

Adaptation Process of Hmong Elders in Eureka:  
How are the Hmong Elders Adapting in Eureka?

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## **Abstract**

This study is about finding out the process of adaptation experienced by Hmong elders in Eureka. The literature written on Hmong adaptation and acculturation is valuable, but does not include or address the adaptation progress of Hmong elders. This study allows the Hmong elders to address adaptation strategies.

The research method used will be in-depth interviews. This will allow for the respondent to speak freely and openly on past and current adaptation issues. Snowball sampling will be used to contact and find the research participants. The interview will be tape recorded and notes will be jotted for further in-depth explanation/clarification.

This research is beneficial to the Hmong community as well as the larger community in that it allows the Hmong elders to speak about their concerns. This will allow for the larger community to be able to understand and work more effectively with the Hmong community. The need to understand Hmong culture is relevant to help them adapt. For the Hmongs to adapt they need to keep their identity as well as understanding their surroundings.

I anticipate no risks to participants. For participant safety, I will give a written consent indicating confidentiality. Privacy will be maintained in all published and written materials resulting from this study. All references to real names will be assigned pseudonyms in any transcriptions and other written materials generated from tape recordings. Tapes will be destroyed within 30 days of transcription. Records that could potentially link participants with data provided will be kept in a secure location.

## **Acknowledgement**

My appreciation goes out to all the people who have helped me in getting hold of the Hmong elders in Eureka; Pata Vang who got the number of an Hmong elder from a client she was working with and from there the participants were snowball sampling.

Thanks to all the Hmong elders who were willing to participate and allowing me into their home and ask them about how they are living in the United States. I am grateful to have meet you all and been able to have you help in making this senior project possible.

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## **Introduction**

This research was in furthering the understanding of adaptation process of the Hmong elders, in that literature on Hmong tends to speak about the generation of well off Hmong. I want to know what was going on with the Hmong elders since their arrival to this country. I want them to be able to voice their concerns and difficulties in adapting to the American culture. I hope that they will reveal their dealings of acculturation were affecting their lives.

This research was more of letting the Hmong elders speak on their own behalf of what is going on, in other words how have they been living in this country and what are the things that have been and still is a problem for them. This study was for them to be heard on what they know about the society they have been living in for the over ten to fifteen years. And how have they been able to cope with these pressure and strains, what methods did they use to help them from depression, death—suicides, drug abuse, etc. I hope to hear that they were using the lifestyles in Laos of social network, social exchange, and solidarity to keep them from losing faith in themselves to live in a new country so different from their own.

## **Methodology**

This study examines acculturation of Hmong elders in Eureka. I used interview data to define Hmong elders understanding of them, as well as their process of acculturation. There is much literature that states that Hmong are doing well in the U.S economically, socially, mentally and physically. But there is ever little data that revealing this response in Hmong elders. Hmong elders in Humboldt County became the subjects that I want to study, because there is a small Hmong population and agencies/organizations. Eureka has a small Hmong population and few Southeast Asian organizations that are essential to support Hmong culture, therefore it is with this emphasis on social identity that I will pursue my research study.

Interviewed Hmong elders with open-ended questions. This allowed them to freely answer the question without biases and word their resettlement experiences. I found participants using snowball sampling. I contacted the Refugee Extension Program, who had contacts of Hmong families in Eureka, but this did not work our. Through a friend who worked with a Hmong client helped me in contacting an elder, aid me in getting my snowball sampling. I contact the participants by phone to set-up meetings or visited homes in which I clarify my study before gathering data. The homes of Hmong elders were for comfort and convenience. I will be the interpreter present for the respondents who do not speak English. The interviews will be between 30 minutes and 1 hour in length, unless the respondents care to take the interview further. The interviews were recorded and notes were jotted down for in-depth clarifications. Data collected were transcribed for patterns and themes. Tapes will be destroyed within 30 days of transcription. Records that could potentially link participants with data will be kept in a secure location.

## Literature Review

The purpose of my research is seeing how Hmong elders feel about and how they see themselves as to having adapt to the American culture. This literature review is to aid in distinguishing between Hmong and American culture such as values, norms, and lifestyle in the areas of gender, family member roles, religion/culture, work, material belongings, marriage/courtship, and community enclaves and education.

