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FAMILY MINISTRY PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN
HMONG CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE
CHURCHES: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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May 2016

APPROVAL SHEET

FAMILY MINISTRY PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN HMONG CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE CHURCHES: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

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All praise and glory be to God in Christ,
the Author and Perfecter of His everlasting kingdom,
the Savior and Redeemer of all nations and peoples,
and the Sovereign LORD over all creation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AM	Alliance Men
AW	Alliance Women
AYF	Alliance Youth Fellowship
C&MA	Christian and Missionary Alliance
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIM	China Inland Mission
CS1	Case Study 1
CS2	Case Study 2
CS3	Case Study 3
GCW	Great Commission Women
HND	Hmong National Development, Inc.
LEC	Lao Evangelical Church
OMF	Overseas Missionary Fellowship
RPA	Romanized Popular Alphabet
VBS	Vacation Bible School
WMPF	Women's Missionary Prayer Fellowship

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PREFACE

My interest in this research topic stems from God's great story of redemption, the faith story of all ethnic peoples, and the contemporary challenges which churches face in regards to the Gospel, ethnic culture, and Christian life and ministry.

I give praise to God for His great mercy and grace upon the Hmong people; that He has proclaimed His Gospel of salvation to the Hmong, and He has invited and called the Hmong to sit at His communion table, to be adopted as His royal sons and daughters, to be part of His redemptive mission in the world, and to inherit His eternal kingdom.

I am grateful to Dr. Timothy Jones, Dr. Shane W. Parker, Dr. M. David Sills, Dr. Jerry Soung, Dr. Lantzia Thao, the Hmong District of the C&MA, and the Hmong churches who have assisted me with this research project. May this research serve as a catalyst for on-going discussion about contextualized family ministry within our diverse *ethne*-cultural families and churches so that we can disciple the next generations to know, love, worship, serve, and share the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Through His Word, His creation, and His people, the LORD has progressively declared to all nations and to every generation that He is the one and only true God (Jer 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thess 1:9). The LORD is the living God (Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; Ps 42:2). He is the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1-25; Isa 40:28), and the Maker of peoples, tribes, languages, and nations (Gen 1:26-28, 5:1-2; 10:5, 20, 32; 11:5-9; Isa 42:5) in His image and in His likeness (Gen 1:27; 9:6). He is the holy (Lev 11:45; 20:7), just (Deut 32:4), and righteous LORD who sanctifies His people (Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8). He is the faithful and compassionate Savior of all humanity (1 Tim 4:10): who sees (Gen 16:13); who hears the cries of the righteous (Ps 34:17; Prov 15:29); who draws near to those who call upon His name (Pss 34:18; 145:18); who delivers (2 Sam 22:2; Ps 18:2), provides (Gen 22:14), and dwells among His people (Gen 3:8; Exod 25:8; 2 Chr 15; Rev 21:3); and who judges the righteous and the unrighteous (Eccl 3:17; Rev 20:11-13).

Besides Him, there is no other god (Isa 45:5-6; 45:21-22; Joel 2:27). Therefore, the LORD will not share His glory with another: “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images” (Isa 42:8). For the LORD is the everlasting King (Jer 10:10). Only His kingdom will never be destroyed and only His dominion will remain forever throughout all generations (Ps 145:13; Dan 2:44; 6:26).

Thus since the fall of humanity (Gen 3; 6; 11; Rom 3:23), God has been on mission in the world. His mission has been to redeem, to liberate, to deliver, and to save

creation, all peoples, and all generations from the power of Satan, evil, sin, suffering, and death to new life in Jesus Christ, freedom and power through the Holy Spirit, and reconciliation and communion again with one another and with God. All peoples of the earth, every generation, are to know His name (Exod 3:15; Ps 102:12) and to fear Him (2 Chr 6:33). All nations, tongues, and generations are to see His glory (Isa 66:18) and know of His salvation (Ps 67:2; Isa 49:6; 52:10; John 3:17). So that all tribes, nations, and people of every language and every generation might seek Him (Acts 17:26-27), worship Him, serve Him (Ps 78:5-7; Dan 7:14), and dwell eternally with Him (Rev 7:9).

God's Redemptive Mission in the World

In the Old Testament Scriptures, God revealed His global, multiethnic, multilingual, and multigenerational redemptive mission through the people of Israel. By His grace, God chose Abram and called him out from his country, his people, his kin, and his gods (Josh 24:2) to worship and follow the one true God, the LORD God Almighty, stating, “I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you....and all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3). The LORD made an everlasting covenant with Abram and his descendants and gave Abram the covenant sign of circumcision, the covenant name “Abraham”, and the covenant identity, “father of many nations” (Gen 17:5-8).

Through the lives, trials, and tribulations of the patriarchs and the people of Israel – their sojourn, enslavement, exodus, conquest, judges, kings, prophets, exile, and return, God was forming, delivering, sanctifying, and refining a covenant people for Himself (Isa 43:1). A covenant people who did not worship false gods or idols but worshiped the living God (Exod 20:3). A covenant people who called upon and exalted the name of God (Exod 20:7). Who walked in loving relationship with God (Gen 17:1; Lev 26:3; Deut 5:33; 8:6). Who lived under the sovereign reign of God. Who obeyed the righteous instructions, commands, rules, and laws of God. Whose faith, values, morals,

ethics, rituals, customs, and patterns of living (culture) were centered upon God and reflected the holy character and image of God (Exod 20:8-17; Lev 11:44-45; 20:26). A covenant people amongst whom God would dwell in all of His glory, majesty, fullness, and splendor (Exod 29:45; 40:34-35; Lev 26:11).

Israel was to be a people set apart by God to be His special possession, His kingdom of priests, and His holy nation (Exod 19:5-6) so that Israel would be a revelation and a light of God's salvation to all the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6). God, in His mercy, did not intend to restrict His salvation and covenant kingdom to only those of Israelite descent. Instead, God intended for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles, from every language, tribe, nation, and generation to also inherit the everlasting covenant of God and to become part of God's eternal kingdom (Matt 28:18-20; Rev 14:6) through faith in Jesus Christ.

In the person of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to the people of Israel and to the world. For Jesus is the offspring of Adam, the seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and the line of King David (Matt 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-34; Gal 3:8, 14, 16). Jesus is the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16; Luke 3:38). He is the Word of God made flesh who dwelt amongst humanity (John 1:14). He is the perfect human image of the invisible God, without sin or blemish (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). He is the true light who enlightens all humanity (John 1:9). He is the promised Savior of the world (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14).

He was despised, oppressed, afflicted, and slaughtered like a sacrificial lamb (Isa 53:1-4). He rendered himself as a guilt offering, bearing the sins of all (Isa 53:6, 10). By his wounds, we are healed (Isa 53:5). In him is life (John 1:4). For Jesus is the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15), the appointed heir over all things (Heb 1:2), and the righteous king and ruler of God's everlasting kingdom (Dan 7:14, 27; Rev 17:14).

Through faith in Christ, all who repent, confess, believe (Rom 10:9), and

crucify the sins of the flesh and its worldly desires (Gal 5:24) are born again in the Lord Jesus Christ through baptism by water and baptism of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3). They become adopted children of God (John 1:12), and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). And through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, all believers are being made new into the likeness and image of Christ (Rom 8:29) and united together (Gal 3:28) into the body of Christ (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12), the Church (Matt 16:18): a royal priesthood and a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9) of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev 7:9) who are following Christ, becoming like Christ, obeying Christ, and proclaiming Christ for the sake of the world and for the sake of the successive generations.

The Growth of God's Kingdom

Through the progressive revelation of God in human history, God has chosen, called, redeemed, sanctified, and included believers from numerous nations and people groups into His kingdom in Christ. In *Thirsty for God*, Holt divides the growth of the Christian Church into four major stages with four distinct contextualized expressions of the Christian faith:¹ (1) Jewish Christianity, centered in Jerusalem; (2) European Christianity, centered in Rome and Constantinople; (3) Western Christianity, centered in Britain and North America; and (4) global Christianity, centered in Timbuktu, Mali, West Africa.² See table 1. Growth of the Christian church.

From the first to third centuries (AD 30-200), the Christian church expanded globally from a Middle Eastern Jewish center to include Gentile believers in Asia, Africa, and Europe: stage one, Jewish Christianity. Tennent explains that “Christianity began as a Jewish movement fulfilling Jewish hopes, promises, and expectations” and was lived

¹Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 14-16.

²Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 4-8. Tennent explores the four major shifts in the center of the Christian church. His shifts parallel the four stages described by Holt, *Thirsty for God*.

Table 1. Growth of the Christian church

Stage of Church Growth	Century (AD)	Dominant Cultural Expression of Christian Faith	Primary Center of Christian Church	Primary Languages of the Church
Stage 1	30-200	Jewish Christianity	Jerusalem	Hebrew Aramaic
Stage 2	300-1400	European Christianity	Rome and Constantinople	Koine Greek Latin
Stage 3	1500-1950	Western Christianity	Britain, North America	English
Stage 4	1960 – Present	Global Christianity	Timbuktu, Mali, West Africa	Multilingual

out according to its Jewish roots (e.g., circumcision, submission to Torah, dietary restrictions, Sabbath rest, Jewish holy days, meeting in the temple courts and synagogues, etc.).³ Yet through persecution and scattering of the Jewish church from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4), through the divine revelation of the Holy Spirit regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Acts 10), through the contextualizing wisdom of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and through Gentile missionary church planting (Acts 13-21), the Christian Church became less Jewish and more and more Gentile.

From the fourth to fifteenth centuries (AD 300-1400), the expanding rule of the Roman Empire and Byzantine Empire centralized the Christian Church in Europe: stage two, European Christianity. Under Roman emperors Constantine (AD 313) and Theodosius I (AD 379-395), Christianity transitioned from being a persecuted Jewish sect to becoming the officially recognized, imperial religion, and imperial church of the entire Roman Empire.⁴ As the imperial church, the Christian church dramatically increased in size, in opulence, in buildings (cathedrals), in hierarchy, and in formalized

³Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 3-4.

⁴Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 239.

institutionalism.⁵ Tennent notes that by the end of the fourth century, “Greek-speaking peoples with a Hellenistic culture and a pagan background were now the best example of *representative* Christianity.”⁶

By the end of the tenth century, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire to Germanic tribes, Christianity continued to expand in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire through the Eastern Byzantine Empire and again in central Europe by the formation of the Holy Roman Empire (AD 800-1806). Moreau, Corwin, and McGee state that “by the year 1500 the entire region from Europe to Russia had been Christianized.”⁷ The Christian Church had become greatly diversified, being comprised of Germanic tribes, Scots, Irish, Visigoths (Spain), Ostrogoths (Italy), Franks (Northern Gaul), Burgundians (Southern Gaul), Vandals (North Africa), Angles and Saxons (Britain), and Russians.⁸ Unfortunately, however, Christianity declined in China, much of Asia, India, the Middle East, and North Africa due to isolation, unstable political conditions, and Mongol and Muslim conquest.⁹

From the sixteenth to mid-twentieth centuries (AD 1500-1950), during the modern era of Protestant Reformation, Western Enlightenment, evolutionary science, and Western colonialization, Christianity was expanded to the Americas, Australia, and South Africa through European emigration: stage three, Western Christianity.¹⁰ Spiritual revival, e.g., the Great Awakenings, and renewed missionary fervor launched both

⁵Ferguson, *Church History*, 241.

⁶Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 4.

⁷Scott A. Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 100.

⁸Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 5.

⁹Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 113.

¹⁰Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 16.

Catholic and Protestant missionary movements from Europe and North America.¹¹ The first two great eras of the modern missions movement was dominated by Western agencies: (a) European denominational agencies (1792-1910), e.g., William Carey's Baptist Mission Society, Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission; and (b) North American faith mission agencies (1865-1980), e.g., Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions,¹² American Baptist Missions Society – Adoniram Judson (1814),¹³ the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1887),¹⁴ etc.

Finally, from the mid-twentieth century to the present, the post-colonial, postmodern Christian Church increased and continues to increase dramatically in the global South – Africa, Asia, and Latin America: stage four, global Christianity. Philip Jenkins, professor of religious history, describes the present growth of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as a Christian revolution and the rise of a new global Christianity: the “next Christendom.”¹⁵ Samuel Escobar refers to this central shift in Christianity from the West to the global South as the coming of the “Third Church.”¹⁶

In Africa, from 1960-2000, African Evangelicals increased in greatest numbers in eastern, central, and southern Africa (i.e., Uganda, Kenya, Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria) after “European colonial powers relinquished their empires and Evangelical

¹¹Ralph D. Winter, “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 259.

¹²Winter, “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions,” 259.

¹³American Baptist International Ministries, “About: Our History,” accessed December 5, 2015, <https://www.internationalministries.org/read/38822-our-history>.

¹⁴Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, and Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), 74.

¹⁵Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-20.

¹⁶Samuel Escobar, *New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15.

Christianity became indigenous.”¹⁷ In Asia, increasing number of Christians grew in China (persecuted church), South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines.¹⁸ And in Latin America, Pentecostal movements increased Christians in Brazil and Argentina.¹⁹ Winter ascribes the third era of the modern missions movement (1934- present) as being dominated by specialized mission agencies from these global, non-Western churches.²⁰

Research Concern: The Hmong Church

The Hmong are an indigenous people group in southern China and Southeast Asia who were first introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ during the third stage (AD 1500-1950) of the Christian Church expansion: the historical period of Western Christianity, Western colonialization, and the Western modern missionary movement. In China, this was a period of dynastic rule and political change, as political power changed from the imperial rule of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), to the Qing (Ch'ing) Dynasty (1644-1912), to a central Republic government (1912-1949), Japanese occupation in WWII (1937-45), and the communist formation of the People's Republic of China and subsequent cultural revolution (1949-present).²¹

Western missionaries to China began in the seventh century with the Nestorians, then the Roman Catholic Church in the thirteenth century, followed by Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century. However, Christianity was perceived by the Chinese government as a foreign religion, and a channel for Western imperialist

¹⁷Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church: History, Trends, and Possibilities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 146.

¹⁸Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, 148.

¹⁹Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church*, 152.

²⁰Winter, “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions,” 259.

²¹Michael Tsin, “Asia for Educators: Timeline of Chinese History and Dynasties,” Columbia University, accessed December 19, 2015, http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/timelines/china_timeline.htm#Chinese%20History.

invasion.²² Thus Christian missionaries were banned and expelled from China in AD 845 under the Tang Dynasty, in 1717 under emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, and in 1949 under the People's Republic of China.²³

In Southeast Asia, this period of Western colonialism and Western missionary movement was also marked with political turmoil between the colonial powers and nationalist uprisings. In 1858 France had invaded Vietnam and in 1883 divided the country into three parts: Tonkin (north); Annam (center); and Cochinchina (southern colony).²⁴ In 1863, Cambodia was placed under French colonial rule.²⁵ And in 1893, the country of Laos was also colonized by the French. Together Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were known as French Indochina. Burma (Myanmar) had also come under British colonial rule from 1885 to 1948. From 1941 to 1945, during World War II, the Japanese invaded and occupied much of Southeast Asia. After the Japanese invasion, France reconquered and re-exerted her colonial rule over Indochina until 1954.²⁶ The establishment of North Vietnam and South Vietnam by the Geneva Accords in 1954 would propel Southeast Asia and its allies into the Vietnam War (1955-1975), leading to the Communist takeover of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The Hmong People

According to Hmong oral legends²⁷ and recent Hmong genetic studies, the

²²Ying Fuk-tsang, "Mainland China," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 150-51.

²³Fuk-tsang, "Mainland China," 151.

²⁴Peter C. Phan, "Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 131.

²⁵Phan, "Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand," 141.

²⁶Phan, "Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand," 131.

²⁷Tswb Tchoj is a heroic legendary figure thought to be a Hmong emperor (vaj huabtais) of China who was tricked out of his rightful inheritance by the Chinese. Nicholas Tapp, "Hmong Religion," *Asian Folklore Studies* 48, no. 1 (1989): 61. Father Savina, a French missionary to the Hmong in Laos and

Hmong are thought to be possible descendants of the San-Miao tribe in the Yellow River basin of present day Hunan province.²⁸ In southern China, the Hmong were classified as being part of the “Miao” minority group.²⁹ The Miao are composed of three major language divisions (Xiangnam or Xiang Xi, Qian dong, Chuan-Qian-Dian)³⁰ and four distinct ethnicities – the Hmong, the Qho Xiong, the Hmu, and the A Hmao.³¹ The Hmong language consists of two major dialects: Blue Hmong (*Hmoob leeg*) and White Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb*).

The word “Miao” literally means “weeds” or “seedlings” and was used as a minority classification for the historically, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations scattered over the southwest provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, China.³² The Miao were pastoralists and slash-and-burn farmers who lived in mountainous villages as tenants of Chinese landowners: the Han, Hui, and Yi.³³ Since the Miao were an oral culture people prior to the missionary development of the Pollard script in the 1940s, the Miao were considered by the Chinese to be inferior, rootless,

North Vietnam in 1924, proposed that the Hmong may have originated from the Turanians in ancient Chaldea and then migrated to Siberia and further down into China. Quincy refutes this theory but does not discount it due to the large number of Hmong oral stories pertaining to a Siberian experience and the Hmong practice of shamanism – first practiced in Siberia. See Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of a People* (Cheney, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 1988), 12-25.

²⁸Bo Wen et al., “Genetic Structure of Hmong-Mien Speaking Populations in East Asia as Revealed by mtDNA Lineages,” *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 22, no. 3 (2004): 725-34, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://mbe.oxfordjournals.org/>. Researchers found that southern lineages account for the majority of Hmong-Mien (H-M) mtDNA gene pool, consistent with southern origins of the H-M populations (733).

²⁹Norma Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao: Writing and Power,” in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 139. Naolue Kue, *A Hmong Church History* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2000), 2. Kue translates “Miao” as “sprouts,” “seedlings,” or “sprouted grain.”

³⁰Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 139.

³¹Gary Yia Lee and Nicholas Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 4.

³²Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 139, 144.

³³Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 141.

illiterate, and uncultured peasant barbarians.³⁴ Around 1810-1820, some of the Hmong left Southern China and migrated to Southeast Asia to escape Chinese rule and Chinese assimilation.³⁵ This was the first dispersion of the Hmong.³⁶

In Southeast Asia (Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar), the Hmong minority group was referred to as the “Meo,” a name derived from the Chinese “Miao.”³⁷ The Hmong became agrarian, slash-and-burn farmers and hunter-gatherers who lived in small, remote villages in the highland mountainous areas. Hmong social structure and relationship was based upon a hierarchical, patrilineal, clan, kinship system. And the Hmong practiced a holistic, ritualistic, and supernaturalistic belief in ancestral worship, animism, shamanism, and reincarnation. An overview of Hmong religious beliefs and practices will be further explored in chapter 2.

Although the Hmong have been classified according to different names in different locations, “Hmong” (Hmoob) is the preferred term used by the Hmong to refer to themselves. Thus the term “Hmong” will be used hereafter.

The Birth of the Hmong Church

Early missionary work among the Hmong people in China and Southeast Asia began in the seventh century. First with the influx of Catholic missionaries. And then with Protestant missionaries. However, it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the Hmong began to respond in faith.

China. Missionary work in China began with the Syrian Nestorian

³⁴Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 143-44.

³⁵Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, xxii.

³⁶Jean Michaud, “From Southwest China into Upper Indochina: An Overview of Hmong (Miao) Migrations,” *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 38, no. 2 (August 1997): 119.

³⁷Jean Michaud, *Incidental Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880-1930* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 34. Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, states that the name “Meo” had negative connotations to the mewling of a cat (2).

missionaries (AD 614-905),³⁸ the Catholic Jesuit missionaries (1543-1607), and then the Protestant missionaries (1807-1959).³⁹ China Inland Mission (CIM), started by Hudson Taylor, was the first missionary agency to introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Hmong. In 1881, Howard Taylor and Samuel Clarke witnessed the first Hmong Christian conversion: P'an Sheo-Shan, in Kweiyang, Guizhou province.⁴⁰ Other Catholic missionaries serving the Hmong in eastern Yunnan also included Father Paul Vial, Father Andre Kircher, and Father Aloys Schotter.⁴¹

In 1904, Samuel Pollard began his missionary ministry with the Hmong (Hua Miao) in Zhaotong City, northeastern Yunnan and then Shimenkan (Stone Gateway), Guizhou. Pollard saw the Hmong as a marginalized, despised, and persecuted people: oppressed by the Chinese landlords, economically enslaved into opium farming, and yearning for liberation.⁴² Pollard lived among the Hmong and shared in their hardships. He developed a phonetic Romanized writing system for the Hmong (Pollard script), and with the assistance of Hmong associates, translated all four Gospels using the Pollard script. Pollard also mentored William Hudspeth and Harry Parsons, who would continue ministry to the Hmong after Pollard's death from typhoid fever in 1915.⁴³

Coming from a Bible Christian Methodist sect, Pollard valued egalitarian lay leadership. He equipped men and women to preach and teach, and developed a small chapel model of daily study and worship. Pollard also trained indigenous Christian

³⁸Paul Pierson, "A History of Transformation," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 263. Derived from the Benedictine monks, the Nestorians flourished from the fifth through thirteenth centuries and moved across Central Asia into India and China.

³⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 16.

⁴⁰Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 19.

⁴¹Michaud, *Incidental Ethnographers*, 238, 247.

⁴²Diamond, "Christianity and the Hua Miao," 143.

⁴³Diamond, "Christianity and the Hua Miao," 148.

leaders to evangelize their own people and to develop their own village chapels, which also served as daytime schools for children and evening schools for adults. This pattern of daily Christian study and worship spread quickly among the Hmong villages.

Diamond notes that “the Tribal Movement, as it came to be called, was seen as a great breakthrough in the spreading of the gospel in China.”⁴⁴

This movement, however, was quickly dissipated by the newly formed People’s Republic of China in 1949. By 1950, most Hmong village chapels and schools were closed down by the government. Christian Hmong pastors and teachers were either imprisoned or dismissed from their posts, and the indigenous Pollard script was banned from being used in teaching and in any official form of communication. It was not until the 1980 government reforms that Hmong intellectuals were granted permission to create a new Romanized script and reopen Hmong schools using Mandarin Chinese as the primary language.⁴⁵

Thailand. In Thailand (Siam), Catholic priests, i.e., Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit (1567-1662), German and English Protestant missionaries (1828), American Baptist missionaries (1833), and American Presbyterian missionaries (1828) shared the gospel with the Thai and translated the Bible into the Siamese, Lao, and Cambodian languages.⁴⁶ Well known missionaries to Thailand included: Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix; Bishop Jean-Louis Vey; Jacob Tomlin; Karl Gutzlaff; Dan Beach Bradley; and Daniel McGilvary.⁴⁷ In 1932, Vietnamese missionary, C. K. Trung translated the Gospel of Mark in the Blue Hmong language using Thai characters. However, Smalley, Vang,

⁴⁴Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 147.

⁴⁵Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao,” 154.

⁴⁶Peter C. Phan, “Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand,” in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 143-44.

⁴⁷Phan, “Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand,” 144.

and Yang contend that this effort was “entirely abortive and never had any following among Hmong people.”⁴⁸

The Hmong in Thailand were not impacted by the gospel until 1952 when the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), formerly known as China Inland Mission, sent missionaries to the Hmong. In 1953, four Hmong families professed faith in Jesus Christ. In 1956, three of those were baptized: Chang Kou Thao, Tzu Xeng Thao, and Pou Xeng Soua Thao.⁴⁹ The Hmong church in Thailand was not formally established until 1978.⁵⁰

Laos. In Laos and Northern Vietnam (colonial French Indochina), Catholic Jesuit priests from the Paris Foreign Missions Society started arriving in 1642 (e.g., Jean de Leria [1642] and Father Francois Marie Savina [1901]).⁵¹ Father Savina was originally stationed in Hanoi, Vietnam. From 1903 to 1925, Savina lived with and studied various tribes in Northern Vietnam (Tonkin) and southern China, including the Hmong. In 1916, Father Savina developed a writing system for the Hmong using different Romanized alphabets and Vietnamese vowels and tone markers. He published a Miao (Hmong) dictionary using this writing system, but “it never caught on widely among Hmong people.”⁵² From 1918 to 1921, Savina was sent to Laos to assist the French government in de-escalating the Miao (Hmong) rebellion. In 1924, Savina published his sentinel book on Hmong history, *Histoires des Miao*.⁵³

Soon after the arrival of the Catholic priests, Presbyterian missionaries Daniel

⁴⁸William A. Smalley, Chia Koua Vang, and Gnia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Messianic Script* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 150-51.

⁴⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 38.

⁵⁰Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 43.

⁵¹Phan, “Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand,” 142.

⁵²Smalley, Vang, and Yang, *Mother of Writing*, 150.

⁵³Michaud, *Incidental Ethnographers*, 173-76.

McGilvary and Hugh Taylor (1880), the Swiss Brethren missionary Gabriel Contesse (1902), the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) Edward Roffe (1929), and Overseas Missionary Fellowship missionaries (1957) also followed.⁵⁴ In 1950, Ted and Ruth Adrianoff, serving with the C&MA, and Nai Kheng (a Khmu Bible student) led the first Hmong in Laos to Christ. His name was Boua Ya Thao, a powerful shaman in the Xieng Khouang province.⁵⁵ This conversion sparked the beginning of the Hmong people movement in Laos, where households and entire villages renounced their traditional Hmong religion and put their faith and trust in God.⁵⁶ Seven months after Boua Ya's conversion, Kue estimates that "approximately 2,500 persons had been converted to Christianity in the Xieng Khouang province."⁵⁷

Since the Hmong in Laos were also an oral society, with no written language, the C&MA appointed two linguists, William Smalley and Linwood Barney, to compose a writing system for the Hmong so that the Bible could be translated into the Hmong language. In collaboration with Father Yves Bertrais, a French Catholic missionary, the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (R.P.A) was developed.⁵⁸ In 1957, representatives of the Lao, Hmong, and Khmu churches met to formally organize themselves as the national Lao Evangelical Church (LEC).⁵⁹ And from 1957 to 1975, the LEC was led by five presidents, three of whom were Hmong pastors: Rev. Saly Kounthapanya, Rev. Xyu

⁵⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 55-58.

⁵⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 63.

⁵⁶Timothy T. Vang, *The History of a People Movement: The Hmong* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District of the C&MA, 2000), 4-5.

⁵⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 66. Also affirmed by Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 80-81.

⁵⁸Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 68.

⁵⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 72.

Xub Thoj, Rev. Moun Douangmala, Rev. Xeev Pov Thoj, and Rev. Nyiaj Lauj Xyooj.⁶⁰

The Dispersal of the Hmong Church

However, just when the LEC was being established in Laos, Laos and its people became entrenched in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). The Hmong under General Vang Pao, along with other ethnic minorities in Laos, were recruited by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to assist the United States against the Communist North Vietnamese. When the United States pulled out of Southeast Asia in 1975 and the Communist took control of Vietnam and Laos, the Hmong and all those who assisted the United States, became targets of military persecution and mass annihilation.⁶¹ Over 30,000 Hmong troops and 50,000 Hmong civilians had already been killed in the secret war in Laos. Soon over 200,000 Hmong refugees would be displaced from their villages and homes.⁶²

From 1975 to 1983, waves of Hmong fled in desperation from Laos to Thailand in search of refuge and asylum. Some were gunned down and killed by military soldiers. Some drowned in crossing the Mekong River to Thailand. Some hid and starved to death in the jungles of Laos. Some became gravely ill and took opium to end their lives in order to save the lives of their families.⁶³ Of those that miraculously survived this treacherous flight, over 100,000 of them were settled in five main Thai refugee camps along the border of Laos: Nong Khai, Ban Vinai, Nam Yao, Sop Tuang,

⁶⁰Paoze Thao, *Mong Christian History: 1950-2000* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2000), 120.

⁶¹For a detailed account of the Hmong involvement in Laos, consult the following sources: Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret War in Laos, 1942-1992* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Quincy, *Hmong*.

⁶²Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, xxvii.

⁶³Changvang Her, "The Trauma of Escape: A Hmong Refugee's Journey to the U.S.," The California Report (January 24, 2012), accessed January 30, 2016, <http://blogs.kqed.org/ourxperience/2012/01/24/the-trauma-of-escape-a-hmong-mans-journey-to-the-u-s/>.

and Ban Thong.⁶⁴ Ban Vinai was the largest Hmong refugee camp with over thirteen thousand people in 1976.⁶⁵

Amidst these Hmong refugees who had survived was a remnant of Hmong pastors and Hmong Christians, who immediately re-established themselves as churches in the refugee camps. In 1978, Nong Khai had four pastors and 883 Christians, Ban Vinai had nine pastors and 2,470 Christians, Nam Yao had two pastors and 712 Christians, Sop Tuang had about 700 Christians, and Ban Thong had about 81 Christians, but no pastors.⁶⁶ To lead the Hmong refugee churches, an Executive Committee of the Hmong Refugee Church was formed in Ban Vinai: Rev. Yong Seng Yang, President; Rev. Pang Ying Vang, Vice President; Rev. Nou Toua Vang, Secretary; and Rev. Chong Shoua Yang, treasurer.⁶⁷

The Hmong refugees and Hmong churches lived in the refugee camps from 1975 to 1992 until they were granted resettlement in other Western countries or until the refugee camp was closed down and they were moved to another refugee camp. In late 1978, the Nong Khai camp was closed down. Nam Yao was closed in 1984. Ban Vinai was officially closed in 1992, with those remaining in the refugee camp to be repatriated back to Laos.⁶⁸ However, some Hmong refugees did not want to be repatriated back to Laos and thus fled to Wat Thamkrabok, a Buddhist monastery, in the Phra Phutthabat district of Saraburi Province, Thailand.

In December of 2003, the U.S. State Department agreed to resettle 15,000 Hmong refugees living in Wat Thamkrabok. In 2007, the last wave of Hmong refugees

⁶⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 103-4.

⁶⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 104.

⁶⁶Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 104.

⁶⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 106.

⁶⁸Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 108.

were resettled in Minnesota, California, Wisconsin and other states. Then in December 2009, more than 4,000 Hmong refugees were repatriated from Thailand back to Laos.⁶⁹ This mass exodus of the Hmong from Laos not only scattered the Hmong people throughout the world, it also propagated a global, multi-denominational Hmong church. This was the second major global dispersion of the Hmong.⁷⁰

In France, Hmong communities and Hmong churches were established in Paris, Alencon, and Caen. In French Guiana, South America, a Hmong church was established in Cacao.⁷¹ Hmong churches were also established in West Germany, Argentina, Australia,⁷² and Kitchener-Ontario, Canada (Hmong Mennonite church).⁷³ In the United States, Hmong immigrant churches began to form in areas of the country where large Hmong refugee communities were being established.

The Hmong Immigrant Church USA

As new immigrants to the United States, the Hmong church, and the Hmong community as a whole, underwent and are still undergoing three distinct periods of acculturation. Yang defines these three periods as: the refugee period (1975-1991); the turning point - transition from refugees to citizens (1992-1999); and the current Hmong American period (2000-Present).⁷⁴

⁶⁹Txong Pao Lee and Mark E. Pfeifer, "Hmong 101 Presentation: Abridged Version" (2012), accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.hmongcc.org/uploads/4/5/8/7/4587788/hmong101presentation2012versionabridged.pdf>.

⁷⁰Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 4-14.

⁷¹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 102-27. Kue details the number of Hmong Christians in the main Thai refugee camps and discusses the exile of the Hmong Christians from the refugee camps to other Western countries in Europe, South America, and North America.

⁷²Hmong Christian Alliance Church of Australia, accessed August 29, 2015, <http://www.connectingup.org/organisation/hmong-christian-alliance-church-of-australia>.

⁷³Daphne Winland, "Revisiting a Case Study of Hmong Refugees and Ontario Mennonites," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 24, (January 2006): 169-76.

⁷⁴Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang, eds., *Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong*

Refugee period (1975-1991). Prior to the arrival of the first Hmong refugees in 1975, neither a Hmong community nor a Hmong church existed in the United States, except for a few Hmong students studying at higher education institutions.⁷⁵ From 1975 to 1980, more than 47,000 persons of ethnic minorities from Laos were resettled in the USA as political refugees through sponsorship by United States families, institutions, and churches. More than ninety percent of the Laotian refugees were Hmong.⁷⁶ Yang states that these foreign-born, Hmong speaking refugees were “educationally, vocationally, technologically, and linguistically unprepared refugees, trying to adapt to life in the United States.”⁷⁷

Among the first group of Hmong refugees was General Vang Pao and his family, the Hmong military leader in Laos who was granted political asylum in the United States in 1975.⁷⁸ Vang Pao was resettled in Montana before moving to southern California in 1977, where he founded the Lao Family Community: a local and later federally funded organization to provide vocational training, language training, job-search assistance, and social agency for Hmong refugees.⁷⁹

From 1976 to 1978 small groups of Christian Hmong refugees began to congregate together.⁸⁰ Then in 1978, Joshua Vang, a former secretary of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) asked the C&MA to organize the Hmong churches in the

Americans in the Twenty-First Century (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 5.

⁷⁵Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 45. From 1965-1969, there were 89 Hmong in the USA.

⁷⁶Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 45.

⁷⁷Kou Yang, “The American Experience of the Hmong: A Historical Review,” in *Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 5.

⁷⁸Kou Yang, “The American Experience of the Hmong,” 6.

⁷⁹Quincy, *Hmong*, 200.

⁸⁰Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 112.

United States.⁸¹ Twenty-four Hmong pastors and elders met in Lake Hughes, California. After prolonged discussion, Moua Chou led one group to organize themselves as the Lao Evangelical Church and the other group was organized as the Hmong Field Conference of the C&MA under the leadership of Pastor Xeng Xiong.

In 1978, there were about 1,525 Hmong Christians in the Hmong Field Conference. By 1979, the Hmong Field Conference included five organized churches (Dallas, Texas; St. Paul, Minnesota; Denver, Colorado; Santa Ana, California; Utah) and twenty-six unorganized groups.⁸² By 1981, the inclusive membership in the Hmong Field Conference had grown to 7,473 people.⁸³ Then in 1985, the Hmong Field Conference changed its name to the Hmong District of the C&MA.⁸⁴

By 1985, seventy-two Hmong communities had been established in the USA. The two most concentrated populations were in Fresno, California and the Twin Cities, Minnesota.⁸⁵ These growing Hmong communities were formed largely through primary resettlement and secondary migration by Hmong refugees in the hopes of reunification with family and clan relatives, better employment opportunities, greater tolerance and or acceptance by the host community, more-generous welfare benefits, better language and job training opportunities, and greater socio-cultural support from an already established Hmong community.⁸⁶ Culture shock, language and cultural barriers, and lack of education and vocational skills led many Hmong refugees to be dependent upon the

⁸¹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 112.

⁸²Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 113.

⁸³Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 114.

⁸⁴Hmong District, "About Us," accessed January 29, 2016, <http://hmongdistrict.org/about-us>.

⁸⁵Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 47.

