

Hmong Scripts in Vietnam: Reality and Problems Related to Language Right

Nguyen Van Hiep

Hanoi University of Industry, School of Language and Tourism

Abstract: This article details the state of writing systems of Hmong language in Vietnam. Hmong Vietnamese script is struggling to be popularized even though it has been taught in classroom for more than half a decade. However, international Hmong script has become more well-known thanks to the support of ecosystems such as movies, music videos with subtitles, and the internet. This article briefly analyses certain traits regarding phonemics and typography of two kinds of Hmong's scripts, examines how they are currently used, and evaluates factors that affect the choice of script. Through in-depth interviews, the article attempts to understand the wishes of the Hmong's community and make suggestions on how to select Hmong script to preserve and further develop unique linguistic traits of Vietnamese's ethnic minority, helping to grow Vietnam's economy in an industrialized era.

Keywords: Lists of ethnic compositions in Vietnam, language rights, writing system, choice of scripts, ethnic minorities, Hmong people, factors affecting choice of scripts, Hmong Vietnamese script, international Hmong script.

INTRODUCTION

The Overall Picture of Writing Systems in Vietnam

Writing is an important invention of mankind. With the birth of writing systems (phonogram *writing system* or *Ideographic writing system*, with various forms), human civilization has grown from the prehistoric period - when knowledge was often spread using words of mouth - to historical period - when notes are turned into writings. The writing was created to aid phonetics. Human language, first and foremost, relies on phonics, but they have two major disadvantages: their inability to survive through time (i.e., words are but gone) and overcoming distances (i.e., we can only hear someone speaking within a limited physical range). Over a long period, writing has helped humans to break down these barriers. The birth of *writing systems* marked an evolution in society's development. It is impossible, for instance, to have education, recruitment, legal documents, laws, literature, etc., without writing. Vietnam is a country that consists of multi-ethnic groups. According to Lists of ethnic compositions in Vietnam announced in 1979, Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups with Kinh people, making up the majority. Besides, there are 53 other groups that belong to different language families, commonly known as Vietnamese ethnic minority groups.

Declaring the rights for language among Vietnamese's ethnic minority groups, part 5 of section 3 in the Constitution 2013 states that "The national language is the Vietnamese language. Ethnic groups have the right to use their own language, writings, retaining their unique identities, further cultivating their wonderful cultures and traditions."

A list created by Ta Van Thong and Ta Quang Tung, (2017) shows that ethnic minority groups that have their own writing systems are: Ba Na, Bru-Van Kieu, Cham, Cho Ro, Chu Ru, Co, Co Ho, Co Tu, Dao, e de, Gia Rai, Gie-Tring, Ha Nhi, Hoa, Hmong, Hre, Kho Me, Kinh, Lao, Lo Lo, Ma, Mnong, Muong, Nung, Ra Giai, Pa Then, San Chay, San Diu, Ta Oi, Tay, Thai, Xo Dang, Xtieng. Ethnic minority groups without writing are Bo Y, Brau, Chut, Cong, Co Lao, Giay, Khang, Kho Mu, Tho, La Chi, La Hu, La Ha, Lu, Mang, Ngai, O Du, Phu La, Pu Peo, Ro Mam, Si La, Xinh Mun (Ta Van Thong and Ta Quang Tung, 2017).

There are different ways to categorize Vietnamese's ethnic minority scripts such as categorizing based on forms (typologically different writing systems), categorizing based on development time ("traditional" writing that has existed for a long time, or "new" writing that is relatively young), categorizing based on ways of expression (phonogram *writing system* or *ideographic writing system*). Vietnamese's ethnic minority scripts have all these traits.

Currently, while there are minority groups without any scripts, there are also cases where one minority group has more than one kind of scripts such as Thai, Cham, Hmong, and so on.

In this report, we present issues regarding the state of the Hmong scripts in Vietnam that are directly related to their language rights and the growth of the country as a whole. The data of this report were obtained through the interviews conducted in Lai Chau, Son La, Nghe An, Thanh Hoa during our stay there to do field work on a state-level research project entitled "*Synthesis of research, request to the government and governing bodies*

that involve urgent issues in preserving and growing ethnic minority languages". This report was brought up in a discussion at the Institute of Linguistic during October of 2020, and afterward it was further studied during our time at Son La, Lai Chau and Ha Giang. Evidently, as seen in the report, we also acknowledge previous researchers, especially the article entitled "Finding Hmong: Research among the Hmong community in Giang Tra, Ta Phin, Sapa, sponsored by the Lao Cai Department of Culture, Sport and Travel in 2013-2014, and authors such as Nguyen Kien Tho Vu Ba Thong, (2014, 2016), Vu Ba Thong, (2010, 2011) among other important authors.