### Hmong Culture in Laos

Hmong culture and religion are undistinguishable, in that the culture and religion are embed together. Meaning that the Hmong believe that there is no such thing as coincidental because they believe that an incident is associated with spirits. “House sites were determined by the relative flatness of the ground, by nearness to kin, and by dividing the attitude of spirits towards the luckiness of the site (Donnelly 1994: 22) .” Hmong culture in Laos as that “they grow upland dry rice and a variety of vegetable crops using swiddening (slash-and –burn) techniques (Donnelly 1994: 19).” She further states that the community is:

Nearly self-sufficient in subsistence production, they grew upland rice, corn, squash, cucumber, mustard, and poppies, and raise pigs, chickens, horses, and cattle (1994: 20-21).

.....

The major cash crop of the Hmong was opium, packed out by horse and traded for silver; most contracts with non-Hmong occurred through trade. The rich silver jewelry for which the Hmong are noted, made from French Indochinese piastres, was one benefits of this trade (1994: 21).

The traditions of the Hmong cannot be completely understood without looking at the economic portion of their everyday life. Hmong interaction with the dominant cultures influenced highly what happens within their communities and group. This is revealed in their culture in that “Hmong social organization is built on the patrilineal family (Donnelly 1994: 21).” The Hmongs lived in a village that consisted of their extended family, serving as a social unit economically and religiously; ancestral worship (Donnelly 1994, Cheon-Klessig et al 1988, Rice 1997, Trueba, 1990, Hendricks et al. 1986, Chai 1999, Geddes 1976, Minner 1986). Women were expected to take on the task of being the domestic worker and the men as the economic provider (Miyares 1998: 73). Children were free from to do as they please in that they were living within an environment, village comprised of their extended families, in which the children were never really let unsupervised.

Marriage is one aspect in which the extended family is highly involved. Marriage unions are usually acceptable in the cases in which both ancestral clans are related; the parents of the bride are related to the parents of the bridegroom. It is believed that if one marries members of one extended family, mates are from the mother’s clan, there would be less conflict in that the families are of the same social unit. The wife’s role is to be devoted and respectful of their husbands and birthing as many sons as possible (Minner 1986).

The Hmong religion being ancestral worship is important in that it keeps families together in a social grouping sharing similar rites (Hendricks et al. 1986: 57). In knowing each other’s social grouping, allows for the Hmongs to continue to carry on their traditions and rituals; these are like sacred requirements of membership—only members of the same pack will be able to relate and construct the same sets of procedures (Hendricks et al. 1986: 57).

There are two types of healing practices for Hmongs, they are “the use of herbs and ceremonies connected to their beliefs about spirits (Cheon-Klessig et al. 1988: 648).” The Hmongs believe that people have three (Rice 1997: 143) or seven souls (Cheon-Klessig et al. 1988, Geddes 1976) that can become astray or frightened away from the body causing a person to become ill. The shaman is the only being that can retrieve a person’s soul from the location of the incident or underworld. S/he can restore the physical health of his/her clients by traveling into the spirit world to give the client more life-time or retrieve their wandering soul (Hendricks et al 1986, Cheon-Klessig et al. 1988, Rice 1997).

### Hmong Culture in the United States

In the United States, Hmong faced difficulties in their traditional and cultural preferences where not regarded for, such as that the need for kinship and relatives-based communities were not understood, therefore the Hmongs would relocate after they arrived in their new settlements. Resettlement workers and policies believe that the relocation of Hmong in dispersed areas will allow them to adapt and assimilate easily to American culture, instead it was painful and devastating. Once the Hmongs arrived in the U.S., they searched for relatives and relocated to states that offered them the best opportunities—jobs or welfare (Trueba et al. 1990: xiii).

“No longer the homogeneous group they were traditionally, Hmong now differ as to religion, education, and resettlement experience ( Trueba et al. 1990: xii).” But their used of the shaman and traditional herbs is still part of their culture that has not assimilated. The shaman is still the only being within the Hmong communities who can interact with the spiritual world (Chai 1999: 44). The use of herb and spiritual healing are still prefer over western medical. Children rearing in the U.S. for Hmongs have become difficult in that their traditional methods

of discipline are seen as child abuse. Hmong parents beat their children for misbehavior back in Laos and Thailand which as regards as being good disciplining parents, the Laotian and Thai school did not identify such acts as abuse (Faderman 1998). Many Hmong religious have converted to Christianity, yet that did not stop them from continuing their cultural traditions. One example of this is the roles of women and men has changed very little, in that men are still seen as valuable to the culture, the provider, and senior leader in the home. As one of the interviewee in Lillian Faderman's book, *I Begin My Life All Over*, put it:

I grew up as a Christian girl, but in the Hmong community the man is supposed to be more superior to his wife. They believe the woman should stay home, babysit, just clean the house.

..... But I feel that as long as I know I am and what I believe in the Hmong culture that should be kept and remembered and practiced, like respecting the elders is good (Faderman 1998).

