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The Hmong

- The term “Miao,” which is widely used in China includes the Hmong and at least three other major subgroups, such as Hmu, Qo Xiong and A Hmao. Hmong is only one sub-group of the “Miao.”
- Hmong language is a Western language of the Miao language, which is from the Miao -Yao language family.
- This presentation covers only the Hmong.
The Hmong

- History
  - Ancestral home is China (Lee, 2007, Yang Kaiyi, 1996)
  - 5,000 year history (Yang, Kaiyi, 1996)
- Diaspora: Largest Hmong population remains in China (+ 2 millions). Other countries: Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, and after 1975: USA, Canada, Argentina, French Guiana, France, Germany and Australia (Yang, K., 2003; Yang, K., 2008).
# Table 1 Hmong worldwide population distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Hmong Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2,777,039 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>800,000 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>315,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>150,000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar (Burma)</td>
<td>10,000-15,000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>300,000 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>3,000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3,000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>10,000-15,000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Guyana</td>
<td>3,000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>50****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
* Lemoine (2007)
** Phang Ching (2008) and Vuong Xuan Tinh (N.D.)
*** Estimated in 2008 by the author (Kou Yang)
The Hmong

- Patriarchal society
  - Patriarchal clan system
    - Clan exogamy
    - Patrilineal ancestor worship
  - Patrilineage
  - Patrilocal residence

- Religion
  - They have their own religion: Prof. Vincent Her calls it, Sheeyism (see his upcoming book)
  - Some aspects of their religion including
    - Animism and Patrilineal Ancestral worship (Shamanism is only one element of their religion)
The Hmong

- The Hmong in Asia are agricultural practitioners.
- Their traditional agricultural practices include one or more of the following forms:
  - Rice Paddy field
  - Slash-and-burn agriculture
  - Horticulture
- Hmong’s agriculture practices have shaped their culture, traditions and religious beliefs (Lee, 2005)
Gender and Hmong Religion

- Both male and female can be called by the Shaman spirits to be shaman
- Offering foods and ancestral ceremonies are performed by man (householder). If the family, however, has violated any religious traditions, only the **paternal aunt** (Phauj Laug) can correct the wrong doing.
- “after marriage, a woman belongs exclusively to the spiritual world of the husband” (Lee, N.D.)
- “The role expectations of sons and daughters are symbolized by the places where their placentas are buried at birth.... Geddes (1976: 53) also reports the burial of a boy's placenta near the central post of the house, and the girl's one under the bedroom floor. This tradition is attributed to the belief that for the Hmong the central post holds the house structure as well as the household spirits and religious symbols” (Lee, N.D.)
• “Strictly speaking, the Hmong's kinship system is not patrilineal with the inclusion of in-married women into the kin group and the exclusion of daughters who marry into other clans. Membership is based on descent, affinity and adoption, but not on descent on the male side alone” (Lee, N.D.).

• Hmong have different terms for maternal grandparents (Yawm Txiv thiab Niam Tais) and paternal grandparents (Pog thiab Yawg).

• Children are raised according to the patriarchal and patrilocal residential rules, so they are closer to the paternal grandparents than the maternal grandparents.
Gender In/Equality in Hmong Society

• Hmong’s Qhuab Ke or ‘Showing the Way’ Chant “says that a pair of female and male super-beings, Nkauj Ntsuab and Sis Nab, were sent from the netherworld to fashion the world, to make the mountains and plains, the rivers and lakes; and to populate it with people” (Lee, 2007:5)

• The seeds of gender equality are present in Hmong folk tales and in the concept that both men and women need each other to achieve maturity, even if they are not always expressed in Hmong social practice (Donnelly, 1997: 191)
Age and Generation