A Glance at the Hmong Community, Their Scripts and Their Presence in Vietnam

According to published reports, Hmong people live in many places around the world, such as China (such as Quy Chau, Van Nam, Tu Xuyen và Quang Tay), Lao, Thailand, Myanmar, America, France, Guyana within France, Australia, Argentina and Viet Nam. In Vietnam, Hmong is the 8th most populated community (behind Kinh, Tay, Thai, Muong, Khmer, Hoa, Nung), with the population of around one million, living in Hà Giang (183.994 people), Lai Chau (170.460 people), Lào Cai (123.778 people), Sơn La (114.578 people), Yên Bái (60.736 people), Cao Bằng (14.770 people), Tuyên Quang (14.658 people), Thanh Hóa (13.325 people), Đak Lak (10.890 people) (according to Nguyen Van Loi Ta Van Thong Hoang Van Ma Ly Thi Hoa, 2018).

As for the specific Hmong communities in Vietnam, according to the document from Ta Van Thong and Ta Quang Tung (2017), there are five groups, namely Hmong Hoa (Hmongz Lenhl), Hmong Trang (Hmongz Douz), Hmong Đen (Hmongz Duz), Hmong Do (Hmongz Siz), Hmong Xanh (Hmongz Sua). The Hmong language is acknowledged as a *syllabic* language, has an overlap between phonological and syllabic words, and is classified as a tonal language (Ta Van Thong and Ta Quang Tung, 2017).

The Reality of the Hmong Scripts and the Two Kinds of Hmong Script Being Used In Vietnam Hmong's writing Systems:

The Hmong language is used by approximately 12 million Hmong around the world. Research indicates that the White Hmong group accounts for the largest population. Therefore, White Hmong's language is the most commonly used. In Vietnam, White Hmong is also the most popular group.

As Nguyen Kien Tho stated in an article posted on the website of Bac Can Society of Literature and Art, there are various Hmong scripts around the world. In China, at the beginning of the 20th century, Hmong scripts already existed. Specifically, in 1904, an English priest named Samuel Pollard came to preach at the Hmong's region in Van Nam province and proposed a type of Hmong script that would be called Hmong Pollard. This script was used to transcribe the chant and the Bible. At the same time, several priests from Europe started to move to the Hmong's region in North Vietnam and South China to evangelize Christianity, and they also created a writing system for Hmong people so that they could understand the Bible.

Nguyen Kien Tho and Vu Ba Thong also suggests that after the birth of People's Republic of China (1949) to 1954, the government of China created 3 types of Hmong language for 3 regions. They are:

Hmong *Qui Chau script (Ntawv Hmoob Kim Tsawb)*, for Hmong people in Qui Chau province and some in Quang Tay province, which has 32 consonants, 26 vowels, and 8 tones.

Hmong *Ho Nam script (Ntawv Hmoob Huj Naj)*, for Hmong people in Northeast region, which has 48 consonants, 35 vowels, and 6 tones.

Hmong *Van Nam script (Ntawv Hmoob Yuj Naj)* for Hmong people at the West of Qui Chau, Tu Xuyen, Quang Tay and Van Nam's provinces, which has 58 consonants, 27 vowels, and 8 tones.

In addition, according to Nguyen Kien Tho, compared to the now commonly used across the world (and in Vietnam) Hmong Latin script, the number of vowels in Chinese Hmong scripts is higher. The researcher claims that people who proposed Hmong scripts in China have brought in many vowels from Chinese's characters to the vowel system in Hmong scripts to ensure proper pronunciation. Meanwhile in Lao, across the XX century has appeared many systems of Hmong scripts such as:

Hmong *Txwj Zeb script (Ntawv Txwj Zeb)* created in 1950.

Hmong *Song Lu script (Ntawv Hmoob Phaj Hauj or Ntawv Soob Lwj)*: Hmong script proposed by Giàng Song Lu in 1959, Hmong people call this *Hmong Châu Phạ script (Ntawv Hmoob Cau Fab)*.

Hmong *Tsuj Yig script (Ntawv Tsuj Yig)* created in 1997.