The gender hierarchy of Hmong culture is persistent in the U.S., girls are still traditionally considered weak and inferior and boys are still held as strong and superior because of their capability of carrying on their father's clan name and lineage (Chai 1999, Rice 2000). Most women still rely on their husbands as leader of the household. In the study about Lao-Hmong attitudes towards women's role by Laura Jo Minner, one Hmong "female interpreter first asked her husband (the male interpreter) if he thought it would make Lao-Hmong men in the Community angry if she interpreted the questions, since they concerned the rights or roles of women (1986: 20)."

## Adaptations Methods

Migration and resettlement of the Hmongs is not something new or just in America for the Hmong in that they have been doing this in Laos. Donnelly says that it is because “Each family constantly sought better crop land, meaning that the most vigorous families preferred to move as soon as yields fell below optimum, leaving their half-used fields for poorer families to take up (Donnelly 1994:.22-3).” The Hmongs lived in community where they had family ties and relative support. The village is consisted mostly of members of the father’s clan in which all were to be regarded as family and highly respected and valued. This help to enforce the social grouping and ancestral worship. When the Hmong were being resettled in the United States, they were placed in a differential states in which was to help the Hmongs to supposedly assimilate quickly through their social interaction with the western community (Smith 1992: 24).

The one adaptation method discussed in the literature as that of the Hmong’s kinships, social grouping and communal ties are supportive networks (Koltyk 1998, Donnelly 1994, Cheon-Klessig et al 1988, Rice 1997, Trueba et al 1990, Hendricks et al 1986, Chai 1999, Minner 1986). The validity is shown in the following literature:

“The first visible Hmong enclaves were in St. Paul.<sup>4</sup> The benefits perceived by other Hmong of being near keys leaders resettled in St. Paul led many to remain. The same process began to occur in communities across Wisconsin. Through secondary migration, refugees originally resettled as dispersed families joined fellow clan members in the upper Midwest. When earlier refugees converted their residency status to resident alien, they were able to become sponsors of family members remaining in countries of first asylum. From 1978 to 1989, St. Paul

(Ramsey County) maintained a dominant role in the relative distribution to welcome family members (Miyares 1998: 26).”

Trueba, H.T., L. Jacobs and E. Kirton (1990) stated in *Cultural Conflict and Adaptation* that:

The conversion of some Hmong to Christianity and the many cultural changes accompanying their new life have not affected the older generation’s profound commitment to their language and culture. They are tough people, confident in facing the challenges of their new country. Yet, the older generations often feel nostalgic, insecure and uncertain about the future. They are aware that their cultural isolation is accentuated by the rapid erosion of Hmong language and cultural values among the school-age children. Grandparents recall with sadness a way of life that is now lost to them. They know the price they have paid for uprooting their families, and feel guilty for having abandoned relatives (xii).

Living in communities that highly resettled with one’s relatives and extended families allow the Hmong to transition into the Western culture. It is not that largely Hmong populated U.S. cities or states are fastly assimilating, but in that they serve to give support and uphold cultural practices. According to Koltyk, “they began a series of internal or ‘secondary’ migrations within the United States, seeking out relatives and friends of their own ethnic background and clustering in key areas to form ethnic communities (1998:10).”

In chapter 4: The Hmong in Seattle, Donnelly talks about how in the early 1980-88, statistics shows that Hmong are migrating from Washington and resettling in the Midwest. She believes that it is because the Hmong political leaders were losing their creditability in the community and that there was a new leaders in the culture/religion was diminishing because the Hmong had converted to Christianity. This is because when the Hmong arrived in the U.S. they

were unable to find the resources to continue their ancestral worship; chickens, pigs, cattle, etc and a lot of Hmongs who were sponsored by churches felt obligated to join (Donnelly 1994: 60-61). A study by D.A. Duchon on Hmongs in Atlanta, Georgia reveal that through their ties to Christian churches and kin groups, the Hmongs were able to succeed economically and adapted to the dominant culture. The churches were sponsors of the refugees and served as a support network for the Hmongs, in aiding them with jobs and material belongings. The Georgia federal Office of Refugee Resettlement was also helpful in that they set up the Asian Community Services that helped the Hmongs find “affordable housing, help find employment, and provide social adjustment services (such as transportation and ESOL training) to new households (Duchon 1997: 77).” Converting to Christianity was not easy for the Hmongs in that it cause conflict within the family and families, when a Christian woman married a traditional Hmong man, the man’s family converted to Christianity which was the suggestion from the girl’s family (Trueba et al. 1990: 34). Conflict also occurs in that not all members will be converted.

