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**พลวัตของเครือข่ายธุรกิจเครื่องเงินม้งปากกลางในจังหวัดน่าน
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**Dynamics of the Hmong's Silverware Business
Network of Pa Klang in Nan Province during
1932-2016**

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พลวัตของเครือข่ายธุรกิจเครื่องเงินม้งปากกลาง เริ่มต้นในช่วง พ.ศ. 2475 การผลิตเครื่องเงินเป็นไปเพื่อประดับตกแต่งร่างกายและนิยมใช้วัตถุเงินแท้บริสุทธิ์ ทั้งนี้ยังจำหน่ายกันภายในกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ของตน โดยใช้วิธีการหาแร่ไปขายตามหมู่บ้านที่มีกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ม้ง อีกทั้งได้นำเครื่องเงินของตนมาแลกเปลี่ยนสินค้ากับคนพื้นราบ ช่วงพ.ศ. 2510 กลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ม้งได้อพยพลงสู่พื้นราบบ้านปากกลาง ลักษณะการผลิตเครื่องเงินจึงเปลี่ยนแปลงไปในช่วง พ.ศ. 2520 ถึงต้น พ.ศ. 2530 เริ่มมีการจัดหาเครื่องประดับจากทองขาวและเงินแท้ แล้วส่งไปขายตามตลาดขายเครื่องเงินในเชียงใหม่และกรุงเทพมหานคร และยังส่งไปขายให้กลุ่มเครือญาติในประเทศสหรัฐอเมริกาและฝรั่งเศส ช่วงต้น พ.ศ. 2538 ชาวม้งปากกลางได้พัฒนาหัตถกรรมเครื่องเงินเข้าสู่ตลาดการค้า โดยการเรียนรู้และมีประสบการณ์ในการค้าเครื่องเงินมากขึ้น มีการจัดตั้งกลุ่มผู้ผลิตเครื่องเงินในพื้นที่ตำบลปากกลาง มีการสร้างเครือข่ายการค้าเครื่องเงินกับหน่วยงานภาครัฐ และกลุ่มเครือญาติ



ในต่างประเทศ ปัจจุบันเครื่องเงินที่ผลิตโดยชาวม้ง ได้รับการสนับสนุนให้มีการจัดจำหน่ายในงานแสดงสินค้าทั้งในและต่างประเทศ และยังเป็นเอกลักษณ์และเป็นสินค้าทางการท่องเที่ยว ของจังหวัดน่าน ขณะเดียวกันเครื่องเงินก็เป็นเครื่องประดับที่สำคัญของประเพณีปีใหม่ของชาวม้ง

คำสำคัญ: พลวัตของธุรกิจเครื่องเงิน เครื่องขาย จังหวัดน่าน ชชาติพันธุ์ม้ง

Abstract

Hmong's silverware business of Pa Klang began in 1932. The production, during this era focused on decorative items made from pure silver sold among different Hmong groups through hawker traders who traveled to different Hmong villages for trading. Furthermore, the silverware was also sold to communities in lowland areas. In 1967, Hmong groups migrated the lowland area and settled at Pa Klang village in Nan province. From late 1977 to early 1987, silverware productions had been changed from traditional wares to jewelry and decorative items made from white gold and pure silver. The products were sold in Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Hmong communities who settled in the United States and France. After accumulating experience in silverware productions through modern market trading, the Hmong of Pa klang established the silverware production groups since the early 1995. Trading networks were also established with governmental offices and relatives who resided abroad. At present, Hmong's silverware receives supports from governmental agencies to showcase their products at trade exhibitions in Thailand and abroad. Moreover, these products are regarded as an iconic representation of the unique Hmong identity during the annual celebration of Hmong's New Year.

Keywords: Dynamics of silverware business, Network, Nan province, Hmong ethnicity



Introduction

Hmong is an ethnic tribal community that has long history and establishment. According their legend, the Hmong were thought to live in a peaceful and cold-climate homeland. (Hmong Environmental Network, 2002) Bematzik (1970) reported that Hmong ancestors inhabited areas along the Yellow River around 2,000 BC (Burutphan, 1995). Chinese referred Hmong as Meau or Meo, an onomatopoeic cat's sound which denigrated Hmong to a barbaric people. However, consolidated Hmong tribes constituted and accumulated their own tribal cultures since their founding days which have been passed on to their respective descendants for thousands of years. Therefore, the Hmong have become an ethnic tribe that possesses strong cultural heritage in many different aspects including clothing, language, traditions, beliefs and customs. Although Hmong's settlements are generally found in southwest China, Vietnam, Laos, northern Myanmar, and Thailand, emigration forced many Hmong families to settle in the United States, France and other countries around the world. (Leepreecha, 2011)

