

THE HMONG, OPIUM AND THE HAW: SPECULATIONS ON THE ORIGIN OF THEIR ASSOCIATION

by

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The importance of opium as a cash crop among the Hmong¹ in north Thailand is widely known and has been studied in detail.² The association between the Hmong and Yunnanese "Haw" traders, through whom the Hmong have traditionally marketed opium, is also well known. It is a common misconception, however, that opium plays a central role in Hmong culture. It has, for example, apparently little or no role in Hmong ritual, unlike rice, which is central to Hmong society and culture. Rice, more than opium, has been by far their most important crop,³ although recently many Hmong have been forced to give up the cultivation of swidden rice due to land shortage, scarcity of mature forest, and labor conflicts involving opium. The prevalence of opium-growing among the Hmong in north Thailand makes it a question of some interest as to how the growing of opium as a cash crop may have arisen among the Hmong and what part the Haw may have played in this process.

The Hmong are primary-forest swidders in the sense that they prefer to farm primary forest, will go to great lengths to find it, are organized to exploit it, use primary-forest cropping patterns (involving migration and farming the same fields several years in a row), and have a lore connected with the use of primary forest and the felling of big trees. There is, however, very little primary forest remaining in Thailand today that the Hmong can use, and the effects of this on Hmong society are considerable.⁴ The majority of Hmong in Thailand also grow opium as a cash crop in addition to swiddening rice. The relative proportion of opium grown with respect to rice has significantly increased over the years.⁵

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1. "Hmong" is the term by which the group generally refers to itself. The term "Meo" is used in Thailand, and while not pejorative, has been objected to by Hmong in Laos, and on occasion by some Hmong in Thailand.

2. E.g. William R. Geddes, "Opium and the Miao: a study in ecological adjustment", *Oceania*, 41, 1 (1970), pp. 1-11; William R. Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains—The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

3. Hugo Adlof Bernatzik, *Akha and Meo, Problems of Applied Ethnology in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula*, 2 vols. (Innsbruck, Austria: Commission Press, Wagnerian University Printing Shop, 1947), p. 357. Translated from the German by the U.S. Army. Copies are available at the Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai, and the Thailand Information Centre, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok; Frank M. LeBar et al., *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964), p. 78; George A. Binney, *The Social and Economic Organization of Two White Meo Communities in Northern Thailand* (Washington, D.C.: Advanced Research Projects Agency Publication APP-T10, 1968), p. 519.

4. F.G.B. Keen, *Upland Tenure and Land Use in North Thailand* (Bangkok: SEATO, 1972); Terry B. Grandstaff, *op. cit.*

5. *Ibid.*

The Hmong have arrived in Thailand relatively recently. Geddes⁶ thinks it safe to say that all Hmong have come to Thailand within the past 100 years. Some have come by way of Burma, some by way of Laos, their rapid migrations having brought them to Southeast Asia from southern China. Binney⁷ guesses that all Hmong migrations into Southeast Asia from southern China have taken place in the last 50 to 100 years, and thinks it a reasonable estimate that they arrived in Chiang Mai Province only in the last 40 to 50 years. Although there are records of a few Hmong villages in remote areas of Thailand around the turn of the century,⁸ Hmong first began arriving in substantial numbers several decades later, the first village in Mae Rim District in central Chiang Mai Province, for example, having been founded around 1944.

While Geddes argues that Hmong swiddening and migration patterns are intimately connected with the growing of opium as a cash crop, he admits that Hmong "were prone to migrate long before opium entered the picture".⁹ The *Miao-fang pei-lan*, written in 1820, does not mention poppy cultivation but it does suggest that Hmong were swiddening in primary-forest manner:¹⁰

Having cultivated for three or four years, they relinquish the old land and exploit new places because the land becomes poor after intensive cultivation...

Bernatzik¹¹ gives an even clearer description of movement occasioned by swiddening rice in primary-forest manner.

How then did the Hmong become involved in opium production? The quest begins, oddly enough, with British involvement in the opium trade with China.