Hmongs came to the U.S. with their herbs and ancestral worship. The Hmong continue to believe in spirits in which the shaman is the ruler in that realm, because s/he can travel into the afterlife or spirit realm and speak for on behalf of the living, striking up bargains and reunite the a spirit of a person is back to their body. The belief of spirits is empowering and supportive for the Hmong community in this allows for the Hmong to keep their identity and religion. Hmongs in Georgia to adapted and keep their identity is to have organized their New Year’s celebrations to held on U.S. holidays so there is opportunity for “visiting relatives and searching for mates (Duchon 1997: 80).” This is part of the cultural tradition, but the importance and understanding the true meaning of this event has become to mean to the young Hmongs of that preserving or participating in their Hmong heritage. It is supportive in their identifying as being Hmong, in that

most young Hmongs no longer follow traditions, understand the importance of religious figures/rituals or take part in ancestral worship.

Roles and expectations of women are changing in that the women since the resettlement camps in the Thailand were able to sell their textile/needlework to Americans and other groups to generate funds for their families because the American rice trucks only delivered rice twice a month or sometimes only once (Faderman 1998). These textiles or needlework is also known as paj ntaub or Flower cloth. A woman's job is to make these embroideries which was the daily task living in Laos, in the U.S. these paj ntaub have become a material good sold to non-Hmongs. Sewing is what a good, respectable Hmong girl do and be good at it (Rice 2000: 29). The marriage of girls at a young age has not completely vanished nor is the roles of women in being the domestic worker in their parents' home or in-law's, but girls' families have learned to incorporate the police/law enforcement as a resource in aiding the families' of the girls to stop unwanted or unsuitable marriages (Faderman 1998). In western culture, men and women are finding that they have conflicts about sex roles in that women are beginning to voice more strongly against the polygamy, restrictions on their professional agendas and education (Faderman 1998). It was looked down upon for women to find baby-sitter for them to attend school ( Faderman 1998, Minner 1986).

One of the harsher adaptation skill for Hmong is the ability to become vocal and literate in English. English is essential to obtain a job and excel (Yamamoto 1994, Duchon 1997, Koltyk 1998). "Most Hmong Families recognize that the only way their children will succeed in the United States is to get an education (Koltyk 1998: 56)." Welfare for Hmongs has allowed them to pursuit educational, language and vocational training as well as the opportunity to freedom to obtain other skills (Yamamoto 1994, Duchon 1997). Where as in Laos, the families would

endure laborious farming to support and sustain everyday needs, which restricted the Hmong to earn an education or learned the dominant literacy to obtain city occupations.

### Summary

Through these three parts, it is seen that in order for Hmong to continue to be in tact with their culture and identity they need their ethnic enclaves. Each of the literatures review stated the importance of this, but were also very ethnocentric to the values and norms of the Hmong in considering their expectation of gender roles in the United States—the continuation of these roles are seen more as new when in fact women and men conflict of roles has always been a issue within the Hmong community. Isolation in Laos, the working of the social unit and extend families was more supportive and in tune to fighting these deutes. As in the case of polygamy, not all families were accepting of male having more than one wife. Bride prices were not lower because a woman became a second wife, but if she was a divorcee or a widow (Faderman 1998).

Adaptations skills adopted by Hmong were successful for the younger generation to cope with new means of support and mobility, while for the elders it continues to be a destruction to the community and social group. In that the culture still uphold in families in the Unites States who are still traditional, families who are Christian find that the support of the churches allows them to have more financial backing as the Georgia Hmong (Trueba et al. 1990, Duchon 1997).

## **Social Exchange Theory and Functionalist theory**

According to Susan D. Smith, “People prefer to engage in behavior that is rewarding or reinforcing. Social interaction involves both rewards and costs, we behave in order to maximize our rewards and minimize our costs (Smith 1992: 19).” Social exchange theory reveals that the Hmong culture is one in which the people work together in receiving rewards and benefits from each other; the needs to survival out in the mountains of Laos. As the village contain members of one clan, extended family the obligations to help each other was necessary for the survival of the whole group. The role of each member is to provide certain needs in order to have those needs given back in return. Each family was not only related to each other as stated in the literature review, but that all members within the household had chores in which they had to do.