⁸⁶Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 47.

public assistance or welfare system during their first fifteen years in America.⁸⁷

To buffer the culture shock of Hmong refugees, informal patriarchal clan systems were organized by the Hmong to provide social support for one another. In 1982, General Vang Pao organized the Hmong Council, Inc., to provide community-wide leadership for the eighteen Hmong clans in the United States.⁸⁸ Hmong mutual assistance associations were also created to assist with English language acquisition, vocational skills training, economic and educational advancement, and obtainment of U.S. citizenship, e.g., Lao Family Community, Inc. (1977), the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota (1979), the Hmong American Partnership (1990), and the Hmong National Development – HND (1992).⁸⁹

Turning point (1992-1999). In 1990, the U.S. Census counted 94,439 persons of Hmong origin. Nine percent of foreign-born Hmong had become naturalized U.S. citizens. Eleven percent of the population held a high school diploma, and 3 percent reported holding a Bachelor's degree. Thirteen percent of Hmong reported owning their homes. The Hmong median household income was just over \$14,000. And above 60 percent of Hmong were living below the poverty level, with 67 percent reported receiving public assistance income.⁹⁰

However by the end of 1991, Hmong refugees had made significant progress in higher education and politics, with the first Hmong refugees earning doctoral degrees in medicine (Long Thao), law (T. Christopher Thao), and chemistry (Thao Yang).⁹¹ The

⁸⁷Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 8.

⁸⁸Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 10.

⁸⁹Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 9-12.

⁹⁰Hmong National Development and Hmong Cultural and Resource Center, "Hmong 2000 Census Publication: Data & Analysis," accessed January 30, 2016, <http://hmongstudies.org/HmongCensusReport.pdf>, 4.

⁹¹Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 15-16.

first Hmong refugee (Choua Lee) being elected into public office on the Board of Education of St. Paul Public Schools, Minnesota.⁹² Increasing political participation, continued educational attainment, mixed generational leadership, and tertiary migration would mark the turning point for the Hmong in the United States as they transitioned from being political refugees to becoming American citizens.

In Wisconsin, Hmong refugees were elected to school district boards (La Crosse, Wausau), and into city councils (Wausau, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Appleton).⁹³ Tony Vang became the first associate professor of education at California State University.⁹⁴ The Hmong National Development (HND) hosted its first annual national conference in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1993, with over ninety national delegates in attendance.⁹⁵ Leadership in the Hmong community and within the Hmong churches became diversified across three generations: first generation (1.0), older, foreign born, Hmong monolingual, traditional leaders; first generation (1.5), foreign born, middle-aged, bilingual/bicultural leaders; and second generation (2.0), American born, younger, college-educated, English monolingual, Americanized leaders.⁹⁶

During this period, a third migration occurred as some Hmong families from central California relocated to Minnesota and to the southern states of North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee.⁹⁷ This tertiary migration to the Midwest crystallized the Twin Cities, Minnesota as the largest and principal epi-

⁹²Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 16.

⁹³Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 17.

⁹⁴Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 19.

⁹⁵Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 20.

⁹⁶Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 18.

⁹⁷Mark E. Pfeifer et al., "Hmong Population and Demographic Trends in the 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey," *Hmong Studies Journal* 13, no. 2 (2012): 6.

center of the Hmong community in the United States.⁹⁸

Hmong-American period (2000-present). By the year 2000, there were 186,310 persons of Hmong origin, representing a ninety-seven percent increase in the census from 1990. Fifty-six percent of U.S. Hmong were under the age of 18, and the median age was sixteen.⁹⁹ Thirty percent of foreign-born Hmong had become naturalized citizens. Educational attainment had increased, with Hmong graduating with a high school diploma (27.2 percent), Associate or Bachelor's degree (11.7 percent), or Master's Degree (1.5 percent). Home ownership had increased to 38.74 percent. The median Hmong household income increased to \$32,076. And Hmong persons across the U.S. living below the poverty level decreased to 38 percent, with only 30 percent receiving public assistance income.¹⁰⁰ The Hmong were steadily progressing in American society.

In politics, Lee Pao Xiong was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the President's Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for a two-year term in 2000.¹⁰¹ In 2002, in the state of Minnesota, Mee Moua became the first elected Hmong woman state senator, and Cy Thao became the first elected Hmong state representative.¹⁰² Nine other Hmong Americans would be elected into local public school and city council offices from 2000 to 2010.¹⁰³

In business, Hmong entrepreneurs began operating small businesses and professional practices: restaurants, poultry and egg farms, ginseng farms, strawberry

⁹⁸Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 22.

⁹⁹Pfeifer et al., "Hmong Population and Demographic Trends," 13.

¹⁰⁰Hmong National Development and Hmong Cultural and Resource Center, "Hmong 2000 Census Publication," 4.

¹⁰¹Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 24.

¹⁰²Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 27.

¹⁰³Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 32.

farms, flower farms, medical practices, chiropractic offices, dentistry practices, real estate agencies, life insurance agencies, financial services, and home health care agencies.¹⁰⁴ In terms of language, Hmonglish (speaking Hmong and English together) became a normal form of communication. Hmong rap, Hmong literary works, Hmong art, Hmong newspapers and magazines, academic Hmong journals, and Hmong cultural centers were also developed to showcase, preserve, and share about Hmong history, Hmong traditional culture and religion.¹⁰⁵

In higher education, there were twenty-one university professors of Hmong ancestry in 2010.¹⁰⁶ A number of Hmong studies programs were developed in major universities located in large Hmong populated areas: University of Wisconsin-Green Bay,¹⁰⁷ University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,¹⁰⁸ University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Minnesota,¹⁰⁹ Concordia University-St. Paul,¹¹⁰ and Fresno State University.¹¹¹

In church growth, the number of Hmong churches, Hmong Christians, and affiliated denominations also increased. In 1978, Moua Chou, formed the Lao Evangelical Church and Xeng Xiong was elected as the first superintendent of the

¹⁰⁴Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 28.

¹⁰⁵Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 44.

¹⁰⁶Kou Yang, "The American Experience of the Hmong," 40.

¹⁰⁷University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Hmong Studies Center, accessed January 30, 2016, http://www.uwgb.edu/hmongstudies/Hmong_Studies_Courses.htm.

¹⁰⁸University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Hmong Diaspora Studies, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://uwm.edu/hmong-diaspora-studies/>.

¹⁰⁹Hmong Studies Consortium, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://hmongstudies.wisc.edu/index.htm>.

¹¹⁰Concordia University- St. Paul, Hmong Studies Center, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://hmongcenter.csp.edu/what-we-do/>.

¹¹¹Fresno State University, Minor in Hmong Studies, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.fresnostate.edu/academics/hsari/academics/>.

Hmong Field Conference of the C&MA. Also in 1978, Chia Ky Vang and his family, became the first Christians in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) in Truman, Minnesota. After moving to Minneapolis, Chia Ky Vang joined with the Lutheran Hmong ministry to form the Hmong Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹¹² Cher Vang Kong, in 1983, left the Hmong Filed Conference of the C&MA to form the Hmong Assembly Church of God. In 1985 Xeng Xiong resigned from the Hmong Field Conference to form the Hmong National Southern Baptist Association.¹¹³ And in 1989, the Her clan left the Hmong LCMS Church to join the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Today, the majority of Hmong Christians in the United States are organized under the following parent denominations:¹¹⁴ the Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (114 churches, 36,187 inclusive members);¹¹⁵ the Hmong National Southern Baptist Association (54 churches);¹¹⁶ the Hmong Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (18 churches);¹¹⁷ Hmong American National Catholic Association (15 churches);¹¹⁸ the National Hmong Caucus of the United Methodist Church (13 churches);¹¹⁹ the Lao Evangelical Church (12 churches);¹²⁰ the Hmong National

¹¹²Sue Her Xiong, "History of Hmong Christian Mission," Hoffman Institute, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://suexiong1.efoliomn.com/Uploads/History%20of%20Hmong%20Christian%20Mission.pdf>, 8-9.

¹¹³Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 115.

¹¹⁴Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 87.

¹¹⁵Hmong District of the C&MA, *DS Report 2015* (Minneapolis: Hmong District), 4.

¹¹⁶Hmong Baptist National Association, "HBNA Member Churches," accessed August 28, 2015, <http://www.hbna.org/directory>.

¹¹⁷The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, "Locate a Church: Hmong," accessed August 28, 2015, http://locator.lcms.org/nchurches_frm/church.asp.

¹¹⁸Hmong American National Catholic Association, "Communities," accessed August 28, 2015, <http://www.hanca.us/>.

¹¹⁹The National Hmong Caucus of the United Methodist Church, "Church Directory," under "Home," accessed August 28, 2015, <http://nationalhmongcaucusumc.weebly.com/church-directory.html>.

¹²⁰Lao Evangelical Church, "Branch Location," accessed August 28, 2015,

Fellowship of the Assemblies of God (10 churches);¹²¹ the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (10 branches);¹²² the Hmong Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (6 churches);¹²³ and the Hmong Christian Reformed (4 churches).¹²⁴

In 2010, the United States Census Bureau counted 256,436 persons of Hmong origin, an increase of 70,126 people from 2000 to 2010. This increase made the Hmong the ninth largest Asian origin group in the United States. The median age of Hmong Americans was 20.4 years old, a very young population. Of the Hmong population 42.3% were under eighteen years old, 36.3% were 18 to 34 years old, 14.3% were 35 to 54 years old, and 7.2% were 55 years old and over. Over 60.2% of the Hmong were now born in the United States. Over 62.2% of the foreign-born had become naturalized U.S. citizens. And the median household income had increased to \$45,776 with 22.5% being high school graduates, 27.3% obtaining associate degrees, 11.1% bachelor's degrees, and 3.7% graduate degrees.¹²⁵

Together the Hmong resided in all fifty states: the Midwest (126,713), West (105,270), South (24,230), and Northeast (3,860) regions of the country. The largest Hmong populations were located in California (91,224), Minnesota (66,181), Wisconsin

<http://laoevangelicalchurch.com/brand-location/>.

¹²¹Assemblies of God, "Church Directory: Hmong," accessed August 28, 2015, http://ag.org/top/church_directory/index.cfm?QuickSearch=no.

¹²²The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, "Maps: Hmong," accessed August 28, 2015, <https://www.lds.org/maps/#ll=39.805802,-84.004236&z=13&m=google.road&tools=help&q=hmong>.

¹²³Evangelical Lutheran Church of American, "Worship Languages," accessed February 26, 2016, <http://search.elca.org/Pages/results.aspx?k=hmong#k=hmong#s=11>.

¹²⁴Christian Reformed Church, "Church Finder: Hmong," accessed August 28, 2015, [http://www.crcna.org/churches/find?circle_op=%3C&circle\[location\]=&title=Hmong&field_church_language_tid=All&barrier_free=All](http://www.crcna.org/churches/find?circle_op=%3C&circle[location]=&title=Hmong&field_church_language_tid=All&barrier_free=All).

¹²⁵U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, "S0201," accessed January 31, 2016, http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_14_1YR_S0201&prodType=table.

(36,809), North Carolina (10,864), and Michigan (5,925).¹²⁶ The top five metro areas with the largest Hmong populations were Minneapolis – St. Paul, Minnesota (64,422), Fresno, California (31,771), Sacramento, California (26,966), Milwaukee, Wisconsin (11,904), and Merced, California (7,254).¹²⁷

These advancements of the Hmong in politics, business, cultural preservation, higher education, church growth, and socio-economy speak to the perseverance, adaptability, and resiliency of the Hmong. As a people group, the Hmong have suffered much and endured great adversity and change. Yet the Hmong have continued to survive and thrive.

Despite war, oppression, persecution, and two great dispersals from their native homelands, the Hmong have become a global diaspora.¹²⁸ Lee and Tapp estimate that there are nearly five million Hmong worldwide: over 3 million in China, particularly in the southern provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Guangxi; 787,604 in Vietnam; 460,000 in Laos; between 200,000 - 300,000 in the United States; 124,000 in Thailand; 2,000 – 3,000 in Myanmar; 15,000 in France; 2,000 in Australia; 800 in Canada; 1,500 in French Guyana; 600 in Argentina; and 92 in Germany.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Mark E. Pfeifer, et al., “Hmong Population and Demographic Trends in the 2010 Census and 2010 American Community Survey,” accessed March 15, 2015, <http://hmongstudies.org/PfeiferSullivanKYangWYangHSJ13.2.pdf>, 4-5.

¹²⁷Hmong National Development, “2010 US Census Hmong Populations,” accessed August 27, 2015, www.hndinc.org/cmsAdmin/uploads/.../Research-Center-Data-Tables.pdf, 3.

¹²⁸Gary Yia Lee, “Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (2007), accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-8-2007.html>. Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, argue that the Hmong show all features of a diaspora: (1) dispersion from original homeland, often in traumatic circumstances; (2) a collective myth about the homeland and commitment to its maintenance; (3) development of liberation movements; (4) strong ethnic group consciousness; (5) ambivalent, sometimes troubled relationship with host society; (6) solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries; (7) possibility of enriching host society with tolerance for pluralism.

¹²⁹Lee and Nicholas Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 1. Lee and Tapp make these estimates based also upon the demographic work of Jacques Lemoine, “What Is the Actual Number of the (H)mong in the World,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 6 (2005):4, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-6-2005.html>. Lemoine estimates these numbers based

Contemporary Challenges

However, the Hmong community in the United States has not been and is not immune to acculturation challenges and societal problems. This paradigmatic shift from a pre-industrial, oral, agrarian, closely-knit, homogenous, patrilineal tribal clan community to a post-industrial, digital, multiethnic, urban, modern-postmodern, and democratic twenty-first century society has and continues to create many challenges for the Hmong community and the Hmong church in the United States.

Sociocultural challenges. Main areas of socio-cultural concern in the Hmong community continue to include (1) discrimination;¹³⁰ (2) poverty and educational and economic development;¹³¹ (3) access to medical and mental health care; (4) changing gender roles and gender inequality;¹³² (5) family conflicts and domestic violence;¹³³ (5) use of Hmong versus Western parenting practices;¹³⁴ (6) youth gangs;¹³⁵ (7) bridging the generational-cultural gaps;¹³⁶ (8) preservation and creation of a new Hmong-American

upon various censuses in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and China.

¹³⁰Kou Yang, "Hmong Americans: A Review of Felt Needs, Problems, and Community Development," *Hmong Studies Journal* 4 (2003):17, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-4-2003.html>.

¹³¹Yang Sao Xiong, "An Analysis of Poverty in Hmong American Communities," in *Diversity in Diaspora*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2013), 72: "Census data indicate that Hmong Americans continue to have some of the highest rates of poverty."

¹³²Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2010), 26: "There is gender inequality in the Hmong world."

¹³³Kou Yang, "Hmong Americans," 12.

¹³⁴Tamara L. Kaiser, "Caught between Cultures: Hmong Parents in America's Sibling Society," *Hmong Studies Journal* 5 (2004-05), accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-5-2004-05.html>.

¹³⁵Kou Yang, "Hmong Americans," 13-14.

¹³⁶Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 97-98. Nicholas Poss also discusses intergenerational cultural conflicts and resulting creative expression through music. Nicholas Poss, "Reharmonizing the Generations," in *Diversity in Diaspora*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2013), 234.

ethnic and civic identity;¹³⁷ (9) preservation of Hmong history, language, music, and creative arts;¹³⁸ and (10) accommodation, assimilation, and adaptation of Western American values, norms, and practices.

Religious challenges. In the area of faith and religion, the introduction of Christianity into the Hmong community has also created familial conflicts and clan divisions. Lee and Tapp observe that “the kinship-based clan or lineage is important in Hmong society at every level and there is a customary need to perform ancestral and shamanic rituals at times of life-crisis and at particular points in the annual calendar to affirm and maintain that identity.”¹³⁹ Through these religious rituals, particularly wedding and funeral rituals, familial and clan kinships are affirmed and reinforced.¹⁴⁰ Thus when a Hmong person converts to Christianity, he/she may be perceived as forsaking their ancestral spirits, their ethnic heritage, their kinship ties, and their own ethnic identity.

Lee and Tapp note that most Catholic missionaries have tended to take a culturally tolerant, “long-sighted view of Hmong culture and custom” and have encouraged Hmong converts to assimilate traditional death rituals and shamanic ceremonies into their Christian faith. On the other hand, some Protestant missionaries have taken a more rigid and culturally intolerant approach and have dismissed all Hmong practices as demonic and paganistic. Therefore, they have instructed Hmong converts to burn their household altars, refrain from ancestral worship and funeral rituals, refrain

¹³⁷Carolyn Wong, “Civic Values and Political Engagement in Two Hmong-American Communities,” in *Diversity in Diaspora*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2013), 108. “With an understanding that Hmong values of communal solidarity and longstanding aspirations for freedom can be a large group resource, some community leaders in Saint Paul have encouraged the Hong Americans to adapt these values to a modern identity embracing civic engagement and the goal of achieving equality and freedom in America.”

¹³⁸Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 67.

¹³⁹Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 42.

¹⁴⁰Nicholas Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 48, no. 1 (1989): 21-30.

from ritual feasts and animal offerings, and to cut off ties with their non-Christian relatives.¹⁴¹ This rigid approach has prevented some from converting to Christianity. In addition, this has caused some Hmong converts to revert back to their traditional religion.¹⁴²

Tapp asserts that shamanic rituals are aimed at healing and restoration and “should not be seen as forming a threat to other religions which Hmong may adopt, but be regarded as coterminous with them.”¹⁴³ These divergent perspectives and historical missionary approaches to Hmong culture and Christianity have created much confusion and conflict between Hmong traditionalists and Hmong Christians.

Contextualization challenges. As an immigrant church, the Hmong church in the twenty-first century is living on the margins between two human societies and two spiritual communities, each with its own distinct culture: (1) Hmong society and animistic culture; (2) Western society and Western culture; (3) denominational society and traditions; and (4) the global Christian community and a Christ-centered culture. See figure 1. Hmong Church on the margins. The Hmong church is the center black zone.

Living on the margins of multiple cultures can provoke many complex questions. Questions which in its infancy, the Hmong church was dependent upon the missionaries to help answer for them. Yet now in maturing, Hmong Christians and the Hmong church must answer biblically for themselves.

What does it mean to be a Hmong-follower of Christ or a Hmong people (church) of Christ? What aspects of traditional culture should a Hmong Christian/Hmong church continue to uphold and practice? What aspects of traditional culture are

¹⁴¹Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 41-42.

¹⁴²Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 43.

¹⁴³Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 80.

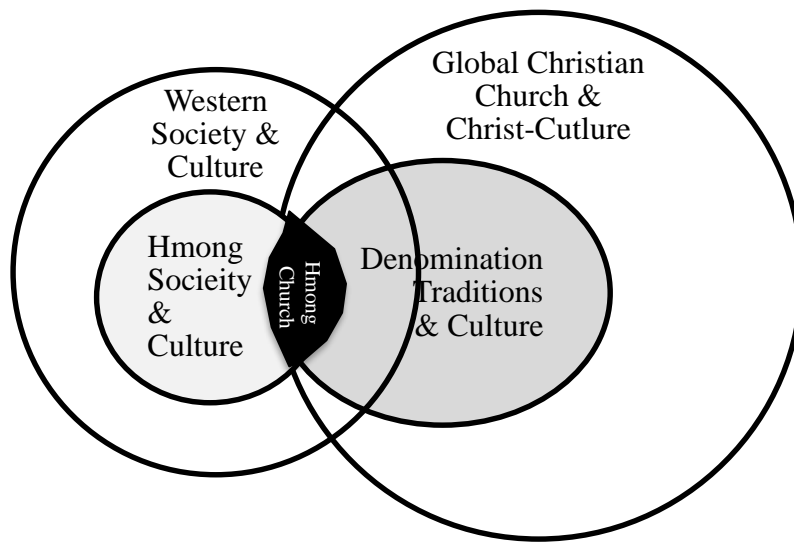


Figure 1. Hmong church on the margins

antagonistic to the teachings of Christ, and thus must be forsaken? Similarly, what aspects of Western culture and Western denominational traditions should a Hmong Christian or the Hmong church adopt? What aspects of Western culture are antagonistic to the teachings of Christ, and thus must not be adopted? How can a Hmong Christian/Hmong church image Christ in a biblical, Christ-centered, yet culturally appropriate manner in all aspects, in all relationships, and in all spheres of life? Lastly, how can the Hmong church contextually disciple people – young and old, men and women, so that every generation will grow in Christlikeness, moving from their worldview and culture of origin towards a biblical worldview and the culture of Christ and His Kingdom? These questions of critical contextualization¹⁴⁴ and full

¹⁴⁴Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 184-89. Hiebert discusses two approaches which missionaries have taken in the past towards culture and advocates for a third approach of critical contextualization. Approach 1: Denial of the old – uncritical rejection (non-contextualization). Wholesale rejection of old cultural ways as pagan – reflective of missionary ethnocentrism. Approach 2: Uncritical acceptance of the old – uncritical contextualization (syncretism). Accept traditional practices uncritically. Old cultural ways seen as basically good, places high value on cultural heritage, call for minimal change in the life of converts. Approach 3: Dealing with the old: critical contextualization. Old beliefs and customs are neither rejected

contextualization¹⁴⁵ of the Gospel are those which the contemporary Hmong church must grapple with and find biblical answers to so that the Hmong church can continue to thrive and be a relevant witness of Christ to its community.

Research Gap

For centuries, the Hmong have lived in obscurity. The Hmong were an oral people with an oral culture.¹⁴⁶ The primary mediums of Hmong oral literature included epic poems, proverbs (*txhiaj txhais*), poetry (*lus sib dhos*), traditional songs (*kwv txhiaj, lug txaj*), wedding chants (*zaj tshoob*), folktales (*dab neeg*), funeral chants or dirges (*qhuab ke, txiv xaiv, nkauj plig*), and instrumental music (*tshuab nplooj, tshuab ncas, tshuab qeej*).¹⁴⁷

Although the Hmong were briefly mentioned in Chinese historical records,¹⁴⁸ the Hmong began appearing in Western written literature in the nineteenth century with Western colonization. The first wave of Western written literature on the Hmong were composed by Western missionaries and Western anthropologists. Bridgman (1859), Lockhart (1863), Deka (1867), Edkins (1871), Crawford (1879), Broumton (1881), Father Aloys Schotter (1909, 1911), Samuel Clarke (1911), Samuel Pollard (1919), and

nor accepted without examination. Converts are to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understanding and make a decision regarding their use – keep, explicitly reject, borrow substitute Christian symbols or rites from another culture, add foreign rituals to affirm its spiritual heritage, or create new symbols and rituals to communicate Christian beliefs in forms that are indigenous to their culture.

¹⁴⁵A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012) 46. Moricau defines contextualization broadly as “the process whereby Christians adapt the whole of the Christian faith (forms, content, and praxis) in diverse culturally settings.”

¹⁴⁶Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 48-49. Various Hmong stories tell of a time when the Hmong were a literate people, possessing their own original writing. However, during the first exodus from China, the Hmong lost their original writing, e.g., horses ate the writing, writings were accidentally dropped in the great river flight, the Hmong swallowed up the writings to save them from being swept away in the river, the Hmong hid their writing in their embroideries.

¹⁴⁷Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 49.

¹⁴⁸Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, xxi.

Methodist missionary William Hudspeth (1922) published articles about the Hmong (Miao) in China.¹⁴⁹ French Catholic priest Francois-Marie Savina, *Historie des Miao* (1924) and French anthropologist Guy Morechand, “Le chamanisme des Hmong” (1968) wrote about the Hmong in Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁰

During and immediately after the Vietnam War exodus, a second wave of written literature on the Hmong were composed by Western missionaries, anthropologists, linguists, sociologists, and journalists. Sentinel works published during this period included William Robert Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains* (1976); Father Yves Bertrais or Txiv Plig Nyiaj Pov (transcriber), *Kabke Pam Tuag Cov Zaj*, a collection of Hmong funeral chants (1985); Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of a People* (1988); William A. Smalley, *Mother of Writing* (1990); and Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains* (1993). Dr. Yang Dao was the first Hmong scholar to publish a book on Hmong economic issues in Laos in 1975.¹⁵¹

After global dispersion, a third wave of research and written literature on the Hmong were composed by Western scholars and Hmong scholars themselves, primarily from Australia and the United States. These scholars include Nicholas Tapp and Gary Yia Lee (*Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 2010), Chia Youyee Yang (*Hmong America, Reconstructing Community in Diaspora*, 2010), Mark Edward Pfeifer (*Hmong-Related Works, 1996-2006*) and Kou Yang (*Diversity in Diaspora*, 2013), Mai Na M. Lee (*Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, 2015), and many others. Mark E. Pfeifer is also editor of the peer-reviewed *Hmong Studies Journal* located in St. Paul, MN.

Although much research progress has been made in the areas of Hmong history, culture, social structure, and religion, the Hmong Christian experience and the

¹⁴⁹Michaud, *Incidental Ethnographers*, 148-49, 203, 206.

¹⁵⁰Michaud, ‘*Incidental*’ *Ethnographers*, 203-10.

¹⁵¹Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 61.

history, development, current state, needs, and challenges of the Hmong church have been immensely underrepresented and unintentionally neglected in academic research. In his annotated bibliography on *Hmong-Related Works, 1996-2006*, Pfeifer lists an extensive index of all academic Hmong-related works: Hmong history, culture, language, traditional religion and Christianity, music and storytelling, cultural arts, war in Laos and refugee resettlement, cultural adaptation, race relations, law, political incorporation, literacy and educational adaptation, physical and mental health, personal narratives of Hmong Americans, juvenile literature and curriculum materials for teachers, fiction and poetry, videos and DVDs, and internet resources.¹⁵² Of the 612 works cited, only two deal directly with the impact of Christianity on the Hmong people: Donald F. Hones' article "The Word: Religion and Literacy in the Life of a Hmong American"; and Timothy T. Vang's dissertation "Coming Full Circle: Historical Analysis of the Hmong Church Growth, 1950-1998."¹⁵³

In *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, a 216-page international treatise on the Hmong, Lee and Tapp devoted only five pages to the impact of Christianity on the Hmong.¹⁵⁴ And in *Hmong America*, a 161-page scholarly portrait of the Hmong, Vang devoted only eleven pages to Hmong Christian churches.¹⁵⁵ Very few studies have been done on Hmong Christianity and or the Hmong church (history, formation, discipleship, evangelism, missions, denominations, theological and cultural issues, etc.).

In advancing Hmong American studies, Pfeifer advocates that "the continued and changing role of religion in Hmong American communities merits much greater attention from researchers." He continues that "research is needed as well that looks at

¹⁵²Mark Edward Pfeifer, *Hmong-Related Works, 1996-2006: An Annotated Bibliography* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2007).

¹⁵³Pfeifer, *Hmong-Related Works, 1996-2006*, 26-27.

¹⁵⁴Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 40-44.

¹⁵⁵Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 78-88.

the evolving role of religion in the lives of both Christian and non-Christian Hmong and the role religion plays in Hmong American identity.”¹⁵⁶ Through this study, I hope to add to the scarce body of knowledge about the Hmong church, particularly in the area of family ministry (Christian education of children) within the Hmong church context.¹⁵⁷

Research Concern

Very little is known and no research to date has been completed about the Christian religious education of children (family ministry) within the Hmong churches. Since following Christ, how have the Hmong churches impacted the next generation of Hmong children and grandchildren with the Gospel? What are Hmong churches doing to instruct children about the basic truths of the Christian faith? When are they instructing children? How are they instructing children? With what types of programs, events, curriculum, or resources are they instructing children? Who is instructing and training children? What are their primary goals in instructing and training children? How are Hmong churches equipping parents to teach and train their children to live out the Christian faith? How are these family ministry practices similar to or different from their traditional religious practices and or to Western church models of family ministry?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case, replication study was to explore the

¹⁵⁶Mark Edward Pfeifer, “Hmong American Studies: A Bibliographic Essay,” in *Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 278.

¹⁵⁷Family ministry is a modern Christian term, which was first used in 1867, to refer to the family’s missional ministry to the world. This term has been revitalized by the contemporary family ministry movement, that has occurred in the past two decades of Western American church history, and used to develop different models of discipleship for the family. Christian education, discipleship, Christian religious education, and or Christian formation of children are similar terms that have been utilized in the Christian community. The distinctive factor about the term family ministry is that it biblically calls parents to be the primary spiritual disciple-makers of their children. See Timothy Paul Jones and Randy Stinson, “Family Ministry Models,” in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, ed. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 178.

family ministry perceptions and practices in three Hmong Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) churches. From the existing literature on Hmong culture and religion, the study first explored the religious education of children within the traditional Hmong culture. From the existing literature on Hmong church history, the study explored the Christian education of children within the historical periods of the Hmong church. Then empirically, the study explored the contemporary family ministry perceptions and practices in three Hmong C&MA churches through a multiple-case replication design.

Delimitations of Proposed Research

Due to time limitations and accessibility, this research study was delimited to the study of family ministry within the Hmong churches of the Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) in the United States of America. Although there are Hmong churches in other countries and in other Christian denominations, the Hmong District of the C&MA (USA) “stands out as the most numerous, both in terms of membership totals and the number of congregations.”¹⁵⁸

In addition, since the existing literature on Hmong church history is predominantly related to the Hmong C&MA movement, this provided a sufficient foundation upon which this study could build upon.¹⁵⁹ This initial research study will form the basis for on-going future research in the area of family ministry in Hmong churches of other denominations and other countries.

Procedural Overview

For this exploratory research, a holistic, multiple-case, replication design was utilized.¹⁶⁰ After a stratified random sample was selected, appropriate access was

¹⁵⁸Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 88.

¹⁵⁹Chia Vang, *Hmong America*, 79.

¹⁶⁰Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), 60.

granted, and consent was received, the study occurred in four distinct phases. In Phase I, data from the first case study was gathered and analyzed, and an individual case report completed. In Phase II, data from the second case study was gathered and analyzed, and an individual case report completed. In Phase III, data from the third case study was gathered and analyzed, and an individual case report completed. Then in Phase IV, a cross-case analysis was completed and case findings triangulated in order to make the final cross-case conclusions, ministry implications, and multiple case report.¹⁶¹

Research Question

The primary question of this exploratory case study was this: “What are the family ministry perceptions and practices of Hmong churches in the Hmong District of the C&MA?”

Empirical Research Population

This study was delimited to Hmong churches in the United States, who belong to the Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA).

Research sample and sampling technique. A proportionate stratified random sample of three Hmong C&MA churches was selected from the research population using a three-step process. First the entire research population was listed and sorted numerically by church membership numbers. From this sorted list, the population was evenly proportioned and stratified into three groups (strata) based upon the church membership numbers: (strata 1) small church; (strata 2) midsize church; and (strata 3) large church. From each strata (group), one church was randomly selected to participate in the study, for a total of three churches.¹⁶² Using a proportionate stratified random

¹⁶¹Yin, *Case Study Research*, 184.

¹⁶²David Freedman et al., *Statistics*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 311. A simple random sample means drawing at random without replacement.

sample decreased sampling bias, increased the representativeness of the sample, and provided an inclusive, cross-sectional perspective on family ministry across Hmong C&MA churches of different sizes.

Delimitations of the sample. The sample was delimited to three Hmong C&MA churches, one church from each of these three stratified groups: (strata 1) small church; (strata 2) midsize church; and (strata 3) large church.

Data collection. A variety of case study data was collected and analyzed for each Hmong church: (1) church documents; (2) audio/visuals – i.e., websites and social media sites; (3) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants; (4) open-ended, focus group interviews with parents; (5) focus group interviews with children’s ministry teachers; and (6) on-site field observations. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed via a qualitative data analysis program (QDAP).

Definition of Terms

A single word can have multiple definitions. And in many instances, especially when describing complex ideas or phenomena, there is not always one agreed upon definition for a particular word or concept. Thus for the purposes of this research study, the following terms and definitions will apply.

Hmong. An ethnic people group indigenous to southern China and Southeast Asia, who were globally dispersed after the Vietnam War.

Christian and Missionary Alliance. An “alliance of Christians for worldwide missionary work” first established in 1897 by Albert Benjamin Simpson in the United States of America.¹⁶³

¹⁶³Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, and Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), 99.

District. A group of local churches constitutionally organized together to fulfill the mission of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Within the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), there are two types of districts: (1) geographical district – comprised of local churches within a particular geographic region of the United States; and (2) intercultural district – comprised of local churches in the United States who belong to a particular ethnic people group. Each district has its own superintendent, executive committee, and bylaws specific to its ministry context. Currently the C&MA has 22 geographic districts, 6 intercultural districts, and 11 ethnic associations.¹⁶⁴

Hmong District. An intercultural district of the C&MA comprised of all the Hmong C&MA churches in the United States of America. Currently the Hmong District is comprised of 144 Hmong churches located in twenty-six states.¹⁶⁵

Religion. All of the specific beliefs and assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality, origins, meaning, and destiny, and the myths, rituals, and patterns of behavior that symbolically express them.¹⁶⁶

Religious education. The process of socializing, teaching, enculturating, and perpetuating the specific beliefs, myths, and rituals of a particular group of people among its members and seekers.¹⁶⁷

Christian education. The process of Christian formation, transformation, and conformation of a person into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. In this study, the terms Christian religious education, Christian education, Christian formation, and

¹⁶⁴The Christian and Missionary Alliance, “Districts and Associations,” under “About Us: Family,” accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.cmalliance.org/district>.

¹⁶⁵The Hmong District, “Church Directory by State,” accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.hmongdistrict.org/church-directory-state#overlay-context=california>.

¹⁶⁶Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 372.

¹⁶⁷Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 389.

discipleship will be used synonymously.¹⁶⁸

Family ministry. The process of Christian formation, transformation, and conformation of children into the image of Christ within the context of the church family. Jones makes a clear distinction between family discipleship (parental discipleship of children within the home) and family ministry (mentoring discipleship of children within the church community).¹⁶⁹ These distinctions will be followed in this study in order to promote continuity with existing definitions.

Culture. Culture is a learned, adaptive, shared, and integrated system of worldview (beliefs and values), norms, patterned behavior, and material artifacts which binds a group of people together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity. It is a total way of life.¹⁷⁰

Ethnicity. Identification with a particular societal people group based upon biological birth, common genealogical ancestry, shared history, or shared place of origin. LeCompte makes a distinction between race and ethnicity, with race being biological identification and ethnicity as being cultural identification.¹⁷¹ However, in this research, the category of race will only refer to the singular human race. The term “ethnicity” will be used instead to refer to biological identification and historical ancestry. Race theory is a social construct of the colonial, evolutionary period which was based upon a Western

¹⁶⁸Warren S. Benson, “Philosophical Foundations of Christian Education,” in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 27. Benson references Robert Pazmino’s definition that Christian education is the “deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith.”

¹⁶⁹Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 33.

¹⁷⁰The definitions for culture are varied. However, they converge on culture as being a total way of life of a people. Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 23.

¹⁷¹Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2010), 30.

European colonial worldview. Stevens criticizes race theory as being unbiblical and anti-biblical.¹⁷² Howell and Paris critique race theory as a culturally exclusive and antiquated approach in cultural anthropology.¹⁷³

Conversion. The conscious decision and process of turning away from a specific system of religion and a turning towards (acceptance) of a new system of religion.¹⁷⁴

People movement. A mysterious movement of the Spirit of God in which a series of small groups make decisions to leave their religion of origin to put their faith in Christ and to follow Christ and his teachings.¹⁷⁵

Contextualization. The process of communicating the Gospel message and the whole of Christian faith (forms, content, and praxis) into a different cultural context¹⁷⁶ so that people may come to Christ and be formed into churches that are both biblically and culturally appropriate.¹⁷⁷

Critical contextualization. The process of communicating the Gospel message and the whole of Christian faith into a different cultural context through exegesis and

¹⁷²David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity: A Biblical Theology of Multiethnicity for the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 52.