Nan province has been one of the important Hmong's migratory routes. According to historical evidences, the first group of Laotian Hmong came to live in Pua district of Nan province near the border of Laos in 1857. Oral history from those migrants indicated that the war in Laos compelled them to move into Thailand. Consequently, Thai government announced the official establishment of Hmong villages in Doi Phu Kha - Pha Daeng of Pua district in 1932 (present day Thung Chang and Chiang Klang districts).

The Hmong are hill tribe of Nan's highlands that once practiced slash-and-burn cultivations and agroforestry. However, drought, land shortages, and the desire to modernize their living arrangements persuaded the Hmong to commercialize their tribal arts



and cultures since 1985. This including silverware handicrafts, embroidery, and various textiles products that can be sold for profits. However, lack of knowledge and commercial experience exposed them to continual exploitations by middlemen.

Furthermore, improper product developments left many of the products rejected by the markets. As a result, a group of 20 handicraft entrepreneurs and silverware and embroidery artisans from Pa Klang village of Pua district instituted a cooperative center for handicraft products trading. The center helped to promote employments for hill tribe people by selling their handicrafts. At present, the silverware group of Pa Klang village sells and custom-made silverware of different models and employs about 20 members and craftsmen who earn an average income of 2,000 - 5,000 baht per month.

Pa Klang subdistrict comprised of many ethnic groups such as the Hmong, Mien, and Lua. These ethnic groups primarily engaged in traditional farming, wicker-work, and silver handicrafts, which are popular products. At present, silverware production of Nan consists of three different groups, which are; 1) Indigenous silversmith of Nan who traced their origin back to Sukhothai era. An advancing Sukhothai troops that were waging a war with Luang Prabang urged Nan ruler to participate in the combat. Upon winning the war, Nan ruler's recruited Luang Prabang's silversmith to work in Nan's royal court. There are about ten silversmiths who still practice Luang Prabang's silverware craftsmanship of producing silver bowl and betel-contained tray. 2) Hill tribe silversmiths of Hmong and Mien ethnicities. In 1965, counter-communist operations forced these groups of hill dwelling peoples to migrate down to the low land areas. Food assistance from the government to the newly arrived migrant was insufficient which necessitated them to exchange their silverware for foods and other



necessities. Upon realizing that their silverware could be commercialized, the newly arrived migrants started to produce the products for larger scale commercialization. 3) Industrial-scale producers including foreign and Thai companies is the third group who uses Nan as a production base to produce a good quality silverware at affordable prices.

Nan Province is the main source of silverware production in Thailand with each local area has their own uniqueness. The products received international standard recognition and have been sold in many countries, as well as being awarded with the OTOP 5-star standard award from Nan province. Moreover, “Chomphu Phukha silver center” has been founded as a distribution center to buy, produce, and sell the silverware. Thus, the silverware, particularly that of Hmong’s production, is perceived as a cultural identity of Nan province.

Cultural changes in Hmong communities of Nan which are due largely to globalization, borderline and kinship help spread Hmong’silverware productions to other locations as well.

The research is anticipated to provide explanations regarding dynamics of the Hmong’s silverware business network in border areas as well as domestic and international trade networks whether this is formal or informal one. The research is anticipated to provide further understanding regarding changes of Hmong’s silverware productions in Pa Klang village.

Objectives

To study the dynamics of the Hmong silver business networks in the border areas, including the aspects of productions, product model creation, as well as formal and informal domestic and foreign trade networks at various levels.



Methods

Key informants of this qualitative research were a group of villagers (ethnic Hmong population) , state departments, private organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These key informants consisted of 36 individuals or until the collected information reached data saturation. Sample groups were selected by a purposive sampling method for which selected participants were requested to engage in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. snow ball sampling method was also applied to the research. Data analysis of information obtained from document research, interviews, discussions, conversations, and non-participative observations were accomplished by employing content analysis and systematic synthesis.

