

The Hmong in the United States: From Preliterate to College Success

Serge Lee, Jenny Chang, Pal Yang, David Lor, Xeng Thao¹

Abstract

The Hmong Americans are mountainous people from Southeast Asia and congregated in the Northern Laos for several generations. While in Laos, they lived within primitive means and are preliterate. It was not until the 1960s and their involvement in the Vietnam War that the visionary goals from strong leadership within the intercommunal structure secured the need for formal education. From the political tension and upheaval circumstances of the Vietnam War, racial pursuits were set to eliminate and execute the Hmong by communist reigns that seized the royal Laotian government. This persecution led the startling refugee exodus, as many families dispersed into other countries for safety in 1975. Decades of resettlement after and now redefined as immigrants in the United States, this paper examines the experiential college successes of former Hmong refugees and the generations thereafter. A Research 1 university in the Midwest and a teaching university in Western United States were selected as sample sites. This study concludes that the Hmong people in the US have made significant strides in transforming a paradigm shift as being preliterate to a college-educated group within 40 years. This change is particularly striking for the Hmong women whom graduated college, as their rate is 1.2 percent higher than their male counterpart.

Key words: Hmong, College success, College attainments of Hmong, Vang Pao's vision, Hmong American education

Hmong Educational Background

From their mass arrival and resettlement between 1975 to 2014, the Hmong in the United States continues to be an uprising ethnic group that is creating significant change in their diaspora (Lee & Chang, 2012). This article aims to focus on the Hmong who came to the US as a refugee or those born in the US that pursued the scholastic goals of obtaining a higher education. Data was collected on Hmong American students from 1990 to 2014 from two university systems: a Research 1 University in the Midwest (MW) and a teaching university in the West coast (WC).

In several Asian countries such as China, Laos, and Vietnam, the Hmong were historically referenced as "Miao or Meo", which is derogatorily translated as "rice shoot, dirty people, or the vocal of cat" (Lee & Chang, 2012; Yang, 1993). Because of the negatively associated connotations, great strides arose to make the necessary changes in a new term that was introduced by Vang Pao (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). He was the only key Hmong person at the time who was recruited by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight against the communist Pathet Lao during the Vietnam War. In 1960, he asked the CIA to reference his ethnic group as "Hmong" instead of "Miao or Meo", in which the US respectfully adopted the term and now it is globally accepted (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993).

Lately, the term "Hmong" was loosely translated as "free people" (Chan, 1994; Yang, 1993). As prefaced and stated by most literature, the Hmong were initially discovered in Southwest China around the Guizhou plateau in the late 18th century (Quincy, 2000; Motin, 1980). Due to various conflicts, including the execution of their leaders by the Qing Dynasty, some migrated west to the Yunnan Province. Eventually, some went south to Vietnam and reached Laos between 1810 - 1820 (Motin, 1980) or 1815 - 1818 (Quincy, 1995). From the migratory process across China to Laos, the Hmong refused to be dominated by others (Lyfoung, 1996). Through historical documentation, the power struggle was first propelled by the Chinese (Quincy, 2000), followed by the French occupation in Indochina (Stuart, 1997; Lyfoung, 1996), and then the communist Pathet Lao (Quincy, 1995; Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). Because of their strong and conscious objections to these supremacies, two of the

¹ Serge Lee is a social work research professor at California State University, Sacramento. Pal Yang is an entrepreneur. Jenny Chang is a private practice mental health clinician. David Lo is a Research Manager at Hmong Women's Heritage Association, Inc. in Sacramento. Xeng Thao is an MSW graduate. For inquiry, please contact Serge Lee at leesc@csus.edu

Hmong men - Vang Pao and Touby Lyfoung², seized the opportunity and got acquainted with the Americans (Lee & Chang, 2012; Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). Their alliance with the US literally changed the history, culture, and customs for the Hmong internationally. It was also a starting point and unknowingly the formulation of new beginnings, as it created the newfound terminology and categorization of ethnic “Hmong” in the US.

In 1955 when the CIA arrived in Laos to conduct military operations, only a few Hmong individuals were able to speak the national language of Lao. For those who possessed the linguistic skills, they were employed as service staff to French leaders before the CIA conjoined with the Royal Lao Army (Yang & Blake, 1993). It was noted by Yang and Blake that the unrivaled Hmong individuals who possessed the Laotian literacy skills were Vang Pao and Touby Lyfoung. There were countless testaments and statements made by the Hmong regarding Vang Pao and Touby’s visionary goals. Both believed that for the Hmong to exit an aboriginal lifestyle, the Hmong must value the foundation of an education (Lyfoung, 1996). Such an example includes Lyfoung’s thoughts and wishes that he wrote in Lao, and later translated into Hmong by one of his sons:

“Born as a person, I wish of a country, I wish for the people that born into the same land I born to have food and shelter, I wish to have a piece of land with a good house so I can live with dignity and respect” (Lyfoung, pp. 200).