Put simply, the East India Company was interested in expanding trade with China, but China was less interested in buying anything the British had to offer. Thus increasing trade between British India and China meant the drain of silver and other specie from India to China, creating a trade deficit. Something had to be found that the Chinese would buy; if it was produced in India, so much the better, as the Company could then finance itself and transportation routes would be shortened. The product found was opium, and by 1767 1,000 chests a year were being shipped to China from India.¹² The importation of opium into China was forbidden, however, and the Company had proven rather inept at smuggling, so by 1782, the trade was totally in the hands of the "country" ships of private entrepreneurs, but the Company itself retained the monopoly of all opium sales to these entrepreneurs. The monopolization of sales in India and the lack of direct involvement in shipping and opium sales in China was to be in general the characteristic pattern for the Company until the cessation of the opium trade in the early twentieth century. In his thorough account, Owen traces the complicated situations which involved the British in progressively greater production of opium for the China trade. In the period 1811-1821 the average annual shipment was 4,532 chests,

6. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 29.

7. Binney, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

8. W.A. Graham, *Siam* (London: A. Moring, 1924), p. 137.

9. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 252.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

11. Bernatzik, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

12. David Edward Owen, *British Opium Policy in China and India* (Hamden, Conn: Shoe String Press, 1968), p. 52. References to the account in the rest of this paragraph may be found in pp. 52-115.

One chest equals approximately 50 kilograms.

but for the period 1829-1839 it had grown to 25,387 chests. By the 1830s the fast opium clippers were appearing in number and the trade continued to grow. In fiscal year 1838/39, a total of 40,200 chests were shipped to China.¹³

The Chinese government in the meantime had been trying unsuccessfully to stem the opium inflow. Since 1799 a series of edicts had been issued specifically prohibiting foreigners from importing opium, but the edicts were unenforceable because local officials were profiting from opium imports.¹⁴ In 1839 Commissioner Lin was dispatched to Canton with extraordinary powers to end the opium trade. The "Opium War" followed; ending in the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. The Treaty did not legalize the import of opium; indeed the subject was not even mentioned,¹⁵ but the trade continued. Since its import could not be curtailed, the Chinese imperial government was faced with two options, which began to be discussed in earnest in the mid-1850s. It could legalize the import of opium and tax its import as well as its sale. By so doing the trade could help to provide needed revenue for the Manchu coffers. Alternatively, the government could legalize the growing of opium in China and stimulate the internal market to the extent that British opium competition would be driven out of the market. With the latter option, opium-growing could then be curtailed, once the foreign trade had been disposed of.

The strategy adopted was in effect a combination of the two. The import of opium was legalized in 1858. By the 1860s internal opium production was distinctly on the increase, and by 1885 China was producing at least twice as much opium as was being imported. By the 1890s British opium imports had "declined perceptibly". British India might have chosen to fight it out with the competing Chinese internal market, but public opinion in England was becoming much more forcefully opposed to the trade. Finally, Britain agreed to phase out the trade if the Chinese would phase out internal production. The trade was eliminated in the second decade of the twentieth century, but, despite serious efforts, China was unable to keep her part of the bargain. Opium revenues were needed by various factions at various times, and it was not until the People's Republic came into being that the industry could be eradicated in China.

How do the Hmong fit into this sorry account? To find out, we will need to take a closer look at internal production of opium in China which was outlined in the above paragraphs. Even before the Chinese imperial government decided on a policy of internal production to compete with British opium imports, the expanded market conditions had stimulated the (illicit) growing of opium in southern China.

Opium had, of course, been known throughout the Eastern world long before the coming of the British. It was probably brought to the Orient from the Middle East early in the first millenium A.D. The trade in opium was widespread, but it is China that most concerns us

13. Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1, *The Period of Conflict 1834-60* (London: Longmans, 1910), p. 210.

14. Owen, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-66; Arthur Waley, *The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), pp. 53-59.

15. Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 206. References to the account in the rest of this and the following paragraph may be found in pp. 220-353.

here. It was apparently Arab traders who brought to China both Islam and opium. The Arabs may have had a trading post in Canton as early as 300 A.D.¹⁶ A mid-fourteenth century account describes the use of the drug and states that "opium is produced in Arabia from a poppy with a red flower".¹⁷ The author of this statement had been the governor of Kansu Province where a large Mohammedan population lived. Other accounts of the same era refer to opium as "*a-fu-yung*, a term plainly derived from the Arabic *afyun*".¹⁸ Owen concludes that the supply of opium from abroad was interrupted by Japanese raiding, from which time it has been grown in China, something over four centuries ago.