Hmong script, which is figurative patterns on costumes (*Ntawv Paj Ntaub*), has two types of two authors: Paj ntaub Txawj Vag born in 1990 in America and Paj Ntaub Vib Nais born in Thailand in 1991.

Hmong Kito script (*Ntawv Hmoob qhia kev ntseeg Vaj tswv*) based on Lao's typography, proposed by Christianity priests to translate the Bible and to preach in the Hmong language.

Hmong Latin script (*Ntawv Hmoob Latin*) created in 1953 in Lào; in 1997 called *international* Hmong script (*Ntawv Hmoob thoob ntuj*).

Nguyen Kien Tho also indicates that currently the population of Hmong in Lao, Thailand, America, France, Canada, and Australia all use *international* Hmong script to set the standard for pronunciation. This is mainly because the majority of educated Hmong people in the countries around the world are White Hmong. Furthermore, these countries have highly developed economies, and their media and communication mediums are used widespread, which include Hmong's publications (Nguyen Kien Tho, documented by Hoi Van Hoc Nghe Thuat)

This information is valuable because it gives an overview on Hmong language and their writing systems that are existing today, in terms of both synchronicity and chronology, in Vietnam and outside of the country. This is a basis for the evaluation and comparison of Hmong scripts in Vietnam.

Hmong Scripts in Vietnam **Hmong Vietnamese Script**

Researchers indicate that in 1917, priest M.Savina, when he came to Vietnam to Evangeline, composed the Hmong phonetic script based on French typography with the aim to spread Christianity among Hmong community, even though no one used it anymore.

In 1961, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam approved the proposal for Hmong's script created by Nguyen Van Chinh and Phan Thanh. Like the National script (Quoc ngu script), this kind of script is based on Latin letters. It was created by retaining phonetics from a dialect (Hmôngz Lenhl from Sapa) as a foundation with additional phonemics from other Hmong groups. In total there are 59 consonants (with 3 consonant phonemes from Hmôngz Siz and Hmôngz Sua), 28 rhymes and 8 tones. This Hmong script, known as common Hmong script, has been taught to Hmong

students or staff working in Hmong's region. In the 1970s, the movement to learn Hmong script is quite widespread in the mountainous Northern part of Vietnam, the main living habitat of Hmong people. However, because of many reasons, the education of Hmong script is no longer developing at the speed it was once in the past.

From the perspective of experts, Hmong Vietnamese script has major drawbacks for its users, such as: "First and foremost, this writing system has too many signs for different variations of a phonemic, with certain vowels that only appear in loanwords. Another drawback that confuses Hmong people is the huge gap between Hmong Vietnamese script and the National script "Quoc ngu", showcasing the use of consonant letters to record tones, which causes users to have problems in differentiating letters for consonants and letters for tones."

(Nguyen Kien Tho, from Cited Document).

The educational process of Hmong script in recent times has been a topic of discussion, due to numerous reasons. Firstly, the government has decided to push the teaching of minority language to officers working in minority regions, and the acknowledgment of language certification, which includes standardized tests for officers. Secondly, the Ministry of Education and Training has approved the program to teach Hmong language to office workers. In the program, the Ministry of Education and Training does not discuss which Hmong script would be used, but the government orders the use of the common Hmong script (based on order 206 of the government).

In fact, in many local areas, the teaching of Hmong language is facing many obstacles. The first reason is that Hmong people in Vietnam live in a wide range of groups with different dialects, since the phonetic solution for common Hmong script is based on Hmong Hoa (Hmôngz Lenhl), which is in Sapa - Lao Cai, and cannot be directly applied to other Hmong regions. Additionally, because the level of phonetic – phoneme understanding was limited in 1960, the solution to differentiate phonemes has its limitation, and according to the research by Nguyen Kien Tho, they were : i) the inability to differentiate relevant features with irrelevant/redundant features, which leads to the inclusion of phonemic variants, ii) the state of writing vowels that only exist in loanwords, or based on personal pronunciations, iii) the state of writing vowels only in Hmong Hoa (*Hmoob Lees*) in the Sa Pa - Lao Cai area, not in other Hmong

groups. Thirdly, the teaching of Hmong Vietnamese script clashes with the more common international Hmong script, so the effectiveness is not high. The research from authors of “Finding Hmong” confirms this reality:

“In Vietnam there exist two types of Hmong’s scripts: Hmong Vietnamese script which is the official script, and international Hmong script which is recently imported and used widespread among Protestantism Hmong. Once converted, the participant would get rid of traditional Hmong practices, contributing to the decline of Hmong culture. Therefore, it is important to recover and spread Hmong Vietnamese script because it is the traditional way of writing for Hmong in Vietnam and plays a part in reinforcing Hmong culture. On the other hand, the information regarding Hmong Vietnamese script and its teachers is limited and needs further study” (Finding Hmong script, page 6).

