

14 April 1986: Eviction Orders to The Hmong Of Huai Yew Yee Village, Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand

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Introduction

On 14 April 1986, I witnessed the first encounter between the Hmong of Huai Yew Yee (or Yooyi) village and officers of the Third Division of the Army and officials from the Royal Forest Department in Bangkok (Plate 74). Most of the adult members of Huai Yew Yee had reached the village site by foot about 19 years earlier. I had taken more than one day to hike into the village from my base at the Khao Nang Rum Research Station to the east in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary. Three helicopters, in time best measured in minutes, had transported the various Government agents to this remote village at the western boundary of the sanctuary in Uthai Thani province in west-central Thailand.

In 1973 I initiated what has become a long-term field study to work out the distribution and habitat preference of the five species of macaque monkeys (Primates: *Macaca*) that are broadly sympatric in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary. My search for macaques was expanded in 1982 and 1983 to the lower montane or hill forest inhabited by Hmong in the western most region of the sanctuary. This research has been carried out in cooperation with the Wildlife Conservation Division of the Royal Forest Department, and workmen and rangers from the Khao Nang Rum Research Station have been my field companions.

Following my first brief expedition to the Hmong area in 1982, I was informed of the intention of the Royal Forest Department to remove the Hmong from Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and contiguous Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary to the west in Tak province. The intent of my research in 1986 was to conduct a demographic and land use survey of the Hmong residing in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and to record the presence of all primates in the immediate region. The resulting data would function as baselines to study the status of the forest and primate populations through time.

Background

During the initial period of field work in the Hmong region (7-18 March, 1986), I was able to census their villages: Huai Yew Yee, the only Hmong village in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and probably the most traditional village in the region, and Huai Nam Kheo and Bao Wai Dam in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. On 14 April 1986, the population of Huai Yew Yee consisted of 176 people living in 19 households. Forty per cent (70) of the population was 10 years of age or younger, and 26 percent (46) of the population was five years of age or younger. Seven percent (12) of the population was between the ages of 60 and 80. Household size ranged from two to 22, with the mean being just over nine. The larger households were extended families containing married sons and their off-spring.

With the exception of two households, all 17 heads of household (89%) had established residence in Huai Yew Yee 18-19 years before the time of my study and about four to five years before Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary was declared in 1972. Most of these people formerly lived in Pa Ka in Phop Phra King Amphoe (subdistrict), Tak province. This appears to have been a communist stronghold about 20 to 10 years ago, during which time the Hmong of Huai Yew Yee left the area at the request of the government. Hmong now living in Pa Ka,

who total at least 1400, have saturated the area which they appear to have entered about three to five years ago, after it was brought under the control of the government.

Until 8 April 1986, the village of Hai Yew Yee was accessible only by foot. Its residents were self-sufficient and grew short-grain rice and corn. Most households had additional fields of sugar-cane and/or bananas, and some had gardens with fruits such as papaya and pineapple. All grew a variety of vegetables. In addition, the people maintained large numbers of chickens and pigs (and some cattle) for food and kept cattle as beasts of burden. Opium poppy was also grown in the area, but the amount of land (*rai*) allocated to this cash crop was small in comparison to that devoted to rice and corn. The larger households had anywhere from 30-50 to 100 *rai* planted in corn and rice but, at a maximum, only four to six *rai* planted in poppy. Smaller households tended to cultivate only two *rai* of poppy. One acre (or 4,047 square meters) is the equivalent of 2.5 *rai*. The rolling plains cultivated by the Hmong are surrounded by forested mountains crowned by rocky outcrops, and macaque monkeys and other wildlife such as barking deer (*muntiacus muntjak*) were observed adjacent to both fields and the village of Huai Yew Yee. During the course of my study, articles appeared in the English-language Thai press to the effect that the Hmong had encroached on Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and were supporting themselves by growing opium and poaching wildlife eg. **Bangkok Post**, 24 March and 14 April 1986).