Although Vang Pao barely finished primary grade school but possessed stellar military duties, he dedicated his life to public service work that instilled the roots of higher education for the Hmong community (<http://abc30.com/archive/7884192/>). Both Vang Pao and Touby Lyfoung valued the pursuit of education and held it in high regards, which is very evident in the Hmong community demographics.

After Vang Pao was recruited by the CIA in 1957 (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993), he knew such surmounted duties would be bestowed upon him. Most importantly, he wanted to take the Hmong people out of a slash-and-burn agricultural lifestyle, move them from the mountainous areas to flat lands, eradicate opiate cultivation, and become literate (primary author’s numerous attendance at Vang Pao’s speeches)³. Therefore, in 1960 he took initiative to change the undesirable conditions. It was most noticeable when he allocated some of the CIA war budgets to Xiengkhouang and Sam Neu Province, and began to build schools and hospitals within the village proximities (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993; Primary author’s witnessed such acts from 1969-1975). With the assistance from his newfound partners, he also attempted to create a secondary school as well. As stated by Hamilton-Merritt, “General Vang Pao and teacher Moua Lia (later appointed to School Superintendent for the Xiengkhouang Province) with help from Pop Buell (an American Aid Worker), and Prince Sai Kham (Xiengkhouang Governor) decided to revive the Xiengkhouang School,⁴ which was abandoned in December 1960 (pp. 199). Hamilton-Merritt further states that because of this revitalization, several hundred of the Hmong students who received an education from College Samthong (Vang Pao’s education project) later went on to earn degrees in France and the US. Whether it was from Vang Pao’s visionary goals and/or the influences of the missionary work, seven Hmong students furthered their studies in the US (Dr. Anthony Toutong Vang, personal conversation, 08/05/2014), and this cohort included: Anthony Toutong Vang (Ed.D.), Bruce Thao Pao Bliatout (Ph.D.), Vang Sher Vangyi (MA), Toufue Vang (BS), Lysong Lysongseng (BA), Chue Vang and Cheng Vang.

The Hmong are uniquely different from many indigenous groups around the world. Their social, economic, political, and spiritual life revolves around their clan (Lo, 2001). Lo explains best about the uniqueness of the Hmong people. He states that within the Hmong enclave and for it to function collectively, what matters most is the group as it is representative and specifically for the family and the clan, rather than individual gain. In fact, clan groups (surnames) remain *noble* to the Hmong community worldwide. Surnames are used to prescribe customs, traditions, heritages, and even communal values. For example, when a Hmong person (in Asia more influence comes from the patriarchal family, and in the US it is mutual) accomplishes a goal or objective (i.e. college degree), the milestone is considered to bring an unmeasurable significance of dignity and respect to three structural entities: (1) the clan group whom s/he belongs to; (2) the immediately family; and (3) the entire Hmong enclave.

² Vang Pao was a French officer during its Indochina occupation and the only Hmong Lieutenant General under the Royal Lao Army Government during the US Secret War in Laos. Touby Lyfoung was the only elite Hmong member of King Sisavang Vattana’s consul and a minister of the royalist government before the communist Pathet Lao came to power in May 15, 1975.

³ The primary author of this article attended three primary schools built by Vang Pao’s war budgets from 1969 to 1975, and was an acquaintance to Vang Pao from 1994 until the time of his passing in 2011.

⁴ Xiengkhouang School was the only primary school available to the Hmong people at the time.

Because of these interwoven and overlapping structural entities, at the end of any academic year many personal and communal celebratory events commemorate such success. Celebrations are hosted for all levels of schooling that range from Preschool/Kindergarten to college graduates. In fact, during Vang Pao's lifetime he was an honorable invitee to commend the graduates.

On the contrary, in the traditional Hmong culture females are encouraged to get married when they are of legal age, procreate for lineal ties, and then satisfy the intricate socio-cultural obligatory roles to care for her husband's clan. Of those who deviated from such expectations, they were stigmatized and may even be disowned. Through the generational outlook and to overcome this cultural dilemma, it took over two decades (1975-1995) for majority of Hmong parents to grant their daughters an equal advantage to pursue college like their sons. Currently, there are 18 identifiable Hmong clans in the US. This paper focuses on 16 of the surnames as some are categorized to uphold larger statistical data: Cha/Chang, Cheng/Chue (normally combine as a single clan), Fang/Pha (combined), Hang, Her/Heu, Khang, Kong/Soung, Kue, Lee/Ly, Lo/Lor/Lao, Moua/Mua, Thao/Thor, Va/Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang.

Education Literature

With the common educational concept, "Education is knowledge, knowledge is power", it can spark an innate trait to influence human intelligence. As one begins to gain knowledge, thus can easily fuel into empowering the inter- and intra-communities that one belongs to. This common saying is an important philosophical aspect for the contemporary human race. To support data about the Hmong in the US (Hmong Studies Journal, 2015), as of Fall 2014, 29.6% of all American ages 25± held a Bachelor's degree or higher, with the desegregated data of 29.7% being females and 29.6% being males.