Critical interpretation of data was conducted in response to each research's objectives. Furthermore, Timeline data analysis was applied to the assessment in order to obtain a chart of dynamics of the Hmong's silverware business network in border areas. This also looked at relationships among silverware trade networks, and an establishment of the cultural power, according to the historical perspective. The approach was intended to illustrate events, a chronological order of significant events which serve as changing points in their respective eras corresponding to the Hmong's silverware business network in the border areas.

Results

1. Hmong's silverware business network from 1932-1966: Settlement in Thailand

Hmong people in Nan province are scattered in many areas, thus, the province is considered as one of the most important Hmong migration routes. Evidences of Hmong settlement in Nan indicated



that the first group of Laotian Hmong came to live in Pua district near the border between Thailand and Laos since 1857. According to the Hmong's oral history, wars in Laos were the cause that drove Hmong people to migrate southward to Thailand and in 1932. The Thai government announced the formal establishment of Hmong villages in Doi Phu Kha - Pha Daeng of the then Pua district (present day Thung Chang and Chiang Klang Districts).

In 1967, Nan province was classified a red zone due to the communist activities and infiltration into Hmong villages which resulted in severe hardship for Hmong residents. Thai Government, in response to the recommendations by the National Security Council, enforced communist suppression operations in the Doi Pha Daeng and surrounding areas. The Hill Tribe Welfare Division of the Department of Public Welfare, Ministry of Interior (responsible authority then) was appointed the central agency to coordinate the relocation of Hmong's mountainous communities to lowerland in order to avoid consequences of the fighting. Consequently, Nan Provincial Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center founded 4 hill tribe evacuation units, namely 1) Ban Pa Klang Hill Tribe Evacuation Center in Pua district, 2) Ban Don Kaeo Hill Tribe Evacuation Center in Chiang Klang district, 3) Ban Pae Klang Hill Tribe Evacuation Center in Thung Chang district, and 4) Ban Song Khwae Hill Tribe Evacuation Center in Mueang district.

During the initial stage of the migration, Hmong population mainly engaged in farming and slash-and-burn agriculture as there were no other options available. Additionally, Hmong migrants brought along jewelry that was accumulated when they were living in China and Laos to exchange for necessary items. This "exchange of goods" marked the commencement of the exchange between



Hmong's silver jewelry and consumable goods and the introduction of the products to local inhabitants.

During this period, Hmong migrants lived along the border as transportation was inconvenient. The production of silverware was limited to decorative items according to Hmong's lifestyle, customs, and activities. In addition, the products were also sold to other Hmong clients in nearby villages that were accessible by traders.



Figure 1 Decorative silverwares production by Hmong people of Pa Klang district.

Source: Wuthipong Srisilp, September 5, 2017.

The Silverware productions in this period were accomplished manually by using Tao Sao, a traditional furnace, and techniques that were inherited from former generations. This household production mostly concerned the head or members of the family who acquired such a unique craftsmanship directly from the silversmith who themselves learned the skills from their ancestors. Family members usually provided labour force while tools and engraving machine were locally available. The production was completely hand-made in all aspects. Pure silver was used as raw materials to produce jewelry which was mostly crafted with simple natural patterns such as animal and geometric shapes. The silverware's beautiful characteristics became more distinctive when worn with tribal costumes during important festivals (Pa, personal communication, September 7, 2017).



The Silverware productions in this period mainly concentrated on decorative accessories sold among ethnic Hmong clients. Trading was primarily made by hawkers who ventured to different villages where Hmong lived. Therefore, The silverware productions in this period were limited to a household level, using pure silver as a raw material, and manually made. The niche market for silver jewelry was limited to Hmong people because their traditions regard silverware as a sign of prosperity that every individual Hmong must have and wear during important festivals. Furthermore, silverware also represented economic status, living conditions, and family's wealth (Sansongsiri. P, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

As for product pattern creations, the unique knowledge was inherited from older generation via family contacts. Thus, the production of this period was sufficient for usage among members of household or clans while trading was limited to small scale selling among Hmong communities. Most of the funds were derived from saving, agricultural products trading, or belonged to family members. Raw materials were original, damaged jewelry that was re-deliquesced. In addition, French silver was brought in from Laos by visiting relatives or transboundary merchants. During this period, Laos and Vietnam were still French colonies where French currency was the official legal medium of exchange. Traveling to Hmong communities predominantly relied on natural routes. At the same time, silver bars were available for purchase as raw materials in large cities such as Nan's provincial town or Chiang Mai. Production tools were used in making a silverware including beating and, compressing tools as well as table which could be found in the community or nearby areas while acid or other tools were purchased when a silversmith traveled to trade their products in bigger cities.