Early production of opium must have been relatively small, however, since the drug was taken mostly for medicinal purposes, until the introduction of tobacco by Westerners in the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Opium was subsequently mixed with tobacco and smoked; later opium alone was smoked, the way having been found to make it smokeable. The use of opium was not by then widespread, however, and the imperial government as early as 1729 was taking steps to insure that its use was curbed.²⁰ Owen²¹ concludes from accounts available that "until well along in the eighteenth century and probably later, the smoking of opium was a localized phenomenon and was not regarded as a critical problem in Peking". It is likely that there was some expansion in opium production in China in the eighteenth century; but whatever the case, it seems that the Hmong were not involved in commercial production of the drug until at least after the 1820 account of Hmong agriculture cited above.

British opium imports to China in the early nineteenth century must have stimulated the production of locally grown opium. Since it is addictive, of course, once the drug is introduced, increasing demand for it tends to stimulate the market. By the mid-1830s, opium production in Yunnan was already up to a reported "several thousand chests annually".²² Still, this was but a drop in the bucket compared to British imports of the period, and it is unlikely that hilltribes were much involved at this stage in the production. By the 1880s, however, Yunnanese opium production had grown stupendously.²³ Yunnan was not the only province producing opium by this time. Production of opium was widespread throughout China, but the southwestern provinces were particularly suited for its production, since the opium could be grown on the hillsides of a relatively sparsely settled area where its production would interfere less with the production of rice in the valleys.

Sometimes in the mid-nineteenth century, then, it seems likely that Hmong living in southern China would have had to become aware of opium production. By far the major portion of opium would have been grown by the Chinese, but production was becoming such an incredibly large industry that the tribal groups in the area could not have failed to have been

16. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

19. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), pp. 201-202.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Owen, *op cit.*, p. 17.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 128 f.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

affected by it. At this time Hmong were living in numbers in Kweichow and were also in Yunnan, two of the provinces most involved in opium production. Prior to this time it is possible that Hmong and other hilltribes in southern China may have grown opium for use as a local medicine and small item of trade. Geddes²⁴ is of the opinion that Hmong probably began to grow opium relatively early, but that the opium boom of the late nineteenth century and its suppression in the early twentieth century "must have increased the incentive to grow it in these (mountain) areas, which were least accessible to surveillance".

If the Hmong did grow opium before the mid-nineteenth century, it seems likely that it was not an important item in their economy, as the 1820 report above tends to substantiate. Geddes²⁵ found that one type of poppy, *na ying*, had been the main type of poppy grown in the past by the Hmong he studied. It is planted in July for harvest in December. Geddes implies that it may have been the variety of poppy mainly cultivated by the Hmong in Thailand earlier in the twentieth century, planted in June and observed by Bernatzik. In a primary-forest swidden regime, the relatively light weeding requirements would allow for this poppy to be cultivated on such a timing schedule, but it would not allow for its intensive cultivation, unless it were at the expense of rice, the principal subsistence crop. Under secondary-forest conditions, the two would be in direct conflict and it is undoubtedly partly for this reason that Hmong do not now cultivate much of this variety.

Trade between swiddeners and lowland society is more likely to prosper when each has something the other wants and cannot easily get. This would probably not have been true of opium prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Even in the opium boom period from, let us say, the 1860s onward, these conditions would not apply since it was the Chinese themselves in southern China who were profiting from growing opium. However, in boom times a market can take on all suppliers, and it seems likely that at this time and for this reason, the Hmong and other hilltribes of southern China entered the opium market. As opium went through periods of suppression in the early twentieth century (through to the present), hilltribe production would then be favored over other types, due to its isolation from lowland authority. In the second decade of the twentieth century, for example, the Chinese government attempted to suppress the growing of opium as Britain was curtailing its opium shipments from India. Reports from Yunnan indicated that Chinese growing of opium was indeed being suppressed, but that hilltribe production, particularly in southern border areas, was booming.²⁶ As Geddes²⁷ points out, the demand from the addict population still existed and the tribal areas were much more difficult to police.

