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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study explored Hmong cultural and educational values. The interview data revealed some Hmong values similar to mainstream American values such as a respect for hard work; a concern about personal honor; and honesty. Some values, however, were in conflict with dominant American values such as: a strong clan-oriented society; a tradition of arranged marriages; a belief in education for some but not all males in a family and a belief in extremely limited education for females. With regard to educational issues, the first challenge for educators is that of language. While Hmong parents valued education, they did not want their children to lose either their language or their culture which they viewed as interconnected. Suggestions for classroom procedures to follow and to avoid are discussed as well as issues concerning home/school relationships. Sex education, after-school activities, conferences and parent organizations were unfamiliar concepts to Hmong parents. Contains 14 references. (BF)

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LAOTIAN HMONG STUDENTS AND AMERICAN EDUCATION:  
MEETING SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

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## Hmong Students/American Education

### Abstract

This ethnographic study explored Hmong cultural and educational values. Interview data revealed some Hmong values similar to mainstream American values and some values which were in conflict with dominant American values. Hmong parents' views of education and home school relations are considered. Linguistic issues impacting Hmong students' experience in American schools are reviewed. Suggestions for classroom procedures to follow and to avoid are included.

LAOTIAN HMONG STUDENTS AND AMERICAN EDUCATION:  
MEETING SPECIAL NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Hmong relocation in the United States, following the political upheaval in Laos at the end of the Vietnam War, offered promise of a new life for Hmong refugees but created unforeseen difficulties as well. Since the late 1970s, well-meaning sponsors, educators and social workers have tried to help the Hmong find their way in American society, but ignorance of American cultural values has confused the Hmong while ignorance of Hmong cultural values has confused the Americans. In this paper, time constraints do not allow for a review of the events in southeast Asia which led up to Laotian Hmong relocation in the United States. Here we shall focus on cultural, linguistic, and educational issues relevant to classroom and school settings. In so doing, we must address some basic Hmong values which impact not only Hmong perceptions and interpretations of life in America but also their responses to a totally new environment. In working with Hmong students and their families, we need to bear in mind two important facts: 1) that the Hmong have been in the United States for less than twenty years; and 2) that there is wide variation among the Hmong themselves, in terms of their degree of acculturation from traditional values to those of mainstream America.

## Method

For over two years, a Hmong research assistant and I conducted a study of Hmong cultural values. The research method was not experimental but rather the field-based triangulation method used by cultural anthropologists. The sampling procedure was similar to that described by Mishler (1990). The research assistant and I constructed an instrument containing sixty-five questions on a variety of issues including child rearing practices, marriage customs, family and clan relationships, gender roles, views about education including formal schooling, after school activities, home/school relationships, and linguistic issues. It is important to note here that the issues addressed in the questionnaire were suggested by the Hmong research assistant because they are important in Hmong culture and that at the end of the formal interview, each respondent was asked if there were any issues we had missed and, if so, the respondent was given open-ended time to talk about them.

The interviews ranged in length from two and a half to three hours, were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed for content analysis. The Hmong assistant also served as translator/interpreter with participants who had a limited mastery of English. We interviewed 23 Hmong males and females in Wisconsin and Minnesota who ranged in age from fifteen to over sixty. A Hmong clan leader and a Hmong community leader were included. We also interviewed the

Caucasian leader of the first Hmong Boy Scout Troop in the United States, located in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and a Thai expert on Southeast Asian culture, who clarified general Southeast Asian values in comparison with uniquely Hmong values. We have also had discussions with over 100 school personnel including teachers, ESL faculty, Hmong aides, and administrators who are working with Hmong students.