At the beginning, the silverware trade networks only covered other villagers who lived in the same or nearby villages as well as other subdistricts where Hmong people were present. This also included shops in Nan Province where Hmong worked. However, silverware trades via family and commercial trading were not only confined within Nan province but also extended to other Hmong communities in Thailand, such as those who lived in Khok Noi village of Phetchabun province, Tham Krabok Temple in Saraburi province, and in Chiang Mai province. These are the networks that have been forged since the initial Hmong's migration from Laos.

At the same time, Hmong villagers in Nan still maintained relationships with other Hmong communities in Laos by visiting and accessing those communities via different transboundary channels or natural passages. This kinship networks also provided basic assistances, such as accommodation at night during the silver trade expeditions. Moreover, residents of those villages also introduced the available products to their own families as well as facilitating for traders travels to meet other relatives. Purchasers of the silverware were Hmongs from Khek Noi Village in Phetchabun province, Tham Pakok Temple in Saraburi province and Chiang Mai province where large Hmong communities were located (Kloi, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

2. Hmong's silverware business network from 1967-1994: Governmental supports in Nan province.

Upon relocating to lowland areas of Pa Klang sub-district, the Thai government allocated 10 rai of agricultural lands to each family and established the Nan Provincial Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center in 1967. The center was purposed to oversee mobile development units operated in remote hilltribes villages, to



examine agricultural development on mountainous terrains, to facilitate transportations, and to support selling of hill tribe products. Each center operated as Provincial Hill Tribe Committee that coordinated, developed, and assisted hill tribe people who lived in the area responsible (Pa Klang subdistrict administrative organization, 2015, online)

Pa Klang village was one of the relocated hill tribe communities that the government agencies and international organizations recognized its importance and consequently presented the village as a model during the communist insurgency between 1967 – 1982. Although the government's agricultural budget was heavily spent on promoting economic crops, such as coffee, red beans, lychees, giant clumping bamboos, peanut, upland rice, and corn, extreme hot weather prevented successful cultivations. In addition, allocated agricultural lands were proven insufficiently thus, villagers were forced to grow cotton, red beans, and corn elsewhere (Leepreecha, 2005)

Residents of Pa Klang village first set up their stalls in front of Ban Nam Yao Refugee Center which was located approximately 25 kilometers from their community. Moreover, they also purchased Hmong's embroidery products which they resold to Hmong and non-Hmong traders in Chiang Mai. Upon the closure of Hmong refugee centers in 1987, traders of Pa Klang village opted to travel to other Hmong villages around the country or even to Laos where they purchased Hmong's skirts and other antique handicrafts for which they resold to retailers at Night Bazaar Market and Doi Pui (in Chiang Mai province) who turned those items to handbags, shoulder bags, sweaters and other products.

Between 1977 and 1987, a male head of each family began their silverware production by replicating that with Mien products.



This jewelry made from white gold and silver were sent to markets in Chiang Mai and Bangkok as well as ethnic Hmong clients who settled in the United States and France. Some of these newly-skilled artesans also worked for Mien employers in other villages and towns while those with exceptional skills who knew gold shop owners became goldsmiths in Bangkok and Sukhothai. However, in late 1980, after working for a few years, these group of artesants decided to return to their village where their families still resided. (Leepreecha, 2005)



Figure 2 Suwat Promsuwan Nan's provincial governor and other government officials joined the Hmong New Year ceremony in Paklang sub-district, Nan, Thailand.

Source: Wuthipong Srisilp, September 9, 2016.

During this period, there was an increase of an increase of governmental assistance in improving qualify of life for Hmong villagers especially career development. Hence, more Hmong' s silverware was made for trading which led to changes in various aspects of the products, such as production processes, product models, and trade networks.



As for production purposes, silverware made during this period was mainly used in important festivals and traditions. Afterward, the products were made for trading in an attempt to raise the family's incomes. In addition to intra village direct sale, public relation techniques, such as the use of word-of-mouth which was similar to that of the first period, was also used.

Further to selling the products to Hmong communities, an annual festival such as the Hmong New Year was a main platform for silverware trading. Subsequently, the government also helped to promote the products via exhibitions held by different governmental agencies including the Department of Community Development, Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center, The Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit.