¹⁷³Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 28-29. Unilateral cultural evolution theory stated that "all cultures evolve from simple to complex along a single trajectory of progress," more complex societies were more evolved and thus more superior to less evolved, less civilized societies, and thus supported cultural superiority or racism.

¹⁷⁴Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 387.

¹⁷⁵Timothy T. Vang, *The History of a People Movement: The Hmong* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2000), 4-5. Vang contributes the origination of this term to Donald McGavran.

¹⁷⁶Holt, *Thirsty for God*, 17. Holt defines contextualization, stating that "contextualization is the process by which Christianity speaks to a group of people in language and symbols with which they feel at home and in which they in turn express their Christian faith within their culture."

¹⁷⁷Charles H. Kraft, "Culture, Worldview and Contextualization," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Stephen C. Hawthorne, 3rd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 389. A. Scott Moreau, in *Contextualization in World Missions*, 46, defines contextualization broadly as "the process whereby Christians adapt the whole of the Christian faith (forms, content, and praxis) in diverse culturally settings."

translation of the universal reality and message of Scripture to promote biblical understanding and thus leading to critical evaluation of one's culture and developing of new contextualized practices which align with that biblical understanding.¹⁷⁸

Syncretism. The assimilation of intrinsically false, evil, or sinful cultural elements into Christian beliefs, customs, norms, and practices (uncritical contextualization).

Significance of Study

Since initial immigration to the United States in 1975, the Hmong have become a significant ethnic minority people group in many communities. This research hopes to increase understanding of the Hmong by significantly expanding the knowledge base on Hmong religious education of children in three direct ways. First, this research will directly impact the Hmong churches and the Hmong District of the C&MA by providing an initial assessment of the Christian spiritual formation of children and parents within local Hmong churches. This knowledge will help Hmong church leaders to develop, revise, and create family ministry strategies that will be effective in their cultural context.

Second, this research will contribute directly to the field of family ministry by expanding its ethno-cultural knowledge base to include the underrepresented perspectives of Hmong Christians and Hmong churches. And finally, this research will enrich the community of learning by adding another ethnic voice to the global church's conversation on the global-contextual discipleship of children.

Research Assumptions

The following assumptions formed the basis upon which this research study was grounded.

¹⁷⁸Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 183-85.

1. There is only one race – the human race, which is comprised of many ethnicities (ethne). Thus all human beings are ethnic-cultural beings.
2. Cultural and religious formation occurs holistically, unconsciously and consciously, through informal (socialization), semiformal, and formal learning.
3. All case study interviewees will respond honestly to the research interview questions.

Limitations of Generalization of Research Findings

This research was an initial step towards discovering the family ministry perceptions and practices in the Hmong churches. Since it was exploratory in nature and small in sample size, the conclusions reached in this research will not be generalizable to all Hmong churches or to other ethnic churches. However, the insights gained from this multiple-case study will be helpful for decision-making and ministry programming within the Hmong church and within other ethnic churches who may share similar collective cultural beliefs, values, norms, and socio-cultural practices.

Driving Force behind Research

The driving force behind this research has been the personal and ministerial struggles that I have experienced as a 1.5 generation Hmong Christian minister to children and families. As a Hmong refugee, who immigrated to the United States when I was seven years old, I have struggled with culture shock, language acquisition, racism and prejudice, and assimilation to life in America as a bicultural, Hmong-American-Christian person. These experiences and struggles have heightened my awareness of cultural and religious similarities and differences between traditional Hmong society, Western-American society, and the Christian church. These struggles have also caused me to critically reflect upon how an ethnic person and an ethnic church can faithfully follow Christ in the midst of their cultural context and ethnic identity.

Since childhood, I have grown up in a Hmong Christian family and served in

the Hmong C&MA church. My father was a first generation Hmong Christian who also became a pastor with the C&MA in Laos, Thailand, and in the United States. My husband is a 1.5 generation Hmong Christian pastor with the C&MA in the United States. I have served and ministered as a lay leader in the children and family ministry for over twenty years within the Hmong C&MA context, and I have also served in a cross-cultural capacity as a licensed minister of children and families in a multiethnic American Baptist Church. I have experienced some of the joys and challenges of discipling children and families within an ethnic and multiethnic church context. And I yearn to explore, discover, and equip ethnic and multiethnic churches with effective contextualized strategies for Christian discipleship. Through this research, I hope to begin that process.

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

In chapter 2, through the examination of existing literature, I will explore the religious education of children within the traditional Hmong culture and the Christian education of children within the different historical periods of the Hmong church. In chapter 3, I will present the methodology of this research, including the four phases of the multiple-case replication design. In chapter 4, I will present the data and analysis of each individual case study as well as the cross-case analysis. Finally, in chapter 5, I will present the final individual and cross-case findings with its ministry implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Through examination of key ethnographic research on the Hmong and Hmong culture, this chapter will provide an overview of traditional Hmong religious beliefs and practices, explore how these were passed down to children in the Hmong culture, and then explore how children were instructed in the Christian faith after conversion to Christianity within the different historical periods of the Hmong C&MA church. Since the religious education of children in the Hmong community, whether in the traditional religion or within the Hmong Christian church, is not a topic that has been comprehensively or directly researched in detail, this chapter will provide general observations about the religious education of children from the current body of existing literature.

An in-depth, exhaustive, exploration of Hmong religion is too extensive for the scope of this research study. Thus only a general overview of Hmong religion will be discussed as needed to examine the primary subject of interest in this research study: the historical religious and Christian education of children within the Hmong community and the Hmong church. Having an understanding of Hmong religious education and the historical Hmong Christian education of children will provide the necessary background for the family ministry case studies in chapters 3 and 4.

The Layers of Human Culture

Ethnicity and culture are two significant factors which impact all human persons and human societies. Systematic theologian Kevin Vanhoozer asserts that “a

human being, we might say, is always ethnic, never generic.”¹ As an ethnic being, each person through birth, biologically and socially identifies himself/herself as belonging to a specific people group who possess a common genealogical ancestry, a shared ethno-history, and a shared ethno-origin.² Psychologist Jean S. Phinney defines ethnic identity as “a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group.”³ “All people have an ethnic identity,” writes cultural anthropologist Paul Hiebert.⁴ Within his or her ethnic people group, each person is formed, socialized, and enculturated in that specific ethnic culture.⁵

In studying human cultures, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization defined human culture as the sum parts of a people’s worldview (understanding of nature and the universe), values, rituals, standards or norms, conduct,

¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “One Rule to Rule Them All? Theological Method in an Era of World Christianity,” in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, ed. Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 94.

²J. E. Trimble and R. Dickson, “Ethnic Identity,” in *Encyclopedia of Applied Developmental Science*, ed. C. B. Fisher and R. M. Lerner (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 1: 415-20.

³Trimble and Dickson, “Ethnic Identity,” 415-16. Trimble and Dickson define ethnicity as “the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residence.” K. A. Matthews and M. S. Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 30. Matthews and Park add that the word ethnic “identifies an affiliated ‘people group’ who share history, traditions, and culture, such as familial descent, language, and religious and social customs.” In both of these definitions, ethnicity refers to a biological sameness (common ancestry), a historical sameness (common history), and a geographic sameness (common country of origin) that is shared amongst a particular people group. These definitions of ethnicity also include common customs and traditions as part of ethnic identity. However, in this research, shared customs and traditions will be defined as being part of ethnic culture. Thus ethnicity, as used in this research, is a person’s genetic-biological-ancestral sameness (identification) with a specific people group who share a common ancestry, history, or place of origin.

⁴Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999), 277.

⁵S. Ananda Kumar, “Culture and the New Testament,” in *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. John R.W. Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 33. The word *culture* is derived from the Latin word *cotere*, which means “to cultivate.” Cultivation, in its agrarian etymology, implies preparation and tending the ground (plowing, tilling, adding fertilizer), planting seeds, weeding, watering, and caring for seedlings until they reach full maturity and bear fruit. Cultivation involves a systematic development of the environment and holistic nurturing so that seeds can grow and flourish.

language, art, laws and governance, and social institutions.⁶ Hiebert defined culture as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated [learned] patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”⁷ Similarly other cultural anthropologists and missiologists have defined culture as the all-encompassing “way of living” of a particular group of people in which an individual is part of.⁸ In the Bible, the concept of culture is contextually referred to as a “way” of living (Gen 6:12), a “pattern” of living (Phil 3:17), and an “order” for life (Rev 21:4). Thus culture is the systematized, human-constructed, social organization or pattern of living in which human beings are born into, live in, formed in, grow up in, and function in.

Culture is not biologically transmitted from one generation to another. Instead culture must be learned by each and every successive generation. This process of cultural transmission (enculturation) occurs through both conscious and unconscious means. Cultural learning can occur through direct instruction by parents, teachers, or elders, through direct observation and participation, through direct imitation of adults in daily life, and through unconscious imitation and absorption. Since culture is socially constructed, transmitted, and acquired, culture is always in a state of change.⁹ This makes the study of human cultures multifaceted, complex, and dynamic.

In order to understand human cultures, cultural anthropologists have developed different visual models to describe, organize, and arrange the various cultural

⁶Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “The Willowbank Report,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press), 163.

⁷Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 30.

⁸Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 38.

⁹Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 11.

components. Kraft depicts culture as a two-layered system: an inner layer and an outer-layer. The inner layer is the deep-level cultural worldview: the central core beliefs and assumptions of an ethnic people group which influence and shape the outward feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. The outer-layer is the surface-level culture: the visible patterned behaviors of an ethnic people group which include various subsystems, e.g., social, language, religion, economics, technology, etc.¹⁰

Hiebert proposed that culture consists of three layers: a surface sensory layer; a middle explicit layer; and a core implicit worldview layer.¹¹ The surface sensory layer consists of material culture, patterns of behavior, signs and sign system (language, symbols), and rituals (rites of intensification, rites of passage, and rites of crisis). Rites of intensification “celebrate the common life of the group and renews the deep beliefs of the participants in their culture,” e.g., festivals, annual celebrations, holy days.¹² The rites of passage “celebrates the movement of individuals from one stage of life to another,” e.g., birth, adulthood, marriage, and death rituals.¹³ And the rites of crisis are “ceremonies that are precipitated by unforeseen events,” e.g., healing rituals and rain dances.¹⁴ The middle explicit layer of culture consists of the belief system (system of knowledge). And the underlying core layer of culture is the worldview: the implicit cognitive assumptions about the nature of reality.¹⁵

Trompeneers and Hampden-Turner, in *Riding the Waves of Culture*, also

¹⁰Charles Kraft, “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1999), 387.

¹¹Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 154-58.

¹²Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 157.

¹³Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 157.

¹⁴Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 157.

¹⁵Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 158.

analogized culture as a three-layered onion.¹⁶ The outer layer of culture is the explicit and visible artifacts and products: language, art, music, food, clothing, crafts, stories, writings, architecture, agriculture, shrines, markets, fashion, legal laws, institutions, customs, rituals, social organization, authorities, government, learning and education, rituals, celebrations, etc.¹⁷ The middle layer is the implicit norms and values: right and wrong, good and bad, proper and improper social conduct, social laws, taboos, etc. The inner layer or core of culture, as observed by Trompenaars and Turner, is the shared beliefs about human existence (linear vs. cyclical), existence or non-existence of a supreme God or gods, and the organization of the universe: their worldview. Together, these three layers create an individual and collective pattern or order for living, e.g., believing, thinking, feeling, acting, and interacting. See figure 2.

At the core of human culture, in all three perspectives, is the worldview layer: the shared assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality and the meaning of life. It is at this core level where religious beliefs are located. From the core of culture, religious beliefs shape and influence societal values and norms, social organization, social rituals and celebrations, and material culture (art, music, dance, poetry, etc). This is especially true of the Hmong people.

Overview of Hmong Culture

At the core of Hmong culture is the Hmong worldview. In the traditional Hmong worldview, there are two concurrent, coexisting realms of reality. The first realm is the earthly realm (*ntiajteb*), often referred to as the material world, the world of the living, and the land of light (*Yajceeb*). The second realm is the sky realm (*ntuj*), also referred to as Heaven, the other side, the metaphysical world, the otherworld,

¹⁶ Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 21-22.

¹⁷Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, *Riding the Waves of Culture*, 21-22.

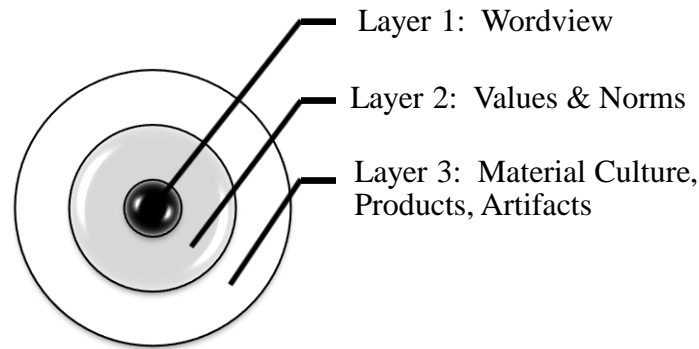


Figure 2. Three layers of culture

and the land of darkness (*Yeebceeb*).¹⁸ Anthropologist Vincent Her proposes an interconnected three realm cosmological Hmong worldview: upper realm (*sau ntuj*); earth (*ntiajteb*); and spirit world (*dlaab teb*).¹⁹ However Cha, Tapp, Symonds, Vang, and I lean towards a two realm worldview: the land of light (*Yajceeb*) and the land of darkness (*Yeebceeb*).²⁰

The land of light consists of the natural world (trees, rocks, animals, etc.),

¹⁸Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2010), 133. Cha uses the term *Heaven (ntuj)* to encompass all of the deities and spirits who dwell in the upper expanse. Nicholas Tapp and Patricia Symonds uses the term *otherworld*. Some of the translated funeral dirges discussed later in this chapter make a clear differentiation between the earth (*ntiajteb*) where humans and spirits dwell, the sky (*ntuj*) where deities dwell, and the land of cold and darkness (*ntuj txiag teb tsaus*) where the ancestors dwell.

¹⁹Vincent K. Her, "Hmong Cosmology: Proposed Model, Preliminary Insights," *Hmong Studies Journal* 6 (2005): 5, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hsj-volume-6-2005.html>.

²⁰Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 133. Patricia V. Symonds, *Calling in the Soul: Gender and the Cycle of Life in a Hmong Village* (Seattle: Washington Press, 2004), 11. Nicholas Tapp, "Hmong Religion," *Asian Folklore Studies* 48, no. 1 (1989), 59. Timothy T. Vang, "Coming a Full Circle: Historical Analysis of the Hmong Church Growth, 1950-1998" (DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998), 90. In comparing the different ethnographic work on Hmong religious beliefs, and reading through the various funeral dirges, a two realm Hmong worldview is more likely. The Hmong funeral dirges refer primarily to the earth (*ntiajteb*) as the dwelling place of humans and spirits and refer to the Heaven or sky as the dwelling place of the benevolent and malevolent deities and the dwelling place of the ancestors. Upon death, the soul must ascend to the sky fortress of the evil one (*Ntxwj Nyooog*) and enter through his gate to gain access to the land of the ancestors. The soul must also descend down from the sky fortress to find its way to being reborn on the earth. So the majority of the immortal soul's journey is up towards the sky and down towards the earth.

human beings, and the benevolent and malevolent earth spirits: ancestral spirits, shamanic neng spirits, benevolent domestic tame spirits who dwell inside the house, malevolent wild spirits who dwell outside of the house, etc.²¹ The spirits can dwell in any material object. The spirits can see humans, protect humans, and or wreak havoc, illness, and death upon humans. However, the spirits are invisible to humans.

The land of darkness consists of the souls of the deceased (animals and human beings), the benevolent and malevolent sky spirits, the benevolent deities (*Huab Tais*, *Yawmsaub*, *Siv Yis*), the malevolent deities (*Ntxwj Nyooog*, *Nyuj Vaj Tuam Teem*, their assistants), and their respective dwelling places. Once upon a time, according to Hmong funeral dirges, the realm of light and the realm of darkness existed jointly with one another. As Symonds explains, “bridges, ladders, and doors connect the two worlds. In the beginning of time, spirits and humans came and went between the worlds as they pleased.”²²

However due to strife between the deities, and strife between the humans and the spirits, these two realms became increasingly separated and divided. At the junction between the two realms is a great piece of water, which is crossed by a bridge. The bridge marketplace is where “the souls of men can meet with the spirits and communicate with them, although none know which are spirits and which men . . . where men and spirits trade, deal, and bargain with each other.”²³ Now “the land of light can be reached by ordinary people only by being born, and the land of darkness by dying.”²⁴

In traditional Hmong belief, the human person is reborn into the earthly realm as an embodied soul, with a mortal body, and at least three immortal souls. A continuous

²¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 11.

²²Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 22.

²³Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 64.

²⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 22.

cycle of birth, marriage, parenthood, death, afterlife, ancestorhood, and rebirth are all key rites of passage for these immortal souls.²⁵ In birth, an immortal soul is granted a mandate-for-life passport (*ntawv noj ntawv haus*) to be reincarnated into a new body, and crosses over from the land of darkness into the land of light. In death, an immortal soul has left its body and has crossed back over from the land of light into the land of darkness. The deceased soul will spend its afterlife seeking its ancestors and awaiting rebirth back into its paternal lineage. Since the land of darkness is a dark, cold, bitter, harsh, parched, and desolate place, rebirth or reincarnation as a human being into the land of light is the ultimate aim for every human soul.²⁶

The only living human being who can communicate with the spirits and traverse briefly into the land of darkness to retrieve a lost soul is the shaman, with the aid of the shamanic neng spirits (shamanism) and his flying horse.²⁷ The work of the shaman is to save, rescue, and restore lost, wandering, deceived, or captured human souls back to their physical bodies. Only when the body and its souls are in balance, can health be maintained and death deterred.

To ensure protection of the embodied souls from evil spirits, reverence for the ancestral spirits and propitiation of the spirits through spirit altars, food offerings, animal sacrifices, soul calling rituals, rites of passage rituals, clan rituals, community rituals, and shamanic rituals are normal and necessary to daily life.²⁸ Similar to other small scale societies, “humans are part of a world full of living beings and invisible forces. In such a world, life is not divided into segments such as religion, science, and humanities; public and private domains; social, economic, political, and legal spheres. This holistic

²⁵Vincent Her, “Hmong Cosmology,” 5-6.

²⁶Vincent Her, “Hmong Cosmology,” 6.

²⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 22.

²⁸Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 21-30.

worldview is at the heart of all life.”²⁹ The spiral pattern found often in Hmong embroidery (*paj ntaub*) is a symbolic representation of this holistic Hmong way of life. See figure 3. Hmong cosmology: Journey of the immortal souls.

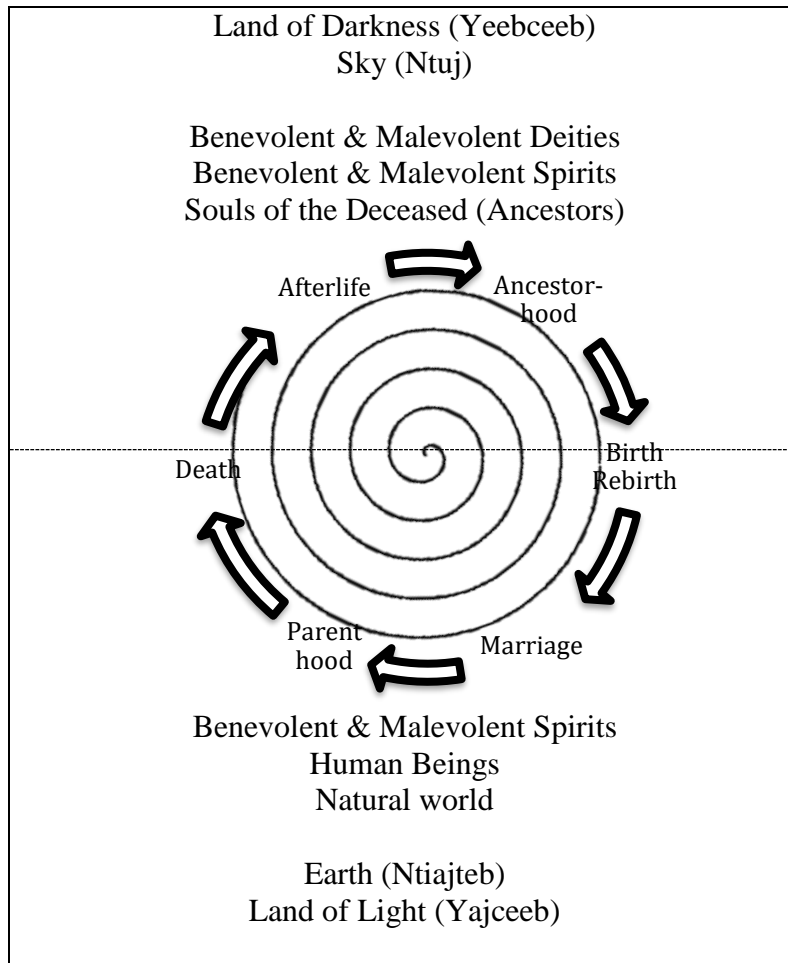


Figure 3. Hmong cosmology: Journey of the immortal souls

²⁹Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 106.

Since reincarnation occurs by patrilineal ancestry, the Hmong social relationships, social norms, and social values are based upon a patrilineal ancestral clan system which reinforces the mutual existence and interaction between living descendants and the deceased ancestors. Lee and Tapp observe that, “Hmong kinship structure is, therefore, really a ritual structure with religious rites and beliefs specific to each category of relationships such as the household, the lineage, the subclan, and the clan.”³⁰

The patrilineal clan is the foundational social structure for all relationships within Hmong society. As a collective community, the Hmong are comprised of eighteen patrilineal clans (xeem): Tsab (Cha, Chang); Tswb (Chue); Tsheej (Cheng); Faj (Fang); Hawg (Her); Haam (Hang); Khab (Khang); Koo (Kong); Kwm (Kue); Lis (Lee); Lauj (Lor); Muas (Moua); Phab (Pha); Thoj (Thao); Vaaj (Vang); Vwj (Vue); Xyooj (Xiong); and Yaaj (Yang). As Dia Cha explains:

Hmong culture consists of a patrilineal clan system in which children are members of their father’s clan and take its name. The Hmong maintain a patrilocal rule, by which the new bride moves to live with her husband’s family after marriage. The Hmong also practice exogamy, according to which marriage partners must be found outside the clan The ancient tradition of levirate marriage, according to which a man marries the widow of his older brother, is also maintained. The clan is the most important social unit of Hmong society, and as such the clan is involved in the political, social, economic, and religious aspects of Hmong culture.³¹

Members with the same clan surname are automatically related to one another by their common paternal clan ancestry. They belong to the same clan (*yog ib xeem*). One clan may have many paternal lineages, with each lineage having many generational lines and family lines who trace their genealogy to one common ancestor.

This common lineage of clan relatives or cluster of brothers (*ib cuab kwvtij*) usually share the same ancestral spirits (*ib tug dab qhuas*). Those of the same clan who

³⁰Gary Y. Lee and Nicholas Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 23.

³¹Dia Cha, “Women in the Diaspora,” in *Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark Edward Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press: 2013), 177-78.

share different ritual practices may also form subclan associations.³² Thus kinship identification is based upon clan surname, lineage, subclan associations, generational order, birth order, and gender. Yet because clan members are related ancestrally, members with the same clan surname are forbidden to marry one another.³³

Clan members, particularly those who share a direct lineage, are expected to be socially and religiously responsible for one another. They have a duty to love and assist (*sis hlub sis pab*) one another physically, financially, and religiously, especially during wedding and funeral ceremonies and rituals. They also have a duty to look after the widows and orphans of their cluster of brothers. At times in the past, this meant that an older or younger brother would have to marry his brother's widow and adopt his brother's children as his own in order for the children to remain within the clan (levirate marriage).

Within the patrilineal clan system, social relationships are stratified by gender, age, generational order, and birth order. Organized hierarchically, Hmong society favors the ascribed status of males, elders, sons, and firstborns.³⁴ Social recognition and respect is dependent upon having a male head of household, specifically a respected father, a respected husband, or a respected son.

From birth to four years of age, children are called "smallest children" (*menyuam mos*). From age four until puberty, they are called "young children" (*menyuam yaus*). Unmarried males and females who have reached puberty are called "young girls and young boys" (*tub hluas ntxhais hluas*). At the time of marriage, girls become "women" (*pojnim*) and boys become "men" (*txiv neej*).³⁵ And at the time of

³²W. R. Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 65.

³³Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 195.

³⁴Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 35.

³⁵Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 19.

parenthood, women become mothers of the household (*niamtsev*) and men become fathers of the household (*txivtsev*).

An infant is granted full social membership only after the name calling ceremony performed by his or her father three days after birth. A man's status is dependent upon his father, his age, his generational order, his birth order, and his marriage and number of children, particularly the number of sons.³⁶ A woman's status is dependent upon her marriage, the social status of her husband, and the number of children she bears. Symonds writes that in traditional Hmong culture,

A Hmong woman's power is located in the realm of reproduction. She provides the vessels to which souls of the lineage can return and continue the cycle of life. After a Hmong woman has lived her life as a wife and mother, one of the vessels produced by her descendants will be hers. If all goes well, she may be fortunate enough to return as a male.³⁷

Those who are privileged in traditional Hmong society are those who are male and those male who have ascribed seniority.³⁸ When a man is young, people respect him out of respect for his father. When a man becomes old and frail, people respect him out of respect for his son(s).³⁹

Within the Hmong family household, sons have the inherent birthright to the clan name and to the family inheritance as heirs. Sons in turn are obligated to care for their parents in old age and serve their clan relatives. Daughters, though born into the family, will leave her father's family and clan upon marriage. As a new bride, a woman will forsake her birth name and take on her husband's name. She will socially be incorporated into her husband's family and clan. And spiritually, she will be placed under the authority of her husband and under the guardianship of her husband's ancestral

³⁶Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 32.

³⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 76.

³⁸Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 31.

³⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 24.

spirits and house spirits.

Therefore, once a daughter is married, she can no longer pay homage to the spirits of her family of origin, nor can she die in her father's house, nor can she tend to the souls of her deceased parents. This would be a grievous insult to her father's ancestral spirits and violate her husband's ancestral spirits.⁴⁰ These gender roles are "reinforced for Hmong children on a daily basis in the discourse of everyday life."⁴¹

The authority of the patrilineal clan, the patriarchal family, the clear gender roles, the obligation of male descendants to care for living descendants and to revere the deceased ancestors, and the expectation for Hmong to look after their own people are some of the core social norms of traditional Hmong culture. Community, honesty, hard work, placing the interests of the family and clan before personal interests, safeguarding family honor and face (*ntsej muag*), and maintaining individual and group reputation (*koob meej*) and unity are some of the core values within Hmong culture.⁴²

Additional cultural values include demonstrating hospitality and generosity, loyalty to one's clan, respect for elders and their wisdom, honoring the ancestors and the spirits, fulfilling one's social duties, honoring and caring for one's parents, being humble and modest, and being well-mannered in Hmong traditions (*paub cai*).⁴³ Unethical deeds, which could bring about social shame and judgment, included: stealing; lying; murder; adultery; torture of living beings; destruction of property; harming of defenseless people; and mistreatment of older siblings, parents, elders, or the disabled.⁴⁴

The father in the home, the firstborn son amongst a cluster of brothers, and the

⁴⁰Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 23-24.

⁴¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 8.

⁴²Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 197.

⁴³Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 32-46.

⁴⁴Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 135.

elders of a clan were those socially authorized to determine just consequences and punishment for flagrant acts of misconduct and harm. Yet “in traditional Hmong society, as in most tribal societies, morality was relative to social context.”⁴⁵ The seriousness of a crime or the severity of the consequences was based upon social relationships and not upon absolute principles. Thus those who were male, those of higher social status, and those with higher degrees of relatedness to the clan elders were often treated with favor and leniency.

Gender inequality in Hmong society has been reported and documented by Dia Cha,⁴⁶ Ya Po Cha,⁴⁷ and Lee and Tapp.⁴⁸ Social inequality, especially the ill-treatment of orphans as second class citizens, has been observed by Ya Po Cha.⁴⁹ However, even when unrighteous acts are not fairly judged or justly punished, Hmong believe that “Heaven is above, Heaven sees” (*ntuj nyob saud, ntuj pom*).⁵⁰ For whether in this life or the next life, every human person will ultimately receive the just judgment from Heaven for the actions and deeds of his/her present life.

Hmong Religious Beliefs

So who or what is this Heaven (*ntuj*) that Hmong believe in? The answer to this question is a complicated one. Due to the oral nature of Hmong culture, attempts to define Hmong religious beliefs has been difficult and challenging. Since the Hmong do not have a common authoritative sacred text(s), nor a single authoritative religious leader, but instead have numerous religious practitioners (i.e., spiritual leaders and shamans from

⁴⁵Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 31.

⁴⁶Dia Cha, “Women in Diaspora,” 179.

⁴⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 26.

⁴⁸Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 31.

⁴⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 25.

⁵⁰Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 135.

different clan lineages), there are a varied number of versions and variations on religious beliefs and practices. An exploration of all these variations will not be discussed in this summary of Hmong religious beliefs. Instead the researcher will present the core Hmong religious beliefs in a story format as often presented in the Hmong oral funeral dirges (*qhuab ke*, showing the way chant).

Hmong oral funeral dirges (*qhuab ke*) have been some of the richest primary sources of knowledge on Hmong religious beliefs. Chanted at every traditional Hmong funeral, the funeral dirge tells the story of creation, the relationship between human beings and the spirits, the flood, the creation of the Hmong clans, and the cause of illness and death. More importantly, it is the funeral dirge that instructs the soul of the deceased into the otherworld so that the soul can safely find its way to the land of the ancestors and receive passage again towards rebirth.

In 1972, Jacques Lemoine, a French ethnologist, published his French version of the Green Hmong funeral dirge from upper Laos. In 1983, Kenneth White translated Lemoine's funeral dirge into English.⁵¹ Father Yves Bertrais (*Txiv Plig Nyiaj Pov*), a French Catholic missionary and Yaj Vam Thaiv were among the first to transcribe, collect, and edit different versions of these funeral dirges using the Hmong RPA script.⁵² In 2004, anthropologist Patricia Symonds published a translated funeral dirge from northern Thailand.⁵³ Vincent Her (2005) and Timothy Vang (1998) have also translated different portions and variations of the Hmong funeral dirge.

Since the Hmong do not want to invite death, talking about death or chanting the funeral dirge outside of the funeral ritual was and is still considered to be taboo and

⁵¹Kenneth White, *Showing the Way* (Bangrak, Bangkok: Pandora, 1983), 5.

⁵²Association Communautaire Hmong, *Kabke Pam Tuag Cov Zaj* (Guyane, France: Association Communautaire Hmong, 1985), 11-110.

⁵³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 193-238.

culturally and ritually prohibited.⁵⁴ Thus collecting, documenting, and discussing the funeral dirges so that they can be systematically analyzed has been culturally challenging for researchers. As Symonds expressed, “requests for an explication of the meaning of the rituals that guide the souls on the journey from life to death and back to life again are often met with confusion and puzzlement” which “can lead to frustration” unless bridges of understanding can be built between researcher and practitioners.⁵⁵ Using these published versions of the funeral dirge and other Hmong ethnographies, I will summarize the major themes of Hmong cosmology. Understanding Hmong cosmology is critical to understanding the religious rituals, practices, and religious education of children within the traditional Hmong culture.

Creation

The creation story is an integral part of Hmong cosmology. According to the *qhuab ke* (showing the way) chant by Cher Kia, as translated by Timothy Vang, “Long time ago, the earth . . . was formless.”⁵⁶ From the beginning, “it was the grandmother Saub [*puj saub*] who created human beings, made animals, formed the universe, and made the land.”⁵⁷ *Puj Saub* (all-knowing grandmother god) created thirty girl suns to govern the thirty days and thirty boy moons to govern the thirty nights. A long time ago, “there was no sickness on the earth, no death on the land . . . the earth was created without sickness, the land was made without death.”⁵⁸ The world had “no sickness, the

⁵⁴Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 81.

⁵⁵Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 149.

⁵⁶Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 312.

⁵⁷Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 325. Also stated in Association Communauté Hmong, *Kabke Pam Tuag*, 37: “yog tau puj saub tsim noob neej los nyob, tsim noob tsav los rau ntiajteb, tsim lub ntuj los txoos, tsim lub teb los poob.” Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 215: “Now, a long time ago, Puj Saub created human beings [noob neej] to live, and created everything on earth. Saub created the sky to cover above, created the earth below . . .” *Noob neej* literally translated means “seeds of men.”

⁵⁸Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 319.

land had no pain; the world had no loss, the land had no death.”⁵⁹

In this funeral dirge, the existence of the world – the universe, the cosmos, the earth, the sky, the suns and moons, the animals, and human beings, is credited to the supernatural creative act of a divine deity or deities. At creation, the world was perfect and good, without sickness, pain, death, or loss. The notion of a benevolent Creator is consistently reiterated within the different funeral dirges. However, there is disagreement as to who that benevolent Creator is.

In Vang, Symonds, and Bertrais’ funeral dirges, creation is credited to grandmother god (*Puj Saub*) and grandfather god (*Yawmsaub*). Vang asserts that “the Hmong believe that God [Shao, *Saub*] exists in both genders.”⁶⁰ Symonds agrees that Hmong often use complementary gendered pairs (female and male) to describe various deities and material objects, e.g., *Saub* as a gendered pair (grandmother grandfather god), parents as a gendered pair (motherfather), female earth and male sky, and female suns and male moons.⁶¹ This may explain why in another funeral chant referenced by Kue, the creation of the world is credited only to grandfather god (Shao, *Yawmsaub*).⁶² Xiong describes Shao (*Yawmsaub*) as the powerful creator of humans and all living things, who possesses a radiant shining face.⁶³

Though grandfather god (Shao, *Yawmsaub*) is cited most often as the creator of the universe, there are other conflicting versions of the creation story. Quincy attributes creation to Hua Tai (*Huab Tais*), the supreme, distant, “creator and ruler of the world”

⁵⁹Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 321.

⁶⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 90.

⁶¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 30.

⁶²Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 5.