### Results

The interviews revealed many similarities between traditional Hmong and mainstream American values. These values include:

a respect for hard work

a concern about personal honor

honesty

the importance of personal responsibility

a respect for family values

a need for good citizenship

the need for a good education as preparation for a

good job

a belief that firm and loving discipline of children

· builds good character

a parents' dream for their children to turn out to be

"good people"

There are, however, some distinct differences between

Hmong and American values. These differences include:

- a strong clan-oriented society
- a tradition of bringing personal decisions to clan elders for advice
- a willingness to abide by the decisions of these elders in one's own life choices
- a tradition of arranged marriages
- a high value placed on early marriages:
  - males ages fourteen to seventeen
  - females ages twelve to sixteen
- a belief in education for some but not all males in a family
- a belief in extremely limited education for females
- animistic religious beliefs and ancestor worship
- a belief in spirits which could be harmful
- a rural life style and a feeling of living at the mercy of nature's power
- a focus on clan or lineal relationships whereby social life revolves around family membership
- a past time orientation
- a focus on activities which meet present needs
- a limited spatial orientation

When we compare these views with those of mainstream America, we are struck with an array of possibilities for confusion, conflict, disorientation and misunderstanding.

Like all cultures, Hmong culture contains attitudinal configurations whereby beliefs held in one domain of experience impact beliefs held in other domains. Our interview data suggests that the primary ideological conflict between Hmong culture and American culture is the Hmong focus on traditional family values in contrast with the American emphasis on individual freedom. The tug between these two values is at the heart of the Hmong dilemma in the U.S. and is causing major problems between older, less acculturated and younger, more acculturated Hmong. With this general background in Hmong cultural values, we turn now to educational issues.

### Educational Issues

The educational issues, problems, challenges and procedures which we will be recommending in this paper are based on both our respondents' views on educational issues and on suggestions and recommendations of school personnel who have had extensive experience working with the Hmong.

#### Educational Issues 1: Hmong Language

The first challenge for educators is that of language. Our interviews revealed a deep concern on the part of Hmong parents about the loss of their language in America. Parents valued American education but did not want their children to lose either their language or their culture which they viewed as interconnected. Both Hmong parents and

students reported a problem in communication between younger and older members even in the same family. A twenty year old college student, for example, said that he could not talk with his grandmother in Hmong and that he knew he was more of an American when he began dreaming in English!

There are profound difficulties for Hmong students attempting to learn English which are far more complex than the obvious mastery of vocabulary because of major syntactical differences between Hmong and English. These differences also cause problems for teachers who are confused by their Hmong students grammatical errors. For example, in Hmong there is no verb equivalent for the verb "to be." A more active verb must be used. There is no plural modification of nouns; no possessive case including no possessive pronouns; only one objective case pronoun with no differentiation made between him, her or them plus the fact that this pronoun is not always used; no gerunds; and no adjectival form of numbers. Taking these differences in order, Hmong expressions appear to be grammatical errors when they are transferred into English. The English "three books" is expressed as "three book" or "a lot of book." "Ler's book" is expressed as "Ler book" and "her book" is expressed as "she book." "He hit him" is expressed as "He nit he." The phrase "barking dog" cannot be expressed in Hmong. "First street" is expressed as "one street." In Hmong, the noun precedes the adjective. Verbs are not modified for tense. There are no past, present, or future

modifications for verb stems - a single word, "yuav," is inserted before the verb to denote past or future tense but the idea of modifying the verb stem in English is an unfamiliar concept. Tense is sometimes determined by context such as day of the week. Irregular verbs in English are even more confusing. Given these differences, it is little wonder that Hmong students struggle in two linguistic worlds. Mistakes in English are not mistakes in Hmong.

In addition to syntax, there are other differences between Hmong and English. Hmong is a tonal language. The meaning of apparently identical words can change - simply by the way the word is pronounced. Even in English, homographs such as straw require a context in order to be sure that the speaker is referring to hay rather than a drinking instrument. A teacher acquaintance of mine reported that, in using a Hmong word in class, she believed she was telling her Hmong students to "sit down", when in fact she was saying "green vegetable!"