Silverware production was originated as household-based manufacturing before being expanded into a household industry which occurred after the silverware trade was proven as a profitable investment. Consequently, community enterprises were formed to jointly produce and distribute the products for which the government agencies helped to provide necessary training including pattern designs. As a result, the products and patterns had become more diverse.

In order to obtain distinctive product patterns that were desirable by the markets, raw materials were developed by combining pure silver with other materials such as brass, copper or gold. This included the use of bleaching chemical agents to modify silverware's colorful appearances.



Figure 3 The researcher and the author observed and participated the Hmong New Year ceremony in Pa Klang sub-district since September 9, 2016.

Source: Wuthipong Srisilp, September 9, 2016.

Silver bar and silver powder that were once ordered from gold merchants in Nan and Phrae Provinces were supplied by trade brokers from Chiang Mai and Bangkok who regularly delivered the materials to the villagers. Other materials, such as brass (sheet and rod), a binder agent, anodized acids for silver plating were also ordered at the same time when the silver bars and powder were purchased. However, traditional production machines and other tools and equipment remained in use. Some of the machines were made by local silversmiths themselves while other sets of equipment could be purchased within the community in Nan Province.

In 1974 Hmong's silverware from Pa Klang had gained prominent reputation after Chiang Mai merchants commissioned local silversmiths to produce 3 sets of 9 necklaces which were presented to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. Number 9 was the auspicious number that signified the 9th monarchy of Thailand's present dynasty. Thereafter, the silversmiths Mr. Kamol Sae-ten, along with Mr. Lao-pa Sae-ten, and Mr.



Thaworn Sae-ten had presented their silverwares to the Queen at Bhubing Rajanives Palace.

A palace representative interviewed the silversmiths regarding the silverware productions and approached Mr. Kamol Sae-ten to demonstrate the silver and gold productions in front of Her Majesty the Queen at Bhubing Palace and Chitralada Royal Villa. Mr. Kamol Sae-ten had worked there for 2 years. Her Majesty the Queen later commissioned the gathering of hill tribe silver craftsmen from all the tribes in northern Thailand at Bhubing Palace. Each of the tribes were asked to produce the products based on their specialty during 1 year of residency (Cluster Silverware Nan, 2016, online).

Mr. Kamol Sae-ten later returned to Pa Klang and gathered around 10 craftsmen in the area to start the silverware productions. Between 1979 – 1984, the products gained more popularity until 1990 and expanded to other groups, such as Doi Silver produced for international markets.

Although Chiang Mai produced similar silverware products, the productions there concentrated on larger items whilst the silverware production in Nan focused on decorative items and belts (Sae-ten. K, personal communication, September 15, 2017).

As for management of silverware production at Pa Klang village, households that produced the silverware continued to use traditional tools but increase the number of production workers which mostly consisted of relatives in the community. Later, manufacturers who were from the same extended family gathered to increase the production capacity to meet customer's orders. Hence, management functions had been divided and a number of skilled workforce had been increased by recruiting those who had previously worked at gold shops in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Finally, a group or



network of enterprises had been formed and received supports from government agencies, according to their structural functions.

Actually, Chomphu Phukha Silver Center Shop was the first one in Nan which was operated around 1993-1994. At the beginning, the shop was actually set up by all silverware entrepreneurs and silversmiths from nearly two hundred households. The objective was to eliminate the middleman which would allow the villagers to directly benefit from the trade. The villagers just manufactured the products and those products were sold for them.

(Pa, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

During this period, a customer-base of the silver products had been expanded to general public such as government officials, merchants, and tourists who contributed to further developments of silverware in Nan province. These customers consisted of the actual users of the items, such as ethnic Hmong individuals or the general public, and the middlemen who resold Pa Kalng's silverware to other consumers in Thailand and abroad. Domestic networks of customers were different from the international ones as they forged a strong relationship with each other and helped to promote the products by word of mouth, received orders from other customers on behalf of the producers, and provided accommodation for traveling traders. This relationship was similar to the initial stage of the trade as previously mentioned.

The main function of the international trade networks were to promote and introduce silver products to other ethnic Hmongs who lived in the same countries. During this period, production methods had been changed and the networks of interactions no longer limited to Hmong ethnic groups. Thus, the kinship relationships had been transformed to trade partners among different clans. Interactions with external groups, both general public and



government sectors were initiated by consolidated efforts from merchants.