Literature that documents the ethnic groups and their college attainment in the US is extensive (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Strage, 2000). Kao and Thompson (2003) state that understanding race, ethnic, and immigrant variation in educational achievement and its attainment is more important than ever as the US population becomes increasingly diverse. They added that racial and ethnic gaps in educational achievement and attainment have narrowed over the past three decades by every measure available to social scientists. Educational aspirations are universally high for all racial and ethnic groups (Kao & Thompson, 2003). The gaps and educational aspirations were also differentiated into other factors by the recent data that was released about Hispanic and Latino, White, and Asian American groups as well.

The American Community Survey (2013) reported that Asians are the most highly educated group of Americans, as 50.5% possess a Bachelor's degrees or higher. Among the traditional groups of Asian Americans (i.e., Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Taiwan, and Thai) ages 25±, 74% of Taiwanese and 71% of Indians had at least a Bachelor's degree. The new groups of Asian Americans (i.e. Southeast Asians [SEA]) arrived in the US around 1975, which mainly comprised of Cambodians/Khmer, Hmong, Laotians, and Vietnamese. According to the Hmong Studies Journal (2015), to dissipate each SEA ethnic group and account for individuals ages 25± that possess a Bachelor's degree or higher, the Cambodians fared at 16.3%, the Hmong at 16.3%, Laotians at 14.9% and the Vietnamese at 28.4% respectively. Considering that the Cambodians and Hmong who came from the most pre-literate and agrarian society, in just four decades they have remarkably and superbly done well educationally in comparison to the Hispanic/Latinos at just 13% (Oguwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, May 2012).

In an attempt to predict college adjustment and successes among the SEA groups, Hispanic and White students, Strage (2000) used several instruments to examine achievement motivation and parental characteristics of a medium sample (n =130; 73 White, 40 Southeast Asians, and 37 Hispanic). Strage was able to concur with Gallimore and Goldenberg's (as cited by Strage, 2000) earlier study that emphasized on the importance of the social, educational and cultural capital investments that parents vested to their children. We selected this article partly due to the notion that the Hmong finally begin to maintain a motivated streak to pursue post-secondary goals from 2000 to the present time.

In other literature supports, Ngo (2006) found that the pursuit of education from Hmong and other Southeast Asian youth are very much intertwined with the needs and demands of their nuclear and collective ties. Xiong and Lee (2011) also found that Hmong college students who utilized academic support programs contributed to completing college as well.

Methods

Purpose

This project aims to analyze college attainment data for Hmong students in the US and how to better understand their college achievements. Information is further segregated by gender and clan affiliation (surnames). The authors display high confidence that this study may be a first of its kind, based on the nature of this topic and in the current generational era.

Nowadays, it is easily common for the Hmong to become advanced into the mainstream values. A common theme is adopting a popular American first name. Because most college campuses do not provide a racial category for the Hmong, it also makes it impossible to clearly enumerate all Hmong graduates. The four major objectives of this content analysis discusses: (1) gender achievements from 1995 to 2014; (2) a probable estimate of graduates (i.e. the term graduate will refer to a student who has completed the requirements for a degree, and their degree has been conferred); (3) compare data about graduates whom obtained degrees that were designated as in high demand by the US Labor Market; and (4) correlate the compiled data to Vang Pao's visionary educational goals.

Data Sample

This research project extracted public data that was available from the *commencement handbooks* (used interchangeably with *commencement programs*) from two universities. The Hmong population in the area of the Research 1 university (MW) is currently ranked first and the area of the West Coast university (WC) is ranked third (Pfeifer, 2014). Both campuses are highly concentrated with Hmong families in the neighboring municipalities as well. In 2014, there was an estimated enrollment of 650 Hmong students at MW (Personal conversation with Juavah Lee, 11/17/2014) and 1,044 Hmong students at WC (Personal conversation with Chao Vang, 11/09/2014)⁵.

Among the various contents of any college commencement program, the handbooks lists names of the candidates, the candidates' college and department/program, the degree to which they are being conferred, and special academic notations such as Honors.

The data collection procedures were first reviewed and approved by the WC Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects for Lo and Lor (2013), in respect to their Master's Thesis. The primary author of this article served as the thesis advisor for Lo and Lor, then sought out the human subjects' protection expansions to include data from MW, along with data about the proceeding semesters at the WC. The second half of data collection began in June 2014 and was completed by October 2014. Four main variables were targeted: (1) Name of the student graduate, (2) Department that the candidates listed, (3) the conferred degree, and (4) Honorable academic recognition. By using names of the graduates, the fifth variable of gender was created (i.e. "Mary May Yang" was identified and labeled as a female, and/or "Kao Kevin Lee" was labeled as male). Most of the graduates with common Hmong or English names were simpler to decode according to gender norms. However, there were some common English/Hmong surnames and/or unisex names such as "Bobbie P. Moua" (i.e. the initial could not be accounted or gender differentiated), and Yang Thao (Yang & Thao are both surnames thus the name could not be distinguished). In cases like the examples provided, both were listed as *Unsure*. To also increase reliability, we purposely deleted 12 individuals (n = 60) from each of the five main clans (Yang, Vang, Lee, Xiong, Thao) from the entire list. This type of statistical enumeration was possible because Hmong children whom are US born from 1970s to 1990s tend to have common Hmong names. In addition, to deter triplicate counting of the same name (i.e. an individual who obtained three degrees: Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral from the same university), the highest degree was only considered for the final data set.