Another problem arises from the fact that in Hmong no final consonants are pronounced but serve as tags for pronunciation which can alter a word's meaning. As a result, Hmong students may ignore a final consonant when written or spoken in English. A middle school teacher reported an amusing example. When she asked a Hmong student to get her audio-visual cart in the next room, she looked out the window a few minutes later to see him wandering

around the parking lot looking for her car!

A third problem derives from the fact that there is less variety in Hmong than in English to express the same idea. As a result, there is a tendency for Hmong students to be confused by English synonyms. For example, a student may understand the verb "to help" but not realize that "to assist" expresses the same idea. I have encountered this difficulty in Hmong college students who are confused by synonyms on test questions which are not the exact words used in class lectures.

A fourth problem is that there are fewer words with subtle differences in meaning in Hmong than there are in English. Therefore Hmong students have a tendency to interpret English words with these subtleties as meaning the same thing. A principal told us that when a radio announcer reported that school was postponed two hours due to weather conditions, her Hmong students either did not come at all or they came at the usual time. Neither they nor their parents understood that "postpone" means "delayed." The students who were absent told her the next day that they thought the announcement meant "no school" (or cancelled).

#### ESL programs

Trueba and his associates (1990) have reported a higher success rate in English acquisition and fewer stress responses among Hmong students who were placed in smaller ESL classes where they were allowed to pace the activities.

There are continuing reports of Hmong children with little or no English simply being placed in regular classrooms where both these students and teachers are at a loss to know what to do. The advantages of ESL classes is that they work toward preserving the Hmong language and also help Hmong students to integrate the language at home with English at school. In order to be effective, however, these classes must occur regularly and be an essential component of Hmong students' education. An urban elementary teacher shared with us her frustration over a poorly implemented program in her school where the ESL classes are used as a reward for Hmong students if they do well with their classroom work first!

There is another issue concerning Hmong students' school experience in relation to language. Goldstein (1990) has reported two types of segregation of Hmong students: academic, whereby they are placed in a LEP (limited English proficiency) program, and social, whereby they are placed in regular classes but remain isolated from American classmates. In a field study, Goldstein found that despite enrollment of Hmong students in regular classes, the within-classroom social contact between American students and Hmong students was severely limited, due partly to language and partly to cultural differences. The lesson here is that the mere placement of Hmong students in a regular classroom does not ensure increased interaction and cultural understanding among American and Hmong students.

Educational Issues II: Classroom Procedures

The second challenge for educators is that of classroom procedures. All students are affected by their cultural frame of reference, but the preschool experience of most Hmong children differs substantially from that of other children for two reasons. First, Hmong families speak primarily Hmong at home and second, there is little practice with outside culture. Even with television and perhaps American playmates in the neighborhood, Hmong children do not have an early cultural experience which "fits" with mainstream culture unless they have attended a preschool. The community leader told us that the Hmong do not generally believe in day care or preschool and that in his best estimate maybe twenty percent of Hmong children attend preschool. Parents told us that they believe children should be at home with mother or, if she is working, a grandmother or other relative.

According to Trueba (1990: 129), a sudden transition from one type of culture to another creates "cultural discontinuities and cognitive ambiguities." Classroom teachers need to take into consideration the cognitive and cultural referents which impact Hmong students' learning. There are procedures which may enhance their progress (Timm, 1992).

Procedures to follow

Teachers should be aware that Hmong parents may expect

formal instruction which focuses on rote learning and memorizing. They also expect specific instructions and directions. Co-operative and discovery learning methods are unknown or new to them and teachers may need to describe the goals of these methods to both students and parents. Teachers need to be clear in presenting their expectations of students' assignments, precise in their instructions and provide step-by-step directions. They should work with Hmong students on a one-on-one basis when Hmong students appear confused about assignments. Marshall (1991) has suggested that teachers should use pictures whenever possible to provide visual associations for unfamiliar English words. She has also suggested that teachers should explain the concepts underlying the classifying and sorting problems in early education and recognize the cultural basis for classifying objects. For example, when asked which object did not belong among a hammer, a saw, an axe and a fire, Hmong students said the hammer did not belong because you use a saw and an axe to get wood for a fire. They did not see the tools as comprising a "set." If their teacher had not asked about the reason for their choice, their answers would have been "wrong" according to the test manual. It is obviously important for teachers to talk with Hmong students' about their work and not simply mark mistakes. Teachers should choose other students who are willing to work with Hmong students, but monitor the process. In assigning students to work in teams teachers