Moreover, there were supports from foreign affairs funding, such as the Hmong's club or association in Thailand, Department of Foreign Trade of the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Apart from selling their silver products to consumers in Phetchaboon, Chiang Mai, Saraburi, Tak, and Nan Provinces, the products were also exported to countries, such as the United States, France, Australia and Laos. In addition to the kinship networks, a governmental agency also helped to support, expedite, and standardize the silverware products. Thus, this era is considered a period of growth in trade and support in all dimensions of Pa Klang silverware.

3. Hmong's silverware business network from 1995 – 2016: The era of transnational trade network of the Hmong's silverware of Nan Province

After the trading business gained foothold in 1994, 9 families worked as main producers and traders, including Mr.Surapol Sae-li, Mr.Sumet Yangsaeng (Sae-yang), Mr.Surapon Siltao (Sae-tao), Mr. Suradet Yangsaeng (Sae-yang), Mr.Yuttana Kirisattayakul (Sae-yang), Mr.Tanong Khesophawat (Sae-li), and Mr.Tantikorn Wanwiputti (Sae-ho from paternal side and Sae-ten from maternal side, and Mr. KamolSae-ten. The remaining producers were craftsmen who produced as per the orders from these 9 families and received wage in exchange of the productions.

This relationship gave rise to trading group establishment, such as Chomphu Phukha Silverware Center formed to alleviate exploitations by middlemen or price undercut by producers in the local community. Chomphu Phukha Silverware Center was an



establishment that helped to set a central price, buy silverware products from members, and act as selling center.

After launching the silver handicraft products in early 1995, Hmong villagers learned and gained more experience, regarding silverware trading. Local and provincial level production groups and trade networks were established and the silverware products were highly recognized by government agencies in Nan province as a famous OTOP product. The products were sold at many local and international tradeshow as well as being used during the annual Hmong New Year traditions. Hence, silverware productions during this period were characterized as a trading business for which many families expanded their production capacity and opened storefronts to welcome tourists.

Initial staff were recruited from family members who provided products and services. Public relations during this period involved government agencies which organized exhibitions, advertised the products via radio, print media, online media such as websites, Facebook, Line, live broadcasting, and silver jewelry trade fair networks throughout Thailand.

As a result, silverware production of this era had become more systematic, which was clearly defined as functionalities, including procurement, order taking, product design, pre-order, quality inspection (responsibility of the manager or the business owner) and delivery departments. Silverware patterns were constantly updated and pre-order was made to suit customers' requirements and usage on various occasions. The products were made in accordance with different customer groups by using raw material composition was modified in order to ensure that the products at different price range, could be offered to all customer



groups. Moreover, machinery was introduced to the production in order to achieve the same standard for every work piece.

After the silverware gained more popularity, the products were designed to accommodate a modern life by modifying original patterns that appeared on the traditional handicrafts. Although modern tools were introduced, delicate patterns still required manual productions that involved hammering tools and knitting of the traditional Hmong patterns. Thus, Pa Klang village of Pua district has been considered as a community that retains the silverware production methods inherited from their ancestors. These jewelry decorated tribal dresses are exquisite and can distinctively indicate the status of wearers.

Silver pellets, the main raw materials for productions, were purchased from gold shops in Bangkok or Chiang Mai by ordering through business representatives who received orders from villagers and delivered the pellets to customers who ordered them. In addition, more pellets were imported from countries, such as England, Australia, and Malaysia.

Pa Klang is a community where ethnic Hmong and Mien peoples live side by side. Skills and neatness in silverware works give rise to modern shops that line the main intersection. One of Nan's unique characteristics is that its "origin" is nested in the middle of the valley. Several lanes separate Mien houses from those of Hmong neighbours. It is world apart from the boisterous lives. Clean, humble wooden houses are full of old women who dress in black traditional pants with beautiful embroidered patterns. They wear shirts whose collars are adorned with red knitting wool, and headbands which reveal embroidered fabric edges on both sides that emerge like ears of a deer. (Komarakun Na Nakorn, 2015, p. 82)



Figure 4 The silver products that combined a traditional and a new trend style by Hmong villagers.

Source: Pa Klang subdistrict administrative organization, 2017.