Overall, 2,781 clan names of graduated Hmong students were collected. Only 1,139 from the MW university (51.4% female, and 48.6% male) and 1,350 from the WC university (59.1% female and 40.9% male) were retained for statistical analysis and to deter secondary/triplicate counting that represented the same student.

The primary author serves as a Faculty Advisor and mentor to the Hmong University Student Association, which is a Hmong Student Association at WC university. From personal insight and professional development, the primary author has been able to ascertain that the Hmong female student population at this campus approximately outnumbered their male counterpart by 2:1. Before data analysis began, 292 of the students (10.5%) were not accounted in part for the same conditions that were aforementioned.

⁵ Juavah Lee is Hmong Student Club Advisor at the MW university. Chao Vang is instructor of *Hmong Experience* course at the WC university.

Some of the deletions were made in reference that the graduates may not be Hmong, given that other racial/ethnic groups also have the same surnames of Cheng, Lee, Xiong, and Yang. After the data was extracted and sifted, 89.5% (2,489 out of 2,781) Hmong graduates from the two universities were merged and retained for statistical analysis.

Study Limitations

We are fully aware that the data collection and a protocol of this nature may raise questions and/or concerns. Specifically, the bias is generalized as to how the research team would be able to identify who are Hmong, non-Hmong, and gender preferences. Some clan groups such as Her, Lor, Moua, Thao, and Vang were simple to identify because no other ethnic groups in the US have identical surnames. Other clans such as Cheng, Lee, Xiong and Yang were much more difficult as other ethnicities also carry these surnames. Thus, the research team systematically went through each name to generalize the common gender Hmong names. Other techniques were also applied to alleviate the curiosities and gender implications, and in consideration if the student specified their academic institution of study. For doctoral students, it is a common practice that the academic institution prolifically recognizes the student and publishes their picture in the commencement handbooks. Therefore, the questionable student was profiled in alignment to their doctoral education accomplishment. To deter further bias, the research team believes that >95% of the remaining graduates on the final data set are Hmong.

Another limitation is due to missing data. The respected colleges in each campus were not obligated to turn in the commencement handbooks to the library for shelving. At the MW university during Fall 2010 to Spring 2014, only two of the colleges handbooks were shelved. Annually there were approximately 90 -130 Hmong students who graduated from the MW university. Therefore, about 600-700 graduates at the MW university could not be accounted in this study. Similarly, five years of academic data could not be accounted at the WC university (2001-2004 & 2006). During 1999 to 2008, approximately 60-80 Hmong students graduated from the WC yearly, thus about 300 students were not accounted for as well. Subsequently, approximately 900 other Hmong graduates could not be included in this data set.

Findings

From the collected student data at the MW and WC universities, it revealed slow trends of college obtainment about Hmong students within the first 24 years of resettlement. For example, in 1990 there were only three (n= 3) from MW, and two (n= 2) from WC whom graduated in this specific academic year (AY). An acceptable baseline was not available until the 1995 AY when a sizeable Hmong student body was enumerated. Of the 1995-96 AY, there were 31(an increase of 933%) at MW and 25 at WC (an increase of 1,150%) graduates. This significant increase ($p = .000$) of graduates from both campuses peaked in 2009, (86 from MW, 131 WC) and it has led a gradual increase to the AY of spring of 2014. In respect to the first research purpose of Lo and Lor's work, Table 1 and 2 below shows the data set.

It is important to reiterate as discussed in the literature review that in the traditional Hmong culture, Hmong women are not encouraged to pursue an education. Instead, they are encouraged to get married when they are of legal age, procreate for lineal ties, and then satisfy the intricate socio-cultural obligatory roles to care for her husband's clan. To transition from this dismay and overcome this cultural dilemma through a generational outlook, it took over two decades after resettlement for the majority of Hmong parents to grant their daughters an equal advantage to attend college as well. In 1995, only 20% (5 out of 25 MW) and 25 percent (8 out of 31 WC) of the graduates in that AY were females. Even with this disparity and the complexity of cultural issues, the Hmong women were able to catch up with their counterparts in 2005 and sustain exceeding graduation rates to this present day (see Table 1).

Table 1 shows that even in 1995, the graduation proportion of men to women was 1.7 times higher. In 2005, the ratio reversed as the women steadily paced at 13.25% (2005), 8% (2009), and 35.6% (2012), resulting in a 1.2% higher than Hmong men. This result was also supported by the American Community Survey (2013) as it showed that Hmong women were 1.7% ahead to receive a Bachelor degree than males (see discussion for Table 2 below).