The illness of one of the workmen made it necessary for me to return to the Khao Nang Rum Research Station on 19 March. Before I was able to resume my study, the Chief of Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary informed the residents of Huai Yew Yee that they had to abandon their village by the 15 of April or face arrest. He also declared the Hmong region to be a sensitive zone and ordered no-one to enter it. As a consequence, on

26 March, I travelled northward to Tak in an effort to obtain information about the proposed relocation site for the Hmong.

I was able to obtain permission to travel to Pa Ka in the Phop Phra subdistrict of Tak province and was able to inspect the proposed relocation site. Some 3000 - 5000 Hmong from Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuaries (and perhaps others from the north) are scheduled to be relocated in an isolated community, analogous to an "American Indian reservation," in a lowland area at kilometer 48 to 45 on the Mae Sot - Umphang road. The area was devoid of water and denuded of vegetation and may require the equivalent of US\$600,000 - \$1,000,000 to develop, if such development is feasible (Plate 72) Following the completion of my study, I was informed in Bangkok that before the Hmong from the sanctuaries are relocated in Phop Phra subdistrict they will be kept for as much as one to two years at a "temporary" holding site at Krakakee village, an area of degraded forest adjacent to the road leading northward to Umphang from Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. Here, in an "intermediate zone" they may begin to undergo a programme of forced cultural assimilation. The argument for this proposed relocation scheme is summarized in a document entitled **Target Areas for Prevention of Forest Destruction by Hilltribes** (See Appendix V), a copy of which was given to me at the Royal Forest Department in Bangkok on 18 April by the Chief of the Watershed Survey and Planning Sub-Division.

Events Preceding Confrontation

On 6 April, with permission from the Royal Forest Department in Bangkok, I returned to the village of Huai Yew Yee. At the time the mood of the people was more one of excitement than apprehension. I noticed that the trail linking Huai Yew Yee with the village of Bao Wai Dam had been widened during my absence, and on 8 April the first automobile, a Japanese minitruck driven by a Hmong from further north, ar-

rived in Huai Yew Yee. The Hmong in villages in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary had extended the "temporary road" to Huai Yew Yee. This road was built by the Army from Umphang to just inside the northern boundary of the sanctuary to facilitate the removal of hill tribe people. The arrival of the first of three minitrucks was celebrated with the consumption of local corn whiskey. Many of the women and most of the children of Huai Yew Yee had never before seen an automobile, and the horn, lights, and windshield wiper immediately became objects of fascination for them. The minitrucks began to move the belongings of the Huai Yew Yee Hmong and some of the more elderly members of the village to Bao Wai Dam. The drivers of the minitrucks may have been recovering their expenses by selling fruit such as mangoes and oranges and other items such as cigarettes, at prices far below those charged by ethnic Thai merchants who first appeared in the region following my 1983 study when they transported their goods in by pack horses. Contrary to assertions in the press that women and children would be taken out by helicopter (**Bangkok Post**, 14 April 1986), the Government was providing no assistance, but other Hmong were helping the people of Huai Yew Yee to evacuate their village.

Beginning on 11 April, more than 30 heavily-armed members of the Volunteer Army (*thahaan pran*) began to arrive in Huai Yew Yee by pick-up truck, in anticipation of the arrival of officers of the Third Army three days later. Minor misconduct toward the young women of the village and considerable discharge of automatic weapons, including possibly the shooting of birds and small mammals in the vicinity of the village, characterized their behaviour. The excitement was heightened by the Hmong conducting a two-day ceremony commemorating the 14th anniversary of the death of a "Mother" in which the *thahaan pran* freely participated (Plates 69 and 70) Finally, on the afternoon of 13 April, the Chief of Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and 17 of his men reached the village on foot.

Confrontation

A military helicopter bearing a Lt. - General from the Third Division of the Army and the Deputy Director-General of the Royal Forest Department was the first to arrive on the morning of 14 April (Plate 73). The *thahaan pran* had cleared a landing pad outside the village, and, as the Government contingent walked toward the centre of the village, they were met by the men of Huai Yew Yee, who had assembled at the house of the village headman (Plate 71). I clearly remember a young Hmong woman coming out of her house to throw a stick at a dog growling menacingly at the approaching strangers.