International Hmong Script

Based on approved documents, the international Hmong script is known in English as the Romanized Popular Alphabet – RPA, created to serve the purpose of preaching by Dr. Linwood Barney (American), Priest Yves Bertrais (French), and Dr. William Smalley (American) when they did their research and evangelize the Hmong community in Lao during the 1950s (Duffy, 2007; Yang, 1997). The international Hmong script uses White Hmong phonetics as standard. The dialect of White Hmong is considered the “standard” dialect for Hmong people, based on the fact that Hmong, regardless of their groups, can listen and understand White Hmong dialect. Our field research in Tay Bac in 2020 confirms this. Nowadays, international Hmong script is used commonly in the Southeast Asia region, China, and countries where Hmong people emigrated to such as France or America and Australia (Smalley and partners, 1990: 135-138), as well as other Hmong script such as Mong Pahawh and Hmong Pollard.

In the beginning of the 90s, international Hmong script came to Vietnam through preaching (Ho Ba Hua, 2014). Based on the research of Nguyen Van Chinh and Nguyen Thi Tam (2013), Protestantism entered Lao Cai in 1930 but was not successful. Their return in 1989 was much stronger. In the last two decades between the 1980s, approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of 1 million Hmong in Vietnam have converted to Protestantism (Ngo Thi Thanh Tam, 2010). Preachers printed and passed the Bible, and

chanted in Hmong international script, as well as taught this script to the people. The presence of international Hmong script is further boosted by movie subtitles, music from Hmong artists being sold in the free market or access via the Internet. Therefore, non-religious Hmong can also approach and be familiar with this script.

For this reason, prior to the arrival of international Hmong script in Vietnam, the script was used for Protestantism Hmong in Vietnam as a tool to understand the Bible, but later spread through the Hmong community. Tran Tri Doi, in a research project on eradicating illiteracy among Hmong people in Pu Tiu, Ang To, Tat He, Ang Nua, Muong Ang, Dien Bien Phu (2013), has proved that 99% of people in Pu Tiu has successfully used native language by learning international Hmong script through Bibles. Meanwhile, people in Tat He have no understanding of Hmong script due to their habits to practice traditional beliefs and not Protestantism. To solve this problem, the author suggests the government care more about the education of language (both common Vietnamese language and minority languages), through religious activities (Tran Tri Doi, 2013).

In the articles in Government digital newsletters (2010) and Ethnic Magazine by the Ethnic Committee (2011), Vu Ba Thong admits that even though it is not a publicly acknowledged official script, international Hmong script is used in common media and the community of Hmong in Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Thai Nguyen due to its easy use. The author also suggests the government needs to make a choice of what script will be used in teaching, in a way that benefits the people (Vu Ba Thong, 2010 and 2011).

Through an in-depth interview with priest Hang A Xa (born in 1975 in Sin Suoi Ho, Phong Tho, Lai Chau Province) he declares that even without the acknowledgement of the government, the existence of the international Hmong script is a subjective reality. He also states that the ratio of Hmong who write international Hmong script accounts for 80% of Hmong who speak their own languages. This number is further correlated with our field research in Dien Bien, Son La, Ha Giang, especially through our interviews in Muong Nhe (Dien Bien) and Muong Te (Lai Chau) in December of 2020.

Issues Facing Hmong Scripts in Vietnam Comparison between Hmong Vietnamese Script and International Hmong Script

Adaptation Difficulty

International Hmong script is much easier than Hmong Vietnamese script when it comes to the ease of adaptation. The people we conducted in-depth interviews with in Sin Suoi Ho (Phong Tho, Lai Chau) and Nam Can (Ky Son, Nghe An) all believe that international Hmong script can be understood without learning. They just read the Bible, in combination with watching movie with subtitles in order to gain a basic understanding. Young Hmong in Sapa, Bac Yen we interviewed also agreed. They suggested that 80% of Hmong teenagers do not need to study. By just watching movies and listening to music with lyrics, they are good enough to write and read international Hmong script. Priest Hang A Xa and Giang A My, a teacher in Sin Suoi Ho (Phong Tho, Lai Chau) also analyzed and found examples of obstacles with Hmong Vietnamese script, claiming that using Hmong Vietnamese script in Lai Chau would not be suitable, and there would be miscommunication due to regional pronunciation.