In the early twentieth century, at various times various hilltribe groups in southern China were forced by local warlords to supply them with opium.²⁸ This was a consequence of the hilltribe group having been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but sustained connections to

24. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 204.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

26. *China no. 2, Reports from His Majesty's Minister at Peking Respecting the Opium Question in China* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1913), pp. 2-3.

27. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 204.

28. *Ibid.*

the trade, such as the Hmong exhibit, were likely to have developed in a different way. Primary-forest swiddeners must move to follow primary forest. Such movements can be expensive. Trade connections, then, must be able to handle this movement: special arrangements may be necessary. It seems likely that it is the nature of these special arrangements that have allowed the Hmong to continue to be the primary-forest swiddeners *extraordinaire* of Southeast Asia, even up to the present time, because of the cultivation and efficient marketing of opium. The involvement with opium and thus the development of this strategy was a consequence of the opium boom in China which had occurred in response to British opium policies. But it was also a result of a rather sophisticated "symbiosis" between the Hmong and the Yunnanese Haw traders. What then were the origins and nature of this involvement?

At the end of the Chinese civil war which brought the present-day government to power, some Yunnanese as well as others, such as remnants of the Kuomintang armies, came overland to north Thailand. Over the years, the Shan-north Thai term "Haw" has been loosely used to refer to these people. Perhaps, even in earlier times, the term Haw once referred to Yunnanese in general, or particularly, those Yunnanese traders with whom the Shan and north Thai were familiar. In fact, however, the vast majority of these traders were not just Yunnanese, they were Yunnanese Muslims, whom the Burmese have called "Panthay". Anderson²⁹ relates an early reference to them:

Colonel Burney tells us that in 1831 almost the whole of the Chinese traders who visited the Burmese capital were Mahommedans [*sic*], except a few who imported hams. Some of them could speak a little Arabic, and one read to him passages from the Koran; but none of them could tell him whence they derived their origin.

Another reference³⁰ states that "the Hos, or Panthays . . . are Muhammadans from Tali . . . in western Yunnan".

It seems that the Yunnanese Muslims occupied much the same "economic niche" in Yunnan as the Chinese do today in Thailand. As a special-interest group they were able to monopolize various types of trade. In the cities they were the principal traders and shopkeepers. Very few engaged in agriculture.³¹ Anderson, who visited Yunnan in 1868 during the Great Panthay Rebellion, reports that they were wealthy but that they were excluded from the "official class" of Mandarins.³² Anderson reports, and Broomhall agrees with him, that jealousy and ill-feeling toward the Muslims by officials and others provoked a series of riots against the Muslims in the mid-1850s which then occasioned a Muslim rebellion.

In fact, conflict between the Muslims and the imperial authorities had been flaring on and off since at least the early 1800s. A war had occurred in 1818-1819 in Yungchang and Yunnanfu, a minor rebellion during 1826-1828, and a serious rebellion, including a massacre of some 1,600 "Moslem men, women, and children at Mienting" had occurred in the period 1834-1840.³³ It was generally the policy of the imperial government to deal with such rebellions in its

29. John Anderson, *Mandalay to Momiën: A Narrative of the Two Expeditions to Western China of 1868 and 1875* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), p. 231.

30. Eric Seidenfaden, *The Thai Peoples* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1967), p. 124.

31. Marshall Broomhall, *Islam in China—A Neglected Problem* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1910), p. 224.

32. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

33. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

border areas by offering favorable terms to some or all of the opposing commanders in order to save the cost of having to garrison a large standing army to control the dissenters. The opposition was aware of these options and often sued for peace. Thus the Muslim position in Yunnan had not suffered as much as it might have. The greatest upheaval of them all, however, the war of 1855-1873, was to end somewhat differently.

The Great Panthay Rebellion was a long and complex war. Muslim successes in this period had far exceeded their previous successes, in part because the imperial government was busy elsewhere, with the Taiping Rebellion for example. At one point nearly the whole of Yunnan was in the hands of the rebels. In eastern Yunnan, a Muslim leader sued for peace with the Chinese government and was made a principal military commander.³⁴ But in the west resistance continued, with the capital of the new "Muslim State" at Talifu ruled by a Muslim "Sultan".