⁶³Sue Her Xiong, “Hmong Animal Sacrificial Offerings” (Course paper, Concordia University, 2010), accessed March 27, 2015, <http://suexiong1.efoliomn.com/Uploads/SX%20MRP1%20%5Bsub3%20rev3%20jjv%5D%20APPROVED%20110127%5D.pdf>.

and *Yawmsaub* as a half man, half god, representative of *Hua Tai* who saved mankind from the flood.⁶⁴ There are also oral legends that speak of the Heaven and the Earth being woven together by Green Lady (*Nkauj Ntsuab*) and Rodent Man (*Nraug Nas*).⁶⁵ Tapp cites another funeral dirge that points to the frog, *Nplooj Lwg*, as the creator of the “world of men and spirits.”⁶⁶ As stated by Cha, “there is no consensus on the creation of Heaven and Earth.”⁶⁷

Benevolent Deities

In Hmong cosmology, there are three primary benevolent deities and many lesser benevolent deities. Grandmother god (*Puj Suab*), grandfather god (*Yawmsaub*), and the ruler of the sky (*Huabtais ntuj*) are the three primary benevolent deities. The all-knowing, creator, grandmother god (*Puj Saub*) and all-knowing grandfather god (*Shao, Yawmsaub*) are believed to reside in Heaven (*ntuj*).⁶⁸ Oral legends state that at one time “Heaven was very close to earth, and Shao was among all the living creatures so any living creature in distress could go seek out Shao, for he had answers to everything and everybody.”⁶⁹ These benevolent deities were observant of human history, and provided instruction, guidance, and advice when consulted or sought out by human beings or spirits.⁷⁰ However, Heaven distanced itself from the earth, and Shao (*Saub*) became disinterested in human affairs. Only the shaman can reach Shao now. Thus these deities

⁶⁴Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People* (Cheney, WA: Washington University Press, 1988), 80.

⁶⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 133.

⁶⁶Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 59.

⁶⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 133.

⁶⁸Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 90.

⁶⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 136.

⁷⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 321 -23.

are viewed as distant or absentee gods.⁷¹

Cha points out that Heaven (*ntuj*) in Hmong religion, literally translated as “sky,” is acknowledged as the dwelling place of all benevolent deities, malevolent deities, benevolent and malevolent sky spirits, and the souls of deceased animals and humans (ancestors). According to some Hmong shamans, Heaven (*ntuj*) is comprised of twelve great mountains, each ascending higher and higher into the heavens.⁷² Tapp states that the twelve great mountains lead to the great mountain (thirteenth mountain), which is inhabited and ruled by *Ntxwj Nyooog*, the evil one.⁷³

Within these mountains are nine levels (*cuaj tshooj ntug*) in which both benevolent and malevolent deities and spirits exist and dwell in hierarchical fashion. These include Hua Tai (*Huab Tais Ntuj*) the ruler of the sky, grandfather and grandmother god (*Saub*), the first shaman Shee Yee and his neng spirits, *Ntxwj Nyooog* (Ndu Nyong, the evil one), the souls of the dead ancestors, the rebirth guides who guide souls back to be reincarnated (*Niamtxiv Kab Yeeb*), the spirits of the four corners of the earth, the spirits that hold up the sky, the spirit of lightning (*Xob*), nature spirits, animal spirits, craft and trade spirits, evil spirits (*dab*), the ancient dragons (*Zaj Laug*), and many others.⁷⁴ Cha explains that, “the human soul can wander into any and all realms of Heaven including the land of the ancestors.”⁷⁵

In addition to being a dwelling place, Cha states that Heaven also is viewed as a collective entity: “a righteous, supreme, supernatural being . . . the one who holds the ultimate divine power . . . it can hear, feel, see, and instruct . . . It has authority over all

⁷¹Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 31.

⁷²Jean Mottin, “A Hmong Shaman’s Séance,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 43 (1984): 106.

⁷³Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 64.

⁷⁴Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 136. Also Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 59-62. Tapp explores many other mythical heroes, spirits, and deities.

⁷⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 136.

good and evil beings in both the natural and supernatural worlds.”⁷⁶ This understanding of Heaven is reasonable since all the Hmong deities, particularly those who will judge the souls of human beings, dwell in the sky (Heaven).

Malevolent Deities

Ntxwj Nyooog, the evil one, is the primary malevolent deity, who rules from the sky with his chief assistant (Nyuj Vag Teem), and his many evil servants (dab). In the funeral dirges, *Ntxwj Nyooog* is described as being wicked, cruel, the savage one (*siab tsis zoo*), the unrighteous one (*siab tsis ncqj*), the devourer of human souls, and the originator and disseminator of sickness and death upon humanity.⁷⁷ Once when the earth laid barren and lifeless, *Ntxwj Nyooog* was the one who had hoarded every kind of living thing into his sky corral and his sky garden as his possessions, e.g., cattle, pigs, chickens, various crop seeds, yeast for wine, hemp, trees, and even human souls. According to Quincy, *Ntxwj Nyooog* spent his time devouring living things. His greatest pleasure was to “consume thousands of Hmong at a setting, tearing at their flesh and drinking their blood like some wild beast.”⁷⁸

Cosmically, *Ntxwj Nyooog* is the controller and grantor of life and death. It is he who can extend the life of an ill person, upon negotiation by a shaman. It is he who “judges the souls of those who are to be reincarnated into animal, vegetable, or human form after their death.”⁷⁹ It is also he who guards the gate which must be crossed by the souls of the dead so that they may progress to the land of the dead ancestors.

Nyuj Vag Teem (also cited as *Nyuj Vaj Tuam Teem*), his chief assistant, is

⁷⁶Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 133.

⁷⁷Association Communautaire Hmong, *Kabke Pam Tuag*, 24, 28. Her in “Hmong Cosmology,” identifies Ntxwj Nyooog as the younger brother and archrival of Shee Yee.

⁷⁸Quincy, *Hmong*, 80.

⁷⁹Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 60.

seated at a magnificent writing desk behind a terrifying throne. *Nyuj Vag Teem* distributes the mandate-of-life passport papers (*ntawv noj ntawv haus*) that have been granted by *Ntxwj Nyooog*. On the passport papers, *Ntxwj Nyooog* can grant three things: an extension of life; or reincarnation; or passage to the cold, dark land of the ancestors (*ntuj txiag teb tsaus, tub tuag teb*).⁸⁰

Ntxwj Nyooog, his chief assistant, and his other evil servants (*dab*) govern and reside on the thirteenth mountain in a towering rocky fortress in the sky (Heaven). A silver and gold sky ladder (*ntaiv ntuj*) is the only way to ascend to and descend from *Ntxwj Nyooog*'s fortress. On this sky ladder are thirteen steps, one step per day for each of the thirteen mountains. Each day a human soul must climb up one step in order to reach the judgment throne of *Nyuj Vag Teem*, a process or full cycle of thirteen days. Each day the soul must also climb down one step in order to descend from the judgment throne down to earth, a full cycle of thirteen days.⁸¹ This thirteen-day cycle has a significant impact on Hmong funeral rituals and burial rites.

From his abode, *Ntxwj Nyooog* can “open the sky door to look, open the sky window to pip” down upon the earth.⁸² Another funeral dirge states that *Ntxwj Nyooog* “opened the sky gate to look, opened the earth gate to see” the affairs of human beings.⁸³

Humans and Spirits

In the earth realm (*ntiajteb*), the land of the light (*Yajceeb*), humans and spirits live together and interact with one another.⁸⁴ These spirits reside in the natural things and natural places and include evil wild spirits (*dab qus*), spirits of accident and disaster (*vij*

⁸⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 318, 333.

⁸¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 224-25.

⁸²Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 324-25.

⁸³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 202.

⁸⁴Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 321.

sub vij sw), benevolent tame spirits (*dab nyeg*), guardian house spirits (*dab vaj dab tsev*), guardian altar spirits (*dab xwm kab*), and shamanic neng spirits (*dab neeb, qhua neeb*).⁸⁵

When human beings were originally created, the human body was created to stay and to endure, a body strong like stone and copper, and bones like steel.⁸⁶ “People know how to die and how to return” to life thirteen days (the Hmong week) after their death.⁸⁷ Human beings were also smart and intelligent and able to see and communicate with the spirits. The spirits were physically vulnerable since they were visible to humans and had no skin. Using their intelligence, humans deceived the spirits and exploited the spirits, selling the spirits for food and drink, and killing the spirits to near extinction.⁸⁸ Only two spirits were able to escape and seek assistance from grandfather god and grandmother god.⁸⁹ Grandmother and grandfather god (*Shao, Saub*) instructed the two spirits to go up to *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s rocky mountain to grab three handfuls of ashes and three handfuls of rice bran and challenge the humans to a throwing contest. The humans lost and were blinded by the ash thrown by the two spirits.

The two spirits then attempted to throw the ash unto the dogs, but they were unsuccessful. Because of this “now the spirits can see the dogs and the dogs can see the spirits, but only the spirits can see humans, humans can no longer see the spirits. Now, the spirits trick the humans to the mountain and sell them for something to eat.”⁹⁰ Symonds’ version of the funeral dirge says, “Now the spirits trick human beings in the otherworld and sell human beings for something to eat. The spirits trick human beings in

⁸⁵Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 30.

⁸⁶Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 312, 319, 321.

⁸⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 215. Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 33. A full week in traditional Hmong culture is reported in the funeral dirge as consisting of 13 days.

⁸⁸Quincy, *Hmong*, 81.

⁸⁹Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 321.

⁹⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 322.

the otherworld and sell human beings from every clan.”⁹¹

The blindness of human beings to the spirits, according to the funeral dirge, is the direct result of the malevolent and deceptive acts of human beings upon the spirits.

As Ya Po Cha explains:

One thing that is consistent in all facets of the Hmong culture is that in the beginning, the natural world and the supernatural world were but the same. Supernatural beings and living creatures co-existed on Earth and they could interact with each other. Only when conflicts arose did Shao separate the supernatural from the natural, making the supernatural world and its beings invisible to humans. The spirits, however, can see the living.⁹²

The only human person who can now communicate with the spirits is the shaman: the one who has been specially selected by the shamanic neng spirits (*dab neeb*).

The Shaman

According to oral legends, *Siv Yis* (Shee Yee) was the first shaman. In one legend, Shee Yee was the forsaken, abandoned, earthbound child of the two servants of *Yawmsaub* (Shao) who were sent to save mankind from being devoured by *Ntxwj Nyoog*. Shee Yee grew up in the home of a Chinese lord and discovered the magic herbs used by a dragon that could cure the sick and bring the dead back to life. Shao (*Yawmsaub*) gave Shee Yee a winged horse so that Shee Yee could travel quickly to save and rescue the souls of humans from *Ntxwj Nyoog*.

However, *Ntxwj Nyoog* tricked Shee Yee into eating the remains of his own murdered son. Bereaved, Shee Yee ascended to live in the heavens, with the promise of his return to earth. However, upon his return, no one was there to meet him. Furiated, Shee Yee threw down his sacred healing instruments, and cursed them. No longer would these healing instruments exert their full power. From thenceforth, only those human shamans who are selected and guided by the shamanic neng spirits into the spirit world

⁹¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 209.

⁹²Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 135.

will be able to utilize the limited powers of these sacred instruments to communicate with the spirits and ancestors, to diagnose spiritual ailments, to drive away evil spirits, to appease the spirits, and to bring about healing from sickness and death.⁹³ Upon the death of a shaman, the neng spirits will return to Shee Yee in the otherworld, until they are resent to call a new shaman.⁹⁴

The Flood

After creation, a flood came over the earth and all human beings died except for two people, the primordial couple: *Nkauj Iab* (female) and *Nraug Oo* (male). One flood myth states that they were brother and sister.⁹⁵ Grandmother and grandfather god (*Saub*) told them to get into a drum in order to be saved from the flood. The drum floated until *Ntxwj Nyooog* sent his blacksmiths to puncture three holes in the ground so that the water would drain. After the water drained, the earth was dried and barren for seven eras and seven years. Bamboo trees died, and there were no seeds for crops.

Nkauj Iab and *Nraug Oo* sought the counsel of grandmother grandfather god and were told that bamboo seeds, yeast for wine, water, and crop seeds and fruit seeds, hemp seeds were all available at *Ntxwj Nyooog*'s rocky mountain. Therefore, *Nkauj Iab* and *Nraug Oo* sent servants (a bird, two young women, a Chinese grandmother, and a rat) to retrieve these things from *Ntxwj Nyooog*'s realm to reseed and regrow the earth.⁹⁶ In this way *Ntxwj Nyooog* is credited in one of the funeral dirges as the source of reseeding the earth: "long time ago, where did the earth spring from? It sprang from *Ntxwj Nyooog*'s rocky garden. Where did the root of the earth spring from? It sprang from *Ntxwj*

⁹³Quincy, *Hmong*, 82-83.

⁹⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 22.

⁹⁵Lao Family Community of Minnesota, "The Flood – A Hmong Folk Tale" (1997), accessed March 27, 2015, <http://10ib.pbworks.com/f/Hmong+Flood+myth.pdf>.

⁹⁶Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 312-19.

Nyoog's garden."⁹⁷

Hmong Origins

Nkauj Iab and *Nraug Oo* were barren and asked how they could repopulate the world. Grandmother and grandfather Shao (*Saub*) instructed *Nkauj Iab* and *Nraug Oo* to sleep together on the bed and stay together on a mat. *Nkauj Iab* and *Nraug Oo* had a child, but this child was born without a nose or a face. Grandmother and grandfather *Saub* told them to "cut the child into nine pieces to become nine Hmong clans; they were told to cut the meat ball into eight pieces which became eight Hmong clans."⁹⁸ Thus all of the Hmong clans were directly descended from one common ancestor.

Sickness and Death

Nkauj Iab and *Nraug Oo* had other children: a son *Ci Tuj*, who wanted to rule the world, and a daughter *Tuj Nplug*, who wanted to rule the earth. *Ci Tuj* and *Tuj Nplug* sent surveyors to survey the earth: a toad (*nplooj lwg qav*) and then a gray eagle. Both these surveyors reported back that the earth was too vast and too great for *Ci Tuj* and *Tuj Nplug* to rule over. *Ci Tuj* and *Tuj Nplug* were so furious at the reports that they cruelly hit the toad with a wooden spatula and killed him. While dying the toad cried out with three shaking voices and cursed human beings. *Ntxwj Nyoog* heard the toad's cry, saw the toad dying, and sent for the best shaman to heal the toad. The shaman's efforts were futile and the toad died. Thus the curse of the toad "fell on the people, they die and cannot come back to life. The toad's bad luck fell on human beings, they die and never rise again."⁹⁹ The selfish domination and evil cruelty of human beings had brought about their own demise.

⁹⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 194.

⁹⁸Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 323.

⁹⁹Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 324.

In addition to killing the frog, human beings had also begun to kill other animals. “They killed a tiger and a gibbon and performed a noisy ritual for them, alerting *Ntxwj Nyooog* in the otherworld,” tells the funeral dirge.¹⁰⁰ They arranged funerals, cried and wailed, made drums and reed instruments (*qeej*). They beat the drums nine times and sounded the reeds nine tones. The noise was so loud that it shook and disturbed *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s sky garden.

Ntxwj Nyooog sent down a fly and a bee to investigate the commotion. When the fly and bee reported back that human beings had begun to kill and wanted death, this provoked *Ntxwj Nyooog* to pour out seeds of sickness and seeds of death upon human beings. Because “people on earth wanted to die, human beings would like to perish,” *Ntxwj Nyooog*, who had a cruel and crooked heart, thus sent “sickness to the earth, poured death into the land.”¹⁰¹ *Ntxwj Nyooog* poured out the seeds of sickness and the seeds of death upon the earth for seven years. Human beings picked up the seeds of sickness and death and placed them in their pockets and in their hearts. The evil seeds fell into their stomachs and into their bodies, causing fever, illness, suffering, wailing, and death. Not even the most powerful shaman can deter death.¹⁰²

Immortal Souls

The Hmong believe that every living creature and every sizeable object that bears a shadow has a soul.¹⁰³ Now a person has “one body, three souls, and seven shadows. The body and the shadows are mortal but the souls immortal.”¹⁰⁴ A soul (*plig*),

¹⁰⁰Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 122.

¹⁰¹Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 320.

¹⁰²Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 202.

¹⁰³Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 148.

¹⁰⁴Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 330. In Association Communitaute Hmong, *Kabke Pam Tuag*, 44: “ib tug neeg 3 tug ntsuj 7 tus duab. Muaj ib tug ntsuj ces yuav mus cuag poj cuag yawm. Muaj ib tus ntsuj plig ces yuav nce lis hlo mus muab ntawv xyoo rov los thawj xeeb rov lawm ntiajteb.”

as explained by Ya Po Cha is

the spirit that lives in the body to keep the body alive . . . it is immortal. The soul can detach itself from the body both voluntarily and involuntarily. The soul has a mind of its own, and it can be influenced by the host body, other people and external forces . . . The soul is delicate and vulnerable . . . It can re-associate itself or be reincarnated into another host body . . . into any living being.¹⁰⁵

A human person is said to have at least three primary immortal souls (plee, *plig*) and many lesser souls called ju (*ntsuj*). Vang notes that the number of human souls reported by various shamans and religious leaders can range from 3 to 32. Ju (*ntsuj*) or lesser souls number anywhere from 12 to 32.¹⁰⁶ Shamans categorize the lesser souls (*ntsuj*) into five natural divisions within the human self: the chicken self (*ntsuj qaib ntsuj noo*), the bamboo self (*ntsuj xyoob ntsuj ntoo*), the bull self (*ntsuj nyuj rag ntsuj nyuj rhi*), the reindeer self (*ntsuj nyuj cab ntsuj nyuj kauv*), and the shadow self (*ntsuj duab ntsuj hlauv*).¹⁰⁷ Vang asserts that the seven shadows refer to the “seven animals used as symbolic signs by the spirit world to warn a Hmong person or family that calamity is coming.”¹⁰⁸ The presence of the plee and ju are essential for the body to remain physically alive and healthy.¹⁰⁹ The most dangerous illnesses are attributed to soul loss.

The three types of immortal souls (*plig*) frequently referenced are the grave soul (shadow soul, *ntsuj dluab*), the ancestral soul (breath soul), and the reincarnate soul (*plig thawj thiab*). Quincy notes a fourth immortal soul, the corralled soul. These immortal souls are genderless but can have many shapes and can leave the body during

¹⁰⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 148.

¹⁰⁶Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 120.

¹⁰⁷Tapp, “*Hmong Religion*,” 75.

¹⁰⁸Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 120, 330. These animals include a snake in the house, or a dog on the roof.

¹⁰⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 149.

sleep and wander about invisibly while a person is still alive.¹¹⁰ The primary immortal souls (*plig*) can be reincarnated, but the lesser souls (*ntsuj*) are lost when the body perishes. This is because the lesser souls are closely associated with different parts of the body and therefore remain attached to the body. If any of these immortal souls or lesser souls wander away from the body, get lost, harmed, detached from the body, captured by evil spirits, or devoured by *Ntxwj Nyoog*, then that person will become weaker, sicker, and eventually die, unless the soul is successfully called back to the body or redeemed by the sacrificial soul of an animal.¹¹¹

In utero, as the bones of a fetus begin to grow, the shadow soul inhabits the fetal body. Upon death, this shadow soul remains with the bones in the grave to guard them.¹¹² At birth, when the infant takes his/her first breath, the wind brings the second immortal soul to the body: the breath soul or ancestral soul.¹¹³ Upon death, the ancestral soul will journey back to the land of ancestors and be united with its spouse's soul to form a dyadic ancestral spirit.¹¹⁴ This is the ancestral spirit that is to be worshipped by the living descendants.¹¹⁵

On the third day after birth, a soul calling chant is performed to call and guide the third immortal soul (the reincarnate soul of a deceased ancestor) to be reincarnated into the newborn child.¹¹⁶ It is the rebirth spirits, *Niamtxiv KabYeeb*, who safely guide the reincarnate soul from the land of darkness into the land of the living and into the body

¹¹⁰Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 35.

¹¹¹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 10.

¹¹²Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 21. Also called sun and moon soul (*nkauj hnub nraug hli*).

¹¹³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 94.

¹¹⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 21. *Nstuj paa fuab siv* (nju pang fua siue)

¹¹⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 149.

¹¹⁶Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 111.

of the newborn child.¹¹⁷ At each reincarnation, the reincarnate soul will be born into a different gender, alternating between male and female.¹¹⁸

The fourth immortal soul, not referenced as often, is the corralled soul. Tapp states that the corralled soul is the soul of living human mortals whom *Ntxwj Nyooog* has captured and placed in his sky corral in the form of cattle.¹¹⁹ Captured and imprisoned in *Ntxwj Nyooog*'s corral, these human souls are at risk to be devoured at any time by *Ntxwj Nyooog* himself. The ultimate cause of physical death is the consumption of the corralled soul by *Ntxwj Nyooog*. If an ox or cow is not sacrificed at the funeral ceremony to replace this consumed soul, then all of the other immortal human souls will also be totally destroyed, thereby unable to reincarnate. Thus *Ntxwj Nyooog* holds every Hmong person hostage and can bring death at any moment.¹²⁰

During the funeral ritual, the funeral chanter (*qhuab ke*) will instruct the reincarnate soul on its journey back into the land of darkness to await rebirth. The ancestral soul will also be instructed on its journey back into the land of darkness to be reunited with the ancestors, and the shadow soul will be instructed by a burial ritual (*xi plig*) to remain at the gravesite.¹²¹

As the souls of the deceased leave the physical body and leave the household home for the otherworld, the guardian house spirits will attempt to block the souls from leaving the home. The spirit of the door, the spirit of the altar, the spirit of the house post, the spirit of the back door will all demand an explanation for the soul's departure. The

¹¹⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 94. Ntsuj plig si or ntsuj plig qaib.

¹¹⁸Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 21.

¹¹⁹Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 31.

¹²⁰Quincy, *Hmong*, 80.

¹²¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 111. Symonds writes, "I found that, for the White Hmong, two souls make the journey to the land of darkness – the second soul to join the ancestors, and the third soul to reincarnate – whereas the first soul stays with the bones in the grave."

soul is instructed by the chanter as to what to say and how to give thanks to the house spirits for their protection so that they will let the soul leave.¹²²

Rebirth. During the funeral rites, the souls of the deceased are instructed to forget everything about this life and to prepare for the soul's journey into the otherworld. One of the souls, the reincarnate soul, is then instructed by the funeral chanter (*qhuab ke*) as to the way in which the soul must journey into the otherworld in order to be reincarnated again. "One person, three souls, and seven shadows," instructs the chanter, "Since you have gone, your body is dead but not your souls. One of your souls will go to put on the rebirth shirt . . . come back to be reborn on earth."¹²³

This journey involves the reincarnate soul putting on the appropriate outfits, climbing up the silver gold ladder to get to Nyuj Vag Teem's writing desk in the sky (Heaven, *ntuj*), asking for and receiving its rebirth passport paper, descending back down to the earth, crossing the wide river which divides the two realms on a spirit boat, traveling to its past residences, and eventually locating its original birth place and home in order to find its buried birth shirt (fetal placenta).¹²⁴ As the reincarnate soul travels through its past residences, it will need paper money to pay the dues to the regional guardian spirits for use of their land and resources while he or she was alive.¹²⁵

Upon coming back to its home and locating its birth shirt, the soul is to put on the birth shirt and then continue walking on the road until the soul reaches a fork in the road which has three paths. The soul is to journey on the middle path until the soul is reborn again on the earth in the womb of a new mother in its patrilineal clan, preferably

¹²²Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 325-26.

¹²³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 129-30.

¹²⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 130-32, 228-29.

¹²⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 118.

as the son of a chief so that the person will have a good life.¹²⁶ Reincarnation and the perpetuation of the Hmong clan lineage is the desired goal.¹²⁷ As Symonds summarizes, “the reward for a life well lived and for funeral rituals correctly performed is the return of the soul of the dead person to the land of light, which is filled with beauty.”¹²⁸

Rejoin the ancestors. Another soul, the ancestral soul, is instructed by the chanter to take with it a traveling sack filled with rice and rice wine, an umbrella, hemp shoes, and a rooster into the otherworld. “One body, three souls, and seven shadows,” says the chanter, “your body and your shadows are all dead. One of your souls will put on new outfits and go to look for your ancestors.”¹²⁹

Rice wine “offers sustenance to the souls of the dead, and also protection from hostile spirits.”¹³⁰ A sacrificial rooster is offered to the soul as a guide into the land of darkness, where the soul will be unable to see. The rooster is a significant religious animal in Hmong religion due to its powerful crow. After creation, an intelligent peacock (*Yaj Yuam*) had crafted a big copper crossbow and shot down twenty-nine suns and twenty-nine moons out of the 30 moons and 30 suns created by *Saub*. The one remaining sun and one remaining moon hid themselves for seven eras and seven years, causing the world to fall into darkness. No one could bring the sun and moon back out of hiding. However, “when the rooster crowed three times in the north, Lady Sun came out. When the cock crowed three times in the south, Lord Moon came out. Then there was light on

¹²⁶Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 327-30.

¹²⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 17. Symonds makes a distinction between Hmong reincarnation and Buddhist reincarnation. In Hmong religion, the continuous cycle of reincarnation is desired since it perpetuates the Hmong clan line. Whereas in Buddhism, the desire is to liberate the soul from the cycle of rebirth so that the soul can reach nirvana or otherworldliness.

¹²⁸Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 162.

¹²⁹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 132.

¹³⁰Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 119.

the earth for seven years.”¹³¹

Taking its rooster and other outfits, the ancestral soul is instructed by the funeral chanter to ascend the thirteen steps of the silver gold ladder to reach *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s judgment throne. However, this time *Nyuuj Vag Teem* will say that “your paper to eat has no name, your paper to drink has no line, you have died and will never be returned; that your paper has no line and contains no name, you have come and will not be able to return home [to earth].”¹³² With this denial of rebirth, the ancestral soul will be granted passage through *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s rocky gate. The gate, opened in silence, grants entry to *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s land where the villages and towns of the deceased ancestors are located.

As the ancestral soul enters the gate, the ancestral soul must traverse through dangerous, deceptive, and difficult terrain in *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s land in order to get to the village of the ancestors. To avoid being lost, detained, or hindered, the soul must: (1) lie to *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s laborers and refuse to peel garlic and onions; (2) use hemp shoes to walk over the Slope of Caterpillars and Hills of Cold Worms, *toj kab ntsig rawm kab no*; (3) throw knots of hemp into the Dragon’s Mouth and Tiger’s Teeth, *rhau zag ncauj tsov lo*, to avoid being bitten; (4) scoop nine handfuls of water at *Ntxwj Nyooog*’s bitter pond and salty water, *pas dej iab pas dej daw*; (5) travel steadfastly through the noisy insects and howling leopards of the Cloudy Slope and Rainy Hill, *toj tsaus huab rawm tsau nag*; (6) use the umbrella for protection through the Hot Land and Brittle Sky, *teb sov ntuj nkig*; (7) use the fan for protection in the mountain of fog and valley of wind; and (8) follow the leading of the rooster’s crow to find one’s true ancestors, “if your rooster

¹³¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 217. In Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 325, it is a human person *Yaj Yuam* who was said to craft the copper crossbow. And it was the children of the primordial couple, *Nkauj Iab* and *Nraug Oo*, who sought counsel from *Puj Saub* and *Yawmsaub*.

¹³²Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 330.

crows and their rooster answers it is your grandmother grandfather's grave."¹³³ The one whose face is black and crimson stained is the rightful ancestral grandmother and grandfather.

The ancestral soul is instructed to live eternally in the land of the dead: "your living threads are broken. Now you have come to the world of cold and darkness, you will not return home."¹³⁴ The ancestral soul also cannot disclose nor follow the chanter back to the land of the living.¹³⁵ Guiding the ancestral soul safely to the land of the ancestors is one of the primary tasks of the chanter (*qhuab ke*). For if the ancestral soul of the deceased person is not safely delivered to its final destination, and gets lost in the spirit world, then that ancestral soul can become a malevolent spirit, wreaking illness, havoc, and death upon the bereaved family members. And since the souls of the dead still need food and money to use in the world of the ancestors, living male descendants will need to provide offerings to their dead ancestors.¹³⁶

In the grave. When a person becomes ill, the shadowing soul may leave the person's body and already take up residence in a grave site before that person even dies. If this happens, a ceremony of redemption is performed in order to call the shadowing soul back to the person's body. This ceremony involves "killing a pig and using its soul to replace the person's soul in the grave and calling the soul back home."¹³⁷ If a person dies, it is assumed that the shadowing soul has not returned to the body. Upon burial, the shadowing soul will return to the body and remain at the grave, protecting it forever.

¹³³Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 332. Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 85.

¹³⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 134.

¹³⁵Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 333.

¹³⁶Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 155.

¹³⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 13.

Traditional Religious Practices

Ancestral worship, animism, shamanism, and reincarnation are all essential and interconnected elements of traditional Hmong religious beliefs.¹³⁸ In Hmong society, these religious beliefs are expressed, practiced, and reinforced through daily familial rituals, rites of passage rituals, and communal rituals. These religious rituals often involve spiritual leaders, animal sacrifices, and food offerings to the ancestors. The rituals are also frequently associated with significant life events and life crisis.

Daily Familial Rituals

In traditional Hmong religion, the home is the primary center of religious instruction and religious life. Just as the body is the physical vessel and dwelling for the immortal souls, so the house is the physical dwelling for the ancestral and domestic tame spirits.¹³⁹ “Every Hmong home is a shrine,” declares Cha, “all spiritual functions center around the house.”¹⁴⁰ For within the house dwells the guardian house spirits who guard the front door (*dab txhiaj meej*), the fireplace and oven spirits (*dab qhov cub qhov txos*), the bedroom door spirit (*dab roog*), and the main center post spirit (*dab ncej tas*).

In Laos the center post was significant since the placenta (birth shirts) of every newborn son was buried beside the center post in preparation for future reincarnation.¹⁴¹ Across the main load-bearing cross beam dwells all of the ancestors (*dab niam dab txiv*). Against a wall in the living room across from the side door (*spirit door*) each family must place a gold-lined spirit paper (*xwm kab*) or build an altar, a small bowl filled with rice or corn and incense sticks, as a dwelling place for the spirits of wealth and prosperity (*dab xwm kab*).

¹³⁸Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 4.

¹³⁹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 11.

¹⁴⁰Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 137.

¹⁴¹Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 94.

The traditional Hmong house is referred to as a mirror or a microcosm of the cosmos. Tapp states that “If the roof and rafters of the house represent the vault of heaven, then the earthen floor represents the world of nature. Between heaven and earth is the world of men and of social life.”¹⁴² Symonds adds that “the Hmong home is the cosmological abode to which souls come, and from which they depart for the otherworld.”¹⁴³

Altars. Each family home must have at least one altar for the spirits of wealth and prosperity to dwell. The family altar is a daily symbol of dependence upon the spirits in daily life and is highly revered. The family altar is also the place for the shaman to invoke other spirits and the place to offer up animal sacrifices. Animal sacrifices to the spirits of wealth and prosperity are usually offered once a year, an offering two chickens on New Year’s day.¹⁴⁴

In addition to the family altar, other altars may be erected in the home. Depending upon the religious specialization of those in the home, a family may also have a shaman’s altar for the shamanic spirits (*dab neeb*), a healing altar for the spirits of dark magic (*dab khawv koob*), or a medicine altar for the spirits of medicine (*dab tshuaj*).

Household rituals and sacrifices. Every male head of household has to learn and perform the following religious rituals in their homes: calling of the altar spirits (*txi xwm kab*), calling back the soul (*hu plig*), re-establishing the front door guardian spirit (*tsa txhiaj meej*), propitiation of the marital bedroom spirit (*dathong, dab roog*), and calling of the ancestral spirits and house spirits to dine and feast (*laig dab*). Through these household rituals (*ua dab*), the house spirits and ancestral spirits are honored and

¹⁴²Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 63.

¹⁴³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 12.

¹⁴⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 13.

appeased.

Each clan who share a common lineage in a town must also choose a spiritual leader, a spirit father (*txiv dab*). The spirit father is “like the clan’s spokesperson to the ancestors – the equivalent of a priest.”¹⁴⁵ He makes the religious decisions for the clan. He is responsible for presiding over those religious rituals that involve the domestic spirits (*dab nyeg*) inside the house: i.e., *niuda* (*nyuj dab*) offering sacrificial cows and provisions to starving ancestors in the spirit world; *buathai* (*ua npua tai*) honoring the Hmong deity who saved the Hmong during the great crossing out of China; and *laida* (*laig dab*) feeding the souls of ancestors three generations past.¹⁴⁶ As the clan spiritual leader, he is responsible for “passing on the religious knowledge and family history to the next generation.”¹⁴⁷

Each and every religious ritual must be performed consistently the same way within a clan. When rituals are performed properly and consistently, the guardian spirits will protect the souls of the living, and protect the reputation, luck, wealth, and health of family members. However, if the rituals are not performed properly, the guardian spirits may feel ignored or violated and barter the souls of family members to evil spirits, causing illness and misfortune.¹⁴⁸

Shamanic rituals. Illness, though having physical symptoms, may have underlying spiritual causes. One of the primary spiritual causes of illness is spiritual harm to one or more of the human souls. For example, the soul may have detached from body, the soul may have been frightened away from body, the soul may have wandered towards the land of the dead, an unhappy soul may have relocated itself into an unborn

¹⁴⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 143.

¹⁴⁶Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 88.

¹⁴⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 143.

¹⁴⁸Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 143.

fetus, and or a soul may have been captured and taken away by evil spirits or *Ntxwj Nyooog* himself.¹⁴⁹

To protect the human souls from wandering away from the body, white soul strings may be ceremonially tied around the wrists, ankles, or the neck of an ill person, their spouse, and their children in order to draw their souls together (*khis tes*).¹⁵⁰ To call a lost or wandering soul back to the body, a soul calling ritual (*hu plig*) is performed by the head of the household. However, to release a soul that has been captured by evil spirits or to retrieve a lost soul from the spirit world, a shaman must be called upon to perform a shamanic ritual séance (*ua neeb*).

A shamanic séance has two purposes. The first is to diagnose or see what the spiritual issue is (*ua neeb saib*). The second purpose is to heal (*ua neeb kho*). A séance usually has five basic parts: (1) the shaman, with the aid of his shamanic neng spirits, enters into a trance entering the spirit world and summons a troupe of spirits to assist; (2) the shaman and his troupe of auxiliary spirits proceed to the house of the patient and greets the house spirits; (3) the shaman and the auxiliary spirits search for the lost soul in the cracks and holes of the house until the soul is found; (4) the troupe leads the fugitive soul back to the house and places the soul under the guardianship of the house spirits; and (5) the troupe spirits return to the altar and the shaman returns back to the world of the humans.¹⁵¹

One of the important shamanic rituals is the redemption ritual (*ua neeb theej txhoj*). The purpose of this ritual is to block the fugitive soul of an ill person from entering into the land of the dead. In this ritual, a pig is sacrificed so that the soul of the pig will guard the crossroads between the land of the living (*Yajceeb*) and the land of the

¹⁴⁹Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 115.

¹⁵⁰Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 26.

¹⁵¹Mottin, "A Hmong Shaman's Séance," 105.

dead (*Yeebceeb*) for one year and block the soul of the sick person from passing on to *Yeebceeb*.¹⁵² Other rituals performed by the shaman can include negotiating for an extension of life on earth (*fab ntawv*), detaching a fugitive soul from an unborn fetus, raising up a soul that has fallen (*poob plig*), changing fortunes (*ntxeev nyeej*), and or exorcising evil spirits and the spirits of accident and catastrophe (*sau sub*).¹⁵³ The primary objectives of the shaman, in Hmong religion, are to save the human soul, to bring all the souls and ju into healthy alignment with the body, and to seek peace and harmony between the spirits and the physical world.