should try to include at least two Hmong students and avoid isolating a Hmong student with non-Hmong students.

Teachers should use basic English and be aware of using synonyms which can be confusing to students with limited English. In creating tests, teachers need to be sure that their Hmong students are aware of synonyms. Teachers should use correct grammar and speak clearly. A Hmong teacher's aide told us that she wished all homework assignments were given in written form and explained in class. Hmong students should be encouraged to ask questions about homework assignments before they leave the classroom.

#### Procedures to avoid

Teachers should not assume that Hmong students always understand their explanations or instructions. They should avoid the question: "... Do you understand?" because the Hmong in general have a tendency to nod and reply in the affirmative, in order to show good manners. In order to ensure that Hmong students understand, teachers should ask them to rephrase both lesson content and directions in their own words. Teachers should avoid slang and colloquial expressions which are confusing. They should avoid embedded phrases and they should avoid speaking too fast. They should avoid singling out Hmong students to recite in class before they are ready. In encouraging students to express their feelings, teachers should remember that in Hmong culture, children are not encouraged to do this. Because

Hmong children are taught to avoid looking directly at an older person as a sign of respect, teachers should not expect eye-to-eye contact until the student has learned this is a behavioral norm in American schools.

Teachers should be sensitive to Hmong gender values and avoid assigning high school students to work with opposite gender students unless the Hmong students are clan-related with the same last name. From an American cultural perspective, this procedure may appear sexist, but from a Hmong perspective it is considered inappropriate for potential marriage partners to work in such close association.

Teachers should be aware of cultural differences in gestures. For example, American teachers often express sympathy or support by gently touching students on the shoulder, arm or even the head, but in Hmong culture this would be viewed as a personal violation. In parent-teacher conferences, teachers can offer a handshake but be prepared for a Hmong woman not to respond.

#### Instructional materials

On entering school, the Hmong student may or may not be able to articulate his or her needs or interests. Identifying instructional materials to meet students' needs will depend on the degree of spoken English which the student has mastered. ESL teachers and Hmong aides can help. In middle school and high school, Hmong students need

reading materials, especially literature, which reflect similar experiences to their own. For example, stories of communication problems between generations, stories of immigrant experiences in a new land, and stories of cultural differences are especially relevant. It does not matter if the stories are not specifically about the Hmong. What matters is the message that others have shared the same experience and problems. At all school levels, Hmong students need reading materials for different levels of both Hmong and English literacy. There are some folktales available with both Hmong and English which may help students in their learning of English and at the same time provide traditional stories of which Hmong students can be proud (Johnson, 1981). More recent editions of a few Hmong folktales are beginning to appear which are delightful. Early versions of these tales regrettably lacked eye appeal and were extremely rough translations. The newer ones are more exciting. Of course these may be enjoyed students of diverse ages and cultural backgrounds (Livo & Cha, 1991; Numrich, 1990; Roop & Roop, 1990; Xiong & Spagnoli 1991). Finally, non-Hmong students need information about Hmong history and culture. Schools may provide a real service to both the Hmong and the wider community by having informational materials available.

#### Educational Issues III: Home/School Relationships

Home/school relations present a third challenge for

educators. Hmong parents reported to us that they believe getting a good education is the way for their children to attain personal success and a good life in America but traditional values influenced their views about four distinct educational issues: expectations of teachers; sex education; children's out-of-school and after-school activities; and home/school relationships.

