

THE STATE OF HMONG-AMERICAN STUDIES (A BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY)

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Introduction

In the newly published volume **Hmong/Miao in Asia, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books**, co-editor **Nicholas Tapp** provides an insightful essay “The State of Hmong Studies: An Essay on Bibliography” which traces the temporal development of research on the Hmong and assesses some of the key works within the interdisciplinary realm of Hmong Studies. Tapp’s essay is very valuable as an overview of the growth of Hmong Studies research based in Asia. Unfortunately, the sections of his piece pertaining to Hmong-American Studies, are, as he himself acknowledges, dated as they are heavily focused on publications from the 1980s and early 1990s. It is the purpose of the present short essay to provide the reader with an assessment of recent developments in Hmong-American Studies and some insights about certain research areas that need further development in the field.

Health and Medicine

Hmong-American Studies research has grown dramatically since the early 1990s. The Hmong Resource Center library in Saint Paul now possesses more than 150 dissertations/theses and 450 journal articles pertaining to Hmong-Americans (as opposed to Hmong in Asia and other countries). The vast majority

of these works have been published since 1994. There are certain fields within Hmong-American Studies that have seen very important milestone publications emerge in the past few years. Foremost of these areas is the study of Hmong-American experiences with Health and Medicine. While there are many individual studies about different health and medicine-related issues experienced by Hmong-Americans that have appeared in medical journals over the years, **Healing by Heart: Clinical and Ethical Case Stories of Hmong Families and Western Providers (2003), edited by Kathleen A. Culhane-Pera, et al.** was the first publication to provide a compilation with numerous articles by different authors giving a comprehensive overview along with patient case studies of Hmong physical and mental health. Sections of the work are subdivided into the following parts: Hmong Health-Related Cultural Beliefs, Practices and Values, Hmong Women's Health, Hmong Children's Health, Hmong and Chronic Disease, Mental Illness and Domestic Violence, and End of Life-Care of Hmong patients.

Also published in 2003, Saint Cloud State Anthropology professor **Dia Cha's Hmong American Concepts of Health, Healing and Conventional Medicine** provides a comprehensive overview of traditional and changing Hmong concepts of health, medicine and healing practices. Chapters in the work discuss the impact of Christianity and refugee resettlement on Hmong society and health care, the traditional Hmong health system, Hmong-American health care in the state of Colorado, Hmong cultural beliefs related to health, healing and illness and Hmong health-related behavior. The volume also includes a detailed glossary with explanations of important Hmong health, medical and spiritual

terms. The Culhane-Pera and Cha volumes have made extensive information about Hmong health beliefs and Hmong-American interactions with the U.S. medical system much more accessible. These are seminal works in Hmong-American Studies.

Education

Contrary to the situation with Health and Medicine, the definitive work(s) pertaining to Hmong-American interactions with the primary, secondary or higher educational systems have yet to be written. There are a vast plethora of recent case studies related to educational issues, however, that have been published as journal articles or theses/dissertations. Among the most insightful of these are the works of UW-Madison Professor **Stacey J. Lee**. Lee's 2001 article **"Learning 'America': Hmong American High School Students."** **Education and Urban Society 34(2): 233-246** explores the way Hmong-American students at a public high school in Wisconsin interpret what it means to be Hmong in the United States. It examines the way a culture of "Whiteness" at the school shapes Hmong-American students' experiences and their understandings about being American. The researcher explores the content of what the school teaches Hmong students about America and being American; the social constructions non-Hmong students and staff have of Hmong-American students and the ways the Hmong-American students in the Wisconsin school respond to the culture of "Whiteness". One specific issue dealt with at considerable length by the author is the school's practice of referring most Hmong students to ESL programs as soon

as they encounter academic difficulties. Lee's (2001) article "**More than 'model minorities' or 'delinquents': A look at Hmong American high school students.**" **Harvard Educational Review. 71(3): 505-528** discusses the ways in which economic forces, relationships with the dominant society, perceptions of opportunities, family relationships, culture, and educational experiences affect Hmong American Students' attitudes toward school, and the variation that exists among 1.5 generation and second-generation youth. The researcher assesses how forces inside and outside school settings affect Hmong student attitudes toward education. The article concludes with recommendations for how schools might better meet the needs of Hmong-origin students.