Once a year at the New Year, all shamans must perform a special ritual to send all of the shamanic neng spirits from their shamanic altars into the spirit world to celebrate their own New Year. Those who have been treated by a shaman are to give offerings and animal sacrifices to the shaman for his neng spirits. Once the shamanic altars are cleaned and remade, another ritual is performed to invite the neng spirits back unto the shaman's altar.¹⁵⁴

All of these household and shamanic rituals normally take place within the home of the family who is seeking the assistance of the spirits. Prosperity, health, and a good rebirth is contingent upon honoring and revering the spirits in every aspect of life thru these ceremonial rituals and religious sacrifices and offerings.

Rites of Passage

In the traditional Hmong culture, birth, marriage, fatherhood, and death are the four primary rites of passage in the earthly realm or land of light (*Yajceeb*). Birth is believed to be the reincarnation of the immortal souls back into bodily form. Marriage is

¹⁵²Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 116.

¹⁵³Tapp, "Hmong Religion," 79.

¹⁵⁴Tapp, "Hmong Religion," 79.

the entry into adulthood. Fatherhood is the procreation of new human life and the continuation of the Hmong kinship lineage. And death is the passing of the immortal soul from the land of the living (*Yajceeb*) to the land of the dead (*Yeebceeb*). Since the world of humans and the world of the spirits exist simultaneously in intertwining interaction with one another, each rite of passage is marked with its own ceremonial ritual and religious rites.

Birth. At birth, a silver or iron neck ring may be given to a newborn to wear to protect the newborn's soul against evil spirits.¹⁵⁵ During the first thirty days after the birth of a child, the mother is confined to her home since her body is considered unclean after childbirth. In this way, the mother does not anger the household spirits or the wild spirits. Three days after birth, a soul calling ritual ceremony (*hu plig*) is performed to call the third soul from the land of darkness to be reincarnated into the body of the child. The father of the child or a grandfather usually performs this ritual ceremony.

During the ceremony, a name is chosen for the newborn, white hemp thread or protective soul strings are tied around the wrist of the baby and of those present (*khi hluas, khi tes*). The ancestral spirits are called to join the feast. And a family feast is shared. This ceremony welcomes the new child into the social community of the family and clan. It also marks the infant as having attained complete personhood - a true human member of Hmong society, therefore, privy to full funeral rites.¹⁵⁶ Symonds explains that, "Any child who dies before the third day is not given a traditional burial, but is simply disposed of, because it is not yet considered fully human."¹⁵⁷

Marriage. Childhood and adolescence are viewed in Hmong culture as

¹⁵⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 13.

¹⁵⁶Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 111.

¹⁵⁷Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 6.

periods of practical preparation for marriage and adult life. A son's role is to grow up in maturity so that he can become a leader for his future family and a productive member of his clan. A daughter's role is to "be obedient and train herself well for her future role as a good daughter-in-law," which includes bearing children to continue her husband's lineage and clan.¹⁵⁸ Marriage is the social rite of passage into adulthood, when a man and woman are "considered 'mature' people worthy of some respect."¹⁵⁹ Thus early marriage is not uncommon in the Hmong culture.

Traditionally there are six main types of marriages. The first type is the parental arranged marriage, when parents on both sides have contractually engaged their children in marriage at a young age. The second type is the forced abduction marriage, when the groom kidnaps an unwilling woman to be his wife. The third type is the forced ceremonial marriage, when clan relatives socially pressure an unwilling daughter to marry in hopes of increased social status and prosperity. The fourth type is the levirate marriage, when an older brother or younger brother is socially responsible to marry the widow of a deceased brother. The fifth type is elopement, when a young man and young woman run away together. The sixth type is the ceremonial consensual marriage, when a man and woman both consent to marriage.¹⁶⁰ A young woman can consensually follow a young man home and remain at his house for three days to initiate the marriage ceremony, or the young man can take clan relatives to go ask for a young woman's hand in marriage (the honorable way). Throughout Hmong history, men have had more choices and options in marriage than women.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸Dia Cha, "Women in Diaspora," 178.

¹⁵⁹Jack Davidson, "Hmong Ethnohistory: An Historical Study of Hmong Culture and Its Implications for Ministry" (DMiss dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1993), 56.

¹⁶⁰Davidson, "Hmong Ethnohistory," 57. Also in Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 77.

¹⁶¹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 79.

Regardless of the type of marriage, three marriage rituals must be completed in order for a marriage to be socially accepted. First, if a man takes his betrothed to his house before the marriage ceremony, the male head of the household must encircle the man and his betrothed with a rooster to cast away any bad luck and bad omens (*lwm sub*). The man must then ask for marital assistance by kneeling before his parents, kneeling before the house spirits and ancestral spirits, and kneeling before his older brothers. Two clan marriage mediators (*mejkoob*) will then be sent to the woman's parents informing them of the marriage, and scheduling a date for the wedding ceremony (*fij xov*).

The bride is to remain sequestered in the man's house for three days and not do any type of work.¹⁶² After the three days, the bride is expected to start working and an induction ceremony is held to induct the bride into the groom's family. Two chickens and an egg are used to call her soul (*hu plig*) into the groom's house. A pig is slaughtered to prepare a feast for extended family and friends, and an offering is made to the house spirits and ancestral spirits (*laig dab*) to acknowledge and protect the new bride as part of the family.¹⁶³

Hence the new bride is now placed under the social protection and spiritual guardianship of her husband, of her husband's clan, of her husband's ancestral spirits, and of her husband's parental house spirits.¹⁶⁴ Without a father or a husband as head of household, a woman was believed to be vulnerable: socially unprotected and spiritually defenseless. Thus polygamy ensured that a woman was always under the social protection of a husband and a clan, and under the spiritual guardianship of paternal clan spirits. Those women who chose to remain widows lived upon the mercy of their

¹⁶²Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 81.

¹⁶³Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 81.

¹⁶⁴Davidson, "Hmong Ethnohistory," 58.

husband's clan relatives and upon the benevolence of their own children.¹⁶⁵

At the appointed wedding time, a wedding entourage is gathered at the residence of the groom's parents. A ritual ceremony (*tsa mej zeeg sawv kev*) and ritual sacrifices are made to ask for protection from the house spirits and the ancestral spirits. And the groom and his wedding entourage are sent off in travel to the bride's house. A black and white striped fabric strip (*siv ceeb*) is tied unto an umbrella to protect the souls of the bride and groom. En route, one pack of rice and two boiled chicken with heads and feet intact are eaten by the wedding entourage (*noj su*) and a small offering made to the spiritual guardians of the land (*laig dab su*). One pack of rice and one boiled chicken with head and feet intact are given to the parents of the bride as an ancestral offering upon entry of the wedding entourage through the back door of the bride's family home.¹⁶⁶

A family dinner of plain rice and boiled pork or boiled chicken is eaten before the wedding proceedings begin. After the dinner, the marriage mediators, two on the groom's side, and two on the bride's side, are seated at a table and the wedding proceedings begin. Gifts of tobacco are passed out to family and relatives who are present. Alcohol and proverbs are used to solidify the marriage, to secure the blessings of the bride's parents, and negotiate the bride price. Included in the bride price would be the groom's monetary commitment to the bride and her family, monetary reparations for the groom's improper conduct during courtship, monetary gifts for honoring the bride's family and extended relatives, and monetary reparations to amend any old grievances between the two clans. In this way, the bride price socially enforced marital commitment, familial honor, and inter-clan solidarity.¹⁶⁷

After the bride-price negotiation is completed, a wedding feast is arranged.

¹⁶⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 76.

¹⁶⁶Ya Po Cha, *An introduction to Hmong Culture*, 84.

¹⁶⁷Quincy, *Hmong*, 94.

Guests are seated in tables by the marriage mediators. The first half of the wedding feast consists of four to twelve rounds of alcohol drinks (*xeej caw*), a symbol of wealth and prosperity. Each side of the family offers drinks to welcome and honor one another. At the beginning of the sixth round, the groom and best man are instructed to kneel down to every relative of the bride, placing their thumbprints on the ground. “Kneeling to honor the relatives, ancestors and spirits signifies the groom’s respect for them and recognizes them as important members of his newfound family.”¹⁶⁸ After the groom and best man are reseated, the last rounds of drinks are poured and then dining of rice and boiled meat ensue until wedding guests leave. At the end of the wedding feast, the parents and relatives of the bride give a dowry for their daughter, say good-bye to their daughter, pack a ceremonial lunch basket for the wedding party, and send off the wedding party back to the residence of the groom’s parents through marriage chants and a last round of drinks (*cawv sawv kev*).

Upon arrival at the groom’s residence, there is another table set to welcome the wedding party back home, to report and present the dowry to the groom’s family, and to thank the marriage mediators and the groom’s wedding entourage. Rounds of alcohol drinks are used to offer thanks. The groom and best man, once again, are instructed to kneel down in homage to all of the spirits, ancestors, and relatives of the groom’s clan. In traditional Hmong weddings, it is the father, clan leaders, and marriage mediators who are in charge and the bride and groom are passive participants, doing what is culturally instructed of them.¹⁶⁹

Parenthood. It is only when a married couple has children, especially sons, that they rise in social prestige in Hmong society. Thus infertility and childlessness is a

¹⁶⁸Ya Po Cha, *An introduction to Hmong Culture*, 93.

¹⁶⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 99.

social stigma. Upon the birth of the first or second child, the maternal grandparents will bestow a mature name (*npe laus*) upon their son-in-law. This mature name (*npe laus*) gives honor to the son-in-law that he has now become a father and a socially mature adult within the Hmong community.¹⁷⁰ The mature name is considered a milestone marker for Hmong men.

To request this mature name, a married man must prepare two sacrificial pigs and two chickens, and a set of burial clothes (*ris tsho laus*) for his mother-in-law and father-in-law. A messenger is then sent to ask the father-in-law and mother-in-law to come attend the renaming ceremony. At the ceremony, the father-in-law is given a drink and asked to select a new name for his son-in-law. At the giving of the mature name, the first sacrificial pig and the pair of chickens are used to perform a soul calling ritual for the son-in-law. The second slaughtered pig is presented in honor of the father-in-law. The hindquarter of the second pig will be taken home by the father-in-law. The rest of the pigs and chickens will be cooked as food for the family and relatives in attendance.

Once the table is set, the clan elders are seated and honored. Each guest then ties a white, hempen soul string to the son-in-law with blessings for prosperity and success. During the feast, many rounds of alcohol drinks are conducted to celebrate this milestone event. After the father-in-law leaves, he uses the hindquarter of the pig to prepare a feast for his family and clan relatives so that he can announce his son-in-law's new mature name.¹⁷¹

Death. In addition to birth, marriage, and fatherhood, death is the fourth and the most important rite of passage in Hmong culture. Death is the passage of a person's immortal souls into the land of the dead (spirit world, otherworld). Thus the funeral ceremony, consisting of an elaborate number of funeral rituals and burial rites, must be attended to meticulously so that the souls of the deceased will find safe passage to the otherworld.

¹⁷⁰Quincy, *Hmong*, 95.

¹⁷¹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 63.

Funeral preparations start from the moment of death. Close family and relatives are informed of the death (*tso moo*) and summoned to attend the funeral (*hu hauv qhua*), to pay their respects, and to show love (*tuaj hlub*). Clan relatives are ceremonially asked by the clan leaders to serve and help with the funeral tasks. Those asked to serve include: a head family representative (*thawj xyomcuab*); the clan representatives or chiefs (*kavxwm*) to oversee all aspects of the funeral; a family leader to make offerings to the deceased (*cuab tsav*); the funeral chanter or path pointer (*qhuab ke, taw kev*) to instruct the soul of the deceased; the reed players (*txiv qeej*) to play the reed and funeral drums day and night; the death song chanter (*txiv nkauj*); the burial chanters (*txiv xaiv*); the cooks to clean, chop, and cook the meat (*tshwj kab*); women to cook rice (*niam ua mov, niam fam txam*); and others as needed to accomplish various tasks.¹⁷²

The immediate family, especially the sons, are responsible for selecting an auspicious gravesite, and an all-natural biodegradable casket. They also need to select and slaughter the animals that will be used as sacrifices or as food for the funeral. Once the body of the deceased has been ritually washed by the family, the body is carefully dressed. Layers of burial clothing, a long outer robe (*tsho tshaj sab*), headwear, and special cloth shoes (*khau noog*) and hemp shoes (*khau maj khau ntua*) are placed on the body for the journey into the spirit world.¹⁷³ No metal alloy is to be left on the body of the deceased, on the burial clothing, in the casket, or within the casket itself. Since metal is non-degradable, it is believed to hinder the reincarnation of the soul.¹⁷⁴

During the wake, which traditionally lasted three to nine days, twenty-four hours around the clock, family, friends, and relatives are invited to come and pay their respects to the deceased and to stay and mourn with the family members. Monetary gifts

¹⁷²Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 109.

¹⁷³Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 114.

¹⁷⁴Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 113.

are given to the family, and accepted with words of thankfulness and knee bows.

Imitation paper money is burned for the deceased to carry with him/her into the spirit world.

In the first part of the funeral ritual, the funeral chanter or path pointer (*qhuab ke*) advises the soul of the deceased that he/she is now dead and instructs the soul on how he/she can enter into the otherworld to reach the land of the ancestors and be reincarnated.¹⁷⁵ During this portion, a chicken is killed and laid by the deceased body to be his/her discerning guide in the otherworld to locate the correct ancestors.

Immediately following this showing the way chant, the reed player plays the song of death (*qeej tu siav*), sending the souls into the land of darkness. Another reed song is played to raise the death horse (*kws txaij kws nraug*): the ritual stretcher used to carry the body. During this portion, a pig or cow is sacrificed by the family leader (*cuab tsav*) and a song for the animal offering (*qeej cob tsiag*) is played. The animal sacrifice not only is cooked to provide food for the funeral helpers and mourners, but more importantly, the soul of the animal is offered to accompany the dead into the otherworld.¹⁷⁶ As Cha explains, “Hmong believe that the journey to the underworld is cold, lonesome and treacherous. Sending animal’s souls, paper money, lots of clothes and other artifacts with the deceased will make the journey easier and will enrich his or her life in the spiritual world.”¹⁷⁷

During the last night of the funeral wake before the burial (*hnub qhua txws*), the burial chanter (*txiv xaiv*) will perform an extensive ritual detailing the life of the deceased and the cause of death (*qheb phiaj*), inviting resolution with the deceased (*cwb qhua*), and blessing of the family (*foom kom*). During the resolution section, the clan

¹⁷⁵Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 55.

¹⁷⁶Davidson, “Hmong Ethnohistory,” 61.

¹⁷⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 121.

chiefs (*kavxwm*) and burial chanter (*txiv xaiv*) will set up a table and invite attending guests to voice any grievances, unpaid debts, or unresolved issues that they may have had with the deceased. Those grievances that are voiced during this hearing will be settled by the surviving family members. Those grievances left unspoken will be forgiven and forgotten. This grievance hearing provides the family and guests with closure and provides the soul of the deceased with peace so that he or she can reincarnate more quickly.¹⁷⁸

On the day of the burial, usually the tenth day, all of the paper money is burned and all sacrificial animals slaughtered. The body is taken to the gravesite and the last reed song is played, sending off all the bad luck, evil spirits, and ghostly spirits with the deceased so that the surviving family may have peace and good health. A torch carrier leads the body of the deceased to the gravesite.

At the gravesite, the family is given an opportunity to say their last farewells to the deceased. Small slits are then cut into the clothes of the deceased and the family does a last search to ensure that no metal objects have been maliciously placed into the casket. The casket lid is then closed and the casket is cut and gouged so that it will not be stolen. Prior to burial, the sacrificial chicken is placed next to the coffin and then the grave is filled up with dirt.¹⁷⁹ The deceased is instructed to spend the “first ten days to get acquainted with the underworld and the next three to wait for relatives to come and get the soul to visit the old house.”¹⁸⁰

After the burial, stringed stakes are driven into the ground along the path to the family’s house to ward off evil spirits and or the spirit of the deceased. Relatives and friends come and stay with the family for three days and three nights (*zov hmo*). For

¹⁷⁸Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 123.

¹⁷⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 126.

¹⁸⁰Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 127.

three consecutive days after the burial, food is delivered to the gravesite by the family to feed the shadow soul that has remained with the body. On the third day after burial, rocks are stacked on top of the gravesite (*txhim zeb*) and no one is allowed to touch the grave or walk over the grave ever again.

Afterlife. For the first twelve days after burial, the family is to leave a setting at the breakfast table for the deceased and call the deceased to join them. Then on the thirteenth day after burial, called the full cycle (*puv tsug*), the family, a family leader (*cuab tsav*), a clan chief (*xyom cuab*), a cook, and a reed player must perform the ritual ceremony to release the shadow soul (*xi plig*). In this ritual, a son will draw a crossbow to retrieve the shadow soul from the gravesite (*tos plig*) and bring the shadow soul into the house for its last meal. The shadow soul is ceremonially cleaned, fed, and brought into the family house for the last time. The shadow soul is taken around the key areas of the house and then seated underneath the family altar. A pig is sacrificed as a food offering to the shadow soul, and paper money is burned. The shadow soul is then taken outside of the house, and sent back to the grave to reside there forever.

One year after the burial, the family is to perform another ritual ceremony (*tso plig*), this time to feed and ensure the release the reincarnate soul for rebirth. Two drummers and two pipers are needed to assist the eldest son. Taking a large tray, the spirit shirt of the deceased is stuffed with food items and placed on the tray. The eldest son then takes the tray and circles the house post nine times before setting the tray down in front of the house post. Facing the tray, the eldest son chants an improvised song telling “the soul of the dead man to be free, to bring his descendants good fortune, and to remember his mandate-for-life paper so that he could be born again and have a good life.”¹⁸¹ During this chant, the eldest son must recite the names of the ancestors correctly

¹⁸¹Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 151.

or else people in the clan lineage can get sick or blind.¹⁸² A sacrificial pig is killed and the soul of the pig offered to the ancestors for food. Once the divining horns revealed that the sacrifice was accepted by the ancestral spirits, the tray with the possessions of the deceased is discarded, traditionally rolled down a mountain.¹⁸³

Ancestorhood. From hence forth, the deceased is enshrined with the other ancestors and can be called upon for assistance. Symonds writes that, “if the souls don’t reach their own ancestors, they can get lost and become wandering spirits, caught too near the land of light, who cannot rest and who cause trouble for the household and the lineage.”¹⁸⁴ The deceased soul, who may live in the otherworld for generations before being reincarnated, can also come to the living descendants for assistance when the deceased soul faces hunger or encounters trouble in the otherworld.¹⁸⁵ If a living descendant becomes ill and the shaman diagnoses that the illness is due to a starving ancestor, then a ritual sacrifice of cows (*nyuj dab*) must be made to provide for the ancestor in the otherworld.¹⁸⁶

Communal Rituals

The Hmong New Year celebration (*tsiab peb caug*) is a longstanding communal ritual celebration that not only celebrates the departure of the current year, it also anticipates the renewal of things with the arrival of the New Year. For the Hmong, the New Year marks the conclusion of the annual crop cycle and the beginning of the new crop cycle. Traditionally the New Year celebration consisted of three major aspects:

¹⁸²Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 149.

¹⁸³Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 152.

¹⁸⁴Symonds, *Calling in the Soul*, 133.

¹⁸⁵Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 129.

¹⁸⁶Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 34.

the family feast (*noj tsiab*), the religious rituals, and the community social gathering.¹⁸⁷

To begin the celebration, a family feast was prepared. A large pig was butchered and friends and relatives were invited to come and join the family. On the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month, the oldest male of each household takes a bundle of bamboo leaves and waves them throughout the entire house, from one room to another, verbally expelling all evil spirits, sickness, and misfortune from the house. The bamboo leaves are then taken to the home of the clan religious leader (spirit father) for a *luchia* (*lwm tshiab*) ritual.

In this ritual, all of the members of the clan are present. The bamboo leaves from every clan household is tied together. A live rooster is waved over the heads of the clan members by the clan religious leader. The spirit father then bestows a blessing upon his clan members for the new year, a blessing of prosperity, health, and joy. The rooster is then killed and its blood applied to the tied up bamboo leaves, which are then thrown away.

Following this ceremony, the male patriarch performs the soul calling ritual (*hu plig*) to call back all the souls of his living family household members. He also renews all of the family altars by cleansing and replacing the altar decorations and incense bowls, and offers a chicken sacrifice to each of the altar spirits to renew his family's commitment to these guardian spirits. Other offerings of sticky rice patties (*ncuav*) and animal sacrifices are made to feed the ancestral spirits (*laig dab*). Stacks of religious spirit paper are then applied to all areas of the house (*foob yeem*) to mark the beginning of the three-day resting period (*hnub caiv*). After the three days of rest, the entire community becomes engaged in a myriad of social games and activities. In Southeast Asia and China, these may include socializing, bull-fighting, wooden top competition (*ntaus tub lub*), ball toss (*pov pob*), and courtship singing (*hais kwv txhiaj*).

¹⁸⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 48.

When the new crop season begins and the first batch is harvested, an offering to the ancestral spirits is again made by the household patriarch in homage to their protection and benevolence.¹⁸⁸

From the moment of birth to the very last breath, from the home to the community, a Hmong person's daily life was saturated with religious symbols, religious ceremonies, and religious rituals. Not only did these rituals teach and reinforce Hmong cultural values and norms. These rituals also perpetuated the religious beliefs, practices, and worldview of the Hmong to its subsequent generations.

Traditional Religious Education of Children

"Crops are raised to await hunger and children are raised to await old age (*ua qoob ua loo los npaj tshaib, tu tub tu kiv los npaj laus*)."¹⁸⁹ This is a Hmong proverb which epitomizes the traditional Hmong perspective on children and the raising of children. Though loved by their parents, the primary purpose of children is to grow up and care for their parents, especially as parents become frail and old and unable to care for themselves. Likewise, the primary purpose of parents is to invest in and prepare their children well so that their children will have the capabilities to care for parents in later life and continue the clan lineage. Thus the relationship between children and parents is to be a reciprocal relationship, where parents care for children while they are young so that one day children can care for parents in old age, in death, and in the spirit world.¹⁹⁰

Therefore, children are expected to grow up and learn how to respect and obey their parents and elders, how to take care of younger siblings, and how to bring honor to their parents, their clan, and their ancestors. Children are not to talk back or question the

¹⁸⁸Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 60.

¹⁸⁹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 22.

¹⁹⁰Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 156. Honoring and caring for one's parents is a Hmong cultural value that aligns with the biblical command to honor one's mother and father (Exod 20:12; Eph 6:2).

authority or actions of their parents. They are to be responsible, self-sacrificing, loyal, and well-mannered.¹⁹¹ Parents, in turn, are expected to raise, guide, and teach their children about proper behavior and proper manners, and to provide for their physical, moral, and religious upbringing. Sons, especially, are expected to be trained from early in life on fulfill their societal role as head of household and to “learn all of the family’s religious rituals and be able to perform them properly.”¹⁹² Since the Hmong did not have religious temples or religious schools to instruct and disseminate its religious beliefs, they relied upon one another to educate children in the ways of the Hmong.

Context of Religious Education

The family, the clan, and the Hmong community were the spatial, relational, and spiritual context for the religious education and training of Hmong children. Together, these three relational contexts formed a concentric network in which the Hmong religious beliefs and practices were introduced to children, repeated to children, and socially imprinted upon children.

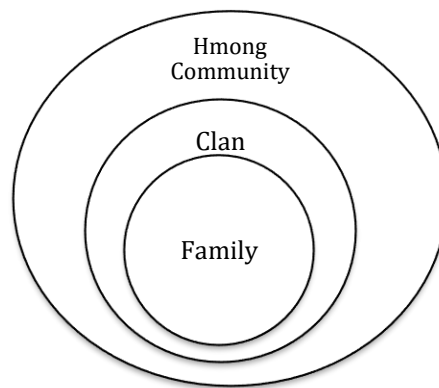


Figure 4. Circles of Hmong religious education

¹⁹¹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 26.

¹⁹²Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 205.

Family, home-centered. The family and the home were the primary, spatial, and relational center for the religious education of children. For the home was a shrine: a symbolic representation of the cosmic reality and interplay between the human world and the spirit world. Both the human family and the spirits (ancestral spirits and house spirits) physically inhabited the same space. The presence of the spirits was real and encountered daily through various kinds of religious artifacts and sensory stimuli within the home, e.g., spirit altars, incense, spirit money, food offerings, and sacrifices.

Most of the religious rituals were also performed in the home. Children grew up every day seeing the religious altars in their homes and experiencing the rituals that were performed in their homes. At times these rituals were performed by children or performed especially for children, e.g., soul calling ritual, or shamanic healing rituals. In one shamanic ritual of protection, a child is made to follow a shaman, leading a dog that has been bound. The sick person follows the child and the bound dog three times inside the house. Then the dog is sacrificially killed outside of the house so that the dog's soul may block the evil spirits from attacking the family members.¹⁹³

Clan-homes. The clan is the extended family of the nuclear family. Thus after the family home, the clan and the homes of extended clan relatives were the secondary social context in which the religious education of children occurred. Since clan relatives often shared the same ancestral spirits, they welcomed one another into each other's homes to share life and to assist one another with religious ceremonies, rituals, sacrifices, and feasts.

Large clan gatherings meant the need for more animals to be butchered, more food to be cooked, more tables to be set, and more dishes to wash. So sharing the workload amongst many families was essential to sustaining the social events and rituals

¹⁹³Tapp, "Hmong Religion," 71.

of the clan. It is through these numerous clan ritual events that children were consistently and repeatedly exposed to the religious language and religious practices of the Hmong.

Hmong community. Not only did children watch and observe religious rituals in their own homes and in the homes of clan relatives, children also observed Hmong religious rituals being practiced in the greater Hmong community. At public funerals, weddings, harvest offerings, New Year celebrations, and other community-wide events, children experienced a community religion, where religious beliefs were upheld in the public sphere and even practiced by the community leaders themselves. Because the family, the clan, and the greater society all espoused many of the same religious beliefs and practiced the same rituals, children were constantly and consistently exposed to the Hmong religion in all spheres of life.

This was the context of the Hmong in China and Southeast Asia when the Hmong resided in their own villages and provinces and were the majority group. However, in the present century, these circles have changed. The changes in these circles will be discussed later in this chapter as the researcher explores the impact of Christianity and Western dispersion upon the religious education of children.

Instructors of Religious Education

In traditional Hmong culture, the father, the clan spiritual father (*txiv dab*), and the shaman were those responsible for perpetuating the religious beliefs and practices of the Hmong. Together, these religious leaders worked in each of the three circles of religious education, mentioned above, to teach and train the young. This religious training was often directed at young boys or men, since it was the males who performed the religious rituals. However, some women have been chosen by the neng spirits to be shamans. Thus the shaman is the only religious leader in Hmong society that can be a woman.

Father. As the family and home are the center of children's religious education, so fathers are the central religious instructors. Fathers were the religious leaders of their families and households. It was the father who was expected to perform the household ceremonial rituals within the home. He was to lead his family in spiritual matters and spiritual practices so that his family would not neglect or violate the spirits, thus causing harm to befall upon his family. From father to son, this knowledge of living in harmony with the spirits was passed down.

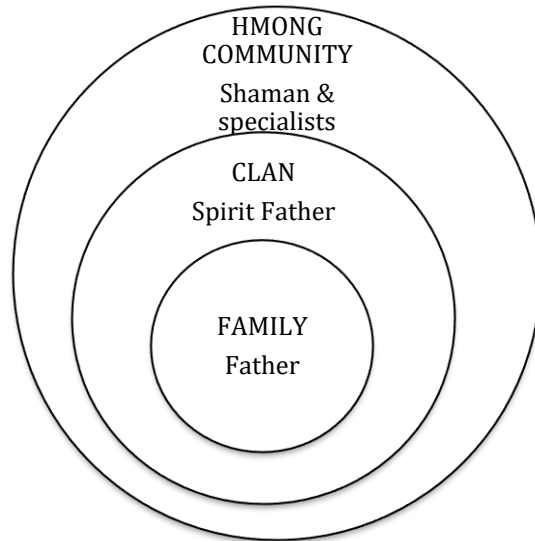


Figure 5. Circle of Hmong religious instructors

Spirit fathers. Within each clan, the spirit father (*txiv dab*) or clan religious leader was the secondary religious instructor for children. Since the spirit father was in charge of performing certain clan religious rituals, e.g., *buathai* (*ua npua tai*) honoring un-named ancestors, *luchia* (*lwm tshiab*) clan New Year blessing, young men would need specific training from the spirit father for these particular rituals. In addition, since the spirit father was the clan religious leader who was responsible for passing on the clan's religious practices, the spirit father assisted and instructed fathers and sons on the proper

ways to perform such rituals within their households.

Shamans and ritual specialists. Outside of the clan, older boys and young men who wanted to become religious specialists, e.g., reed pipe player, funeral chanter, were trained and mentored by the experienced ritual specialists as apprentices. These apprenticeships can last for years until a young apprentice is able to master the religious specialty. Cha writes of a young apprentice who started to play the bamboo reed pipe at the age of ten and continued until adolescence before he had mastered the reed songs.¹⁹⁴

Those, male or female, who are chosen by the shamanic neng spirits to become a shaman (*txiv neeb*) are initiated into their role by a Master Shaman (*Xwb Hwm*). Tapp writes that, “as the Hmong see it, he [Master Shaman] does not *teach* the future shaman shamanism, since nobody can do that but the shaman’s familiar spirits or *neeb* themselves. What the Master does is teach him to control and organize the experience of encountering these *neeb*.”¹⁹⁵ Under the guidance of a Master Shaman, an apprentice shaman learns how to control the neng spirits and harness their power to enter into the spirit world.

When an apprentice shaman is ready, the Master Shaman will conduct a shamanic rite with the apprentice shaman, “invoking the *neeb* spirits and riding off together into the Otherworld for the first time.”¹⁹⁶ After returning from the Otherworld or spirit world, the Master Shaman will symbolically divide water from his bowl into the bowl of the apprentice, signifying that the neng spirits are now divided between them. The Master Shaman will then assist the apprentice to erect a shamanic altar in the new shaman’s home. The bowl of spirit water will be reverently placed and remain

¹⁹⁴Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 28.

¹⁹⁵Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 72.

¹⁹⁶Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 72.

thenceforth on the shamanic altar of the newly initiated shaman.¹⁹⁷ Once a shamanic altar is erected, the ritual paraphernalia of shamanism (divination horns, a black hood, bell rings, a gong, a rattle, etc.) will be obtained from another shaman who is of the same ancestral lineage. In this way, the ancestral neng spirits will also come and reside on the new shaman's altar to assist him.¹⁹⁸

Way of Religious Education

In *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Hiebert asserts that “in tribal and peasant societies, people generally share fundamental beliefs and assumptions that are constantly reinforced by the group. They also teach their world view to their children and so assure its perpetuation.”¹⁹⁹ Hiebert continues stating, “one of the important discoveries of the social sciences has been the crucial importance of childhood years in the formation of the human personality and in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next Each society has its own ways of ‘enculturating’ its young, of teaching them its cultural ways.”²⁰⁰

Since the Hmong were an oral people, a supernaturalistic people, a practical people, and a collective people, the Hmong enculturated its culture, and its religious beliefs and practices to children primarily through socialization within the home, within the clan, and within the Hmong society. The transmission of religious beliefs and practices occurred through informal, oral, experiential, and intergenerational learning.

Informal learning. Daily life was the setting for the religious education of children in the traditional Hmong culture. Almost every major life event and every clan

¹⁹⁷Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 72.

¹⁹⁸Tapp, “Hmong Religion,” 73.

¹⁹⁹Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 44.

²⁰⁰Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 50.

and community celebration involved some sort of religious ritual. Sometimes children were intentional participants in these rituals (e.g., soul calling, healing rituals, New Year celebrations) and sometimes children were excluded from these rituals (e.g., marriage negotiations and wedding rituals).²⁰¹ Yet children were always silent observers and intakers of the cultural traditions, norms, and practices.

Children learned by living, experiencing, and being immersed in the Hmong culture and religion. This is informal learning. Estep, Anthony, and Allison state that in informal learning (socialization), “one learns by living in and experiencing a culture or society. Learning may or may not be regarded as intentional, but it does take place. In fact, socialization is often the most life-changing learning format in any setting.”²⁰²

From a sociocultural theory perspective, Haight asserts that children are not lone spiritual seekers, but are born into relationships, family, and a community that shape and are shaped by his/her development. Spiritual development occurs through “the dialectical processes of socialization [intentional or incidental] and acquisition.”²⁰³ Spiritual development is “embedded within a social and historical context as children actively observe and increasingly participate with others in the routine, everyday practices through which culture is maintained and elaborated Embedded within a complex sociocultural context, spiritual development is multidimensional involving the

²⁰¹Ya Po Cha, *Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 88. Children do not participate in wedding ceremonies since there is too much alcohol involved.

²⁰²James R. Estep, Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 17. Estep, Anthony, and Allison make a distinction between the three types of learning and thus the three formats of education. The first is formal learning (structured, systematized learning) in a formal setting (school, educational institution). The second is the semi-formal or non-formal learning (intentional training) in a non-formal setting (seminar, training institute). And the third is informal learning (socialization) in an informal setting.

²⁰³Wendy Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 110.

active engagement of intellect, emotion, and morality over time.”²⁰⁴ As children are exposed to religious practices, children are actively constructing their own spiritual understandings.²⁰⁵ Acquisition then is “the process through which children interpret, respond to, and ultimately embrace, reject, or elaborate upon the social patterns to which they are exposed.”²⁰⁶

Intergenerational learning. Many Hmong believe that knowledge is collectively derived from the original forefathers and ancestors and passed down from the older generation to the younger generation, from fathers to sons, from mothers to daughters, and from masters to apprentices.²⁰⁷ Intergenerational learning and intergenerational socialization were key to the social and religious instruction of children.

As soon as children were able, children worked in the house or field with their parents. Older children were responsible for watching and caring for younger siblings. Young girls were taught how to cook and sew by their mothers. Young boys learned how to hunt and trap by their fathers. Much of what children learned was through direct imitation of adults.²⁰⁸ As Quincy observed,

The Hmong children lived constantly in the presence of adults and, contrary to the observation of some ethnologists at the turn of the century, they did not lack supervision or moral education. Quite the opposite, their socialization to Hmong culture began almost immediately. If anything they absorbed the morality of their group much earlier than a child in Europe or America who, in comparison with the Hmong child, remains relatively isolated from the real world of adults until late puberty.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” 111.

²⁰⁵Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” 110.

²⁰⁶Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” 110.

²⁰⁷Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 29.

²⁰⁸Quincy, *Hmong*, 91.

²⁰⁹Quincy, *Hmong*, 91.

Oral learning. The preferred medium for passing on knowledge in Hmong culture is the spoken word. Through oral myths, legends, stories, and chants, the story of the Hmong, their ancestors, the spirits, and their religious beliefs were told to the younger generation. Children and young apprentices learned these religious stories and chants through listening, rote repetition, and verbal memorization.