This leads to the Functionalist theory. Durkheim believes that “society uses social facts to function as a complex system (Macionis 1999: 112).” As for the division of labor based on collective conscience, fall into two categories 1) the preindustrial societies in which there is mechanical solidarity in which social bonds are based on similar morality and likeness, and 2) the industrialization where solidarity is called organic solidarity in which the social bonds are through connections of industrial means such as each member needing the others ability or skill (Macionis 1999: 114) . The Hmong culture/ community showed sign of both these solidarity in Laos, so when they relocated many Hmongs wanted to keep these solidarity and relocated to find those who in Laos where committed to these bonds.

## **Interview**

### **Subjects**

The subjects for the in-depth interviews will consist of 6 local Hmong elders, hopefully three females and three males, age of 50 and older. It would be beneficial to speak about their culture and adaptation experience. In addition, this project will inform other cultures in future dealing with the Hmongs. The interviews will be completely confidential. Participation in the project is completely voluntary. Records that could potentially link to participants will be kept in a secure location. There will be no identifying information attached to their narratives in the transcripts or in the final report. Tapes will be destroyed within 30 days of transcription. Privacy will be maintained in all published and written materials resulting from this study. Respondents can stop the interview at any point they feel uncomfortable and also that they do not have to answer any questions that would cause them discomfort. They have the right to refuse to answer a particular question or questions for any reason. They have right to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time. The researcher also has the right to end interview at any time.

### **Participants**

There were six participants, all were over 50 years old. One arrived in 1987, one arrived in 1989, two arrived in 1990, and two arrived in 1993. Four are on disability/SSI, one is a caretaker for a family member, and one works at a school as a bilingual aid. All fled Laos because of the Vietnam War; three left when the U.S. left, while the three others left because of the reform/reeducation program. All the participants stay for a period of thirteen or more years in Thailand before deciding to come to the U.S.

## **Data and Findings**

Most participants when asked about their upbringing focused on the Vietnam War, while one is focused on education. Seven topics of interest arise in going through these interviews. These topics are 1) reason why they left and 2) relocation, and the difficulties in 3) returning to homeland, 4) financial means, 5) education, 6) English, and 7) cultural differences. These reveal difficulties adjusting to American culture.

### Reason why they left

Three of the participant left when the U.S. left, while the three others left because of the reform/reeducation program started up in Laos after the war. Some of the participant joined the resistance, Chao Fa, against the reform in which they were slaughter by the Communist Government. Here is an account from one participant:

When General Vang Pao left, I stayed. Afterwards Vang Pao left the communist searched and captured the Hmong soldiers who had work with the CIA. I couldn't stay, because I heard that some soldiers were captured for educational reform, so I was scared. I ran into the jungle, taking over 200 villagers along with my family. I thought that since the country (Laotian government) was acting as such and I was a soldier involved with the CIA, therefore I had to escape and come to the U.S. So I went to Thailand.

Another participants spoke of the reform and the scared tactics used by the Communists:

So, we decided that since we had a lot of children, even though staying would be difficult, we won't leave. Just work in the land for food. Although many men had been soldiers, the Vietnamese now were in control the country, so might as well stay and surrender to the Vietnamese and become Vietnamese citizens. But at the end that as like that, once the Vietnamese got control, the Vietnamese call everyday to join the campaign. Campaigning is not really anything, campaigning for the Vietnamese...see our country is poor and miserable, they built a bonfire and had the all the women and men to circle it

and discredit General Vang Pao and the American enemy. So, whoever refused to speak against them, the Vietnamese said that that person was someone who did not know the rules and needed reform/educating. In other words, whoever did not speak against the enemy--they were to be put to death. You had to speak against, you had to speak against...so now you speak against and you escape and not die, you are to speak, you don't then they want to kill you, you prefer them not to kill you. As the Vietnamese want, you should speak openly against so you will not be persecuted and save you life and run afterward to escape them. That was why we run and became Chao Fa. So, we enter into the forest, the Vietnamese... we went and lived for three years and the Vietnamese hunted us for all those three years.

During this resistance there was starvation and death forcing many to follow these before into Thailand. Once in Thailand many were faced with the hardship of returning back to Laos, since there was also starvation in the camps, or coming to the U.S. (in that many of their relatives had resettled there) in hopes of a bettering their situation. All of them lived in the camps in hopes of Laos' situation to change/stabilize in hopes of returning to live in peace; instead the Laotian reform continue to subjugate the Hmongs.

Word from the relatives in U.S. spoken of good and bad situations, but this was more promising than Laos, besides the fear of death and sufferings in Laos was more dreadful. Once they arrived they were placed on welfare to aid them in their resettlement, many were placed into the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program in order to educated the refugees into being able to read and write as well as speak English, these skills were to aid them in finding means (money for food and jobs with benefits, etc.) to support their needs and independence from welfare assistance.