The Lt. - General conducted all discussion with the Hmong men. With vigour, the first question that he asked the men was where they hunted gaur (*Bos gaurus*), a wild cattle, which led them to believe that they were being evicted from Huai Yew Yee so that the Army could come in to hunt wildlife. The Lt. - General seemed surprised that Huai Yew Yee had been occupied for 19 years, while other members of his contingent expressed surprise at the diversity of Hmong agriculture and the number of children in the village. One man kept repeating in English that the villagers did not practice birth control. When the Lt. - General stated that to be a good citizen one must comply with the decisions of the Government, each Hmong man raised an identity card indicating that he was a Thai citizen.

The men of Huai Yew Yee asked for permission to remain in their village through the monsoon season in order to harvest the rice crop. Instead, they were given an extension until 15 May to evacuate the village but were allowed to continue to work their old rice and corn fields in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary. In Bangkok, the Army and Royal Forest Department had decided to move the people to Huai Nam Kheo, a village that may have had fairly extensive contacts with ethnic Thais, but the men requested and received permission to stay with relatives in nearby Bao Wai Dam. The monsoon had already begun in the area, with heavy rains in the afternoon, sometimes extending into the

evening, lasting from two to five hours daily. The Lt. - General offered plastic to the Hmong to make tents or temporary shelters if they did not have sufficient: the 176 residents of Huai Yew Yee would have to be accommodated among the more than 240 people already in residence at Bao Wai Dam.

The military helicopter had already departed when two small (Ministry of Agriculture) helicopters arrived with more officials from the Royal Forest Department, including the Chief of the Watershed Survey and Planning Sub-Division. Someone with a television camera accompanied them. This was my first encounter with this group of officials, who were unaware of my presence in Huai Yew Yee, but it appeared that they were responsible for the eviction of the Hmong from Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary and ultimately from Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. I was informed that a development project in situ for the Huai Yew Yee Hmong was impossible because others would move in to take advantage of the project, but no effort had been made to study their patterns of land use and other economic activities. Likewise, I was told that although forest destruction in the region had been relatively minor, a new policy of "preventing forest destruction by hill tribes" was being initiated in the two sanctuaries because they were contiguous with Kamphaeng Phet province, where one of the highest rates of forest loss had been recorded in northern Thailand. The idea that to receive government assistance the hill tribes must become "Thai," to the extent that they must abandon their own culture, including their distinctive dress, and adopt Thai culture, repeatedly came up in our discussion.

In front of the men of Huai Yew Yee, I questioned the Chief of the Watershed Survey and Planning Sub-Division about the feasibility of relocating the Hmong in Phop Phra subdivision. He had never inspected the proposed site. However, he stated that USAID Thailand had offered to assist with the relocation of the Hmong and that a request would be submitted for assistance only in transporting the Hmong to the relocation site

and developing an irrigation system there. Subsequently I learned that the Royal Forest Department never followed through by submitting any form of proposal for consideration by USAID.

Aftermath

Even before the last two helicopters had departed, and before it was necessary for me to return to the Khao Nang Rum Research Station, I met with the men of Huai Yew Yee in the house of the headman. As a woman, even a foreigner or *farang*, it was a profound experience for me. The men had been terrorized by, in their own conception, being singled out for eviction and relocation in Phop Phra subdivision. Several stated that they were being sent to Phop Phra to die or that it would be better to die than to go to Phop Phra. Their primary concern was that they would not be able to plant rice to feed their families. One of the most articulate men in the village said that if they could remain in Bao Wai Dam or even Bhekhee, the largest village in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, they would be able to carry on their subsistence activities. At no time did they threaten to resist relocation, but they were attempting to come up with a reasonable alternative to Phop Phra. And during this intense discussion, a younger man could not refrain from running out of the house to watch the helicopters, a wonder of modern technology, fly over the village and disappear behind the nearby mountains.