At the time when the Muslims held western Yunnan, a British expedition set out from Bhamo in 1868 to explore overland trade routes to China. Anderson, who accompanied the expedition, records the affection that developed between the British and the Muslim authorities who welcomed the British and encouraged the development of overland trade with them.

There is some evidence that this expedition, the Sladen expedition, directly or indirectly encouraged the Muslims to hold out against the imperial government in the hope that Britain would assist them. Anderson himself implies that the friendly relations enjoyed between the rebels and the expedition may have been the cause of the massive imperial mobilization that finally crushed the Muslims in western Yunnan.³⁵ Broomhall³⁶ comments :

Those who know the province intimately state that there is little doubt that the real or supposed sympathy shown to the Mohammedan Pretender by the British and others during this rebellion is responsible for much of the ill-will subsequently manifested towards foreigners by the Chinese authorities of the province.

What were British intentions in Yunnan? Sladen's diaries reveal that he had at least told rebel Sultan that there was a possibility of British assistance in reconciling the Sultan's position with the government in Peking.³⁷ Fytche, the Chief Commissioner of British Burma at the time, was interested in the Yunnan trade routes apparently because he was afraid American interference might upset British opium shipments to China and an alternate route might be necessary. The French, however, were also interested in Yunnan. Indeed, they had a better trade route via the Red River valley. British willingness to deal with the rebels may have been prompted by desire to establish trade relations before the French could. As for the actual emissary, Sladen himself, Fytche was of the opinion that he was thoroughly pro-rebel.

In 1871 the rebel Sultan sent his son on an expedition to Burma and on to England to try to get help, military or otherwise, for the Muslims.³⁸ In fact, the Sultan was offering to place

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

35. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

36. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

37. S.T. Wang, *The Margary Affair and the Cheefoo Agreement* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940); this reference and others in the remainder of the paragraph may be found in pp. 29 ff.

38. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 340; Wang, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

his kingdom under British authority: a "formal expression of his desire to become feudatory to the British Crown".³⁹ Britain itself, however, was not prepared to back the Sultan and jeopardize relations with the Chinese empire. The Chinese, for their part, were adamant about confining foreign trading to the Treaty Ports, and there does seem good reason to believe that the severity with which they treated the rebels was occasioned by their fears of British meddling in borderland areas. The rebels were, in fact, buying firearms from British Burma.⁴⁰

By the time the Sultan's son returned to Burma, Talifu was surrounded. He was not to see his native land again. In Yunnan, the slaughter was enormous. In Talifu alone, thousands were massacred after the city had surrendered in 1872.⁴¹

After 1874, peace came to ravaged Yunnan, but it was not a peace that many Yunnanese Muslims would be able to enjoy. Those Muslims still living were not allowed to open shops, their goods were confiscated, and in some areas they were not even allowed to live within the cities.⁴² Broomhall says that "this policy had been on the whole the general rule up to the present time" (1910).⁴³ The opium boom that was to hit Yunnan in the 1880s was not to favor many of the Muslims.

Those rebel Muslims who escaped the slaughter fled to the hills and across the borders into Burma and Laos. Quoting Davies, Broomhall relates:⁴⁴

Sometimes one finds Mohammedan colonies in very out-of-the-way places, probably men who have taken refuge there after the suppression of the rebellion; and even in the Shan States, within British territory, there are two or three Panthay settlements.

Anderson⁴⁵ says that the remaining rebels "had become dacoits". Apparently large numbers of them also fled to Tonkin and northern Laos, where for a time they attempted to monopolize an area and had a great reputation for ferocity.⁴⁶

It was probably at this time that the rebel Yunnanese Muslims, the Haw, began sustained relations with the Hmong. Tribal groups had fought on both sides of the Yunnanese war,⁴⁷ but particularly on the Muslim side.⁴⁸ It is likely that the Muslim rebels were in alliance with at least some groups of Hmong, and in fact that the Hmong hilltribes in general had sided with the rebels or at least against the imperial government. The period 1855-1881 is said to have been one of general Hmong uprising against the imperial authorities not only in Yunnan but in Kweichow and other provinces as well.⁴⁹ When Margary passed through Yunnan in 1875 he found large, devastated areas where the Hmong had come "down from the hills and butchered the whole population."⁵⁰

39. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, pp. 140, 285.