Table 1 Hmong men and women graduated per year for selected year

Gender	1995 N = 52	2005 N = 242	2009 N= 228	2012 N = 174	Overall ratio of female to male proportion
Female	19 (36.5%)	137 (56.6%)	123 (54%)	118 (67.8%)	53.73% (n = 397)
Male	33 (63.4%)	105 (43.4%)	105 (46%)	56 (32.2%)	46.25% (n = 299)
Proportion difference between female and male	-27%	+13.2%	+8%	+35.6%	1.2% higher

When enumerating the total of Hmong graduates from the two prominent universities, the proportions of college attainment by Hmong women also showed very different figures. Of the total 2,489 graduates, 55.6% were women (n = 1,384) and 44.4% were men (n = 1,105), yet the total of college degrees evenly distributed by gender. Men only earned one percent (n = 4) more doctorates than women (Table 2). In fact, women earned 11.3% (n =222) more baccalaureate and 13.8% (n = 61) Master’s degrees than the men. This factual figure is compared to the 2013 American Community Survey report about the Hmong population in the US, as it indicated that 17.1% females and 15.4% males ages 25+ attained a Bachelor’s degree or higher (Pfeifer, 2014).

As discussed in the literature review, when the Vietnam War ended only seven (n = 7) Hmong men were able to come to the US for their college education. One was a Ly, a second was a Thao and five others were Vang. After resettling 40 years in the US, the Hmong should be proud of what they have accomplished from these prestigious and rigorous systems of higher education.

Table 2 Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Percent (%)	Overall Degree	Percent (%)	Degree by Gender	Percent (%)
Female	55.6 (n = 1,384)	Undergrad	79.1 (n = 1,970)	Female Undergrad	79.2 (n = 1,096)
Male	44.4 (n = 1,105)	Graduate	17.7 (n = 441)	Female Graduate	18.1 (n = 251)
	N = 2,489	Doctorate	3.1 (n = 78)	Female Doctorate	2.7 (n = 37)
			99.9%	Male Undergrad	79.1 (n = 874)
				Male Graduate	17.2 (n = 190)
				Male Doctorate	3.7 (n = 41)

Because the clan group identity remains as essentially distinctive in the Hmong culture, Table 3 (first column) displays a breakdown of the identified clan groups. The rank-ordered of clan include: Yang (n = 469 or 18.8%), Vang (n= 423 or 17%), Lee/Ly (402 or 16.2%), Xiong (n= 315 or 12.7%), Thao (n= 204 or 8.2%), Lo/Lor/Lao (n= 145 or 5.8%), Her (n= 140 or 5.6%), Moua (n= 127 or 5.1%), Vue (111 or 4.5%), and Cha/Chang (n= 73 or 2.9%). The Cheng/Chue, Fang/Pha, Hang, Kong/Soung, and Kue clan all constituted ≤1%.

The US Census Bureau and Laos census (when the Hmong Americans resided in Laos) were ever enumerated to separate the Hmong clan groups according to the population status. However, it is accustomed among the Hmong that the Yang, Vang, Lee/Ly, Xiong, and Thao clans are more commonly populated in locales where the Hmong congregate. Therefore this finding was not surprising to be in alignment of the graduating rank orders as well. When the data was further organized into gender sub-groups, the five top female groups (in numerical ordered) were: Yang, Lee/Ly, Vang, Xiong and Thao. The male sub-groups were: Vang, Yang, Lee/Ly, Xiong, and Thao. As presented, the Xiong clan consistently ranked fourth for both genders (Table 3) and overall when considering all clan groups.

Table 3 Surnames by Gender and Rank-ordered of Clan Groups (N = 2,489)

Surname	Frequency	Percent	Surname by Gender	Frequency	Percent
Cha/Chang	73	2.9(10)	Female (n = 1384)		
Cheng/Chue	26	1(11)	Cha/Chang	42	3
Fang/Pha	13	.5(13)	Cheng/Chue	10	.7
Hang	12	.5(13)	Fang/Pha	4	.4
Her	140	5.6(7)	Hang	5	.4
Kha/Khang	14	.6(12)	Her	78	5.6
Kong/Soung	14	.6(13)	Kha/Khang	6	.4
Kue	1	0(16)	Kong/Soung	8	.6
Lee/Ly	402	16.2(3)	Kue	1	.1
Lo/Lor/Lao	145	5.8(6)	Lee/Ly	248	17.9
Moua	127	5.1(8)	Lo/Lor/Lao	80	5.8
Thao	204	8.2(5)	Moua	60	4.3
Vang	423	17(2)	Thao	102	7.4
Vue	111	4.5(9)	Vang	233	16.8
Xiong	315	12.7(4)	Vue	55	4
Yang	469	18.8(1)	Xiong	170	12.3
			Yang	281	20.3
			Male (n = 1105)		
			Cha/Chang	31	2.8
			Cheng/Chue	16	1.4
			Fang/Pha	8	.7
			Hang	7	.6
			Her	62	5.6
			Kha/Khang	8	.7
			Kong/Soung	6	.5
			Kue	0	0
			Lee/Ly	154	13.9
			Lo/Lor/Lao	65	5.9
			Moua	67	6.1
			Thao	102	9.2
			Vang	190	17.2
			Vue	56	5.1
			Xiong	145	13.1
			Yang	188	17