- Authority and respect in Hmong culture come with age and ability (Yang, K., 1997: 2)
- Authority and order in the Hmong household are maintained through known patterns of respect for age and by showing recognition of capacity (Geddes, 1976)
- Hmong children are expected to listen to their mother but to obey the word of the father as the final authority (Barney (1957)).
- The Hmong value highly a social system with father-right as the norm (Lee, N.D.)
Socialization and Expectation of Hmong Boy

- From childhood to old age, Hmong men assume many superior roles, and are perceived by family and society to be the breadwinners, protectors, leaders, and pillars of the family (Yang, K., 1997:1).
- Men are being perceived as important and intelligent (Yang, K., 1997:1).
- Male children receive special attention, love, care, training in hunting and leadership, and are viewed as the eventual pillars of the family (Yang, K., 1997:2).
- Additionally, boy will:
  - Carry on the name of the family,
  - Be the primary care providers for parents and elders in old age (filial piety),
  - Worship the parents and ancestors in the afterworld, and boy
  - will bring his wife to the household, adding more labor power to the family whereas a daughter will move into the home of her husband ... this is no small consideration in a society for thousands of years based upon subsistence agriculture (Yang, K., 1997:2).
Generation and Gender Roles in Hmong American Society

Map is from CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html
Hmong Americans

- Adapting to new social environment is not new to the Hmong (Yang Dao, 1993), who are people of diaspora
- Hmong Americans are adaptable and resilience (Yang, K., 2008)
- “I found tremendous changes in the conduct of daily life. Changes was proceeding at lightning pace, too fast too record” (Donnelly, 1997: 113)
- Choua Lee, the first Hmong American to hold political office in the US, is a woman
- Mee Moua, the first Hmong American to hold state office (MN Senator) is a woman
- At least three of the known six school principals of Hmong ancestry in the US are women (Yang, K., 2008)
- Hmong men seem to encounter greater adaptation problems than Hmong women (Yang, K., 1997:05)
- Hmong women seem to adapt much faster in many aspects, such as learning English (Yang, K., 1997:05)
Dr. Mai Moua, President and CEO of Leadership Paradigm
A Hmong American woman leader at work
Pakou Hang, a Hmong activist at work
Cy Thao, Member of the Minnesota State Assembly
Traditional roles, such as Qeej and Drum Masters continue to be men.
Almost all ‘Khi Tes’ or blessing rituals are performed by men.
Non-segregated table
Regardless of their gender, all children are honored for their educational achievement. Dr. Mai Thao Moua is blessed and honored for her completion of her Doctoral Program in 2007.
MN Senator Mee Moua and her husband, Yee Chang
Thanksgiving Dinner of an extended Hmong American Family
Hmong American New Year Celebration
1980s

- Baby carrier
A Hmong American Family
Generation and Gender Roles in Hmong Society in Laos

Flag and map: from CIA World Factbook: Link to view from:
The Hmong of Laos

• History:
  • The first Hmong immigrants from China to Laos arrived around 1810s
  • 1896: Hmong’s first rebellion against French Colonialists
  • 1919-21: Hmong’s second rebellions against French Colonialists
  • 1960s-75: The Secret War (part of the Vietnam War/Cold War)
• Current Hmong Population in Laos: 315,000 (Lemoine, 2005)
• Hmong live mostly in Northern Laos
Hmong of Laos

- Marriage was a natural condition for maturity, and children the only solace of age (Donnelly, 1997:29)
- Until Hmong marry and produce offspring, they are not considered adults (Donnelly, 1997:33)
- Hmong men in Laos in the 20th century: hospitable, proud, energetic, and purposeful, with a line of knack for animal husbandry and great dexterity in blacksmithing (Donnelly, 1997:29)
While the mother has been seen everywhere with her young child, the father has also been seen of holding children at home.
Grand Parent and GrandChild
An older brother and his baby brother
Hmong in urban Loas: Children and their mothers
Two Hmong women shopkeepers in Xieng Khouang
A group of young Hmong men tend their rubber tree field
Dining segregation
Dress for the New Year