Hmong's silverware is renowned OTOP products at the provincial and national levels as well as being tourism souvenir products of Pua district. The silverware could be produced by traditional and manual productions or manufactured by modern machinery. The productions have become an industry that required systematic labor arrangements which employs between 10 to 30 people whilst those that have been established as industrial companies may employ 50 people or more. Most of the operational machine is a modern one that is sent directly from Bangkok. As per management models, both household and industrial companies managements are used. International market's demands for more silverware are currently increasing.

Merchants or trade agents serve as a link between producers and consumers in domestical and international markets. The



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ปีที่ 11 ฉบับที่ 2 (กรกฎาคม-ธันวาคม 2563)

products are advertised through different channels such as (almost all of) online media, trade exhibitions held by government and private agencies, especially the Hmong New Year held annually in Thailand and abroad.

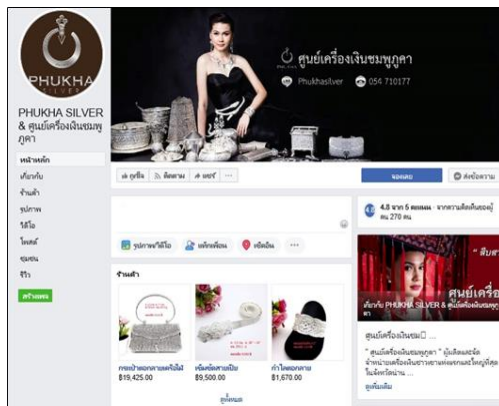


Figure 5 The use of the online marketing to promote the Hmong's silverwares in Thailand and abroad under the name of silverwares entrepreneurs, Nan, Thailand.

Source: Phukha Silver, September 12, 2017.

Nan Province is considered a major source of Thailand's silverware productions and trading. At present, apart from being sold at individual retail stores, the products are also sold at CHOMPHU PHUKHA Silver Center and Handicraft Center. The center acts as a site of production, purchasing, sale, and occupational training for people in the community. In addition, the center distributes silverware products to both domestic and international clients. These products are available at major tourist attractions at tourist destinations in Bangkok, Chonburi, and Phuket and in nearby provinces where Hmong communities exist such as Chiang Mai, Phetchabun, Saraburi, Kamphaeng Phet, Tak, Phitsanulok, and Chiangrai.



However, middlemen are still active in foreign markets, such as Laos, Vietnam, China, Japan, Australia, India, Argentina, Brazil, USA, Canada, France, Germany and England as well as numerous department stores.

Expansion of Hmong's trade networks, especially external trades, leads to more trading networks. The trading evolves from exchange of goods to middleman-facilitated trading, and establishment of trading groups.

Direct sales with customers are made via different trade channels including hawking at the beginning of the trade where sellers travel as far as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. A selling center in Pa Klang remains a popular option for tourists to place their orders and shop ready-made products. Furthermore, on-line platform, such as Facebook is a new medium that gains more popularity, due to its easy access around the world. Thus, traders and consumers have formed a closer relationship.

... initially we traveled with a case to sell (the products). Then came the internet and recently the social media. There is no need to travel anymore; customers ordered via Facebook. Once the manufacturing has been completed, we send (the products) via Nimseeseng, Sapcharoen, or DHL.

(Kloi, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

As for today's marketing, social media marketing can quickly reach more consumers. Word-of-mouth, receiving orders from local customers, providing shelters for those who travel for multiple days trading, introducing interested individuals (in a foreign) country to participate in the business are significant characteristics of trading via kinship networks in Thailand and abroad.



In addition to relatives that assiste Hmong producers to sell their products locally and internationally, Hmong of different clans, traders, trad representatives, NGOs, Department of Community Development, Arts and Crafts Center, Nan Provincial Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Center, Nan Provincial Industrial Office, Nan Labor Development Office, Nan Provincial Chamber of Commerce, Royal Thai Embassy, Hmong Association of Thailand, Department of Foreign Trade of the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chamber of Commerce, and private enterpreneurs all continue to support the silverware exportations to foreign countries.

... Government agencies continue to help us as always. Community development (department) and the Bureau of the Royal Household also support our occupational challenges. This is to prevent further environmental destructions. Those capable ones with skills and dedication can really do this job.

(Sansongsiri, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

At present, Nan' s silverware trading is growing due to supports from consumers, tourists, trade networks, and various other sectors. The growth in domestic and international markets remains strong despite competitions because the network of ethnic Hmong is a driving force that maintains Nan's silverware busines.