#### Parents' expectations of teachers

Historically Hmong parents trusted teachers implicitly but there is confusion resulting from traditional Hmong views of education and American educational practices. Xiong (1991) reported that Hmong parents expect a tightly controlled classroom. They expect the teacher to provide information and the students to learn it. They view memorizing as equivalent to learning. They expect students to do their own work. Informal teaching styles and cooperative learning strategies confuse them. A kindergarten teacher reported to us that a Hmong mother looked at the diverse activities in her classroom with "great surprise." Parents reported to us that they wanted their children to have homework starting in the first grade and that teachers should assign it every day.

#### Sex education

There was disagreement among our respondents concerning sex education. Older parents were unanimous in their

opposition to sex education in school. They were not concerned about legal issues. Three young parents in their twenties said that they were in favor of such a program in high school, but not earlier, while two other parents, also in their twenties, expressed both a concern about sex education being taught in the schools and a belief that this topic belongs in the home. Thus not all parents agreed with this school program. Our teenagers said that their (older) parents were "out of touch" and that sex education was a good idea.

#### Out-of school and after-school activities

The Hmong parents reported to us that they expect their children to come directly home from school, do their homework, assist with chores and help care for younger siblings. Both older and younger parents reported a reluctance to ask neighbors or non-Hmong to care for their children after school. A mother in her twenties said:

They are afraid that the Americans will not understand their child and mistreat him or would not like him if they see their child doing something (wrong).

Teenagers are permitted to have an after-school job, but parents expressed a dislike for them going to other peoples' homes or elsewhere. An interesting finding was that there appeared to be a confusion by parents about the distinction between teenage cliques and "gangs." Social

groups were referred to as "gangs" and parents reported that they did not want their children to become "gangsters" or go around in "gangs" when they were actually referring to teenagers going to shopping malls or fast food restaurants. This view was a problem for the teenagers we interviewed who wanted to go places with their friends. A sixteen year old girl said "I want to go shopping with my friends and they just don't understand."

Another after-school issue is participation in athletics or other formalized activities. Older parents reported that they do not view these activities as a valuable way to spend time. They preferred that their children limit them to the summertime and spend their time on academic work during the school year. This issue creates misunderstanding between Hmong parents and school personnel hoping to engage Hmong students in athletic and other extra-curricular activities. Coaches and teachers have expressed some confusion about a generally low participation on the part of Hmong students. A high school teacher reported that no Hmong students attended the spring prom and that the school personnel had wondered why. When we asked Hmong parents about the proms, one father said "It's too expensive. It's not worth it. He (his son) should put that money for his education."

Scouting is an exception to parents' resistance to extra-curricular activities. David Moore, the leader of the first all Hmong Boy Scout troop in the United States,

reported in a personal interview that parents support his troop because they see it as building good character and preparing boys for good citizenship. There has not been similar support for girls' participation. Moore reported to us that over 700 Hmong boys have enrolled in his summer camp program in the past eight years but only 3 Hmong girls, all from the same family and whose brother had attended the camp.

Home/school relationships I: child rearing practices

Child rearing practices have been an issue in home school relationships. Hmong parents have traditionally practiced corporal punishment which has caused misunderstandings between them and school personnel. Some teachers have interpreted Hmong practices as being child abuse and have, on occasion, encouraged Hmong children to report punishments to them. Our respondents viewed this as interfering with their parental right to discipline their child as they see best. The Hmong community leader reported:

If a kid goes to school and says "My father does this to me or this to me" then the teacher who knows nothing about what the parents have done, will call the police or will accuse the parents of abusing the kid. All I can say is that the Hmong parents are in great stress right now because they do not know how else to teach their child.

Some school personnel have misinterpreted Hmong cultural practices altogether. For example, the practice of "coining" involves rubbing a coin on the temples or between the eyebrows to relieve a headache. This procedure leaves a bruise which Americans misperceive as abuse.