An extensive body of work (especially in terms of dissertations and theses) has also emerged pertaining to Hmong-American youth and their responses to the deviant American youth culture. In this subfield, perhaps most notable for their scholarly rigor in the assessment of explanatory variables are **Zha Blong Xiong's 2000 work Hmong American parent-adolescent problem-solving interactions: An analytic induction analysis, PhD dissertation. University of Minnesota** and **Mai Xiong's 2002 publication A descriptive study of Hmong youth gang members in the California Central Valley. EdD Dissertation, University of the Pacific.**

Gender

The experiences of Hmong-American women have been the focus of many research articles and theses/dissertations. The most definitive work

pertaining to Hmong-American Women remains **Nancy Donnelly's** 1994 book **Changing lives of refugee Hmong women. Seattle: University of Washington Press.** This work explains through case studies, female gender roles in Hmong society as well as the Hmong marriage and courtship processes. A more recent study of note is **Stacey J. Lee's** 2001 article: **"Transforming and exploring the landscape of gender and sexuality: Hmong American teenaged girls."** **Race, Gender, and Class. 8(2):35-46.** Hmong-American boys and men have not received nearly the same level of research attention as girls and women. For this reason, two articles particularly stand out as they assess Hmong-American male gender roles and gender-specific experiences in the United States. These works are **Kou Yang's "Hmong Mens' Adaptation to Life in the United States."** **Hmong Studies Journal 1(2)** and **Stacey J. Lee's** 2003 piece **"Hmong American Masculinities: Creating New Identities in the U.S."** In **Adolescent Boys: Exploring Diverse Cultures in Boyhood.** Eds. **Way, N., and J.Y. Chu. New York: New York University Press, 13-31.**

Family Life and Relationships

Hmong marriage trends in the United States (in particular related to early marriage) have received quite a bit of attention in graduate dissertations and theses over the past decade. An important research article in this area is **Bic Ngo's** 2002 piece **"Contesting 'Culture': The Perspectives of Hmong American Female Students on Early Marriage."** **Anthropology and Education Quarterly 33(2): 163-188.** Drawing on the perspectives and

experiences of Hmong American female students, the researcher argues that early marriage may be an expression of students' opposition to the structures of and experiences with school and family, challenging the commonly held notion that early marriage in the U.S. is mainly the result of forced adherence to traditional Hmong cultural practices.

Compared to marriage trends, Hmong clan and family life has received comparatively less research attention. A noteworthy study in this area is **Xong Moua's** 2001 graduate work **Hmong clan leaders' roles and responsibilities, MSW Thesis, California State University, Fresno**. This case study explores through ethnographic interviews the role that Hmong clan leaders play in the indigenous helping network of the Hmong community in Merced and Fresno counties in California. **Julie Anne Keown-Bomar's** 2003 study **Relative abilities: Hmong-American kinship in Wisconsin, PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota** substantively shows how through kinship networks and family strategies, Hmong-Americans create continuity and adapt to new situations.

Oral and Family Histories

Several volumes have been published which provide oral histories of Hmong-American families. Most notable of these are **Lillian Faderman's** 1998 work **I begin my life all over: The Hmong and the American immigrant experience, Boston: Beacon Press** and **Sucheng Chan's** 1994 edited volume **Hmong means free: life in Laos and America, Philadelphia: Temple**

University Press. Another excellent but difficult to find work featuring the life stories of several older Hmong Americans is **The Hmong and Their Stories, Weston, WI: D.C. Everett Area Schools** printed by a Wisconsin school district in 2001. A more recently published work in this genre is **Sue Murphy Mote's** 2004 volume **Hmong and American: Stories of Transition to a Strange Land. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Publishers.**

Religious Adaptation

Most of the seminal studies related to Hmong animist religion and Shamanism belong to the catalog of Hmong in Asia Studies. Much more work is particularly needed in regard to Hmong-American maintenance and adaptation of traditional Hmong religion. However, in recent years, a few studies have emerged of changes and continuity in Hmong-American religious practices. These publications include **Gregory A. Plotnikoff, Charles Numerich, Chu Wu, Deu Yang and Phua Xiong's** 2003 study "**Hmong Shamanism: Animist Spiritual Healing in Minnesota**" **Minnesota Medicine 85(6): 29-34** as well as **Donald Hones' 2001 work "The word: Religion and literacy in the life of a Hmong American" Religious Education (4): 489-509** which assesses the effects of Christian conversion on Hmong refugee clan and family relationships. **Rev. Timothy Vang's** 1998 graduate study **Coming a full circle: Historical analysis of the Hmong church growth, 1950-1998. D. Min. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary** provides detailed information about the history and development of the Hmong Christian Missionary Alliance church in Asia and

the United States. The largest number of Hmong Christians in the U.S. belong to the Alliance church.

Hmong-American Cultural Consumption and Production

This is a relatively new realm of scholarly study that will likely be receiving increased attention with the enhanced cultural exchanges between the Hmong diasporas in the United States and Asia. A most interesting recent work is **Louisa Schein's 2004 article "Homeland Beauty: Transnational Longing and Hmong American Video." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63(2): 433-463.** Schein's study examines the content of Hmong American videos as they relate to social constructions of Hmong homelands in Laos, Thailand and China. The author argues that the Hmong American community has developed "social imaginaries" and senses of community and identity that are transnational through the production of videos, many of which incite among viewers a longing to return to an imagined homeland.