To confirm further the rank-ordered of clan groups, we selected six years as trends (unequal intervals due to missing data). Rather than an academic year, we chose Spring, Summer, and the Fall terms of each year for statistical analysis. The chosen years included 1995, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2012. The total graduates of each clan group from the two universities were tallied by rows and columns (Table 4). As illustrated in Table 4, 1,050 Hmong students were accounted from both campuses during the specified years. Since there was no population size for the 18-clan groups to be accounted for in this study, the researchers wanted to show the rank-order of graduates. It is not intended to display status among the clans, and aims to simply illustrate the size of the graduates available. In numerical order, the Vang (1st) clan ranked first, followed by Yang (2nd), Lee (3rd), Xiong (4th), Thao (5th), Lo/Lor/Lao (6th), Her/Heu (7th), Moua (8th), Vue (9th), Cha/Chang (10th), Cheng/Chue (tied for 11th), Khang (13th), Fang, Hang, and Khang (tied 14th), Kang (17th) and Kue (18th). Therefore when the clan groups were either ranked by gender or year, the Vang and Yang simultaneously ranked first or second, followed by Lee, Xiong, and Thao. The authors of this article highlighted potential social and political implications of these rank-ordered clan groups within the Hmong community that is later deliberated in the Discussion section.

Table 4 Overall Clan Total by Year and Rank-ordered of Clan Group (unequal intervals due to missing data)

Clan Name	1995	2000	2005	2008	2011	2012	Total
Cha/Chang	1	4	7	9	5	3	29(10)
Cheng/Chue	0	2	7	1	0	1	11(11)
Fang/Pha	0	0	1	3	0	0	4(14)
Hang	0	1	1	1	0	1	4(14)
Her/Heu	4	3	11	19	11	15	63(7)
Khang	1	0	3	0	2	1	7(13)
Kong/Soung	1	1	0	1	0	0	3(16)
Kue	1	0	0	0	0	0	1(18)
Lee/Ly	18	20	41	46	20	22	167(3)
Lo/Lor/Lao	5	6	18	17	14	13	73(6)
Moua	1	4	11	23	7	8	54(8)
Thao	2	10	19	25	14	9	79(5)
Vang	7	19	65	56	26	36	209(1)
Vue	3	3	14	13	3	14	50(9)
Xiong	5	15	23	40	18	19	120(4)
Yang	<u>7</u>	<u>21</u>	26	<u>59</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>31</u>	176(2)
	56	109	247	313	152	173	N= 1050

Because of the missing data for MW, this section examined Hmong graduates from WC from Spring and Fall semesters of each AY starting with Spring 2011 to Spring 2014 to make a plausible prediction about the increase of Hmong students in the oncoming years. Between 2011 and Spring 2014, there were approximately 1,044 Hmong students (WC university, Office of Institutional Research, November, 2014) who attended WC per year with an annual graduation rate of 14.6% (n = 146 for 2011), 16.3% (n = 163 for 2012), and 18.7% (n = 187 for 2013) and 7% (n = 70) for Spring 2014. Without adding Spring 2014 to the computation, the average annual graduation rate is 16.5% or a predictable increase of 2% per year for the next three years at WC. When combining these proportions among the clans, five groups consistently ranked highest among the clans: Vang (1st), Yang (2nd), Lee/Ly (3rd), Xiong (4th) and Thao (5th). This seemed to be consistent with the overall enumeration of the 18-clan groups for MW and WC in the past 15 years. As inferred, it is possible that Hmong scholars examine the 2020 Hmong census and add the variable of “clan/surname” to their enumeration of the Hmong American population.

The third research aim was to examine how well Hmong college students fared in various college disciplines and professions. As the primary author of this article and among the first wave of Hmong American professors, in the 1990s a large proportion of Hmong college students opted to study areas that were common to their native upbringing or in similar support to their parents’ resettlement period like teaching (i.e. Liberal Studies) or political science. Another goal was intended to examine how Hmong students chose their collegiate studies in the past decade and a half. By gathering information about the college degrees that candidates declared in the commencement handbooks, from 1995 to Spring 2014, the top ten (in rank-ordered) for female Hmong students were (Table 5): Business Administration, Education, Liberal Studies, Social Work, Child Development, Sociology, Biological Sciences, Health Sciences, Psychology, and Criminal Justice/Law. The top ten areas of study for males (in rank-ordered) were: Business Administration, Criminal Justice/Law and Engineering (tied for second), Social Work, Education, Biological Sciences, Liberal Studies, Psychology, Sociology, and Economics.

Although, government and political science (less than 1% for both gender) have become less popular among Hmong students, Liberal Studies continues to remain popular as it is an area where graduates can further pursue a teaching credential (7.6% for female and 4.3% for male). To equate how Hmong students fulfilled high demand careers according to the US Labor Market, computer science, engineering, nursing, physical therapy, and accounting emerged nearly equal for both gender at .4% to 2.2%.