The Vietnam War was a big part for the Hmongs in that is a reminder that they did not choose to come to foreign lands. This vision is a hope to keep their heads up in one day returning to the agricultural subsistence living. One feels resentment that the promises made with recruiters and refugee camp advisors were unkept, this was supposedly believed to be the promises from the government itself for agricultural subsistence. This participant feel that there were social injustice for him in first being these promises, second was in that housing were set on member quotas, and thirdly that the law such be accordingly to a person's capability and background.

Many of the participants were surprise to see that they were to pay for housing. Other participants feel that the Vietnam War has alienated them from being able return to back to living in their homeland. In other words, living in the U.S. they had lost the ability to provide and sustain themselves if they are to return. One participant stated:

In the also the mountains and wilderness, they used small plane to drop bombs. 1978, we thought if we didn't reach Thailand by then that we would not escape. We ran along the mountains and river for two months then we got the Vinai (Ban Vinai, Thailand). They stay there. We lived for thirteen years there. When we got there, we thought that we were too dumb, America everyone else came, but we thought that to go to America—they say to go to American we need to know the language, if you don't know the language you are going to have a lot of hardship. We decided that since we did not know or the written text we will stay, we will try to go back to Laos, and forget coming. Living there for a while, we thought if we go back Laos might not let us in, the Vietnamese/Laotians might cut us. We full-heartily came to America. We were there for thirteen years before we came, we came the year 1993 the third month day fifteen. We came to this country. We came to live here for eleven years. When we got here, we were no longer afraid of anything, there was no one who was going to try to kill you, and it was easier now. But there is was the

hardship of/despair of you not knowing the language or the text. When we came we were able to get on welfare

### Relocation

Four participants were relocated in Eureka, CA while two were relocated in Minnesota, MN. The two participants who were relocated in Minnesota came to Eureka because of relatives; one came to be with a cousin-sister and husband, the other came to help and resettle with a close cousin who was working with resettlement of the few Hmong families located in Eureka.

In Minnesota, over there, there is. I was there for one month, I was able to sponsor my sister and two brothers from Thailand over there, then about one week I came here. My relative over here, at the time he run business for the Hmong collection, the national Hmong collection he was all by himself so I came and joined him. There were very few Hmongs so I came to help him, in three years after that he sponsored more relatives in 1996. In bring three families, three more families making us a little bigger, but one family later moved to Wisconsin and now lives there.

Another participant was also sent to Minnesota, his response to coming to Eureka, Ca was:

Before when I came to live here I had my sister and her husband who lived here, I came here to live with them.

He later said:

When I came I had an aunt and uncle who sponsored me.

.....

At first arrival there was no one. There were a couple of brother-in-laws that come first, so they helped a little with the paperwork and for food, so everyone was did not have difficulties.

The reasoning of relocation show that the Hmongs continue to find their close relatives who were helpful to them in Laos and in that they will continue to be so in the U.S., allowing the

Hmongs to have more support (financially and emotionally) and comfort as in their village in Laos. Hmong relocation not only reveal their need of social network in social exchange, but also the solidarity bonds of Functionalist theory to serve Hmongs in the U.S. in adapting and survival.

#### Returning to homeland

Five participants replied that they would like to visit their homeland, only one of these have actually done so. One hopes to one day return in live as before the war. One participant is afraid to return in that reform and execution of those unwilling to reform. Another participant fears being stuck in Thailand and unable to enter into Laos, but all of spoke about returning to visit family members still in Laos. Most participants did not speak English (except the one who has visited) and fear that they will face difficulties in getting onto the correct planes in the U.S.

#### Financial means

Majority of the participants are on government assistance; this being either welfare and/or disability, SSI or caretaker of a family member. The participants receiving aid feel that the government was very greed on allowing them to have this aid. One was anger that the process in which one had to go through to receive this benefit; such as doctor visits and required approval of the Social Service and medical examination. Only one of the participants is working at a local school as a bilingual aid. The working participant was glad to be able to no longer be on welfare. This participant was in the GAIN training, but was later able to obtain an AA degree from the community college.

#### Education

Four participants have no schooling/education before they went into the GAIN program. One participant had gone to a Laotian school prior to the war. One participant's past educational history is known.