Socioeconomic Incorporation and Race Relations Studies

The study of socioeconomic incorporation and group-level race relations is one of the weakest areas in Hmong-American studies. Most of the existing published works related to Hmong-American socioeconomic status, and race relations consist of locality studies (i.e. studies of the Hmong-American experience in a specific city or region). The absence of substantive national-level studies of these very important topics constitute a major gap in Hmong-American

studies research. Most notable of the existing community-specific locality studies are **Ines M. Miyares'** 1998 Fresno community study **The Hmong refugee experience in the United States: Crossing the river**, New York: Garland, Jo **Ann Kolytk's** 1998 Wausau study **New Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong Life in Wisconsin**, Boston: Allyn and Bacon and **Cathleen Jo Faruque's** 2002 study of the small Hmong community in Rochester, Minnesota **Migration of Hmong to the Midwestern United States**, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

Jeremy Hein has authored two notable studies based on his research in Wisconsin pertaining to Hmong experiences with racial discrimination and Hmong experiences in the legal system. These articles include his 1999 work **"Interpersonal Discrimination Against Hmong Americans: Parallels and Variation in Microlevel Racial Inequality."** **Sociological Quarterly 41(3): 413-429** and with co-author **R. Beger**, the 2001 piece **"Immigrants, Culture, and American Courts: A Typology of Legal Strategies and Issues in Cases Involving Vietnamese and Hmong Litigants."** **Criminal Justice Review 26(1): 38-60**. Another important article is **C. Ly's** 2001 piece **"The conflict between law and culture: The case of the Hmong in America."** **Wisconsin Law Review. 2: 471-499**. This work presents several case studies of situations in which Hmong cultural beliefs or practices came into conflict with the legal system in Wisconsin and the manner in which the conflicts were adjudicated.

In terms of the broader Hmong-American experience, California State University Stanislaus researcher **Kou Yang** has authored several articles on Hmong-American achievements and perceived social issues in Hmong-American communities. These works include his 2001 piece **“The Hmong in America: Twenty Five Years after the U.S. Secret War in Laos.”** **Journal of Asian American Studies** 4(2): 165-174 and the 2003 article **“Hmong Americans: A Review of Felt Needs, Problems, and Community Development”** **Hmong Studies Journal** 4:1-23. Within the broader realm of community studies, Hmong-American political involvement and economic, social, religious/cultural and political diversity within and between different Hmong-American communities across the United States are topics in need of much greater scholarly attention.

Research Resources

Students and scholars of Hmong-American Studies are fortunate that annotated bibliographies are available that fully cover the different eras of Hmong-American research dating back to the late 1970s. These bibliographies include **Douglas P. Olney’s** 1983 publication **A Bibliography of the Hmong (Miao), Minneapolis, MN: Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, University of Minnesota** (covering works up to 1983), **J. Christina Smith’s** 1988 publication **The Hmong, An Annotated Bibliography, 1983-1987. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs**, Smith’s 1996 work **The Hmong: 1987-1995: A Selected and Annotated Bibliography, Minneapolis, MN: Refugee Studies Center,**

University of Minnesota and **Mark E. Pfeifer's** annually updated publication **Annotated Bibliography of Hmong-Related Works: 1996-2003. St. Paul, MN: Hmong Studies Resource Center.** 30 highly comprehensive Hmong Studies subject bibliographies and Hmong bibliographies organized by date of publication are also available at the Hmong Studies Internet Resource Center website at www.hmongstudies.org

In terms of scholarly publications, the online Hmong Studies Journal continues to be the only peer-reviewed Hmong Studies focused academic journal. The journal has printed 4 volumes and 6 issues with 30 journal articles since 1996. The Hmong Studies Journal did its first hard copy printing in a special edition of volume 4 in 2004. Volume 5 of the Hmong Studies Journal will be published near the end of 2004. All of the articles published in the Hmong Studies Journal since 1996 are accessible at www.hmongstudies.org

With regard to Hmong-American census data, Hmong National Development and the Hmong Resource Center of the Hmong Cultural Center in 2004 have printed **Hmong 2000 Census: Data and Analysis.** This publication represents the most comprehensive work ever compiled related to Hmong-American census data and Hmong-American socioeconomic status, demography, and educational status. The volume includes analysis of differences in Hmong populations across states and regions of the U.S. and 6 scholarly articles which discuss important trends that do and do not appear in the census data. General Hmong-American census data is also available on the website of the Hmong Studies Internet Resource Center at www.hmongstudies.org

As for library collections, there are three significant collections of Hmong-American Studies materials in the United States. The most comprehensive collections of Hmong-related scholarly books, dissertations and academic articles are located at the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine <http://www.lib.uci.edu/libraries/collections/sea/sasian.html> and the Hmong Resource Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota www.hmongcenter.org.

The Hmong Nationality Archives in Saint Paul consists of a very unique collection of a broad range of Hmong-related historical items and older out of print books www.hmongarchives.org.