Table 5 Rank-ordered Ten Most Popular Program of Study by Gender

Female (F)	Percent	Male (M)	Percent
(1) Business adm.	13.2	(1) Business adm.	16.5
(2) Education	13	(2)Criminal justice/Law	10.3
(3) Liberal studies	7.6	(2) Engineering	10.3
(4) Social work	6.5	(4) Social work	8.5
(5) Child develop	6	(5) Education	8.3
(6) Sociology	3.8	(6)Biological sciences	6.5
(7)Biological Sciences	3.6	(7) Liberal studies	4.3
(8)Health sciences (i.e., nursing)	3.4	(8) Psychology	3.3
(9) Psychology	3.3	(9) Sociology	3.1
(10)Criminal justice/Law	3.3	(10) Economics	2.7

Discussion

Within just four decades of resettlement and the computed data from MW and WC universities, Hmong American students did not become intrigue to obtain a college education until the mid-1990s. It is speculated that even among the early comers, they spent a majority of their time orienting themselves to the host country. Such adjustments included learning to rebuild a new cultural identity, evident through the phonetics of a new language and then acclimating into a family culture that sought out goals to correspond to a modern lifestyle. It is documented through various literatures that the Hmong culture preferred their offspring to get married prior to taking on social roles and civic duties. Specifically, maturity was primarily based on marital status and child bearing, as opposed to maturation and wisdom. Therefore, it took Hmong parents roughly two decades (i.e. post 1975) to have a better understanding of higher education and adopting educational values that are reflective of how success is portrayed in the US. It was then that Hmong parents began to set more realistic goals and priorities for their children. As shown in Table 4, a sizeable collection of Hmong college graduates from the two universities did not occur until 2000.

This research study is a starting point and an initial pioneering attempt by any research team in the US or internationally abroad, that examines the Hmong college graduation rates by using clan and gender based estimations to reflect the followings:

1. Because social status remains as an important concept in the Hmong community in the US and abroad, the rank-ordered of clan group serves as a strong social indicator. With the common educational concept, “Education is knowledge and knowledge is power” as a variable factor, findings from this research project reaffirmed traditional cultural beliefs that the Yang, Vang, Lee, Xiong, and Thao clans are and will remain most populated among the clans. This leads to the attention that they can retain a sense of influential community leadership role as well.
2. A possible mediating factor that emerged from this report is the changing trend of Hmong female intellectual groups. Although no Hmong female in the US has ever pursued a leadership role in Hmong nationalism (i.e. unity and respect of one another), from the successful Hmong female graduation rates, we can infer the likeliness that someone can greatly perform and carry out the notable duties like Vang Pao and Touby Lyfoung’s work.
3. Findings from this content analysis highlighted the root of his lifelong accomplishments and significant social contributions that were made possible by the former Hmong refugees and their offspring. It was with small thought that the friendship the Hmong forged with the US actually led them into the US with unlimited potential and boundless opportunities.

College successes of Hmong students, whether at the MW or WC universities, or at any other college institution across the US, did not simply occur only because of the educational opportunities presented. It also can be attributed to several social and cultural factors that are exceptionally important to the Hmong. Without these important social and cultural factors, it would take a significant amount of time to surpass for a paradigm to shift.

Some of these factors are briefly summarized below, but their successes are not exclusively limited to the followings:

- I. **Leaders/Supporters.** For the many Hmong college students who are quite successful in navigating their educational endeavors, there were authority figures that greatly influenced their resilient behaviors and overall well-being. Leaders, role models and supporters for Hmong educators come from several sources: (a) traditional and stoic civic leaders like Vang Pao, clan elders, and community activists, (b) extended familial kin and/or surrogate figures, (c) student engagement clubs, and (d) friends. These are the lifeline that publicly applauds and acknowledge the higher education achievements of the Hmong, and unknowingly were/are actively involved in sustaining the oncoming generations of Hmong students, which plays an integral role in the educational careers and various endeavors in their career paths. They are frequently the ones who motivated the Hmong students to strive for the ultimate success.
- II. **Cultural Influences.** As discussed earlier, Hmong parents, relatives, and other supporters are extremely supportive of the graduates. It is common for Hmong parents and their relatives to host substantial congratulatory events to praise and support their graduates, even at the pre-school/kindergartener level. For many Hmong families, it is a highlight to see that any educational achievement is a worthy milestone. The higher the degree one is able to achieve, the bigger the celebration. For example, a Bachelor's and Master's level graduation party could entail pristine cuisine, whereas a doctorate celebration would be elaborately amassed to a community sized event. When it comes to recognizing the graduates, the Hmong community would typically not see it as a separate clan achievement, but rather a gain and accomplishment for the Hmong people as a whole.
- III. **Intellectuals.** Hmong people are respectful of their graduates. This is in respect to the historical literacy challenges that has been an integral part of their existence as secondary citizens which was a common theme in their native homeland. A high value is placed onto higher education and its achievements with all the liberations attached. Name recognition is commonly used to show gratitude towards individuals that have attained a distinct college degree. The advantage of a graduated college student allows the individual to be of assistance to the community at large. They are perceived and valued as someone with career specialty, valuably in part due to overcoming many social and cultural impacts, worthy of their personal and professional integrity and of credible source. Overall, this type of recognition enables the graduates to gain a sense of personal empowerment for themselves, their families, and a representation to all of the Hmong people as a collective enclave. This sense of fulfillment is an overriding factor that contributes to the personal drive that one has to incorporate in being successful in seeking out educational achievements.
- IV. **Educational Promotions.** Hmong media, specifically radio and TV personalities, will dedicate airtime to maintain dialogue about the core values of obtaining a college education. This may be one of the factors to why the so-called "Hmong Vang Pao"⁶ is currently considered "more educated; more generous; more intelligent; and, gained more respect" internationally than the Hmong who reside outside the US. Due to this prestigious notion and high regard, it is not rare that when major events are held by the Hmong in the US, many will continue to promote similar themes to inspire others to gain a college education. It is also evident that educational materials are promoted, which are allocated by community-based event organizers to gather the Hmong community together for this purpose.