Four of the participants were placed into the GAIN/CALWORKS program either a year or less when they arrived in Eureka. Participant #1 was in program for eight years from 1991 to 1999, in which the participant wanted to continue attending and learning English, but was forbidden. The participant was told to find a job upon completion of the lessons training, the participant felt cheated because not only was the participant not allow to continue learning, the Socila Service refuse to pay for the training hours for two months. Participant #2 was also placed in the GAIN/CALWORKS program but was unable to gain any recognition of the language both verbal or wriiten, this participant later was placed on disability. Participant #3 also placed in the training program, also was unable to recognized the symbols, in which after four years of the program in which participant #3 was told she had completed the training and needed to find a job, this was impossible in that the participant did not drive nor knew how to read, write, and speak English, she was placed on disability for being dumb/retarded.

### English

For all the participants learning and obtaining the English language has been difficult, none can speak it or understand it except the one participant who attend college and acquired an AA degree. For these participants they use their children as interpreters and translators. This is difficult for the children and the parents in that in that appointment and social affairs fall on the children, in that the children are forced to learn the meaning of medical terms and other terminology in order to communicate to their parents and the medical/professional personnel. As a participant explain:

The hospital is not really a big problem, when you go and whatever pain or ache you have you tell the children, the children are too shy they will not said it. You tell the children, tell the doctor that I have this and this pain or aches. The children are too embarrass, they said they will not say it, they will only speak to the doctor about what

easy to explain. If the things you say are too much, the children say they will not say, to say those things are too embarrassing, they won't say it. How the children, the children now know more. We go at the time that they are available afterschool around 4:30pm, if it is in the morning we can't go, so we have make appointments to those times.

The use of translator in the past has been mention by three participant; two participants had the help of two "church" (Christians) who can speak Hmong. These Christians-"servers" helped the participants to obtain housing with Section 8, took them to the doctor's, shopping, etc. The need for translator for the elders is very high in that they don't want to have to burden their children forever about their affairs.

### Cultural differences

In discussing about cultural differences, the question was geared into countries differences. Many Hmong elders believed that Laos was simpler, their lifestyle there was agricultural subsistence. Expenses were limited to trade, education, and Laotians cuisine and products/materialistic. The participants were able to farm and raise their own livestock for all purposeful uses, all felt there is less strains and depression; freedom to do what they want—housing was free if you lived in the mountains, making you house out of bamboo, living in town you bought the materials to build the house. On participant emphasis that there was no crimes.

For the U.S. differences, three of the participants spoke about having to pay for rent and other expenses that came in having a house. One participant spoke about housing quotas on how many members within a household was unfair. All participants agree on the ability to gain an education for both genders of their children.

## Summary

The Hmong elders are slowly adapting, but not in that they understand the laws and rules of the U.S., but in that they are learning through social interaction with the government officials and through their daily encounters with the community. In all the elders don't agree upon the changes pressured on them to change their lifestyle—get a job, pay for housing, learn English, follow the regulations/laws. As one participant put it:

They (U.S.) are going to control us elders who do not speak their language, if we are sick they do not take into consideration that we are refugees we do not speak their language. We ask for things only according to what they have promise. When we ask for things, they instead say “You immigrant, you have no property no country, not an American citizen, why don't go back to your country? Why are you begging and living off of their back? You are taking up all your housing.” These are some things they say to our people. They do not realized that they had come and demolish and obliterate our homes and homeland because of their ways of warfare. We lost everything, forcing us come to their country, the Americans insult however they wish, showing us no respect. The American government refuses to be as understanding of our position as they had said.

Hmong elders feel despair and miserable in that they are seen as incapable of bettering their situation. Many go on disability and Social Security Insurance because they either were injured from the Vietnam War; retardation, brain damage, lame body parts, and others have become too old with cramping and other diseases such as cancer, and so forth. All over the country Hmong resettling in the U.S. choose to immigrate to find relatives who had proved worthy and beneficial to them in Laos, such as the two participants from this study. The needs, and difficulties faced by Hmong elders are education, English speaking and cultural differences. This is because Hmong elders are unable to voice and discuss their needs and difficulties in that they lack the ability to

speaking English and are not educated in what are the U.S. government's duties and laws. They also feel that their cultural differences are not taken into consideration. This is perhaps as such as Susan D. Smith states that "We must recognize differences in cultural norms among the nationalities represented (1992: 20)." Yamamoto also said "the vast cultural differences between the Hmongs and other Americans and that efforts need to be made to understand the differences and to support the Hmongs in overcoming the hardships caused by these differences. . . . . The members of the community in which the Hmongs live also have to recognize the existence of ethnic minorities, and to try to accept cultural diversity (1994: 66)."