Though various writing systems were derived for the Hmong by various missionaries, it was not until 1962 that literacy began to spread among the Hmong population. From 1962 to 1975, the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) was being learned by Hmong students in Vientiane, Laos and then by ordinary Hmong as they waited in Thai refugee camps.²¹⁰ Yet literacy rates were still very low. Barney, C&MA missionary to Laos, wrote that during this time period “mission records show that approximately three to four percent of the Meo [Hmong] are literate.”²¹¹ Thus the spoken word continued to be the primary method of knowledge transmission, even with the existence of a Hmong written script.

Experiential learning. From the moment of birth and during his or her name calling ceremony, a Hmong child is already an unconscious participant of Hmong religious practices. From an early age, young girls and boys grew up in their homes unconsciously exposed to their household altars and household religious rituals. Daughters were expected to watch and learn how to prepare food and set-up for ceremonial feasts. Sons were expected by parents to watch and learn how to perform the religious rituals.

Through participant observation, through active participation in religious

²¹⁰William A. Smalley, Chia Koua Vang, and Gnia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Messianic Script* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 153.

²¹¹ G. Linwood Barney, “The Meo-An Incipient Church,” in *Readings in Missionary Anthropology II*, ed. William A. Smalley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1978), 468.

rituals, and through the imitation of practicing adults, children were learning the Hmong religious beliefs and practices. Jarvis states that imitation is a basic and fundamental aspect of learning and social living. Children are imitation machines. From “our earliest days we learn to imitate.”²¹² In “Great Expectations,” Ngo and Lor document the stories of two young high school males who grew up attending and participating in Hmong religious ceremonies every weekend. As a son, Xiong was present and witnessed many religious rituals in his home. He greeted people who came to their house. He watched the shamans and did as his parents instructed him, whether that was to hold the shaman’s bench, to beat the drum, or to bang the ceremonial plates together. Toua helped to set-up around the house, then to cook, and then to even kill animals. As young men continue to grow, they are often involved in reciting chants, playing musical instruments, assisting the shaman, and sacrificing animals.²¹³

Lave and Wenger, in their situated learning theory, assert that a human being is a whole person-in-practice: a whole person developing through embodied participation in an ongoing social world.²¹⁴ Participation is the way of learning, “of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the culture of practice.”²¹⁵ Through participation, a Hmong child usually grows up to trust and practice the religion of his parents, his clan, and his ethnic community. “This trust in their religious teachings,” as Lee and Tapp explain, “is one based on practices and self-learning, not the preaching of any priests or religious leader

²¹²Peter Jarvis, *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 13.

²¹³Bic Ngo and Pa Nhia Lor, “Great Expectations: The Struggles of Hmong American High School Boys,” in *Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mark E. Pfeifer, Monica Chiu, and Kou Yang (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 158-59.

²¹⁴Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50.

²¹⁵Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 95

because they do not have an organized religion.”²¹⁶

Goal of Religious Education

The process of traditional Hmong religious education was for a child to progress from being a participant observer, to becoming an imitator of religious leaders, and finally to becoming a self-practitioner. The end goal for religious education in the Hmong culture is for children to grow up and fully embrace and practice these religious traditions that have been passed down for generations.

By embracing and practicing these religious traditions, Hmong children, continue to perpetuate the Hmong ancestry and Hmong culture. Cha writes that, “to know Hmong manners [*paub kev cai*] is to have a general understanding about every aspect of our culture. Such knowledge may be quite profound, but it is also essential to keeping the culture alive.”²¹⁷ The fate of a culture, whether it remains a living culture or disappears into extinction, lies with the children: the next generation.

Hmong Christian Conversion

In May of 1950, the conversion of the first Hmong to Christianity in Xieng Khouang province, Laos sparked a mass conversion of Hmong households and villages. Boua Ya Thao, a personal shaman to tribal chief Touby Lyfong, had rented one of his village houses to Nai Kheng: a Khmu bible student serving with Ted and Ruth Andrianoff, missionaries with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.²¹⁸ The house was believed to be haunted by evil spirits and “no one had been able to stay there, even for one night.”²¹⁹ On the first night, Nai Kheng and his wife heard strange noises and raps

²¹⁶Lee and Tapp, *The Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 197.

²¹⁷Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 29.

²¹⁸Jean L. Andrianoff, *Chosen for a Special Joy: The Story of Ted and Ruth Andrianoff* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 2001), 48.

²¹⁹Andrianoff, *Chosen for a Special Joy*, 48.

on the wall, but they knelt and prayed for God to remove the spirits.

After two weeks of living in the haunted house, Nai Kheng was asked by Boua Ya to visit him at his home. Nai Kheng also brought missionaries Ted and Ruth Andrianoff to the visit. In broken Lao language, Boua Ya spoke these words:

You know that I am a very powerful shaman People come to me from all over the mountains when they are sick. I make offerings to the spirits to make these people well. I talk to the spirits, and sometimes they come into my body, making me shake and fall down on the floor. I know that the spirits have much power. They are not kind, but I must respect them. I know that powerful spirits have lived in the house Nai Kheng has rented from me. No one has been able to live there for several years. I thought that Nai Kheng would probably have to leave too. But I have watched him and his family. They have lived in peace for two weeks now. Their God must be more powerful than the spirits. If there is a God that mighty, I want to worship him.²²⁰

After Ted and Nai Kheng shared God's story of redemption from creation to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, Boua Ya prayed in Hmong and invited Christ into his life. Then Boua Ya gathered all of the fetishes from his altars, tore down the altars, removed all of the soul strings and spirit bracelets and necklaces from each family member, and burned all of his family's religious paraphernalia in a large bonfire.²²¹

While the Andrianoffs left to attend a field conference in Vietnam, Boua Ya took Nai Kheng to tell his relatives living in his village and also in a nearby village about God and His power. In the second village, while Nai Kheng was sharing the Good News of Jesus, an old woman, a sorceress, spoke to the villagers stating that the spirits had given her a vision two years prior. In this vision, "a messenger of the God of grace would visit them. If they would receive Him, He would become their God and they would become His people."²²² She was the first one to confess faith in God. On May 16, 1950, both villages, Ban Phou Nian and Ban Phou Kabor, were converted on the same

²²⁰Andrianoff, *Chosen for a Special Joy*, 49-50.

²²¹Andrianoff, *Chosen for a Special Joy*, 50.

²²²Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 64.

day.²²³ By the end of July 1950, “fifteen villages had burned their spirit paraphernalia, and a total of 1,700 Hmong had converted to Christianity, with the number increasing each week.”²²⁴ By the end of 1950, 2,500 Hmong persons had been converted to Christianity in the Xieng Khouang province. In 1951, there were 3,190 converts in Xieng Khouang.²²⁵

Kue credits this explosive growth in Hmong conversions to the supernatural power encounters which the Hmong experienced.²²⁶ The Spirit of God moved in the hearts of those whose hearts were yearning for ultimate salvation and redemption from the power of *Ntxwj Nyooog* and the spirits to believe in Jesus Christ. Upon reception of Christ, they burned their religious altars as a visible sign of their separation from the spirits and their newfound loyalty to Christ. Yet even as they tore down and burned their altars, they were unharmed.²²⁷ They were delivered from the possession of evil spirits. They were healed from physical illness.²²⁸ These Hmong converts reported personally experiencing the divine power of God over the power of the spirits.

Timothy Vang, in his analysis, credits the rapid Hmong conversions to a number of religious and socioeconomic factors. According to Vang, one major religious factor that contributed to the Hmong receptivity to Christianity was the similarity between the Hmong belief system and the Bible. Vang asserts that the Hmong “already believe in the existence of God the creator, Satan, evil spirits, a universal flood, life after death, and the concepts of redemption and substitution. Accepting Christianity brings a

²²³Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 63.

²²⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 64.

²²⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 66-67.

²²⁶Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 63-64, 67, 74, 104.

²²⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 67.

²²⁸Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 107.

major change of lifestyle for the Hmong but not a major change in belief.”²²⁹

Another major socio-religious factor for Hmong Christian conversion, as cited by Timothy Vang, was the homogenous, Hmong to Hmong, nature of evangelism and church growth that occurred during this period.²³⁰ This included the sharing of the Gospel into Hmong villages by Hmong Christians themselves, after the first initial conversions. Winter and Koch refer to this type of evangelism as E1 on the E-scale: evangelism of non-Christians by Christians within the same culture.²³¹ This also included the organization of mono-lingual, mono-cultural Hmong, indigenous churches, consisting of Hmong people and led by Hmong people.²³²

In addition to these religious factors, Timothy Vang also identifies socio, political, and economic factors which may have contributed to the Hmong receptivity to Christianity. Such factors included: insecurity and fear from war and political upheaval;²³³ hardship and suffering from inadequate food, shelter, water, health care, and costly animal sacrifices;²³⁴ and stress and pressures from acculturation.²³⁵ Xiong and Xiong critique Vang’s assertions as “seriously flawed methodologically and conceptually” and that Vang’s analysis subjugates “certain Hmong traditional practices or

²²⁹Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 126.

²³⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 149-50.

²³¹Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 510-11. The E-scale (evangelism scale) compares the cultural distances that Christians need to move into in order to communicate the gospel to others. The scale moves from E0 to E3. E0 is renewal evangelism of church members inside the church within the same culture. E1 is the evangelism of non-Christians by Christians within the same culture. E2 is cross-cultural evangelism of non-Christians in a similar but different culture. And E3 is cross-cultural evangelism of non-Christians in a completely different culture.

²³²Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 149.

²³³Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 217.

²³⁴Timothy Vang, “Coming Full Circle,” 218.

²³⁵Timothy Vang, “Coming Full Circle,” 219.

kev coj dab as inferior to Christianity” and “in need of liberation....in need of cultural cleansing.”²³⁶ Instead Xiong and Xiong suggest that Hmong conversion to Christianity should be viewed from a sociological perspective. That religious conversion is a complex process of adaptation to new social circumstances. The Hmong are “active agents in synthesizing attitudes, beliefs and practices,” thereby producing a “syncretic-cultural-religious system” in which specific Christian beliefs and practices have been adopted and assimilated into their own Hmong traditional religion.²³⁷

The discouragement of Hmong shamanic practices and Hmong traditional religion has been viewed by some as subjugation by Western Christianity.²³⁸ Anthropologist Nicholas Tapp, in “Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong,” hypothesizes that minority, ethnic groups, like the Hmong, who are less socially organized and possess a more primitive animism are more susceptible to Christian conversion than a dominant, majority people group who are highly organized, highly rational, and have a “clearly defined class of intellectuals.”²³⁹ Tapp points out that there were many socio-economic reasons for the Hmong adoption of Christianity in China and in colonial Southeast Asia: economic persecution by the Chinese; the desire for a new form of political organization and centralization of authority; the desire for literacy; the presence of indigenous Messianic conceptions of a returning King; severe economic deprivation and need; avoidance of costly kinship or ritual obligations; achieving some type of social or economic advantage;

²³⁶Nao Xiong and Yang Sao Xiong, “A Critique of Timothy Vang’s Hmong Religious Conversion and Resistance Study,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 9 (2008): 18-19.

²³⁷Nao Xiong and Yang Sao Xiong, “A Critique of Timothy Vang’s Hmong Religious Conversion and Resistance Study,” 19.

²³⁸Donald Hones, “The Word: Religion and Literacy in the Life of a Hmong American,” *Religious Education* 96, no. 4 (2001): 496.

²³⁹Nicholas Tapp, “The Impact of Missionary Christianity upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, no. 1 (1989): 70.

and social pressure to conform to the Christian beliefs of benevolent Western sponsors.

Since historical research data on Hmong conversion was not collected during the rapid growth of the Hmong church in Southeast Asia, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons why Hmong converted to Christianity. What is most evident from the differing perspectives on Hmong conversion is that conversion is a complex, multi-faceted, and on-going process. People may convert to Christianity for many different reasons: sociological, political, economic, religious, supernatural, etc. Though conversion may begin with a personal or collective decision to follow a new religion, that decision is not the end of conversion.

Joel Green explains that “sociologically, conversion is not an event or static occurrence.”²⁴⁰ Religious conversion is an ongoing “transformation of conceptual scheme – conceptual, cognitive, and behavioral – by which life is reordered.”²⁴¹ This transformational reordering does not take place in individual isolation, but requires a “community of reference and formation as they (re)learn how to think, believe, feel, and behave – that is, as they embrace and embody fresh patterns for ordering life.”²⁴²

For Hmong Christian converts, the new community of reference and of Christian transformation and re-formation was the Hmong church. Since some of the Hmong converts to Christianity were rejected by their clan relatives for leaving their traditional religion,²⁴³ the Hmong church became their newfound spiritual family. Yet learning to rethink and reorder their whole lives according to Christian beliefs and practices was difficult and challenging.

These new Hmong Christians struggled and wrestled with how they should

²⁴⁰Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 137.

²⁴¹Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life*, 136.

²⁴²Green, *Body, Soul and Human Life*, 136.

²⁴³Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 44.

live in light of God's grace and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Should Hmong Christians eat the food sacrificed to the spirits and the ancestors? Should Hmong Christians continue to participate with their clan in the traditional religious rituals? Which traditional rituals and religious practices should they keep and which ones should they no longer uphold? Should they continue to use alcohol in their weddings and rituals? What should they do about polygamous marriages? What should they do if someone dies? How are Hmong Christians supposed to mourn and bury their dead? And what about the ancestors, the spirits, and *Ntxwj Nyooj*? Will this new God be able to protect the Hmong believers from evil spirits, curses, and bad luck? Will this new God be able to heal them like the shaman? These were some of the lingering questions and issues that the Hmong faced in converting to Christianity.²⁴⁴

Formation of the Hmong Church

By the end of 1954, Hmong Christians were located in 96 villages in Laos, between five and six thousand people.²⁴⁵ Some Hmong Christians had constructed village chapels and parsonages, while other Hmong Christians were meeting in homes.²⁴⁶ The increasing number of Christians among the Hmong, the Lao, and the Khmu in the Xieng Khouang province prompted missionaries to call for a conference to establish an indigenous provincial church committee to oversee the Christian work in Xieng Khouang. This provincial church committee fueled the desire of indigenous church leaders to establish an indigenous national church with its own structure and governance. In March 1957, fifty-five delegates from forty-three churches throughout Northern Laos gathered in Xieng Khouang to establish the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). Dr. Edward

²⁴⁴Tapp, "The Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities," 87.

²⁴⁵Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 69.

²⁴⁶Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 66.

Roffe, the C&MA missionary field director, assisted to draft the national constitution for the Lao Evangelical Church.²⁴⁷ Rev. Saly Khounthapannya was elected as the first president of the LEC.

In 1960, due to Communist invasion of Xieng Khouang province, the LEC office was moved to the capital city of Vientiane, Laos. Rev. Saly served as president of the LEC from 1957 to 1960. From 1960 to 1963, Rev. Xu Xu Thao became the first Hmong pastor elected as LEC president. From 1963 to 1965, Rev. Moun Duangmala served as president. From 1965 to 1967, Rev. Seng Pao Thao, another Hmong pastor, served as LEC president. From 1967 to 1969, Rev. Seng Pao Thao, another Hmong pastor, served as LEC president. From 1969 to 1971, Rev. Nhia Lo Xiong served as president. From 1971 to 1973, Rev. Saly again served in this role. Then Rev. Seng Pao Thao, a Hmong pastor, served as president from 1973 until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.²⁴⁸

The Lao Evangelical Church was a young church. Many of its leaders “had not the advantage of an elementary school education. Some of these leaders had to learn how to read and write after they became Christians.”²⁴⁹ In 1951, the C&MA opened a short-term Bible school in Luang Prabang to train indigenous pastors who could go back and minister in their own villages. Due to Communist takeover, the Bible school was closed in 1961 and relocated to Vientiane. From 1961 to 1975, Rev. and Mrs. Herbert S. Clingen, Ted Andrianoff, Malcolm M. Sawyer, and Oliver J. Kaetzel were C&MA missionaries who taught and served in leadership oversight of the Bible school.²⁵⁰ Many Hmong pastors, Khmu pastors, and Lao pastors were trained by the Bible school. My father was one of the Hmong pastors who graduated from this Bible school.

²⁴⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 72.

²⁴⁸Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 84.

²⁴⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 74.

²⁵⁰Timothy Vang, “Coming a Full Circle,” 82.

From 1951 to 1975, Linwood Barney (C&MA), Father Yves Bertrais (*Txiv Plig Nyiaj Pov*), and William Smalley (Baptist linguistic missionary) worked to develop a written Hmong script: the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA). In addition, other missionaries, e.g., Wayne Persons (C&MA), Doris Whitlock and Gilliam Orpin (OMF), Don Scott and Ellen Van Brammelen (C&MA) worked with Hmong translators, Yang Ger and Wang Doua Hang, to translate the Bible into the Hmong language. In 1975, the New Testament in Blue Hmong was published by the United Bible Society.²⁵¹

In 1964 the Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) purchased a wren, four-seater plane for the C&MA missionaries in Laos to transport national pastors and Bible school students to the 56 organized and 25 unorganized Hmong churches in the various villages.²⁵² In 1970, with donations received in memoriam of Ted Andrianoff, a recording studio was set up at the Bible school to produce Hmong language sessions for the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC).

Christian Education Practices

From 1957 to 1975, the Hmong Christian churches throughout various villages and provinces in Laos were part of the national LEC, under the spiritual guidance of C&MA missionaries. However, from 1975 to 1978, during the mass exodus from Laos into the refugee camps in Thailand, the Hmong Christians re-organized themselves as the Hmong Refugee Church.²⁵³ Then from 1978 until the present, as immigrants in the USA, many of the Hmong Christians were re-organized as the Hmong Field Conference of the C&MA, later renamed as the Hmong District of the C&MA.

Throughout these three distinct periods of Hmong church history, similar

²⁵¹Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 78.

²⁵²Timothy Vang, "Coming a Full Circle," 71.

²⁵³Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 105.

methods were used by the Hmong churches to educate or disciple Hmong believers in Christian belief and Christian practice. These similar Christian education methods were a reflection of the denominational influence of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. To understand the direct influence of the C&MA upon the developing Hmong church, the researcher will first present a short historical overview of the C&MA and its Christian education practices and then discuss the Christian education practices that were utilized within Hmong church history.

Influence of the C&MA

The Christian and Missionary Alliance was founded in the United States during the modern, industrial period. This period of American history was marked by the industrialization of factories, urbanization, European immigration, and the proliferation of various independent Christian societies and associations. Thus Christianity in nineteenth century America is referred to by Sentner and Erb as the period of associations and societies.²⁵⁴ Many Christians tended to organize themselves into churches, associations, national charitable societies, missionary societies, independent age group Sunday Schools, and young men and young women societies, often imported from England.²⁵⁵ The expansion and cheapening of transportation, travel, and postal communication rapidly nationalized any local organization. Temperance societies (1786), young people's missionary societies (1796), women's societies, the American Sunday School Union (1824), the Young Men's Christian Association (1844), the Young Women's Christian Association (1866), and the Young People's Association of the Christian Endeavor (1881) were some of the societies started during this period.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴F. Erb, *The Development of the Young People's Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1917), 14-19. Also in M. Senter, III, *When God Shows Up* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 99-113.

²⁵⁵L. Bacon and C. Northrop, *Young People's Society* (New York: Lentilhon, 1900), 17.

²⁵⁶Erb, *The Development of the Young People's Movement*, 14-38.

In addition, this period is also considered by Winter to be the second great era of the modern missions movement, in which missions to the unreached inland areas was dominated by American Protestant missionary agencies.²⁵⁷ The American Board of Commissioners had sent Adoniram Judson to Burma (Myanmar) in 1812.²⁵⁸ China Inland Mission was formed by Hudson Taylor in 1865, later renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF).²⁵⁹ The Student Volunteer Movement (1886) was birthed two years after the first international conference of Christian college students, hosted by evangelist Dwight L. Moody to evangelize the world “in this generation.”²⁶⁰

It was during this social, religious, and missionary context that Albert Benjamin (A.B.) Simpson, a Presbyterian pastor, decided to plant a new church in New York city called The Gospel Tabernacle (1882).²⁶¹ Simpson had resigned from two prior churches before planting this church. In Louisville, Simpson was spiritually irritated with “the accepted custom of rented church pews and other social distinctions that kept many low-income people, including blacks, from attending his church.”²⁶² At the Thirteenth Street Presbyterian church, Simpson was spiritually troubled by the practice of infant baptism, since he was convicted that believer’s baptism by immersion was the biblical practice.²⁶³

²⁵⁷Ralph D. Winter, “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 259.

²⁵⁸Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, and Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), 80.

²⁵⁹Winter, “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions,” 259.

²⁶⁰Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 68.

²⁶¹Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 54.

²⁶²Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 51.

²⁶³Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 43.

In planting The Gospel Tabernacle church, Simpson envisioned a New Testament church whose mission was to “evangelize unreached peoples both locally and afar.”²⁶⁴ The Gospel Tabernacle had a congregational form of government. It had an executive board and a board of elders who were elected every year by the members. It observed the ordinances and church discipline. It maintained a balance of worship, discipleship, evangelism, and missions. Expository sermons on entire books of the Bible were preached by Simpson.²⁶⁵

In March 1883, the Gospel Tabernacle formed its own missionary society: The Missionary Union for the Evangelization of the World. Then in October 1883, the church also formally opened its own Missionary Training College to prepare young men and women into the neglected fields.²⁶⁶ In 1887, Simpson founded the Christian Alliance: an interdenominational association of Christians from many denominations who were united in promoting the full salvation of the Gospel. He also formed the Evangelical Missionary Alliance (EMA), renamed the International Missionary Alliance (IMA): an interdenominational missionary sending association of the Christian Alliance. By 1893, the Alliance had emerged as a missionary force, sending 180 missionaries on forty stations in twelve field, e.g., Congo (now Zaire), Sudan, India, China (Central, South and North), Japan, Bulgaria, Palestine, Alaska, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.²⁶⁷

In April 1897, in order to combine its efforts, the two Alliances merged together to form one single entity: The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). Simpson approved of the name stating, “we are an alliance of Christians for worldwide

²⁶⁴Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 53.

²⁶⁵Niklaus et al., 152-53.

²⁶⁶Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 59.

²⁶⁷Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 94. In 1910 mission leaders converged in Edinburgh, Scotland for the first global missionary conference, precursor to the organization of the World Council of Churches.

missionary work.”²⁶⁸ To provide spiritual leadership for the growing C&MA fellowships, large territorial districts were formed, each district led by a district superintendent.²⁶⁹ The Missionary Training College was moved to Nyack, New York, which was renamed the Missionary Training Institute and later became Nyack College.²⁷⁰

The holiness movement, pentecostalism, and the fundamentalist movement during the early 1900s deeply impacted the Alliance. Divided by the issue of speaking in tongues, some of the Alliance leaders and members left to join the Assemblies of God.²⁷¹ In 1911, the C&MA sent Robert A. Jaffray to French Indochina to establish the first Protestant mission in Annam (Vietnam).²⁷² In 1912, the C&MA drafted a new constitution to provide increased organizational structure and governance for its local branches, e.g., Board of Managers, secretary, treasurer, finance department, foreign department, and home department.²⁷³ In 1914, women’s prayer bands were organized to pray for world missions.²⁷⁴ However, on October 28, 1919, A.B. Simpson passed away peacefully and was succeeded by Paul Rader as the next president of the C&MA.

By 1920, the tract and Bible societies, rescue missions, and Sunday schools were a normal feature of Christian churches in the United States.²⁷⁵ The Sunday school movement that was originally evangelistic and outreach focused in educating at-risk children in the community had been adopted as a primary Christian education program

²⁶⁸Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 99.

²⁶⁹Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 102.

²⁷⁰Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 104.

²⁷¹Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 98, 115.

²⁷²Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 109.

²⁷³Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 116.

²⁷⁴Alliance Women, “History of Alliance Women Ministries” (2007), accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.alliancewomen.org/adobe10/awmhistory10.pdf>.

²⁷⁵Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 149.

for the children of church members.²⁷⁶ Jones observes that the societies of the previous generation had become “the church-based programs of this generation,” with churches internally attempting to streamline, combine, centralize, segment, and professionalize all of the previous societies’ programs into each local church.²⁷⁷

Within the C&MA, this streamlining included organizational, educational, and ministry changes. As the new president of the C&MA, Paul Rader reorganized the district-level leadership to give district superintendents full time oversight of their regional areas. Each district was also to receive support and counsel from its own executive committee. Several district or regional Bible schools were opened to train home workers. Large tabernacle buildings were constructed to evangelize the mass numbers of unchurched people.²⁷⁸ Christ, as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King (The Fourfold Gospel) was adopted as the core distinctive of the C&MA.

After Simpson and Rader, the C&MA in the USA struggled to define its organizational identity. Those branches that were part of C&MA were often affiliated churches, tabernacles, or mission societies who had their own denominational ecclesiology. The C&MA did not have a uniform constitution for local branches. As Niklaus explains, “Dr. Simpson founded the Alliance to be a catalyst that would work primarily within existing churches He rejected the possibility of a C&MA denomination or even a truly Alliance Church. Branches were to be noncompetitive auxiliaries to existing churches.”²⁷⁹ The C&MA was originally intended to be an interdenominational parachurch missionary society, without institutional church forms or functions. Yet as the number of branches and societies continued to increase,

²⁷⁶Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 106.

²⁷⁷Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 127.

²⁷⁸Nikalus et al., *All for Jesus*, 151.

²⁷⁹Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 172.

organizational issues continued to arise.

In the C&MA mission fields, a “stifling, pervasive attitude of paternalism” was also evident in some missionaries, “including some of the most successful and influential.”²⁸⁰ Therefore, at the General Council of 1927, the C&MA endorsed the three-self policy of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation for national indigenous churches.²⁸¹ The intent of this endorsement was to call for “reduction of money spent on building projects, gradual withdrawal of subsidy for national workers and progressive transfer of authority to the national church.”²⁸²

In 1929, the beginning year of the Great Depression (1929-1939), Laos became an Alliance field of operations. Its field center was stationed in Luang Prabang. Women in the C&MA had also organized themselves into prayer groups. In 1947, an area women’s group was formed in Albany, New York by Georgia Derk. In 1949 a district-wide Ladies United Missionary Organization (LUMO) was formally organized in the Northeastern district. The purpose of these auxiliary women’s prayer bands was to pray for and to raise additional financial support for overseas missionaries.

Under the leadership of the home secretary, the C&MA began to promote and strengthen its local fellowships. In 1952 the first full-time Sunday school secretary was appointed. In 1953, the C&MA Board of Managers approved the formation of the Laymen’s Crusade for Missionary Action to mobilize men from local churches for community outreach and evangelism,²⁸³ later renamed the Alliance Men (1976). In 1954,

²⁸⁰Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 213.

²⁸¹Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 125. Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson, John Nevius, Roland Allen, and Alan Tippett were some of the missionaries who recognized that missionaries were transferring Western church forms and structures to indigenous believers. These missionaries initiated the indigenous movement to develop indigenous churches that were self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing (3-self indigenous movement).

²⁸²Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 177.

²⁸³Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 217.

the first full-time national youth secretary was appointed to organize and lead the Alliance Youth Fellowship (AYF). In 1960, the Jaffray School of Missions opened on the Nyack Campus. In 1961 an auxiliary national Women's Missionary Prayer Fellowship (WMPF) was approved by General Council, previously known as the Ladies United Missionary Organization (LUMO).

In 1974, the General Council approved a new uniform constitution and bylaws with reorganized structures for the C&MA, changing the C&MA from being an interdenominational parachurch missionary organization into an official Christian denomination with its own uniform church structure.²⁸⁴ The Jaffray School of Missions, also in 1974, became the Alliance School of Theology and Missions, later renamed Alliance Theological Seminary.²⁸⁵ In 1975, the Office of Specialized Ministries was formed to provide humanitarian assistance and religious oversight of ethnic Christians from war-torn Indochina. In the following decades, the Office of Specialized Ministries would continue to oversee the planting of ethnic churches within the C&MA. Today, the Office of Specialized Ministries is known as the Office of Multicultural Ministries.²⁸⁶ The Office of Multicultural Ministries serves under the Division of Church Ministries. Within the Multicultural Ministries, there are six ethnic districts (Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Spanish Central, Spanish Eastern, Vietnamese), eleven ethnic associations (Arabic-speaking, African, African-American, Filipino, Montagnard, Chinese, Haitian, Lao, Native American, Portuguese-speaking, Spanish Western), and a Jewish ministry.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 230.

²⁸⁵Niklaus et al., *All for Jesus*, 219.

²⁸⁶The Alliance, "October 2011 Board Summary Letter," (November 30, 2011), accessed February 25, 2016, <https://www.cmalliance.org/news/2011/11/30/october-2011-board-summary-letter/>.

²⁸⁷The Alliance, "Districts and Associations," accessed February 25, 2016, <https://www.cmalliance.org/district>.

Early Church Period (1950-1975)

When the C&MA missionaries entered Laos in 1929, the C&MA was still an interdenominational parachurch missionary society. In 1950, as the number of Hmong converts increased, the Alliance missionaries engaged in leadership training, development of a written Hmong language script, Bible translation, radio ministry, aviation transportation, and organization of the local Hmong churches.

Formal training of pastors. Training national leaders to pastor the growing Hmong churches was the first and primary objective of Ted Andrianoff. To provide biblical training for indigenous pastors, a short-term, Bible school was established in Xieng Khouang in 1951. Anyone who could read and write Lao was accepted into the program. The program consisted of three semesters: six weeks of classes interspersed with six weeks of field ministry. The Lao Bible, translated and published in 1932 by the Swiss Brethren, was utilized for biblical instruction. Training in the life of Christ, Christian doctrine, Christian conduct, singing, and Scripture memorization were also included in the curriculum.²⁸⁸

In 1960 the Bible school was transferred to Vientiane and renamed the Laos Bible Training Center. It provided a four-year curriculum study. From 1951 to 1966, the Laos Bible Training Center was “totally operated by the missionaries.”²⁸⁹ In 1967, the Bible School reorganized itself to include national church leaders in administrative oversight of the school. In 1975, the Bible School was closed down when Laos was taken over by the Communists.²⁹⁰

Church-centered, intergenerational worship. As Hmong pastors were

²⁸⁸Timothy Vang, *The Hmong*, 11, 15.

²⁸⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 91.

²⁹⁰Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 94.

trained in the Bible school, they were sent out and transported via airplane to care for local churches. The early Hmong church was organized under the care of male elders and pastors, a presbyterian-form of church leadership espoused by C&MA's founder, A.B. Simpson.²⁹¹ Together, churches met on Sunday mornings for worship in homes or village chapels. Children, youth, and adults sat together for prayer, singing, and the oral study of God's Word. Intergenerational worship, through oral transmission and oral learning, was the first primary Christian education practice of the Hmong church.

As churches grew larger, larger chapels were built or rebuilt and the church chapel increasingly became the center of Christian worship and Christian education.²⁹² Jean Andrianoff noted that "each village wanted its own place of worship . . . in later years when the Hmong were displaced to refugee camps, church construction often took priority over building their own family homes."²⁹³

In 1957 the Hmong churches were formally organized as part of the national Lao Evangelical Church (LEC). The constitution for the LEC was drafted by C&MA missionary, Dr. George Edward Roffe. Like the C&MA, The LEC was organized into different regional districts. Each district had its own District Superintendent to oversee the churches in that area.²⁹⁴ Governance and financial support of the LEC were transferred from the missionaries and the C&MA to the national church and its leaders. However, the missionaries continued to serve as church consultants, Bible teachers, and pastoral trainers. Missionaries and national church leaders served together on the Radio Committee, Scripture Translation Committee, Laos Bible Training Center Board, and the

²⁹¹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 82.

²⁹²Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 83.

²⁹³Andrianoff, *Chosen for a Special Joy*, 122.

²⁹⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 73.

Aviation Ministry Committee.²⁹⁵

Youth ministry. In 1964, as the number of Hmong students increased in Vientiane, the first youth group was formed in the Vientiane church. The youth group met on Sunday afternoons for “Bible study, fellowship, worship, and evangelistic events.”²⁹⁶ In April 1970, the LEC held its first national youth conference in Vientiane. This conference was “planned and executed by the youth themselves.”²⁹⁷ The national youth conference was held annually until 1974, and national youth presidents were elected, which included a number of Hmong young men.²⁹⁸ Throughout northern Laos, most of the Hmong churches had organized their own youth groups and sent delegates to attend the annual youth conference.

Women’s fellowship. In 1968 the LEC organized the Women’s Fellowship and the Relief Committee. The Women’s Fellowship was formed to engage women in hospital visitations, relief distribution, and meeting for Bible study and prayer.²⁹⁹ The Relief Committee was involved with oversight and coordination of World Vision relief projects. By 1970, in the Sayaboury district, there were weekly women’s meetings in almost every church.

Youth taught, Sunday school. In 1969, a Sunday school program was initiated in the Hmong church in Vientiane. Mrs. Helen Sawyer wrote in the *Alliance Witness* that, “some months ago a goal was set for Laos – an organized Sunday school in

²⁹⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 76.

²⁹⁶Timothy Vang, *The Hmong*, 18.

²⁹⁷Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 77.

²⁹⁸Timothy Vang, *The Hmong*, 18.

²⁹⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 78.

the Vientiane church to be in operation as soon as possible. The plan called for a program that could be copied by other churches throughout Laos a program of regular bible lessons for all ages.”³⁰⁰ Since the Lao government did not approve the Romanized script (RPA) developed by Smalley, Barney, and Bertrais,³⁰¹ Doris Whitelock (*Paajmim*), OMF missionary in Thailand, had developed a Lao script for writing the Hmong language. Her colleague, Gillian Orpin, converted the Thai script Sunday school curriculum into the Lao script and developed a literacy program for the Hmong using that Lao script.³⁰² A Hmong hymnal using the Lao script was also printed in 1969. In addition, the New Testament was being translated into Hmong using that same Lao script.

Since there was a lack of qualified and dedicated adult teachers, the Hmong students in Vientiane, who were literate in Lao and the Lao script, became the primary Sunday school teachers. Kue writes that the youth “served their church by being Sunday school teachers, holding children’s meetings, and helping to establish new Sunday Schools in up-country areas.”³⁰³ By 1974, the Sunday school program was instituted in many Hmong churches using the Hmong Lao script. Then in 1975, the New Testament was translated into the White Hmong dialect (Doris Whitelock) and Blue Hmong dialect (Wayne Persons, Yong Xeng Yang) using the Hmong Lao script.

Refugee Church Period (1975-1986)

The newly translated Hmong bibles using the Lao script were distributed to the Hmong in the refugee camps. From 1975 to 1978, as a result of the Vietnam War, the Hmong churches were dispersed from Laos into Thailand as a Hmong Refugee Church.

³⁰⁰Helen Sawyer, “Operating Sunday School in Laos,” *Alliance Witness* (July 23, 1969), 16.

³⁰¹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 86.

³⁰²Sawyer, “Operating Sunday School in Laos,” 17.

³⁰³Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 78.

Within the five refugee camps, Hmong pastors led and reorganized the Hmong Christians in the refugee camps into churches, a total of 4,846 persons. Chapels were built for Sunday morning intergenerational worship.