In conclusion, there are many valid praises about the commencements that were made by Hmong community activists, mentors, parents, and educators. The Hmong's contemporary visions about valuing education have captured great strides by a good fraction of the Hmong population in the US and elsewhere around the world in regard to college attainment. As explained by Leat (2005), cultural influences can clearly play an important part in social change. Leat added that in order for change to occur, it must include economic, political and cultural factors. If the Hmong people are to make additional progress in their living standard in the United States, this is exactly what needed to happen next. There are two other major social issues that the Hmong continue to face in today's society. First, the Hmong still fare poorly on K-12 education. In comparison to other Asian sub-groups, mainly Chinese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and East Indian as the Hmong is likely to rank last. Second, the

⁶ "Hmong Vang Pao" is a common concept used to describe the Lao-Hmong under the leadership of General Vang Pao, Touby Lyfoung and the CIA. They were also the cohort whom fled Laos when the communist dominated Laos in May 1975, leading to their resettlement in the West and Europe.

Hmong continue to be impacted by a higher poverty rate, despite of the aforementioned information about higher education obtainment in this article. The American Community Survey (2013) computed a 24.4% poverty rate for Hmong families compared to 11.6% for the average US family, and 25.6% vs. 15.8% for all backgrounds in the US (Pfeifer, 2014). This essentially indicates that 1 out of 4 Hmong continue to remain poor, which coincides with the lack of college attainment. So for the Hmong in the US to flourish, particularly carrying the visionary goals from the previous leadership, we all must collectively address how the Hmong would be able to catch up and par themselves with other Asian sub-groups and aim towards reducing the poverty rates.

References

- Cha, Y. P. (2010). *An introduction to Hmong culture*. McFarland & Company.
- Chan, S. (1994). *Hmong means free: Life in Laos and America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Hamilton-Merritt, J. (1993). *Tragic mountains: The Hmong, the Americans and the secret wars*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hillmer, P. (2010). *A people's history of the Hmong*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Kao, R., & Thompson, J. S. (2003). Racial and ethnic stratification in educational achievement and attainment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 417-442.
- Leat, D. (2005). *Theories of social change*. http://www.peecworks.org/peec/peec_inst/017962C6-001D0211.0/Leat%202005%20Theories_of_change.pdf
- Lee, S. & Chang, J. (2012). Mental Health Status of the Hmong Americans in 2011: Three Decades Revisited. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation*, 11:55-70.
- Lo, D. & Lor, G. (2013). Higher education attainment disparity between Hmong female and male students at Sacramento State in the past 17 years. California State University, Sacramento. Unpublished Project.
- Lo, F. T. (2001). *The promised land: Socioeconomic reality of the Hmong people in urban America (1976-2000)*. Lima, Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press.
- Lyfoung, T. (1996). *Touby Lyfoung: An authentic account of the life of a Hmong man in troubled land of Laos*. Dr. Touxa Lyfoung.
- Mottin, J. (1980). *The History of the Hmong*. Bangkok: Odeon Store.
- Oguwole, S. W., Drewery, M. P., & Rios-Vargas, M. (May 2012). The population with bachelor's or higher by race and hispanic origin: 2006-2010. United States Census Bureau.
- Quincy, K. (1995). *Hmong: History of a people*. Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press.
- Stuart, M. (1997). *A history of Laos*. Cambridge, New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Szonyi, M. (2002). *Practicing kinship : lineage and descent in late imperial China*. Stanford University Press.
- (2013). *The state of the Hmong American community*. Hmong National Development, Washington, D.C.
- Xiong, S. & Lee, S. E. (2011). Hmong students in higher education and academic support programs. *Hmong Studies Journal*, 12(1). 1-20
- Yang, D. (1993). *Hmong at the turning point*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Worldbridge Associates.
- Yang, D., & Blake, J. L. (1993). *Hmong at the turning point*. Minneapolis : WorldBridge Associates.