Social exchange theory and Functionalist theory are evident in the Hmong in Eureka. These are necessary for the elders in their adaptation to the U.S. and its culture where the Hmong elders feel alienated, isolated, and under-represented. Solidarity and Social Exchange are needed for the Hmong community to have a social network to keep their culture. Hmong elders called on each other to create bonds with each other through practices of religious rituals and ceremonies and as well as support of both financially and emotionally as in Laos. These reveal that the Hmong culture is still the practice of the Hmong community.

Hmong elders find that although they faced many challenges they see that the U.S. is beneficial to their children. They find that their children have the opportunity to better themselves in obtaining an education. The Hmong elders find that their survival in the U.S. is highly dependent on their children and observe that they are to support their children of both gender. The social exchange of goods and services has for them changed to emotional support, this being that they sense that the U.S. is changing their shared morality for their children. In that the children are forgetting the traditions and culture of their people—their shared likeness, and the organic solidarity of the specialized pursuits are dividing the community and the family

apart. The recognition of emotional support for their children from Hmong elders reveals that they have taken on the dominant culture's pressure to adapt from their children's behaviors. The Hmong elders change is not because they are trying to become Americanized, but because they want to ensure their children have a solid social identity.

### **Conclusion**

This study was extremely difficult for me in that I had to interpret and translate the interviews from Hmong to English. In that this was my first research project of having to do this, I had to fathom what particular descriptive word would convey what each speaker was speaking from in the Hmong language is very simple and not descriptive, such as the term difficult was really hard to describe. This could also be the reason for not getting across how I wanted the questions to sound.

Overall, I found, as Yu-Fong Grace Chai did, that "the interviews revolve around their religious beliefs, cultural values and family values (1999: 69)," and that the adults see that their difficulties are due to cultural differences and language barrier. Their children they believe have fewer difficulties in the U.S. because of their ability to speak English and can easily deal with social interaction with Americans. The Hmong elders believe that the way to get over these difficulties is either for a translator to be able or for their children to be translators, all the elders seem to acknowledge the need for cultural consideration from the government; this being social services, city officials, the American community, etc.

Due to my sample being small and limited, I think that it would be important to have further studies in more densely Hmong populated city in viewing their Hmong elders adaptation process in seeing what effects are the elders concern about.

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## Appendix 1

May-Pa Her  
An undergraduate student in Sociology  
Senior project  
Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself?

Probe: upbringing; key educational experiences; work; religion

2. Tell me about your resettlement experiences. What have they been like?

Probe: where first located, why migrated to recent location, expectations, significant people, self image, emotions, and relationship with sponsors: churches/relatives

3. Presently, how have family and friends responded to the resettlement?

Probe: strategies for response: education-English and social support networks; emotions; influence on decisions: politically-culture and religion

4. How are you supported financially?

Probe: people, family and children, job/opportunity, community experiences

5. Are there any conflicts or difficulties?

Probe: dealt with welfare agencies, community-schools and hospital

6. Do believe that you have adapted now? How?/Or why not?

7. Have you ever thought going back? To visited/live?

Probe: countries differences

8. Is there anything we missed or that you would like to talk more about?

## Appendix 2

### Adaptation Process of Hmong Elders in Eureka: How are the Hmong Elders Adapting in Eureka? Consent Form

#### Overview

You are invited to participate in a project developed by a student, May-Pa Her at Humboldt State University. The goal of the project is to provide the viewpoint of adaptation of Hmong elders in Eureka.

#### Researcher Contact Information

The study is under the direction of May-Pa Her, Department of Sociology, (707) 826-XXXX, a student at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, 95521.

#### Your Role

Your part in this study will involve participating in an open-ended interview. Sessions will take place in private settings. The interview will take up to 1 hour. This interview will give to community a wider understanding of the importance of Hmong identity and culture.

#### Risks and Benefits

I foresee no risks to you through your participation in this interview. It would be beneficial in that it will allow you to speak about your culture and how your people are adapting to American culture. In addition, this project will allow other cultures to be more culturally relative in dealing with Hmong and shape future interactions and education for refugees like you.

#### Voluntary Participation

Please understand that your participation in the project is completely voluntary. You may choose to participate in all or none of the interviews. You may question the procedures at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer a particular question or questions for any reason. You also have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. The researchers also have the right to end your participation in the study at any time.

#### Confidentiality

Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written materials resulting from this study. All references to real names will be assigned pseudonyms in any transcriptions and other written materials generated from tape recordings. Tapes will be destroyed within 30 days of transcription. Records that could potentially link you with data you provided will be kept in a secure location.

#### Concerns

If you have any concerns regarding this project that you are not comfortable communicating with the researcher, you may contact confidentially Dr. Mary Virnoche, Department of Sociology, (707) 826-XXXX at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, 95521.

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signature of participant

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date