In Ky Son, Nghe An, the chairman of commune Nam Can and his staff claimed that Hmong Vietnamese script is hard to learn, understand, and cannot be applied to record Hmong dialect in Ky Son. The chairman and his man claimed that their children, who are Hmong living in Ky Son, felt that learning Hmong Vietnamese script is extremely challenging.

We believe that phonetic traits and the vocabulary Hmong dialects affect the adaptation of Hmong script. The evaluation of Hmong Vietnamese script is not one-sided. For example, in certain mountainous areas, with phonetic notation similar to Hmong dialect in Sapa (Lao Cai), the opinion of the script is different. This is consistent with the data we acquired when we returned to the Hmong community in Mai Son, where people interviewed believed that Hmong Vietnamese could be learnt and was welcomed by the community. During the time we were working with the staff of Committee of Culture and Ethnic in Phong Tho, Lai Chau, they thought Hmong Vietnamese had its drawbacks but was still a learnable script.

Technically, the research by Nguyen Kien Tho (cited document) shows that the rationality of the phonological solution makes international Hmong script easier to learn compared to Hmong Vietnamese. Specifically,

- In terms of consonant and tone, both scripts have a similarity (both include 57 consonants and 8 tones)
- In terms of vowel: international Hmong script has 13 vowels while Hmong Vietnamese has 29 vowels. In reality, Hmong White and Hmong Lenhl consist of only 13 vowels. Therefore, the vowel system of Hmong Vietnamese script is excessive, with 16 unused vowels (either rarely used, or absent in most dialects of Hmong). The introduction of a large number of vowels that are not present in most of the Hmong dialect into the Vietnamese Hmong script will make it difficult for Hmong people to pronounce (impression of awkward pronunciation) and if pronounced according to the letter, the pronunciation will also not be standard according to the Hmong language that the Hmong people in many parts of Vietnam and around the world are using.

In an interview with priest Hang A Xa and teacher Giang A My at Sin Suoi Ho, we witnessed how certain words cannot be pronounced using Hmong Vietnamese script, and even if it did it would change the meaning.

Hmong Vietnamese and International Hmong Script Ecology

When comparing these two writing systems, we notice a major indifference. While there are not a great number of documents and books in Hmong Vietnamese script, international Hmong script is very well represented in the media. In regions where Hmong practice Protestantism, the Bible is printed in international Hmong script. Furthermore, many movies and music videos that people watch online have international Hmong script.

Most importantly, international Hmong script is used on the Internet and thus attracts a large number of young Hmong, who mostly use smartphones with 3G/4G connectivity. In a research paper by Nguyen Kien Tho (cited document) most of Hmong college students living in the North area can read and write international Hmong script fluently. They can get access to the information about Hmong people around the world and learn popular Hmong songs due to their exposure to the Internet. In addition, the author claims that Hmong Vietnamese script, which was proposed and popularized thanks to the Government's decision in 1961, is rarely used, or used in an extremely limited area (for example,

high schools and junior colleges in Northwest of Vietnam).

Popularity

The above-mentioned comparisons can explain why using international Hmong script helped promote its popularity. This is because it is more advantageous and suitable for the situation:

- Hmong people in local areas mostly use international Hmong script. According to priest Hang A Xa, 80% of the people who speaks Hmong use the international version. On the other hand, through our in-depth interviews in Son La, Lai Chau, Ha Giang, after dozens of years being taught with Hmong Vietnamese, only 20% use Hmong Vietnamese since most of them never use it and soon forget about the script.
- International Hmong script is easy to understand, read, and type on the computer, which is suitable for modern society.

The learners can self-study and use existing documents that teach Hmong language on the internet. Because international Hmong script is standardized through unicode, sending emails or getting updated on the internet is easy, which allows Hmong people in Vietnam to communicate with Hmong people around the world. Google Translate, a famous auto-translation service, translates international Hmong script, further boosting its popularity. A propaganda officer that we interviewed in Yen Minh, Ha Giang province, said that he used google translate to translate the guidelines and the policies of the Party and the Government written in Vietnamese into the international Hmong script, and then spread it to Hmong people.

