989). In his book, Tapp discussed the issue Hua Tai (*Huab Tais*) of the Hmong people in Laos: in Xieng Khoang in 1920, in Sam Nua in 1950, and in Long Cheng in 1960 and in particular, the case of Giang Song Lu (*Yaj Soob Lwj*) who performed a “king proclamation” in 1967 in Sam Nua province. This event then spread to the Hmong community in Thailand and later on Chang Pha Minh succeeded Giang Song Lu. In Thailand, two similar events recently

took place in Doi Dao Mountain (also called A La) in Chiang Rai province in 1972 and in Nan province in 1991. Those who carried out “king proclamation” disseminated the news that “By... date, the Hmong King will return; the Hmong people do not have to work but get everything,” or “Everyone must be dressed in linen clothing so that Hmong king will know and allow them to follow” (Fieldwork data by the author in Chiangmai province, 1997).

However, the several phenomena of “king proclamation” that took place in Laos and Thailand later were somehow changed. From the traditional *Sor Vangx* (*Sor Phuôz teik*), they changed to *Uô Chao Fa* (follow Heaven King). The most typical case was Chang Pha Minh. After succeeding the “king proclamation” movement of Giang Song Lu, Chang Pha Minh shifted to the movement to “follow Heaven King.” Many Chao Fa Associations were established by Chang Pha Minh with the mandate saying “the Hmong have to preserve their traditional culture. Only by so doing the Hmong can hope for the world to be saved and to return to their own motherland.”

In any period of time and in a different context, “messianic movement” of the Hmong has always been formed by an important factor, i.e. the expectation for the savior to help the Hmong change their lives. This might be an important link capitalized on by Western missionaries for a long time now, hoping to guide this ethnic group toward a new savior - Christ.

However, the Vang Chu movement taking place in the Hmong community shows that the Hmong “king proclamation” has been used as a key or a tool to introduce a form of mixed religious belief into this ethnic minority group. This activity is completely different to what clergyman Samuel Pollard, James R. Adam, Francois Marie Savina, etc, did to the Hmong in Southern China and Indochina in the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century in order to “bring fame” to Christ.

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Hmong woman in Dien Bien province, Vietnam.

Photo: Le Mui