Home/school relationships II: conferences.

Our older parents expressed confusion about parent/teacher conferences. Traditionally, Hmong parents had little or no frame of reference for these conferences. We were informed by several young adults with college degrees that traditionally teachers, by role definition, were viewed as experts who teach students what they need to know. Parents were not contacted unless there was a serious problem. Thus, when a parent does not appear at a scheduled conference it is likely that the Hmong parent sees no reason to attend because they believe they have nothing to contribute to the teacher's knowledge. An American teacher may view this as disinterest but with Hmong parents this assumption is not valid. Another reason for the failure to participate in conferences is that Hmong parents may feel embarrassed because they believe they are being singled out. Our data suggest that the younger and more educated parents do understand the purpose of conferences. A Hmong teachers' aide recommends that aides can facilitate conferences by calling the parents and preparing them for the meeting.

Home/school relationships III: Parent organizations

A problem similar to conferences exists with parent/teacher organizations. School personnel reported to us that especially older Hmong parents do not attend these meetings. There are ways, however, of building a successful Hmong parents group. Such an organization was created by the principal and Hmong ESL teacher in an elementary school in central Wisconsin which resulted in almost full attendance by Hmong parents. We turn now to a description of their procedure.

First, the Hmong ESL teacher invited parents directly to visit her classroom and asked them if they would be interested in forming their own parents group. The Hmong aide conducted the meeting. The parents voted on the best day of the week and time for the meetings. The ESL teacher and her Hmong aide then created a survey, translated into Hmong, which asked what problems were important to the parents that they would like to have discussed at future meetings. The principal enlisted the help of the executive director of the local Lao/Hmong Association who encouraged parents to attend the meetings. Topics for discussion were chosen by the parents on such issues as school policies, discipline, American holidays, a Hmong cultural show. They also voted for a pot luck supper and a picnic. The notices for meetings were sent home with the students and followed up by a Hmong-run telephone tree. The Hmong parents have enthusiastically supported their own organization which has

continued to meet. An important factor contributing to the success of this program was child care which was provided during the meetings. The personnel involved in this effort emphasized the importance of the opportunity for the parents to set the agenda and choose the topics for discussion.

### Discussion

One of the reviewers for this paper suggested that some attention be given to theoretical issues of acculturation among the Hmong that may have wider relevance for other groups. The reviewer asked for information about how the Laoatian Hmong experience was both similar to and different from the experience of other immigrants and refugees. I turn now to this issue of acculturation.

Twenty odd years ago Margaret Mead (1970) described three cultural types which she labelled post-figurative, co-figurative and pre-figurative. Post-figurative cultures are historically pre-literate and depend heavily on oral tradition. This type of culture derives authority from the past. Children learn from the elders, who are the transmitters of skills, knowledge and values. The older members of the society are highly respected but they have difficulty with culture change and wish to maintain their culture as it has been in the past, with as little alteration as possible. Co-figurative cultures are those in which individuals of the same generation share knowledge and

skills with each other under conditions of culture contact and culture change. Focused on the present, they attempt to adapt to new situations and in, the case of an immigrant experience, to a new society. The new ways they learn are often in conflict with those of the past. Pre-figurative cultures present the largest gap between the youngest generation and the elders who have grown up in totally different environments. The young try to teach their new cultural knowledge to their elders who must adapt or remain disoriented in a new cultural situation.

Three age groups emerged in this study which clearly reflect these three categories. Elder Hmong, or those over age thirty-five, represent a post-figurative culture, focused on time-honored customs, skills and values. The young adults, between their early twenties and mid-thirties, represent a co-figurative culture as they look to each other for ways of integrating traditional Hmong values with mainstream American culture. The Hmong youth represent a pre-figurative group with little or no memory of life in Laos. Even if they are recent arrivals, their memories of Southeast Asia are from the relocation camps in Thailand. As they become more educated in American schools, they have increasing difficulty understanding and relating to the culture revered by their elders. In a manner similar to that described by Mead, they may be called upon to interpret American culture to their older family members. Both school and medical personnel have reported to us that children

continue to serve as interpreters for older Hmong during conferences.