Afterthoughts

The Royal Forest Department appears to have taken the position that the Hmong in Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuaries are adversaries or enemies - "encroachers" causing the destruction of forest and wildlife. One junior officer even informed me that the Hmong entered Thailand deliberately to destroy the forest and that ethnic Thais practice slash-and-burn agriculture only because of the example of the hill tribes. As a consequence, the potential for using the Hmong to stop forest destruction, through the promotion of per-

manent land tenure has been overlooked. In 1982 the headman of Huai Yew Yee village, for example, expressed interest in methods or technology that would permit his family to cultivate their fields for longer periods of time.

The eviction of the Huai Yew Yee Hmong necessitated that the Chief of Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, as an ad hoc response, establish a new ranger substation at the former village site in anticipation of increased hunting pressures in the area. My observations made during searches for primates suggest that they and other wildlife may have been hunted out of some areas frequented by ethnic Thais and Karen, especially a trail leading southward to Ban Rai at the southern boundary of the sanctuary. Huai Yew Yee village may have acted as a deterrent against the extirpation of wildlife in its vicinity. In addition, an apparently thriving business in the horns of protected wildlife such as gaur, supposedly obtained from Burma but more likely obtained from south of Umphang, already occurs in Tak province at the border town of Mae Sot. Such trade probably will increase as a consequence of the road constructed within Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. There is no indication that any effort was made to establish the relative benefits and costs to conservation efforts of evicting the Hmong from Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuaries.

Postscript

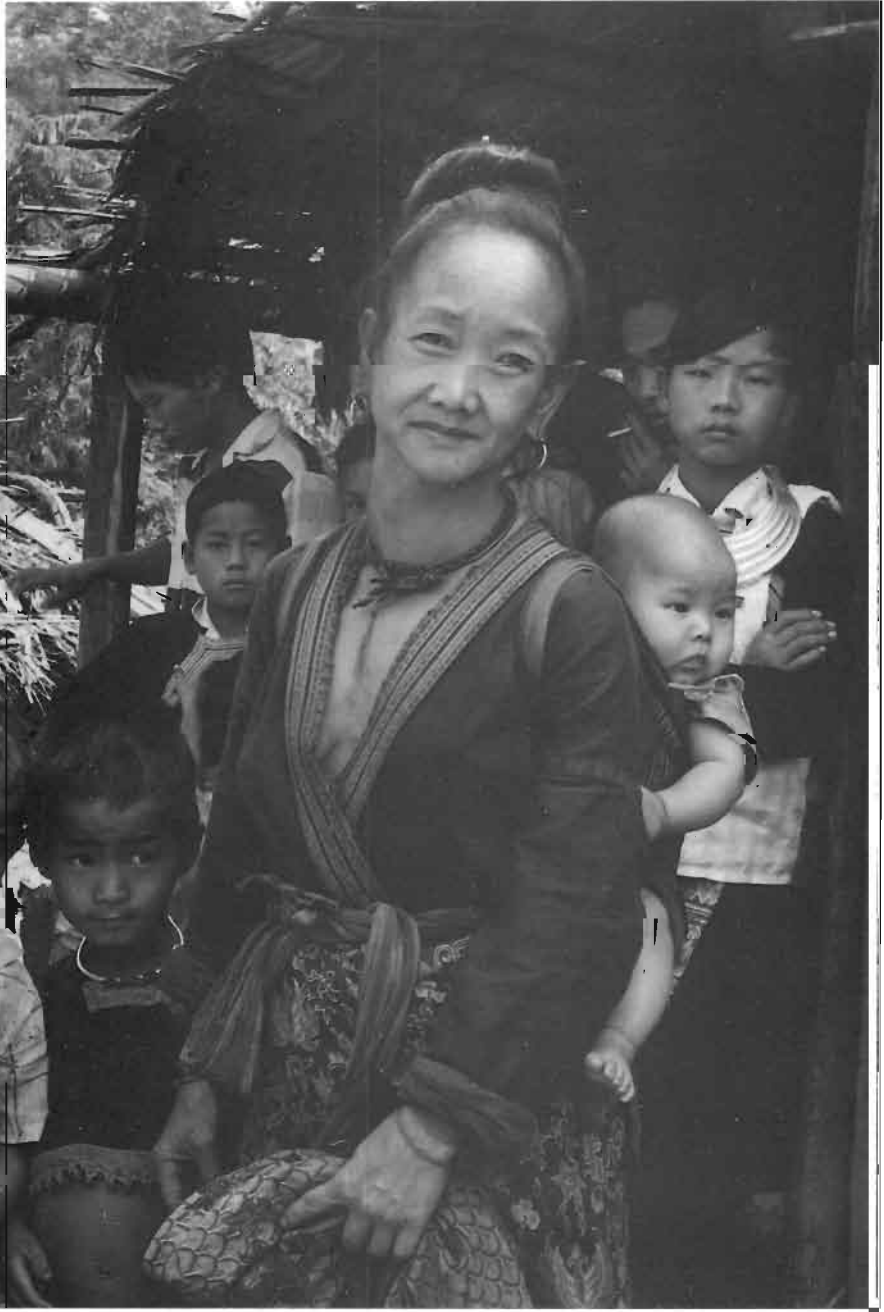
The first of almost 5000 Hmong scheduled to be removed this year from Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, a "batch" of 270 from Phap-hueng village on the sanctuary's boundary were reported to have been moved directly to the resettlement area in Phop Phra subdistrict on the 3 May 1987 (**Bangkok Post** 4 May, 1987). A 7 July, 1987 communication from the U.S.A Embassy in Bangkok identified the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control as providing some "development assistance" for the resettlement project. According to this