Not only from the perspective of foreign media, Nguyen Kien Tho research indicates that the television programs of the radio communication stations in Bac Kan and Thai Nguyen all use international Hmong script and almost everyone can read it, while Vietnamese Hmong script is rarely understood or used.

In terms of popularity and the spread of international and Vietnam Hmong script, the opinion from Hoang Xuan Luong deserves attention:

“Take writing system for example, since 1961, the education system in our country has proposed a Hmong Vietnamese script based on Latin, however after many years, its effects are limited and rarely

used by the people. It is too complex, combining Latin letters with Vietnamese timbre, creating difficult vowels to pronounce, certain words also lose their original meaning, while the international Hmong script is easy to understand, memorize, and well-received. However, there are many people who believe that enemies outside the country are trying to take advantage of the international Hmong script, they already have a unified speaking language, and further development of it would encourage illegal activities. I realized that this viewpoint is wrong and inhumane. Governing a country by treating its own people with doubts and fears cannot unify the country.” (Hoang Xuan Luong, 2011)

Recently, in a quick survey using Google Form with 150 examples related to the usage level and demands of Hmong Vietnamese script and international Hmong script for Hmong college students in the University of Science and other members of the University of Thai Nguyen, Pham Thi Phuong Thai, (2021) has received some results, in particularly:

- + 68, 5 % believe that international Hmong script is easy to study, and use, 31, 5% believe that Hmong Vietnamese script is easy to study and use.
- + Learning international Hmong script through: friends, relatives: 63, 7%, self- learn through internet/software: 17, 1%, online education (by teachers): 1,4%, other methods: 17,8%
- + Which Hmong script you choose to learn: 69,9% chose International Hmong script, 31, 1% picked Hmong Vietnamese script.

Issues that need to be solved with Hmong in Vietnam

Factors Affecting the Selection of Script:

In a situation where there are two Hmong scripts in Vietnam, the problem it creates is which type of Hmong scripts can be used effectively as a tool to record Hmong speech, especially in the new language program, where Hmong is used as one of the eight minority languages to be used in courses and programs across many levels.

Unseth, (2005:22) claims that there are four factors that play a part in the selection of script. Firstly, a community can choose a writing system to identify the group and distinguish themselves from others. In another way, the selection of script is a way to reclaim identity, and it is often associated with the “glorious” past of the group. The identity of the group can be a national trait but can also be

identified by the tight relationship between the group and the language, even when they live abroad (Unseth, 2005: 23). The Hmong community who does not practice Protestantism can use Hmong Vietnamese script this way as a way to connect with the memories of the Revolution led by Ho Chi Minh.

Secondly, a community can pick a script to create a distance with another group. This desire is created by many factors, such as national pride, religion, and the need to have self-government (Unseth, 2005: 24). We believe that Hmong who practice Protestantism could have picked international Hmong script due to religious reasons.

Thirdly, the participation in developments on a broader scale can also affect this choice (Unseth, 2005: 27). This is a pragmatic factor. The reality is that there are Hmong people who do not practice Protestantism but choose to learn international Hmong script due to their desire for personal development and being a part of the community, with emotions, spiritual, and political connection. In this case, they simply want to learn the script to expand their knowledge, open up communications, get access to business opportunities, trade, and offer entertainment.

Unseth, (2005: 28) suggests that based on the desire for interaction with other groups, the selection of script can be affected by the availability of printing technology. Obviously, in the case of two Hmong scripts in Vietnam, this factor is not evident because Hmong Vietnamese script is mostly printed in government propaganda that readers cannot understand or approach, while international Hmong script is mainly used to print Bible and related religious documents, as well as translated movies from other countries that are adapted in Vietnam. In this country, the effect of “the availability of printing technology” is replaced by the ease of Internet’s availability and digital documents, which can all be accessed by smartphones.

Fourthly, the community can also select scripts based on the linguistic traits of it. It means that they will review its suitability, whether or not it includes all the vowels, consonants, and tones of their native language. It is clear that Hmong communities are not language professors when making this decision. The majority of Hmong feel that international Hmong script sounds better when being spoken and is easier to learn because it does not have unfamiliar vowels. It is a shame that

Vietnamese academics have not published or conducted research on the differences between these two scripts.