Moore (1990) has further identified three types of Hmong youth which he has labelled American-Hmong, Hmong-Americans, and Rebels. The American-Hmong have resolved to make it in America in the American way. They are determined to finish their education. They are willing to move around and adopt an American life-style, but always they are resolved to be good Hmong and use their success to support their families. These students are under the most pressure because they are often the intermediary between the family and other Americans. The peer group is their major support, but they also have the support of Hmong family and American friends. The Hmong-American are trying to make it in America in the traditional Hmong way. For the boys this may mean dropping out of school and getting a job. For the girls it means marrying early. It includes participating fully in Hmong traditional ceremonies. These youth become caught in an economic spiral which makes it increasingly difficult to obtain and hold a single well-paying job. They may have two semi-skilled or unskilled jobs but they feel compensated for the hardship by the love and support of their family. The Rebels have given up on the American dream of success through achievement and hard work. They have also given up on being good Hmong. They have adopted popular culture, the cars, the clothes, the focus on immediate materialistic gratification. They have

misinterpreted the American value of individual freedom to mean that they can do anything they want. They may join a gang. Some inter-gang violence between Hmong and other youth has been reported in both larger cities and smaller communities. The Rebels have cut themselves off from all support systems except each other. No one in the Hmong community knows what to do with them.

It is a new phenomenon in Hmong culture for youth to get into legal trouble but the Rebels do. A particularly heart-rending image of this problem appeared, of all places, on COPS, the late night television program, during the second week of this past March. A Hmong teenager was being questioned by the police about his involvement in a car theft. He had been picked up because he was a passenger in the car. There in the police station sat his parents, looking distressed and confused by the situation. You could read on their faces the question "What is happening?" Not simply at that moment but to them, to their son, to their values and to their lives.

Moore believes that every Hmong youth is a mixture of all three types and that "whichever type (ultimately) predominates in any one individual may be due at least partly to luck or circumstance" (1990: 49). He reported to us that rebellious behavior among Hmong boys begins to appear as early as the fourth grade and that by then they are "already on a fast track into one of these three subcultures." In Moore's opinion, Hmong children's early

experience in school determines their hopes for the future because they learn whether or not they can succeed in American society, balance living in two cultural worlds, and be both successful Americans and good Hmong.

The Hmong experience in America is in many ways no different from that of other immigrant groups. The pattern is not new whereby the older generation maintains their native language and holds on to traditions while the children acculturate more quickly to English and American mainstream culture. Among the Hmong youth, the Rebels are following the pattern of rejecting the old traditional ways while the rest are struggling to integrate the old with the new. The experience of being misunderstood and even discriminated against is also not new in the immigrant experience. In the 18th century in Pennsylvania, the English wanted to exclude newcomers. In the 19th century in Boston, the English resisted the Irish who in turn resisted the Italians at the beginning of the 20th century. In the 19th century in Milwaukee, the Germans who were there first resisted the Polish newcomers. Prejudice in the United States has historically followed a pattern against those arriving most recently. In this view, the Hmong experience is the latest chapter in the American immigrant experience.

But the Hmong also face the century and a half old bias against Asian immigrants, from the Chinese Exclusion Act to the bigotry against Japanese workers and farmers in

California. In my presentations to various schools and civic groups, I have come to realize that many Americans do not know who the Hmong are and are often unaware of their assistance to the United States during the war in Southeast Asia. Many confuse them with the Vietnamese, north and south alike. Therefore many Hmong encounter open hostility which is born of ignorance and misdirected against them.

Apparently, the predictors of successful relocation in America are not only cultural values which the newcomers bring with them but also the information which others have about them. Educators can help in the process.

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