communication, "Every effort is made to resettle people on a voluntary basis although the promise of Thai Citizenship for all those who agree to be resettled is used as a persuasive measure". The communication describes the land of the resettlement area as being "the most arable in Tak province and....located near good water sources".

In early October, 1987 the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control announced that at this time it was no longer associated with the resettlement of the Hmong in Phop Phra subdivision because of the failure of the Thai Government to establish an independent panel under the auspices of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to review the resettlement project.

Acknowledgments

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69. Hmong mother, Huai Yew Yee (Eudey)



70. Mock assault (Eudey)



71. Village officials 1982 (Eudey)



72. Phop Phra relocation area (Eudey)



73. Soldiers, Huai Yew Yee (Eudey)



74. Soldiers & Hmong confer (Eudey)



75. Raising the flag (Eudey)



76. Akha bride (Ralana)



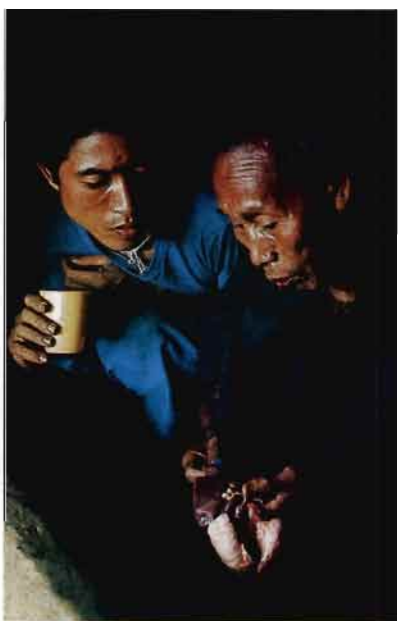
77. Akha ceremony (Vienne)



78. Akha thatching roof (Ralana)



79. Lahu felling a tree (Supachai)



80. Lisu consulting liver (Conrad)



81. Lahu field ceremony (Supachai)



82. Htin mother and child (Connell)



83. Akha children (Hobday)



84. Mien women (Connell)



85. Karen mother (Connell)