A Few Suggestions

Citing previous research (from authors Ho Ba Hua, Nguyen Kien Tho, Ly Tung Hieu, Hoang Xuan Luong, Vu Ba Thong, Ethnic Committee... as cited) and our own study (through in-depth interviews during our field trip in Lai Chau, Son La, Nghe An, Thanh Hoa, where in places such as Son La, Lai Chau, we conducted two trips (focusing on in-depth interviews) that lead to the following suggestions.

Firstly, the government and educational organizations need further research on the situation and desire to use script from Hmong people living in Vietnam as well as the comparison of the social traits and linguistic traits of Hmong Vietnamese and international Hmong scripts to identify which script is suitable for the people, a requirement before standardizing the education of international Hmong. If we only acknowledge Hmong Vietnamese script then we have overlooked the objective existence of international Hmong script in Vietnam, used by many Hmong every day. We have interviewed young Hmong in Bac Yen (Son La) and Cat Cat (Sa Pa), all of whom said that they can “understand international Hmong script without learning” by watching movie subtitles, reading song lyrics, and using smartphones.

Secondly, we agree that there is a need to separate the original goal with the real value of the script. If we consider international Hmong script to be a potential threat to political stability (seeing that it is used to spread Protestantism), we are overlooking how Protestantism use international Hmong script to spread the Bible and this script is being widely used among the community (both Protestantism and non-Protestantism). These are two separate facts. Looking at the history of the National Script (Quoc ngu Script), it is easy to see that even the Quoc ngu Script was built to spread religion, it later became the script of the entire nation, replacing Nom script to record Vietnamese language.

Thirdly, we need to take in early arguments from linguistic researchers when they objectively claim that: Hmong Vietnamese script was not well-built, it is complicated, hard to learn, and lacking in efficiency. Because the solution of phonological analysis is not reasonable, there are many cases where relevant features with irrelevant/redundant

features are not distinguished. Also, the Vietnamese Hmong script is mainly based on a Hmong dialect that is not really typical. According to our field research in Sa Pa (Lao Cai), Bac Yen (Son La), Muong Nhe (Dien Bien), Muong Te, Sin Suoi Ho and Phong Tho (Lai Chau), Ky Son (Nghe An), international Hmong script arrived in Vietnam naturally (first through the Bible, then traditional media channels, and entertainment), is accepted by the people and slowly became more popular. The government needs more people who can investigate, research, hold scientific discussions, and listen to the opinions of Hmong people and experts to officially acknowledge and use international Hmong script in educational programs and ensure its unity and ease to learn it across the country.

Fourthly, there is a need to consider the advantages and drawbacks of acknowledging international Hmong script. As we all know, the idea of Marxism claims that language is not classified, but the way it is used and the purpose it is classified. Reality shows that if we keep on using Hmong Vietnamese script as the only script for Hmong people in Vietnam, the act of forcing to use and learn one script that from many points of views is hard to write, understand and rarely used (only 20% of Hmong knows Hmong Vietnamese, compared of 80% for international Hmong script) would be inefficient, lacking in scientific research, unrealistic, and costly.

Fifthly, we should not call international Hmong "American Hmong script" or use Revolution Hmong to indicate Hmong Vietnamese script. There is a need to unify and use international Hmong script (originated from foreign countries) and Hmong Vietnamese script (built by Vietnamese).

Sixthly, if we are still keen on using Hmong Vietnamese script, there need to be modifications in order to fix the weaknesses of Hmong Vietnamese script and further improve it to appeal to other Hmong communities. When there is a lack of documents in Hmong Vietnamese script and most people have not known it and it is not widely used, these improvements are possible. In our in-depth interview with a local leader in Muong Te (Lai Chau), the leader claims that Hmong Vietnamese script can be used but needs improvements, in the mold of international Hmong script.

From our investigation and the interviews on the reality, status and wishes from the community on using Hmong script, we agree with the argument of Nguyen Kien Tho in a research in 2014: "It is impossible to delay, we have to acknowledge and agree to use international Hmong script in the teaching of Hmong in Vietnam, for a goal to develop, discover, and preserve the unique cultural values and rich history of Hmong community and build a modern Vietnam culture, with national traits" (Nguyen Kien Tho, cited document)

For the country's growth in the era of multi-ethnics and multi -languages, in which Hmong plays an important part, the Government needs to have an appropriate policy in selecting Hmong script, so that the community has a powerful tool to preserve and develop their language and culture in a modern society. We hope this report could receive suggestions and exchanges to provide scientific facts and opinions on the selection of Hmong script in business and education.

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