In 2002, government agencies initiated an OTOP program with the view that every village has their own marketable products. Thaksin made our silverware known all over the country. In the past, we sold our products at weekend markets, even the police extorted money from us. We paid taxes but no one believed us. After the government assistance, no one bothered us anymore. Hence, this gave rise to Pua district's products, different agencies came to help, finding us markets, organize events. So, we coved sell our products.



(Namchai, personal communication, September 7, 2017)

Before the end of 2007, Hmong Association played a crucial role in representing Hmong people in many social activities which enhanced better understanding of Hmong people and Hmong cultures among the general public. However, after the establishment of various networks at community, and provincial, and national levels, the associations came under supervisions of these new network groups.

As Hmong associations have been established to ensure the continuation of Hmong cultures, Hmong of 18 clans has also been formed to serve as a common ground for communication between these Hmong clans. Hmong Thai Merchants Association has been institutionalized to enhance all of Hmong's business entrepreneurs. Although the objectives of each organization may be different, in general, they are driving social developments and the quest for recognition of Hmong people. (Udomsawasdee, 2018, online)

Conclusions

Hmongs settlement in Nan province began with successive migrations to the border areas of northern Thailand before moving into inner areas of Nan province. Silverware production is a tradition that has been passed on to successive generations among different Hmong clans. Most of the products are used to decorate clothes and body of ethnic Hmong people. Although networks of Hmong traders who travelled to different villages to sell their products may have been in existence, but commercial production of silverware for trading purposes was not clearly characterized. Meanwhile, silver jewelry has become more popular among Hmong people as they can be produced in many forms and distributed to Hmong people who live in other areas of Thailand and abroad. Moreover, the general public



began to use more silver jewelry at various occasions making silverware trading more lucrative.

Contacts with outsiders and middlemen as well as receiving supports from state and private agencies resulted in several changes of relationship in the society. First of all, silverware productions in Pa Klang had evolved from family-based production to family-based industry as “silver” was capable of restoring the family’s financial situations.

The changes also extended to workforce who opted to work in silverware productions, instead of engaging in traditional agricultural works which derived higher incomes. Apart from ethnic Hmong workforce, outsiders who had experience in silver and gold productions were also recruited to work in the area.

Secondly, a production system, silverware trading, and tourism in Pa Klang were also changed which led to more interactions with people from outside the community. This resulted in changes living arrangements of people in the community. However, social relationship of people in Pa Klang still maintain through traditions that have been conducted for generations, such as Hmong new year festival.

Previously, participants were mainly Hmong villagers in the areas and silverware trades were limited. At present, “outsiders” such as governmental agencies or private businesses also participated and provided financial supports to the event. Thus, silverware has become an iconic product during the new year festival at it represents ethnic Hmong identity.

Furthermore, changes in internal and external marketing trends are also evidenced. Internal marketing refers to ethnic Hmong networks in Pa Klang and provinces where Hmong communities are located whereas external markets are tradings that



are done with buyers from lowland areas. Money has been adopted as a medium of trade in this external market.

Upon considering internal factors, stakeholders both government agencies and local capital group attempt to exert relationships between Pa Klang's Hmong silverware to consumers in other areas of Thailand and abroad. Hence, the silverware has become more popular among Hmong families and other consumers. The growth and expansion of the business to influences from external capitalists who became interested in tourism. Therefore, the image of silverware products have been intertwined and incorporated into tourism.

Moreover, strong kinship in the past is undoubtedly challenged by modern economic system where Hmong villagers have placed more emphasis on economic benefits. Relatives from the same clan may not be considered a part of associations if mutual economic gains are not presented. On the other hand, people who are not related may be considered as a family due to the abovementioned economic interests. Changes in values and work practices, due to economic reasons not only affect people in the community but also result in changes of relationship between members of the family.

Thus, big Hmong families in the past have been changed to a nuclear family consisting of parents and children only. More importantly, the globalization has caused people in the community to adopt dual roles of kinship and international trade partners especially ethnic Hmong who lives in Laos PDR and the USA.

Research suggestions

This research forms a part of the study, regarding ethnic Hmong's silverware networks in Nan province. More research should be conducted in other areas to consolidate knowledge, on Hmong's



ethnic identity, in Furthermore, the findings of this research could be adapted and adopted to enhance Nan' s provincial strategic development that supports more silver productions and improves collaborative networks of productions and sales of the products in domestic and international markets.

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