

**Hmong Agricultural Transformations and Different Scales of Networks:  
Preliminary Findings**

**Ian Baird**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Department of Geography**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
**ibaird@wisc.edu**

**and**

**Pao Vue**  
**PhD Student**  
**Department of Geography**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**  
**pvue@wisc.edu**

Hmong agricultural practices in Laos have been undergoing rapid transformations in recent years. Whereas swidden agriculture and opium cultivation dominated upland Hmong agricultural until quite recently, the Hmong have become increasingly engaged in new types of agriculture, such as the development of small-scale commercial rubber plantations, the focus of our research. There are various factors affecting the changes occurring, some of which relate to government policy directives in Laos. Others are linked to Hmong networking, both within Laos and beyond its borders. In Laos, improved transportation and communication systems have made it much easier for Hmong to travel longer distances for conducting agriculture, and to maintain links with various types of networks. Some Hmong have begun traveling hundreds of kilometers to participate in rubber cultivation in different provinces, partnering with Chinese companies involved in contract farming rubber concessions in central Laos. Hmong have also relied on social and kinship networks within Laos and internationally to gain capital and knowledge valuable for engaging in new forms of agriculture, such as rubber cultivation.

In this presentation we present some preliminary findings from our research in Laos and the United States of America regarding Hmong networks and agricultural transformations. In particular, we discuss the possible social and environmental implications of these changes. Our preliminary research will be augmented by further field work in Laos over the next number of months.