The church building in Vinai refugee camp, Loei province, was built in January of 1976. Also in Vinai, a central Refugee Church Committee was formed with the Alliance World Fellowship and the C&MA to oversee the newly reorganized Hmong refugee churches. During this refugee period, the Hmong churches were led entirely by Hmong pastors and elders. Only a few C&MA missionaries, i.e., Rev. Wayne Persons, Don Durling, Doris Whitelock, and OMF missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Don Rulison, were able to visit the refugee camps to provide Bible teaching and leadership training to men, women, and young people.³⁰⁴

Intergenerational worship. Those Hmong Christians who had immigrated to the United States from 1975 to 1978, worshipped inter-generationally. They met in each other's homes or in the church buildings of their sponsors.³⁰⁵ Without a church building of their own, many Hmong churches used their homes as the central gathering place for worship, fellowship, bible study, and ministry meetings. Due to a lack of classrooms, children and families worshipped together.

Semi-formal training of pastors. In 1978, the Hmong churches in the USA were formally organized with the C&MA as the Hmong Field Conference. In 1981, the Hmong Field Conference adopted the Theological Education by Extension Program (TEE) to train Hmong laymen as pastors. The TEE program was developed by Tony Barrat and SEAN (Seminario por Extensión ANglicano) in the 1960's in Guatemala. The purpose of TEE was to train indigenous pastors who could not afford or were unable to

³⁰⁴Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 108.

³⁰⁵Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 112.

meet the educational qualifications for formal theological training. SEAN (subsequently called Study by Extension to All Nations) became an International Foundation and Registered Charity whose TEE materials were translated into many languages, including the Hmong language.³⁰⁶

Segmented ministries. In 1981, the Hmong Field Conference adopted the formation of the Hmong Youth Rally Zone. The purpose of the Hmong Youth Rally Zone was to equip local church youth groups and to coordinate national youth conferences. The first national Hmong youth conference was held in Denver, CO, with about 200 young people in attendance. To guide the local youth groups and coordinate the annual youth conference (HLUB), the Hmong Field Conference hired Nha Long Yang as its first district youth director, followed by Tong Yang and Samuel Her. From 1980 to 1985, the annual youth conference attendees increased from 300-500 youth to 700-1000 youth respectively.³⁰⁷

In 1982, both the Alliance Men and the Women Missionary Prayer Fellowship (WMPF) were formally organized within the Hmong Field Conference. The role of the Alliance Men was to equip men's ministry in the local churches as well as coordinate district-wide men's ministry projects and conferences. The role of the WMPF was to equip women's ministry in the local churches and to coordinate district-wide and national women's ministry projects and conferences. Local men's and women's ministry groups met at least monthly for fellowship, prayer, and bible study.

In 1984, The Department of Alternative Christian Education was formed to provide pastoral and leadership training through the TEE program. Jerry Soung was

³⁰⁶SEAN International, "About SEAN: A Short History of SEAN," accessed February 25, 2016, <http://www.seaninternational.com/history.html>.

³⁰⁷Paoze Thao, *Mong Christian History: 1950-2000* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2000), 144, 150.

appointed as its first director to coordinate the TEE program and to help translate the TEE materials into Hmong. The Hmong District also hired additional staff to resource and develop the Christian education (disciplemaking) ministries within the local churches. Hmong language Sunday school curriculum for adults and children were produced by the Hmong District. Curriculum translators and writers included Timothy Vang, Chang Nha Kue, Tou C. Her, Nhia Vang Vang, Boua Tong Her, Cher Chu Vang, and Pa Y. Her.³⁰⁸ The Hmong adult Sunday school curriculum, “Manas” (Manna) was produced and distributed by the Hmong Field Conference to all of the Hmong C&MA churches.³⁰⁹ Segmented Sunday school classes for adults, youth, and children were offered in most churches during the first hour, followed by a corporate worship for adults and youth, and a separate children’s church during the second hour.

In order to extend church-planting efforts among the Hmong immigrant community, the Church Growth office was also formed. From 1984 to 1988, the Hmong Field Conference had 54 established churches and 14,588 members.³¹⁰ To guide church leaders, the C&MA district and church bylaws were translated into the Hmong language for use in the Hmong Field Conference and within local churches. In addition, translation of the Bible into the Hmong RPA script was begun by Pang Sy Moua, Chue Koua Thao, Yong Xeng Yang, Nao Tou Vang, Wayne Persons, and Earnest Heimbach. A Hmong hymnal was also commissioned for completion for congregational use.³¹¹

Hmong-American Church Period (1987-Present)

In 1987, the Hmong Field Conference officially changed its name to the

³⁰⁸Thao, *Mong Christian History*, 150.

³⁰⁹Kue, *A Hmong Church History*, 118.

³¹⁰Hmong District, *DS Report 2014* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2014), 9.

³¹¹Thao, *Mong Christian History*, 150.

Hmong District of the C&MA. In 1988, a Missions Committee was formed to promote global missionary efforts within the Hmong C&MA churches. With increased giving to the C&MA Great Commission Fund, in 1992, two Hmong missionary families were sent to Thailand: Jerry Soung and Nhia Ko Lor. In 1994, another couple, Naolue and Pang Kue, was appointed to work with the Thai people in Thailand. The sending of these first Hmong missionaries marked the beginning of the Hmong-American church period. Once the Hmong were the mission field, now the Hmong church had become the missionary.

From 1978 to 2014, the Hmong District of the C&MA had increased from 12 churches and 1,525 members to 114 churches and 36,187 members. Of these 114 churches, 61 churches had purchased their own church facility, and 12 had already paid off their church mortgages. Of these members 75% were under 35 years of age, and 1,726 were new converts. Worship attendance averaged between 49% to 52%. And baptisms numbered 1,578 people: 645 people under 18 years of age and 933 people over 19 years of age.

In 2005, there were 38 pastors who were college or seminary trained and 22 pastors who were trained in the TEE program.³¹² In 2014, there were 254 TEE graduates, 20 MSP (ministerial study program) graduates, and 172 bible college or seminary graduates. The Hmong District had 129 senior pastors, 20 youth pastors, and 11 Hmong missionaries. In the Hmong Alliance Youth Department, the annual youth conferences for high school (HLUB) and college students (SALT) attracted between 1100 to 1500 young people. The Alliance Men's Ministry conducted four regional men's conferences. The Great Commission Women, previously known as the Women's Missionary Prayer Fellowship and then the Alliance Women, conducted three regional women's conferences, ranging from 460 to 1300 women in attendance. The radio ministry of the Hmong District extended to 25 countries and 108,000 listeners. And the Hmong District

³¹²Hmong District, *DS Report 2005* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2005), 19.

was in the process of revising the Hmong Bible, which was completely translated using the Hmong RPA script in the year 2000.³¹³

Since its inception in the United States, the Hmong District has demonstrated increasing growth in church membership, financial giving, pastoral training, leadership training, missionary deployment, Hmong Bible and Hmong hymnal revision and production, multimedia ministry, youth ministry, women's ministry, and men's ministry. However, in the areas of ministry to the second generation Hmong-Americans, church planting, and ministry to children and young couples, Hmong District leaders have reported the need for increased growth in these specific areas.³¹⁴

In the Hmong District *DS Report 2005*, both the district superintendent and the church ministry director voiced the need for increased ministry to the second generation Hmong-Americans, especially the need for English-speaking second generation church plants.³¹⁵ In the *DS Report 2015*, the church ministry director voiced his concern about the missing generation of young couples in the local churches. He also raised concerns about the manner in which new churches were being planted in the Hmong District. From 2007 to 2013, 52% of church plants were due to church conflict and church splits. Only 9% were planted by mother churches. Only 13% were planted in new locations. And only 26% were planted by individual church planting groups.³¹⁶

In 2004, the Hmong District halted the production of the Hmong Sunday school curriculum for adults and for children. Only 27 out of 84 churches (32%) were using the adult Hmong Sunday school curriculum, and only 10-11 out of 84 churches (11%-12%) were using the children's Hmong Sunday school curriculum. The previously

³¹³Hmong District, *DS Report 2015* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2015), 9. Also in Thao, *Mong Christian History*, 146.

³¹⁴Hmong District, *DS Report 2015*, 9-10.

³¹⁵Hmong District, *DS Report 2005*, 9, 14.

³¹⁶Hmong District, *DS Report 2014* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2014), 37.

published curriculum materials were placed on CD format for redistribution, and churches were instructed to use English Sunday school curriculum from the C&MA or other evangelical publishers.³¹⁷ Lack of funding for children's ministry in the local churches was also an issue.³¹⁸

Although the Sunday school program for adults, youth, and children continued in many local churches, attendance in the Sunday school program was decreasing. In 2004, the average Sunday school attendance for the entire Hmong District churches was 25.5%, and the average worship attendance was around 50.5%.³¹⁹ In 2010, the average Sunday school attendance for the Hmong District was 24.2% and 52% worship attendance. In 2011, the average Sunday school attendance was 25.1% and 52% worship attendance. In 2012, the C&MA stopped the annual reporting of Sunday school attendance.³²⁰ This declining attendance led some churches to replace the adult Sunday school with small groups, women's ministry groups, and or Alliance Men groups.³²¹

Christian Education of Children

As the influence of Western missionaries and the C&MA penetrated into the indigenous Hmong church, many of its church organization and Christian education practices reflected the practices of its missionary parent denomination. In Laos, the Hmong churches were organized according to the presbyterian, pastor-elder structure of A.B. Simpson's church, the original founder of the C&MA. Even when the Lao Evangelical Church was formed, its national organization mirrored that of the C&MA in

³¹⁷Hmong District, *DS Report 2005*, 27.

³¹⁸Hmong District, *DS Report 2015*, 10.

³¹⁹Hmong District, *DS Report 2005*, 65.

³²⁰Hmong District, *DS Report 2013* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2013), 32. Average worship attendance also located in *DS Report 2014*, 34.

³²¹Hmong District, *DS Report 2015*, 7.

terms of establishing a national executive committee, regional district organization of churches, and oversight of those churches by district superintendents. When the Hmong immigrant churches were reconstituted under the C&MA in the United States, they were also organized according to the uniform constitution of the C&MA that was approved in 1974, a year prior to the immigration of the Hmong to the United States. Not only did the C&MA influence the structure of the Hmong churches, the C&MA also influenced the Christian education of adults, youth, and children within the Hmong churches.

Instructors of Christian Education

The C&MA missionaries, with the assistance of translators, were the primary Christian educators of the new Hmong Christian converts. With no knowledge of God, Jesus, the Scriptures, or the church, the Hmong Christian converts were dependent upon the missionaries to provide them with all the necessary knowledge and skills to understand and live out their newfound faith in Christ. As indigenous pastors were biblically and formally trained in the Christian faith, they became the next tier of Christian educators for the Hmong churches.

All throughout the different stages of Hmong church history, the Hmong pastor has played an essential and integral part in the spiritual growth and development of the local Hmong churches. As the new spiritual leader of the Hmong Christian church community, the pastor's role encompassed all of the responsibilities of the traditional shaman (communicating with the supernatural for healing and salvation), the traditional clan spirit father (overseeing, teaching, and leading religious rituals and practices), and the traditional clan leader (leading, caring, and making decisions for the good of all its members).

After pastors, the next group of Christian educators in the Hmong church were the church elders and Sunday school teachers. After the start of the Sunday school program in 1969, Sunday school teachers played a significant role in the teaching,

training, and passing on of the Christian faith to adults, students, and children. During the early Hmong church period, the Sunday school teachers were comprised mostly of youth and young adults, since they were more educated and more literate than the older generations. Thus it was the youth, both young men and young women, who became involved and were entrusted by the Hmong church to teach the children's Sunday school programs.

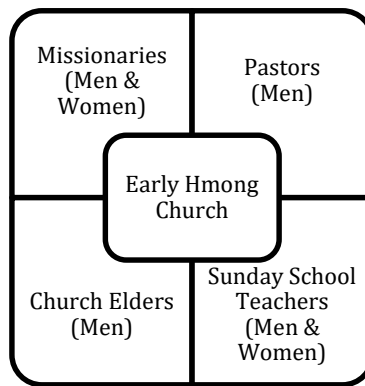


Figure 6. Instructors of Christian education

Context of Christian Education

During the early Hmong church period, new Hmong Christian converts met in one another's homes. However, as the Hmong churches grew, small chapels and then larger church buildings were built to accommodate the increasing number of Hmong Christians. The church building slowly became the primary center for Christian fellowship, Christian worship, Christian education, and Christian rituals and celebrations.

As the Hmong church immigrated to the United States, the church building and its classrooms became the physical environment in which adults, youth, and children were taught the Christian faith. Christian rituals of worship occurred on Sundays within the church sanctuary. Christian ordinances, e.g., infant dedication, communion, baptism,

were performed by the pastors and elders within the context of the church gathered. Christian holy days were celebrated with the church gathered in the church building.

Way of Christian Education

During the early Hmong church period, Hmong churches utilized Christian education practices that were intergenerational, informal, and oral. However, as new ministries were created, the Hmong church adopted Christian education practices that were segmented, semi-formal to formal, and literary.

Literate learning. From 1950 to 1975, the majority of Hmong Christian converts learned through the oral translation and oral transmission of the Lao Bible by missionaries, Hmong pastors, Hmong elders, and Hmong Sunday school teachers. The Hmong Christian converts in Laos belonged to an oral culture and were predominantly oral learners. Only a few were educated and literate in the Lao script.

A large task of the missionaries was to develop a written Hmong script, to translate the Bible into the Hmong language using that Hmong script, and then systematically teach the Hmong how to read and write that Hmong script. The development of the Hmong Lao script by Doris Whitelock enabled Sunday school materials (1969), a hymnal (1969), and the New Testament (1975) to be translated into the Hmong language for worship and Christian instruction. Then from 1975 to 2000, as the Hmong RPA script was used in the United States to develop Hmong Sunday school materials, a new Hmong hymnal, and a Hmong Bible (Old and New Testaments), Hmong Christians gradually transitioned from being oral learners to becoming literary learners.

From 2000 to the present, even though the older generations still preferred the Hmong language and Hmong language resources, the younger generations began to lean towards English Christian resources. This led to the decline in use of the Hmong District's Hmong children's Sunday school curriculum, which was replaced in many

Hmong churches by English children's Sunday school curriculum.

Semi-formal learning. As the number of Hmong Christians grew, semi-formal and formal training of key spiritual leaders, i.e., pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, and ministry leaders, became a high priority for the early missionaries and the early Hmong churches. Since the majority of Hmong did not have access to education, the missionary Bible school in Laos, and the Christian college and seminaries in the United States provided formal opportunities for adults and youth to obtain formal Christian instruction. The TEE and MSP programs and annual Christian conferences for church leaders, women's ministry, men's ministry, and youth ministry, e.g., HLUB and SALT, also provided semi-formal ways of Christian education for adults and youth. However, for the children in the Hmong C&MA churches, the Sunday school program remained the primary, semi-formal program for the Christian discipleship of children.

Segmented learning. During the early Hmong church period and during the Hmong refugee church period, intergenerational worship was utilized as the primary method for instructing all ages in the Christian faith. Since there were few Hmong Christians, few Hmong pastors, and few Sunday school teachers, this was a pragmatic method of Christian education.

Once the number of Hmong Christians began to increase, intergenerational worship was replaced with segmented ministries and separate Christian education programs. These segmented ministries began with the formation of the youth group and the national Alliance Youth Fellowship (AYF), the formation of the women's groups (WMPF, AW, GCW), the formation of the men's groups (Alliance Men), and the Sunday school program. Each group had its own elected leaders, and its own ministry programs.

Even when the Hmong churches were reorganized in the United States under the C&MA, these four segmented ministries continued to be perpetuated in the local

Hmong churches and within the Hmong District. While the adults and youth worshiped together in the main sanctuary and had their own respective ministry programs, children remained in their own age-segmented Sunday-school classrooms.

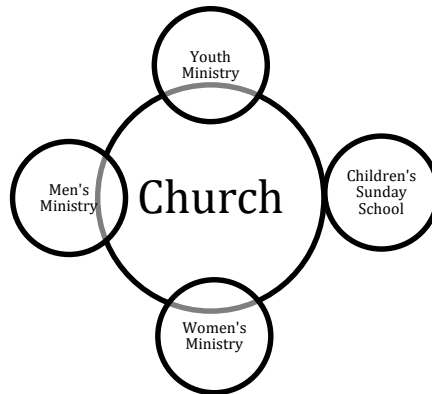


Figure 7. Segmented Christian education ministries

Cognitive learning. Biblical knowledge, Scripture memorization, biblical doctrine, and Christian conduct were key areas of content that Hmong pastors were trained in. In addition, pastors and Sunday school teachers were also trained in effective preaching and teaching of the Bible. The core task of pastors and teachers were to help Hmong Christians of all ages to know and understand the Bible so that they could live according to the Bible. Bible study became a priority ministry area for many Hmong churches.

Goal of Christian Education

Thus the ultimate goal of Christian education was for Hmong believers of all ages to know the Scriptures, obey the Scriptures, and imitate Jesus Christ: the perfecter of the Scriptures. This value of the Scripture for Christian instruction and formation was

evidenced by the amount of time that the missionaries devoted to the translation of the Bible into the Hmong language, and the emphasis on bible study in the youth ministry, women's ministry, men's ministry, and Sunday school program.

Paradigm Shifts in Christian Education

In exploring the existing literature, there are some significant similarities and significant differences in the manner in which children were religiously instructed in the traditional Hmong culture and in the Hmong C&MA church. The introduction of the Gospel, the development of a Hmong written script, the translation of the Bible, the introduction of the Sunday school program, and the introduction of segmented ministries created some key paradigm shifts in the Hmong Christian church. Hmong Christians shifted from an oral culture to a literary culture, from informal learning to semi-formal and formal learning, from intergenerational learning to age-segmented learning, from experiential learning to classroom-oriented learning, and from home-centered, father-led to church-centered, pastor (teacher)-led religious instruction.

Clan to Christ

In both the traditional Hmong culture and the Hmong C&MA church, the religious community was an essential aspect of children's religious formation. The religious community provided religious instruction for children. The community provided a social context for children to practice their religious beliefs. And the community provided social identity, social value, and social reinforcement of those religious beliefs.

In the Hmong traditional culture, the religious community was comprised of the collective Hmong ethnic community and the patrilineal clan. Religious affiliation and kinship affiliation were often synonymous with one another. To belong to a clan also meant that one worshipped the same ancestral spirits. Clan identity and religious

affiliation were integral and inseparable aspects of one another.

When the Hmong converts became part of the Christian Church, the religious community was no longer defined by biological ancestry, clan lineage, or ancestral spirits. Instead the Christian community was a fellowship of all believers based solely upon one's personal faith in Jesus Christ. Kinship was redefined based upon the lineage of Christ. Although Hmong Christians still identified themselves by their ancestral clan relationships, their primary religious loyalty and religious affiliation had changed from the clan ancestors to Christ. This difference in religious affiliation created spiritual tension and social fragmentation within the clans, since Christian converts often dissociated from participating and assisting with traditional ceremonial rituals, wedding rituals, funeral rites, and New Year rituals.³²²

Home-centered, Father-led to Church-centered, Pastor (teacher)-led

In the traditional Hmong culture and religion, the religious education of children occurred primarily through oral, informal, experiential, and intergenerational learning. The home was the shrine of religious practice and the center of religious rituals. The family, especially the father, was the head of the household and the religious leader of the household. The father led his family in revering the ancestors and in propitiating the spirits. The religious beliefs, rituals, and practices of the family were enforced communally by the clan and by the larger Hmong society. Since the clan and the larger Hmong community shared similar religious beliefs and practices, children were immersed in three consistent social circles of religious influence.

When the Hmong became Christians, the center of religious instruction shifted away from the home and family to the church and the church building. The Hmong church became the one and only circle of Christian influence. The missionaries, pastors,

³²²Lee and Tapp, *Culture and Customs of the Hmong*, 42.

and Sunday school teachers became the Christian religious experts, since they were more trained in Christian faith than most Hmong fathers, clan leaders, or shamans. Thus the missionaries, pastors, and Sunday school teachers were religiously entrusted by Hmong converts to teach and guide adults, youth, and children in the ways of their new faith in God. This provided young Hmong Christian women with increased opportunities to become religious instructors, which was limited in the traditional Hmong religion.

Socialization to Semi-Formal Learning

Informal socialization was the means of religious transmission in the traditional Hmong culture and religion. Through intergenerational transmission from father to child, older to younger, master to apprentice, Hmong religious beliefs and practices were orally passed down and ritually experienced by children. Children were allowed to be participant observers of religious rituals and ceremonies. As children became older, they were encouraged to participate in these rituals with their parents.

In the early Hmong Christian church, children were allowed to observe and participate in the intergenerational worship services with their parents. However, as the Hmong church grew, children were separated away from the adult worship and instructed semi-formally through their own Sunday school classes. Age-segmented programs encouraged peer relationships and age-appropriate learning of Scripture. However, children had diminished intergenerational contact with the rest of the youth and adults of the church.

Ritual Practice to Bible Study

Children growing up and continuing to practice the traditional rituals, offerings, and ceremonies was the ultimate goal of traditional Hmong religious leaders. Right ritual practice, correctly performing the religious rituals as the generations have done before, was the focus of religious education. Right practice ensured the ongoing

reverence for the ancestors and the spirits, thereby ensuring health and prosperity for the subsequent generations.

In the Hmong C&MA churches, primary focus was placed on corporate worship and the learning, study, and understanding of the Bible. Through study of the Bible, Hmong converts were expected to grow in their knowledge of God, and grow in obedience to teachings of Christ. Teaching and preaching the Bible became the key role of Hmong pastors and Sunday school teachers. See summary table 2.

Table 2. Religious education of children

	Traditional Hmong culture & religion	Hmong C&MA Church
Type of Culture	Collective Ethnic Community Kinship – patrilineal clan Oral	Faith Community - Church Kinship - faith in Christ Literate
Religion	Ancestral Worship Animism Shamanism Reincarnation	Christianity
Context of Religious Instruction	Family-centered, Home Clan, Home Community	Church-centered Church sanctuary Sunday school classroom
Instructors of Religious Education	Father - led Clan Spirit Father Shaman Religious Specialists Male Instructors	Missionaries Pastor-led Elders Sunday School Teachers Male & Female Instructors
Way of Religious Education	Informal Intergenerational Oral Experiential – Ritual Practice	Semi-formal, Formal Segmented Written Cognitive – Bible study
Goal of Religious Education	Participant Observer Imitator Practitioner	Know Scripture Obey Scripture Imitate Christ

Contemporary Hmong C&MA Churches

How have these historical paradigm shifts impacted the contemporary Hmong C&MA churches and the Christian education of children? To explore further into what Hmong C&MA churches are currently doing in the Christian education of children, a multiple case study of three Hmong C&MA churches was completed. In chapter 3, I will detail the methodology utilized for the multiple case study. In chapter 4, I will report the findings from each of these three case studies, and in chapter 5, I will explore the cross-case study findings and discuss the implications for contextualized Christian education in the Hmong C&MA church and other similar ethnic people groups.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case, replication study was to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices in three Hmong C&MA churches. From the existing literature on Hmong culture and religion, this research study first explored the religious education of children within the traditional Hmong culture. From the existing literature on Hmong church history, this study explored the Christian education of children within the historical periods of the Hmong church. Then empirically, this study explored the contemporary family ministry perceptions and practices in three Hmong C&MA churches through a multiple-case replication design.

Research Questions

What are the family ministry perceptions and practices of Hmong churches in the Hmong District of the C&MA? This was the primary research question for this proposed study. The three sub-questions also explored in this study were: (1) What are Hmong churches doing to disciple children? (2) What is their goal in discipling children? (3) How are Hmong churches equipping parents to disciple their own children?

Research Design

This multiple-case replication design occurred in four distinct phases. In Phase 1, the first case study was conducted, the data analyzed, and an individual case report was written. The written case report was verified with the senior pastor of the church. This process was repeated again in Phase 2 for the second case study and again in Phase 3 for the third case study. In Phase 4, a cross-case analysis of all three case studies was

completed and a multiple case report was written.

The underlying logic of multiple-case studies is its replication logic: discovering similar findings or contrasting findings within multiple cases or experiments. The convergence of these similar or contrasting findings from different cases enhances the external validity of the findings. As Yin states, “Each individual case study consists of a ‘whole’ study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case’s conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases.”¹

Reliability, external validity, construct validity, and internal validity are four important aspects of a social science research design.² To increase reliability in this study, a case study protocol was developed and followed by the researcher: research study objectives; data collection procedures; data collection questions; and case study report format. External validity was enhanced by utilizing the replication logic in three multiple case studies. Construct validity was enhanced by collecting multiple sources of data evidence, establishing a chain of evidence in the data analysis, and confirming case study reports through key informant review. To increase internal validity, two cycles of coding were utilized in the data analysis and cross-case patterns and themes were compared, matched, and explained.

Case Study Research Design

The population for this multiple-case, replication study was delimited to Hmong churches in the Hmong District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). The Hmong District of the C&MA contains the greatest number of Hmong

¹Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 59.

²Yin, *Case Study Research*, 45. Reliability is the trustworthiness and or dependability of the research. Validity is the soundness, legitimacy, rationality, and strength of the research.

churches and Hmong Christians in the United States, totaling 114 churches with 36,187 inclusive members.³

Research sample. A proportionate stratified random sample of three Hmong C&MA churches was selected from the research population using a three-step process. First, a list of all the Hmong C&MA churches and their church membership numbers was obtained from the Hmong District Annual Conference report. From this list, all of the churches were sorted numerically in ascending order according to church membership numbers. The sorted list was then evenly proportioned into three groups based upon the church membership numbers: (strata 1) small church; (strata 2) midsize church; and (strata 3) large church. From each group (strata), one church was randomly selected. See table 3.

Table 3. Stratified random sampling

Total Population	114 churches		
Strata (church membership)	Small Church	Mid-size Church	Large Church
Proportioned Population Size	38 churches	38 churches	38 churches
Sampling Fraction	38/114	38/114	38/114
Random Sample	1 church	1 church	1 church
Total Sample Size	3 churches		

Using a proportionate, non-overlapping, stratified sampling method ensures that each church has the same chance of being selected, each type of church size (strata) is included in the sample, and each strata has the same sampling fraction. In this way, the stratified sampling method has a “higher statistical precision compared to simple random

³Hmong District, *DS Report 2015* (Thornton, CO: Hmong District, 2015), 4.

sampling.”⁴ To draw this random sample, the names of the churches in each strata were placed into three separate containers. Each strata container was mixed, and then one random name was drawn out of each container without replacement, for a total sample of three churches.

Access to sample. After the sample was drawn, the Hmong District Superintendent and the Hmong District Church Growth Director were contacted via email. The researcher study was presented and a signed consent was received from the Hmong District Superintendent and the Church Growth Director, granting access to the local churches. Upon consent by the Hmong District authorities, the senior pastor of each of the randomly selected churches was contacted to seek consent for the study within each local church. A research study summary and a church consent form was emailed to the senior pastor to share with the local church governing board.

After discussing the research study with their respective church governing boards, two of the randomly selected churches consented to participating in the research study (midsize church strata and large church strata) and one church declined to participate (small church strata). Signed consent forms were received from the two consenting churches with the names and contact information of key informants who were willing to participate in the prolonged case study interviews and the contact information of the site research partner. In coordination with the senior pastor and the site research partner of each consenting church, appropriate dates were scheduled for the on-site visit and key informant and focus group interviews.

Another church from the small church strata container was randomly drawn, and the senior pastor was contacted. The senior pastor declined participation in the research study. Therefore, another church name was randomly drawn again from the

⁴Explorable, “Stratified Sampling Method,” accessed September 8, 2015, <https://explorable.com/stratified-sampling>.

small church strata container. The senior pastor was once again contacted and a research summary and church consent form was emailed to the senior pastor. A signed consent form was finally received from this last selected church and dates were scheduled for the on-site field visit and key informant and focus group interviews.

Data Collection

Data collected for each case study included primary data sources and on-site field observations by the researcher.

Primary Data Sources

A variety of case study method data was collected from each of the Hmong C&MA churches: (1) church documents; (2) audio/visual materials; (3) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants; (4) open-ended focus group interviews with children's ministry teachers; (5) open-ended focus group interviews with parents; and (6) on-site field observations.

Documents. Copies of public documents and records that were relevant to the study of family ministry in the Hmong church were obtained from the Hmong District and from each of the individual Hmong churches in the random sample. These documents included membership reports, copies of church bylaws, church bulletins, flyers, etc. These documents were filed and stored according to each case study for data analysis.

Audio-visuals. Organizational websites and social media sites were reviewed for relevant information on family ministry programming, events, locations, time, etc. Site pages relevant to the study were copied, printed, filed, and stored according to case study for data analysis.

Semi-structured, interviews with key-informants. As part of this multi-case

replication study of Hmong churches, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended exploratory interviews of key informants were conducted. Since there has been minimal research about family ministry in the Hmong ethnic church, exploratory interviews allowed maximum flexibility to explore the research topic and to discover new domains for investigation.⁵ Since key informants have in-depth knowledge of the context, culture, and research subject, interviewing several key informants or local experts on the same topic helped to create validity and reliability through comparison and cross checking of the accumulated data.⁶

Interview of key informants occurred in 1-2 hour sessions per key informant,⁷ via telephone or face-to-face interview.⁸ The goal of these interviews was to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices within the selected Hmong churches. The key informants interviewed included: (1) the senior pastor, (2) two elders, and (3) the children's ministry director or disciple-making ministries director.

Prior to the case study interview, an exploratory interview instrument was developed through the assistance of an expert panel.⁹ The expert panel consisted of three individuals who had professional experience and knowledge in one of these key areas: (1) family ministry; (2) church ministry and leadership; and (3) cross-cultural ministry.

⁵Jean J. Schensul and Margaret D. LeCompte, *Ethnographer's Toolkit, Book 3, Essential Ethnographic Methods – A Mixed Methods Approach*, 3rd ed. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2013), 135.

⁶ Schensul and LeCompte, *Ethnographer's Toolkit*, 41.

⁷Yin, *Case Study Research*, 110. Interviews may take place over 2 or more hours, single sitting or multiple sittings.

⁸John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 124. Creswell states that “a telephone interview provides the best source of information when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals.”

⁹Carol V. McKinney, *Globe-Trotting in Sandals: A Field Guide to Cultural Research* (Dallas: SIL International, 2000), 104. McKinney recommends that “when working with a population that is illiterate, semilliterate, or a mix of literate and illiterate respondents, an interview schedule is the research instrument of choice” instead of a written questionnaire.

An initial draft of the exploratory interview instrument was developed and then emailed to the expert panel for review and input. All of the returned reviews, corrections, and revisions were integrated into a final draft of the interview instrument for the expert panel to approve for field interviews. Since the in-depth interviews were exploratory in nature, this granted flexibility to ask further probing questions during the field study as new concepts arose.¹⁰ See Appendix 2 for a copy of the exploratory interview instrument used for this research.

In collaboration with the key informants, an interview schedule was created for each case study. One to two weeks prior to the interview appointment, a copy of the interview instrument was emailed to the key informants so that they had opportunity to critically reflect upon their answers. Interview notes were written down during the interview sessions. All of the interviews from each case site were audio recorded, with the verbal permission of the key informants. The recorded interviews were then transcribed by a research assistant. The transcriptions were filed and stored with the appropriate case study site for coding and data analysis.

Focus group interview with children’s ministry teachers. Face-to-face focus group interviews with children’s ministry teachers were conducted at each case study site. The purpose of focus group work is to “explore perceptions, feelings, and thinking about issues, ideas, products, services, or opportunities.”¹¹ Since children’s ministry teachers work directly with children on a weekly basis, they are key informants about the needs, issues, and challenges of the children and families within their church.

In collaboration with the site research partner, a focus group interview

¹⁰Schensul and LeCompte, *Essential Ethnographic Methods*, 135. The open-ended exploratory interview format “allows researchers maximum flexibility in exploring any topic in depth and covering new topics as they arise and the interview expands.”

¹¹Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical guide for Applied Research*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 7.

schedule was created. The site research partner then recruited a convenience sample of children's ministry teachers who were available and willing to participate in the research study. At least one to two focus groups were interviewed per case study, each group varying between 3 to 6 children's ministry teachers. Interview notes were written down and audio-recorded per consent. The interviews were transcribed by a research assistant, and the transcriptions were filed and stored for coding and data analysis.

Focus group interview with parents. Face-to-face focus group interviews with parental couples were also conducted at each case study site to explore parental perspectives on family ministry within their respective churches. Instead of individual parents, parental couples were selected so as to resemble the parental unit within the Hmong community.¹²

In collaboration with each pastor and site research partner, a focus group interview schedule was prepared with dates and times for each case study site. The site research partner then recruited a purposive, convenience sample of parental couples who had children in the church between the ages of birth to 12, and who were available and willing to participate in the research study.

Though a random sample was ideal, there were a number of factors which made it difficult to obtain a random sample of parents. First complete access to the parental population was not granted to me, so I relied upon the site research partners to assist in the recruitment and selection of parental participants.¹³ Second, the site research

¹²Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 199. Focus groups should be organized so that it “resembles natural group discussions in the community.”

¹³Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 199. Krueger and Casey recommend the use of organizational insiders to assist with recruiting participants in cross-cultural communities. “Within communities there are often insiders who serve as gatekeepers. These individuals are able to open doors for the researcher. These insiders vouch for the outsider. They may be present at the beginning of the focus group and even serve as a host for the focus group. They often are asked to assist with the recruiting. And they offer useful advice on timing, location, incentives, and other logistical concerns.”

partners experienced difficulty in finding available and willing participants for the focus groups at the scheduled group times due to schedule conflicts and other reasons.

Creswell makes note that “in many experiments, however, only a convenience sample is possible because the investigator must use naturally formed groups or volunteers.”¹⁴

Krueger and Casey state that “no selection process is perfect . . . we make the best choices we can with the knowledge and resources we have available at the time of the decision. Selection is limited by our human capacities as well as our budgets and schedules.”¹⁵ To increase participation, focus groups were piggybacked with concurrent church events when possible. Focus groups met in the church building or in the homes of various church leaders. Refreshments were also provided.¹⁶

At least one to three parental focus groups were interviewed on-site at each case study site, each focus group varying in number between 3 to 10 parents. Krueger and Casey, in *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, state that “focus groups are typically composed of 5 to 8 people, but the size can range from as few as 4 to as many as 12.”¹⁷ What is important is that “the group must be small enough for everyone to have opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions.”¹⁸

¹⁴John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 155. Becomes quasi-experiment, not true random experiment.

¹⁵Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 90.

¹⁶Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 84-85, 92, 97. To increase participation in focus groups, Krueger and Casey recommend piggybacking focus groups with organizational events, using top organizational leaders to recruit participants, providing multiple dates and times for focus groups, and providing refreshments and food.

¹⁷Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 6. Creswell recommends that a focus group be comprised of six to eight individuals, in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 181. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 112, recommends that “to obtain the views of a larger group of persons, you would not enlarge the focus group but would instead assign interviewees to several smaller focus groups,”

¹⁸Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 6.