40. Wang, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

41. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 342; Broomhall, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-144.

42. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, pp. 144, 162.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

45. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 344.

46. J. M'Carthy, "Siam", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, March 1888, pp. 124-227.

47. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-234.

48. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

49. Bernatzik, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

50. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-366.

M'Carthy's 1888 account of a trip through Laos placed Hmong and Haw as recent arrivals in the same area at the same time, and mentioned that the Hmong were cultivating opium as a principal crop.⁵¹ Listening to M'Carthy present his paper, Colquhoun commented:⁵²

The Haws, who were really freebooters, the Black Flags... were in reality the riffraff who had been driven over the Chinese borderland to the western side of Tonquin, and who were now being forced step by step down to Luang Phrabang.

It is likely that those Hmong who had fought on the Muslim side also found it safer to move out of Yunnan at the close of the war. If the imperial army commanders were willing to sanction the massacre of urban populations it is doubtful they would have hesitated to do the same to rebel hilltribes. Fear of reprisal continues to this day to be a prime reason for swift migration in Southeast Asia. Many thousands of Hmong now languish in refugee camps in Thailand, having recently fled from Laos. The Hmong of the 1870s, however, had other options.

Broomhall⁵³ characterized the Yunnanese Muslim as being "a keen businessman, and very persevering in trade". But after the early 1870s he was a trader who was banished from the entrepots of Yunnan. The market for opium was booming, the Hmong could grow it in their swiddens. The Haw could move with the Hmong and market their opium for them. Some of the Haw traders thus found a new clientele. Those who could successfully make a stake at this trade might then move to some Southeast Asian city, open a little restaurant or some other modest venture, and retire comfortably. This is a characteristic pattern for the Haw trader to this day. The pattern having been developed continues to offer opportunity to the overland Chinese refugee, whether Muslim or not.

For their part, the Hmong benefited significantly from growing opium for the Haw traders. Indeed it financed their migrations and pioneering efforts in new areas.⁵⁴ In pursuing the primary-forest swidden pattern, the Hmong depended on the availability of suitable, mature forest. When such forest had been farmed in one area, it was necessary to move to a new area perhaps returning to an old area decades later when the forest regenerated or moving on to still other areas. Such moves, particularly the long ones, were expensive. Houses might have to be abandoned and sometimes transport purchased. Rice would have to be purchased if it could not be transported or if rice swiddens in the new area were not soon productive. The easily transportable opium was an ideal source of cash in such situations, and the Haw trade could be helpful not only in accomplishing the market transactions but also in helping in locating and moving to the new swidden areas. As mature forest areas became increasingly smaller, the movements became more frequent and opium was even more needed. Today the entire Hmong migration system is grinding to a halt in Thailand. Due to population pressure in the northern highlands, few if any suitable unoccupied sites are left for the primary-forest swiddeners to move to.

If the above historical speculations are substantially correct about the origins of the Hmong-opium-Haw association, it would seem there is little reason to agree with the popularly held

51. M'Carthy, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

53. Broomhall, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

54. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 124.

belief that hilltribes and opium have been fellow-travelers since time immemorial. It seems likely that the initial Hmong-Haw association may have helped to make the Hmong particularly successful among the primary-forest swiddeners, but that the others also may have adopted opium as a cash crop for similar reasons connected with migration and the primary-forest swidden pattern, at about the same time. Bradley believes that "the Lahu, along with many other mountain groups, began to cultivate opium as their main cash crop about a century ago"⁵⁵ as a result of the high prices created by the British trade. Dessaint also agrees:⁵⁶

The historical evidence... suggests that [the Lisu] have grown opium on a commercial scale for only slightly longer than a century.

One of the Hmong myths states that their opium came originally from a place called England.⁵⁷ Perhaps the story comes fairly close to the truth of the matter for the opium-growing highlanders of Southeast Asia.

55. David Bradley, "Lahu dialects and Proto-loloish", Ph.D. dissertation, London University, 1975, pp. 15-16.

56. Alain Yvon Dessaint, "Economic organization of the Lisu of the Thai highlands", Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Hawaii, 1972, p. 11.

57. Geddes, *op. cit.* (1976), p. 211.