Interview notes were written down during the focus group interviews. All focus group interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of group participants, and transcribed by a research assistant. Transcriptions were filed, and stored for coding and data analysis.

Interview language. Since I am bilingual in Hmong and English, both Hmong and English were used in the study to conduct the key informant interviews and the focus group interviews. When the research participants were more fluent in the Hmong language, the Hmong language was utilized. When the participants were more fluent in the English language, English was utilized. Using the primary language of the participant allowed me to establish rapport, ascertain information, and clarify the ideas of the interviewees. Krueger and Casey recommend conducting cross-cultural focus group interviews in the “primary language of the participants” by a moderator who is also fluent in that particular language.¹⁹

Field Observations

Three on-site visits were conducted for field observations. Each visit lasted between 3-5 days in order to conduct face-to-face interviews, to observe the church’s Sunday morning worship service, to observe the Sunday morning children’s ministry program, and to observe the physical church facility and its usage. Pictures were taken by the researcher of the physical church building. And direct observations and participant observations were made by the researcher and recorded in the field notes for each respective case study site for data analysis.²⁰

To be culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate, I was accompanied by my spouse throughout the field site visits. My spouse functioned as a bilingual research

¹⁹Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 202.

²⁰Yin, *Case Study Research*, 106.

assistant: welcoming male participants; sitting in and listening to interviews in which men were participating; and transcribing interviews. In the traditional Hmong culture, it is improper for a host to “talk casually or whole-heartedly with a guest of the opposite sex who is a stranger.”²¹ Women are expected to converse with women, and men to converse with men, unless both couples are present together.

Since my spouse was a male, a Hmong pastor, and a trusted insider within the Hmong C&MA community, his presence created a trusting, comfortable, and welcoming environment for the male participants to share and discuss their thoughts and feelings. The use of cultural and organizational insiders is recommended in cross-cultural settings to ensure successful focus group research.²²

Data Analysis

After data collection for each case study site was completed, the data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed. After analysis, a written report for each case study was completed and emailed to the respective key informants for verification.

Transcription

All the key informant, children’s ministry teacher focus groups, and parent focus groups were transcribed by the research assistant. Since the interviews utilized both Hmong and English, and there were no external Hmong transcription services available, I trained the research assistant to transcribe all interviews conducted in this research. Hmong language portions of the interviews were transcribed in Hmong, English portions transcribed in English. All transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher prior to coding and data analysis.

²¹Ya Po Cha, *An Introduction to Hmong Culture*, 39.

²²Krueger and Casey, *Focus Groups*, 199.

Coding and QDAP Analysis

A code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes interpreted meaning. A code may consist of simple words or phrases that summarize, distill, condense, and reduce data to smaller components. Coding then is the process of segregating, grouping, regrouping, and relinking data in order to consolidate meaning and provide plausible answers to the research question. The research question determines the appropriate coding method to be utilized.²³

In this research, all interview transcriptions, documents, copies of audio-visual materials, and field notes were analyzed and coded using a qualitative data analysis program (dedoose.com).²⁴ Data was coded using a two cycle coding approach. In the first cycle, attribute coding, structural coding, descriptive coding, In Vivo coding, and values coding were utilized to identify the most relevant data to the research question. In the second cycle, pattern coding and focused coding were utilized to reorganize the analytical data into patterns and themes for reporting and cross-case analysis.²⁵

Triangulation of Data

Data collected was analyzed one case at a time and case reports were sent to each of the site research partners for review. After all three cases were analyzed, a cross-analysis of the findings from all three cases was completed. Key informants were contacted as needed for any additional review, clarification, input, or validation during

²³Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 9,17, 34.

²⁴Dedoose Version 6.1.18, web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (2015). Los Angeles: SocioCultural Research Consultants, www.dedoose.com.

²⁵Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 59-64. Attributive coding is demographics management. Structural coding is applying content-based or conceptual phrase to code and categorize data; i.e. family ministry perceptions and practices. Descriptive coding is assigning basic labels to data to provide inventory. In Vivo coding is using verbatim participant words as codes. Values coding assesses participant's worldview, values, experiences, or belief system. Pattern coding involves assembling 1st cycle codes to determine their patterns (211). Focus coding involves categorizing the coded data based on themes or conceptual similarities to develop a tree diagram of categories and subcategories (216).

this final cross-analysis.

Using multiple sources of input in developing the interview instrument (researcher and expert panel), replicating the case study in three different sites,²⁶ and triangulating the findings from the three case studies strengthened the reliability and validity of the multiple-case study. Data triangulation which produces convergent evidence strengthens the construct validity of the case study method.²⁷

Research Protocol

Throughout the research process, the same research protocol was utilized and repeated for each case study.

Records Management

A written logbook for each case study was used to document research activity. In addition, all research documents obtained were catalogued, filed, and stored in a secure location.

Ethical Treatment of Participants

All participants involved in this case study research were treated with cultural sensitivity, fairness, and respect. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research study and consent was obtained prior to all interviews. The answers given by participants were listened to and recorded without critique or judgment.

Throughout the study, measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The names of the participants were not disclosed, and the results from one participant or group was not revealed to other participants. No children or adolescents under the age of eighteen were included in this research.

²⁶Yin, *Case Study Research*, 57. Replication logic is the underlying rationale for multiple-case design. Each case is selected so that it either predicts similar findings or predicts contrasting findings.

²⁷Yin, *Case Study Research*, 120-21.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS REPORTS

To empirically explore the contemporary family ministry perceptions and practices of Hmong C&MA churches, three case studies were conducted over a period of four months. Case Study 1 (CS1) is located in the mid-eastern area of the United States. Case Study 2 (CS2) is located in the southeastern area of the United States. Case Study 3 (CS3) is located in the mid-central area of the United States.

A grand total of twenty-two interviews were conducted, over 31.25 hours of interviews with 60 participants. Twelve of the interviews were individual key informant interviews with twelve key leaders from the three churches. Four focus group interviews were completed with seventeen children's ministry teachers. Six focus group interviews were completed with thirty-one parents.

To be culturally sensitive to the Hmong value of social honor, the names of the churches and individual participants are withheld by mutual agreement. To preserve the confidential identity of the participants, each church will be referenced by their case study numbers: Case Study 1 (CS1); Case Study 2 (CS2); and Case Study 3 (CS3). Individual interviews will be referenced by their assigned participant number, and focus group interviews will be referenced by their assigned group number.

Participant Demographics

From the three case studies, a total of 60 people were interviewed: twenty-one people in CS1 (35%); sixteen people in CS2 (26.7%); and twenty-three people in CS3 (38.3%). Thirty of the participants were male and thirty participants were female. Eighty-eight percent were married, and 11.7% were single adults. Of those who had

children: 36.7% had children ages 0-4; 53.3% had children ages 5-12; and 28.3% had children ages 12-17.

In terms of age distribution: 5% were under the age of 20; 13.3% were ages 21-25; 26.7% were ages 26-34; 38.3% were ages 35-44; 11.7% were ages 45-54; and 5% were ages 55-64. In terms of educational background: 1.7% have less than a high school education, 16.7% have graduated from high school, 28.3% have attended vocational school, 41.7% have graduated from college, and 11.7% have completed graduate school. And in terms of employment: 6.7% were currently not-employed; 3.3% were employed part-time; 86.7% were employed full-time; and 3.3% had already retired.

Fifty-eight participants (96.7%) were of Hmong ancestry and two (3.3%) were of other ethnic ancestry. Thirty-one were born overseas (51.7%) and twenty-nine (48.3%) were born in the United States. Of those born overseas, twenty-three were born in Laos, four were born in Thailand, two in France, one in Mexico, and one in another country of origin. Those who are foreign-born have been in the United States for the following number of years: 3.2% under 20 years; 6.5% for 21-25 years; 16.1% for 26-30 years; 38.7% for 31-35 years; and 35.5% for 36-40 years. English was the primary language spoken at work (78.3%) and with children (51.7%). Both English and Hmong were spoken at home (53.3%), at church (58.3%), and with a spouse (41.7%). And church membership varied from 10% being members for less than one-year, 33.3% between 2-4 years, 23.3% between 5-9 years, 18.3% between 10-19 years, and 15% being church members for 20 or more years.

Case Study 1 Report

Case Study 1 (CS1) is a mid-size Hmong C&MA church, located in the mid-eastern portion of the United States. A case study research was conducted in December 2015 to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices within this church. Four key informant interviews, one children's ministry focus group interview, and three parent

focus group interviews were conducted at CS1. Twenty-one participants were interviewed: four church leaders (senior pastor, two elders, the discipling ministries director); six children's ministry teachers; and eleven parents.

Of the participants, 47.6% were female and 52.4% were male. They varied in age from: 9.5% being under age 20; 19% ages 21-25; 14.3% ages 26-34; 28.6% ages 35-44; 19% ages 45-54; and 9.5% ages 55-64. All of the participants were ethnically Hmong in ancestry, with 38.1% born in the United States, and 61.9% born overseas. Of the foreign-born, one was born in Thailand, and twelve were born in Laos. Of the participants who were born overseas, 15.4% have resided in the United States between 21-30 years, and 84.6% have resided between 31-40 years. Both Hmong and English are spoken in the home (66.7%), at church (66.7%), with children (33.3%), and with a spouse (42.9%). English is the primary language spoken at work (66.7%).

Of the participants, 85.7% were married and 14.3% single adults. Of those who had children, 28.6% had children ages 0-4, 42.9% had children ages 5-12, and 33.3% had children ages 13-17. In terms of education, 4.8% had less than a high school education, 42.9% have graduated from high school, 23.8% have attended vocational school, 19% have graduated from college, and 9.5% have completed graduate school. In terms of employment, 14.3% were currently not employed, 81% were employed full-time, and 4.8% were retired. The length of church membership varied from 9.5% being less than one year, 4.8% between 2-4 years, 38.1% between 5-9 years, 23.8% between 10-19 years, and 23.8% over 20 years.

Church Background

CS1 was formally organized as a church with the Hmong District of the C&MA in 1994. The church began as a result of secondary migration by first-generation Hmong immigrants to the middle eastern region of the United States in the early 1990s. When the church was organized, it had an inclusive membership of 7 families and 44

members. Throughout the years, like other churches, CS1 has experienced both cycles of growth and also cycles of decline.

From 1994 to 1997, under the first senior pastor and assistant pastor, the membership doubled to 17 families and 109 inclusive members. From 1998 to 2002, under the leadership of the second senior pastor and the assistant pastor, the membership of the church increased dramatically to 41 families and 243 inclusive members in the year 2000. However, from 2001 to 2002, the church experienced a sharp decrease in membership to 27 families and 172 inclusive members. From 2002 to 2005, the assistant pastor became interim senior pastor and a new assistant pastor was called to serve. During this time period, the membership of the church had plateaued and remained steady between 172 to 184 members. From 2005 to 2010, a new senior pastor was called. Under his leadership, the church membership once again increased and peaked in 2009 with 64 families and 273 inclusive members.¹ However, after 2011, under the leadership of two subsequent senior pastors, the church membership began to decline. A church split also divided the congregation in half. Today, under new pastoral leadership, CS1 is beginning to heal and to rebuild its congregation.

Church building. From 1994 to 2000, the church rented the facility of an Anglo C&MA congregation until CS1 was financially able to purchase its own church facility in the year 2000. The church facility consists of two main buildings (a sanctuary building and a separate fellowship hall) surrounded by a parking lot. The parsonage is next to the Fellowship Hall. The senior pastor and his family currently live in the church parsonage.

Church leadership. Since its inception, CS1 has been shepherded by seven successive senior pastors and two successive assistant pastors. The average senior

¹CS1, *2011 Directory*, 2-3.

pastorate was 3.3 years; with a range of two years to five years of pastoral service. The average associate pastorate was 8.5 years, with a range of 8 to 9 years. Currently, the senior pastor is the only person on staff.

In terms of church leadership, CS1 is structurally organized according to the uniform policy of the C&MA. CS1 is headed by the church governing board, whose members include the pastor, four elders, the church secretary, and the church treasurer. Serving under the church governing board are twelve ministry departments: (1) Deacon; (2) Deaconess; (3) Trustees; (4) Missions Committee; (5) Auditors; (6) Music Ministry; (7) Ushers; (8) Alliance Men; (9) Great Commission Women; (10) Nursery Ministry; (11) Youth Ministry; (12) Sunday school or Disciplemaking Ministry (DM).²

The church governing board meets monthly and the various ministry departments meet on a quarterly basis. At the end of the calendar year, the church also has an annual congregational meeting. It is at the congregational meeting that the church elects and approves new leaders, makes any necessary changes to the church bylaws and policies, and approves the budget and ministry goals for the next ministry year.

Church strengths. Participants who are long-time church members reminisce about the days when the church was growing in numbers, committed to worship attendance, committed to Sunday school learning, faithful in tithing and offerings, multiplying in spiritual leadership, and active in ministry service.³ As one parent expressed, “when we first came to the church in 2007, it was really packed, people really motivated, wow it’s like a rising church.”⁴

In spite of its subsequent decline and painful church split, CS1 has continued

²CS1, Handout “Pray for Leaders,” (2016).

³CS1003, interview by author, December 29, 2015.

⁴CS1 Parent Focus Group 1, interview by author, December 31, 2015.

to be a growing, maturing, and learning church.⁵ Love (*kev sis hlub*), cooperation (*kev sis pab*), unity (*sib koomtes*), close relationships, and fellowship (*sib raug zoo*) are the words which the participants use to describe the on-going strengths of this church.

Church struggles. CS1 has endured through various struggles in the past, some which also continue to impact the church today. First, short-term senior pastorates have caused variable and inconsistent pastoral leadership for the church. For example, one senior pastor decided to discontinue the Sunday school program and replaced it with small groups. The next senior pastor discontinued the small groups and reinstituted the Sunday school program.⁶ These inconsistent leadership decisions have caused confusion amongst church members.

Second, differences in the cultural worldview, language, and educational levels between the first generation Hmong immigrants and the second generation Hmong-Americans have created a widening generational gap within the family units and within the church itself. Church leaders admit that the 2nd generation of young adults and young couples have been disappearing from their church.⁷ Parents admit that even though their second generation offspring may have attended the Hmong church from childhood to adolescence, once they were married, many of these young couples have stopped attending the Hmong church and some have begun attending American churches.⁸

Third, differing ideas and a lack of shared vision for the church has created internal conflicts within the church leadership, which led ultimately to a church split.⁹

⁵CS1001 interview.

⁶CS1004 interview.

⁷CS1001, CS1003, CS1004 interviews.

⁸CS1003 interview. CS1 Parent Focus Group 1 and CS1 Parent Focus Group 2 interviews, December 31, 2015.

⁹CS1001, interview by author, December 29, 2015

The church split has caused dramatic changes to the leadership of the church, the ministry programs of the church, and the climate of the church. Some of the long-standing leaders and teachers in the children's ministry have left the church.¹⁰ Peer friendships in the children and youth ministry have declined due to the leaving of a number of children and youth.¹¹ One of the younger participants senses that there is still lingering "bitterness between the older generation."¹² There is also a sense that the church split has caused discouragement and disillusionment amongst the younger generation, leading some to drift away from the church.¹³

Due to these church struggles, CS1 is in a time of rebuilding. Lack of mature spiritual leaders for the church, lack of spiritual leaders for the second generation, spiritual apathy and stagnation, inwardness, and the lack of community outreach and service are various challenges that CS1 participants see in their church. Bridging the generational divide and mentoring the next generation of leaders is an important task of the existing leadership of the church.¹⁴

Church culture. CS1 is described by various participants as being an adult and youth oriented church. One of the participants expressed that, "I feel like our church is very elderly oriented, geared more towards the elders."¹⁵ CS1001 states that "we tend to think about the adults and the youth and neglect to think about the children."¹⁶ Most of

¹⁰CS1 Children's Ministry Teacher Focus Group, interview by author, January 2, 2016.

¹¹CS1 Parent Focus Group 2, interview by author, December 31, 2015.

¹²CS1 Children's Ministry Teacher Focus Group, interview by author, January 2, 2016.

¹³CS1004 interview. CS1 Children's Ministry Teacher Focus Group interview.

¹⁴CS1001 interview.

¹⁵CS1 Children's Ministry Teacher Focus Group interview.

¹⁶CS1001 interview.

the church's events are often geared toward the youth and adults.¹⁷ This is because culturally, the Hmong have traditionally placed a high value on elders and the youth. The elders are valued for their age and wisdom, and the youth valued for their education, physical strength, and stamina. The youth have been said to be "the backbone of the church."¹⁸

In addition to being adult and youth oriented, CS1 is described as being an age-segmented church, where adults, youth, and children exist together but in separate age groups, separate age classes, and separate age activities. Although the church has a few intergenerational events during the year, e.g., intergenerational worship, church picnic, Christmas, New Year's, etc., for the majority of the time, the children are excluded from the corporate life of the church. Children worship, fellowship, and are disciplined in separate age-segmented programs.¹⁹ One of the participant stated that, "I think in the church, it's the parents, the youth, and then the kids last."²⁰

Church Demographics

CS1 is a homogenously Hmong congregation. Almost all of the church members are of Hmong descent. Currently CS1 has 37 families and 149 inclusive members. Only one head of household is of another ethnicity.²¹

Of the inclusive membership, CS1001 reports that between 60-70 are adults, and then the rest are youth and children. CS1002 reports averaging 20 to 25 children on Sunday mornings.²² The researcher noted three generations of families present in the

¹⁷CS1001 interview.

¹⁸CS1003 interview.

¹⁹CS1001, CS1004 interviews.

²⁰CS1 Children's Ministry Teacher Focus Group interview.

²¹CS1, Handout "Pray for Members," (2016). Obtained by author during site visit.

²²CS1002, interview by author, December 30, 2015.

church during the field site visit: middle age to older parents, their adult children, and their grandchildren.

Perceptions of Children

Within the church, people differed in how they perceived children. According to CS1001, children have been perceived in traditional Hmong culture as having “very low value.”²³ Thus within the church, there are some who perceive children as being bothersome and distracting, especially crying babies and misbehaving children.²⁴ They would rather prefer that children be separated by themselves, away from the adults.²⁵ Even when children are present, children are often unnoticed by these adults.²⁶

Yet there are some adults who desire and delight in having the children in worship with the adults, especially when the children sing during the worship service. These adults perceive children as the future leaders of the church. Thus it is important to prepare, teach, and train the children while they are still young.²⁷ Greeting children, acknowledging children, and welcoming children as Jesus did is an important change that the church leadership desires to make in the future.²⁸

Strengths of children. Two points that were reiterated consistently by CS1 participants is that children, when young, were more eager to follow their parents to church and were more eager to learn about God. A few parents expressed how much their children enjoyed coming to church when they were young. Parents did not have to

²³CS1001 interview.

²⁴CS1001, CS1003, CS1004 interviews.

²⁵CS1003 interview.

²⁶CS1001 interview.

²⁷CS1003 interview.

²⁸CS1001 interview.

force their young children to attend church. Often it was the children who would remind parents saying, “Mom, we have to go to church next Sunday because we have this and this.”²⁹ Children would also remind parents to pray together at home. They had inquisitive minds and asked questions about God. Children demonstrated an openness to God.

Struggles of children. Within the church, parents reported that their children struggled with a number of different issues. Loss of peer friendships due to the church split was painful for their children.³⁰ Joining the church as new believers was difficult for older children since Christianity was foreign to them and they were not accustomed to attending church.³¹ Not understanding the Hmong language was difficult for some children as well. This made attending the Hmong church services challenging for children. And as children transitioned into the youth group, some struggled to assimilate since they did not know anyone or have any friends in the youth group.³²

Expectations of children. As part of the church, the leaders, teachers, and parents expressed three primary expectations for the children in the church. First, that children listen and obey the adults and teachers who were ministering to them. Second, that children attend church and participate in their Sunday morning classes. Thirdly, that children behave properly while they are at church. Children are usually in their separate classes and not directly involved in the corporate life of the church. On occasion, the children will sing a special song during the corporate worship service.

²⁹CS1 Parental Focus Group 2, interview by author, December 31, 2015.

³⁰CS1 Parental Focus Group 1, interview by author, December 31, 2015.

³¹CS1 Parental Focus Group 2, interview by author.

³²CS1 Parental Focus Group 1, interview by author.

Dreams for Children

Church leaders, teachers, and parents desire children to know God, to have personal salvation through Christ, to grow and be like Christ, to become disciples of Christ, and to become future leaders of the church. “I want every boy and girl, teenager and child to learn and serve in these ministry positions so that it will strengthen their faith,” stated CS1003.³³ Parents want their children to grow up and transition well into the youth group. They want their teenagers to remain active in church and continue serving and being part of the church even as they become young adults and have families of their own.

Family Ministry practices

Age-segmented discipleship is the primary discipleship paradigm of the church. One teacher expressed that, “I think it’s ok to separate the kids because they learn differently from adults.”³⁴ The ministry structure and leadership structures of CS1 reflect this paradigm, with separate committees for men’s ministry, women’s ministry, youth ministry, Disciplemaking Ministry (DM), and nursery ministry.

Leadership structure. The Disciplemaking Ministry Department is led by the DM Director and the DM Committee: comprised of the senior pastor, DM secretary, and DM treasurer. The primary responsibility of the DM Department is to organize, plan, and coordinate all of the age-segmented Sunday school classes for adults, youth, and children. This includes recruiting teachers, selecting curriculum, and designating classrooms.³⁵ The DM Director is also in charge of overseeing the children’s ministry. This includes children’s church, vacation bible school, and other children’s ministry events.³⁶

³³CS1003 interview.

³⁴CS1 Children’s Ministry Teacher Focus Group interview.

³⁵CS1001, interview by author, December 29, 2015.

³⁶CS1002, interview by author, December 30, 2015.

Age-segmented programs. The Christian education of children, youth, and adults at CS1 occurs largely through age-segmented Sunday school classes and ministry programs. Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights are the two primary days for worship, discipleship, and prayer at the church facility. On Wednesday nights from 6:00PM-7:30PM, there is an adult midweek prayer gathering.

On Sunday mornings from 10:00AM to 11:00AM are the age-segmented Sunday school classes for adults, youth, and children. There are six Sunday school classes: (1) nursery care for infants and toddlers, birth to 3 years old; (2) preschool class, children ages 4 to 6; (3) early elementary class, children ages 7-9; (4) older elementary class, children ages 10-12; (5) adult and youth class in English; and (6) adult and youth class in Hmong.

From 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM are the age-segmented ministry gatherings for the Alliance Men, Great Commission Women, and Alliance Youth groups. The children gather in the fellowship hall for lunch or snacks during this time. Then from 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM, the adults and youth join in corporate worship in the main sanctuary. The children remain in the fellowship hall for children's church.

On Sunday, January 3, 2016, I was able to participate and observe the first Sunday morning gathering of the year. As families came to the church, infants and toddlers were dropped off by the nursery room. The Nursery Director explained that most of the women in the church are put on a rotating schedule to serve in the nursery room.

For this first Sunday, instead of breaking up into separate groups (men, women, youth), the adults and youth were all gathered in the main sanctuary to hear reports from the senior pastor, the church leaders, and the newly elected DM Director. This was the first year that this person was serving in this role. After the reports were completed, the adults and youth remained in the sanctuary for worship while the children

were gathered by the DM Director and relocated to the fellowship hall for children's church. The ten children played informally with one another and sat with one another at adult-size tables for an hour while the DM Director met with some of the new children's church teachers.

Meanwhile in the main sanctuary, the adults and youth participated in corporate worship. The worship was conducted in Hmong with some English. The worship service included a welcome, prayer, praise songs, offertory, and the sermon.

Children's curriculum. The main content emphasis for the children's Sunday school and children's church is "Getting to know Jesus": teaching children to know Jesus, believe in Jesus, and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord.³⁷ The current curriculum materials used to teach the children are from the C&MA publisher and from other free online children's ministry resources. The children's curriculum can vary year to year depending upon the DM Director or senior pastor.³⁸ In the past, CS1 also used the Hmong District curriculum, before it was discontinued.³⁹

Other children's ministry programs conducted in the past include summer vacation bible school, Mailbox Club home bible study program, children's camp, lock-ins, etc. The children's ministry teachers and activity leaders are mostly high school students and some young adults, with very few older adults. Since the youth and young adults can read and speak English more fluently, the older adults have depended upon the younger generation to teach and communicate with the children.⁴⁰

³⁷CS1001 interview.

³⁸CS1 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

³⁹CS1003 interview.

⁴⁰CS1003 interview.

Occasional intergenerational events. Occasionally, CS1 has intergenerational events, e.g., church picnic, and intergenerational worship services for the entire church. Special holy days are celebrated together; e.g. Easter and Christmas. New Year's Eve is also an intergenerational event, when families come to the church to eat dinner together and spend time together in preparation for the New Year. I was able to participate and observe this New Year's gathering on December 31, 2015.

During this New Year's event, the families brought food to the fellowship hall and shared a meal together. The older men sat with one another at one table, and the older women sat together at another table. Families with teenagers and young children sat together as a family. After the women had the buffet line set-up, the pastor prayed for the meal and then people proceeded to line-up. After the meal was completed, the adults and youth gathered in the main sanctuary to participate in a variety of activities, e.g., singing, prayer, testimonies, games, etc. Some children stayed with their parents, a few stayed in the nursery room with older siblings, and some children were led by youth members to the fellowship hall for separate games and activities.

Perceptions of Parents

In the parent focus group interviews, parents expressed their own marital, familial, and spiritual struggles. Family issues included divorce, remarriage, step-parenting, the stress of both parents working outside of the home, and the challenges of parenting young children and teenagers. Spiritual issues included dealing with one's past, disillusionment and distancing from the church, being a new believer, and being a new member to the church. Some parents were especially worried about their teenage children and the lack of interest that their teens had in attending church.

At home, parents reported doing nothing or very little to share their Christian faith with their children and teens. Some of the common faith practices that parents were engaged in at home with their children included bedtime prayers, prayers before meals,

Bible reading (mostly with younger children), and conversations about faith and church. Laziness, busyness, lack of priority, lack of spiritual instruction as to how to train children at home, lack of spiritual leadership by fathers, lack of personal self-discipline and consistency, and lack of spiritual knowledge and maturity were some of the reasons parents gave for not engaging with their children about the Christian faith.

Though parents recognize that they are the most important spiritual influencers in their children's lives, due to their own struggles and spiritual inadequacy, parents rely upon the church to help disciple their children in the Christian faith. Parents see the church's role as the one to teach the Word of God and to introduce Christ to their children. The main role of parents, as some perceive, is to bring their children to church. CS1001 notes that traditionally since Hmong parents did not receive any formal training, parents often defaulted to others to teach their children.⁴¹ In turn, the church, instead of the home and parents, has become the default center and agent for the Christian education of children.

Parent-equipping practices

In the past, CS1 used to have marriage banquets, parenting workshops, and even in-home pastoral visits to equip parents and strengthen families. However, because of changes in pastoral leadership, church leadership, and leadership in the DM ministry, and because of lack of interest by the young couples, these parent-equipping programs have decreased.

Impact of Family Ministry on Children

Some of the parents and children's teachers have grown up in the church. From their perceptions, the children's ministry was impactful to them when they were growing up: lots of kids, bible college students were very involved in the children's

⁴¹CS1001 interview.

ministry, worship was powerful, and there was even a kids worship band. However, over the years, the children's ministry has declined in effectiveness.⁴²

Family Ministry Grade

The two grades which participants consistently gave to the current discipleship ministry of the church to children and families was a C minus or D plus, with A being excellent and F being failing. Major areas of concern included the following: (1) lack of trained, committed, long-term leaders to lead the discipling ministry of the church; (2) lack of committed, trained, spiritually mature adults to teach the children's ministry classes; (3) lack of spiritually mature leaders to lead, assimilate, and reach out to the next generation of students, young adults, and young couples; (4) lack of budget and resources for children's ministry; (5) burn-out and turn-over in the children's ministry; (6) lack of parental involvement in the home and in the children's ministry; (7) inconsistent attendance of children; and (8) the low priority of ministry to children within the church leadership. One participant voiced, "I felt like every time we had something planned, if the elders had something else, they would put theirs on top and put the kids aside because they are just kids."⁴³

Changes Needed

Participants voiced that changes needed to be made on the church leadership level, on the family ministry level, and on the parental level. First the discipleship paradigm of the church needs to be changed. A partnership between the pastor, the church, and parents must be instituted. As CS1001 stated, "Today, I have to educate the church that it is not just the pastor's job, it is also the church's job to disciple the family and the children . . . parents have to teach their children at home, and we teach them

⁴²CS1 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

⁴³CS1 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

also.”⁴⁴ The church culture has to shift from a church-only discipleship program to a church-and-home discipleship paradigm. Discipleship of children must also occur in the home. For parents are the first spiritual teachers of their children, and parents need to be given examples and role models of how they can impress faith upon their children at home.⁴⁵

Second, there needs to be shift within the children’s ministry from youth-teachers to adult-teachers. In the past, most of the children’s ministry teachers were high school students or young adults. One parent stated that, “we have lost our children because the adults are not willing to teach the children. This is where I see the gap. We must move the adults in our church to teach our children so that we can bridge this gap. If children are teaching children, then we will not see growth and we will continue to lose our children.”⁴⁶ Spiritually mature adults and adult parents are needed to lead, teach, and mentor children in the children’s ministry. Those leaders and teachers in the children’s ministry must be willing to invest long-term in the lives of the children, not just rotate in and out of the ministry.⁴⁷ Children need parents, pastors, and teachers to be Christian role models whom they can imitate and follow.⁴⁸

Third, the discipleship of children and the equipping of parents as spiritual leaders must become a priority within the church. CS1001 stated that, “since reflecting upon your survey, I have realized that ministry to children has to be a priority for us. We need to focus on the children first, because if we do not focus on them, and help them

⁴⁴CS1001 interview.

⁴⁵CS101 interview.

⁴⁶CS1 Parent Focus Group 3 interview.

⁴⁷CS1004 interview.

⁴⁸CS1001 interview, CS1 Children’s Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

when they are young, as they grow up they will drift away.”⁴⁹ Prioritizing ministry to children and families entails the investment of financial resources to train teachers and children’s ministry leaders, possibly even hiring a paid staff in the future.⁵⁰ It entails vision casting and training by the senior pastor and elders to uplift parents as spiritual teachers and equip parents for home discipleship.⁵¹ The spiritual formation of children within the home has to become a high priority for parents and for the church. As CS1001 reflected, “the Hmong people have a proverb, ‘If you do not harvest bamboo shoots when they are young and tender, they will grow tough, then you will not have a harvest, which will make it difficult for you.’”⁵²

Resources Needed

Resources desired by the participants included a church resource library for children’s ministry teachers and leaders, and home discipleship materials for parents. Affordable training for children’s ministry leaders and teachers was also desired. The growth and development of children and the appropriate discipline of children were the two main areas of training which the children’s ministry teachers desired.⁵³

Case Study 2 Report

Case Study 2 (CS2) is a small Hmong C&MA church located in the southeastern portion of the United States. A case study was conducted in January 2016 to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices within this church. Four key informant interviews, one children’s ministry teachers focus group interview, and one

⁴⁹CS1001 interview.

⁵⁰CS1004 interview.

⁵¹CS1001 interview.

⁵²CS1001 interview. “Ua li Hmoob hais uas, ntsuag tuaj tsis lov ntsuag noj ces ntsuag laus tes yuav tsis tau noj, ces yuav nyuaj.”

⁵³CS1 Children’s Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

parent focus group interview were conducted at CS2. Sixteen people were interviewed: four church leaders (pastor, two elders, children's ministry director); four children's ministry teachers; and eight parents. Half were male, half were female.

Of the participants, 6.3% were under 20 years of age, 12.5% ages 21-25, 43.8% ages 26-34, and 37.5% ages 35-44. In terms of ethnicity, the participants were 87.5% Hmong, and 12.5% of other ethnic origin. The majority, 62.5%, were born in the United States, and 37.5% were born overseas. Of the foreign born, three were born in Thailand, two were born in France, and one was born in Mexico. Those who are foreign born have resided in the United States for 21-30 years (67%), and 33% for 31-40 years. English is the primary language spoken in the home (68.8%), at work (75%), at church (81.3%), with children (68.8%), and with a spouse (56.3%).

Of the participants, 87.5% were married, and 12.5% were single adults. Of those who had children, 50% had children ages 0-4, 56.3% had children ages 5-12, and 12.5% had children ages 13-17. The educational attainment of the participants included: 6.3% graduated from high school; 31.3% attended vocational school; 50% graduated from college; and 12.5% who completed graduate school. The employment status of the participants varied with 6.3% not employed, 6.3% employed part-time, and 87.5% employed full-time. The majority of the participants (81.3%) have been church members between 2-4 years, and only 18.8% who have been church members between 5-9 years.

Church Background

CS2 was a daughter church plant for second generation Hmong-Americans. The CS2 church was planted in 2012. The original church planting team consisted of seven individuals, and their seven families, who felt called by God to plant a new church in the southeast area. The majority of the church planting team had served together in leadership at their mother church: a first generation Hmong immigrant church. "I felt

that God was calling us to plant a church,” shared CS2001.⁵⁴ “We wanted to have a church that was based on families, especially the younger generation,” shared CS2003, “I knew that . . . people needed a different kind of church. . . . God was tugging our hearts so I was on board with them.”⁵⁵ “We were comfortable [at the mother church],” added CS2004, “I needed that extra step of faith” so CS2004 also became part of the church planting team.

Once the church planting team was assembled, they decided on who would be the head church planter and pastor of the new church.⁵⁶ The head church planter went through a church planting training process with the C&MA. The Church Ministries Director of the Hmong District also guided the church planting team. In addition, the church planting team consulted an outside mentor, a professor at a nearby Christian college, to assist them in defining the mission, vision, values, and ecclesiastical structure and function of the church plant.⁵⁷ The church plant team spent a year together in prayer, fellowship, study of Scripture, and discussion over “what is our DNA.”⁵⁸

Target population. Reaching second generation, Hmong-American families, who are third culture people, and or had mixed ethnic marriages became the natural target population for the CS2 church plant. CS2001 stated that, among the Hmong in the southeast area, there is “a generation of Hmong people that’s just culturally and traditionally different from the rest, particularly the younger English-speaking families and single adults.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴CS2001, interview by author, January 12, 2016.

⁵⁵CS2003, interview by author, January 14, 2016.

⁵⁶CS2003 interview.

⁵⁷CS2003 interview.

⁵⁸CS2004, interview by author, January 17, 2016.

⁵⁹CS2, Youtube Channel, viewed by the author (accessed January 2016), confidential.

In the first generation Hmong immigrant church, CS2004 observed that many young, second generation, Hmong-Americans were drifting away from the Hmong church and from the Christian faith. “There were many young [Hmong] people,” shared CS2004, “they break out and go to the American churches, which is not a bad thing. But some stopped going to church. They just stayed home.”⁶⁰ CS2003 shared that, “we stepped out of the Hmong church for about two years to go to an American church. But when we went to the American church we were really missing the Hmong, the community and the fellowship with each other. We didn’t really have that with the American church.”⁶¹ CS2003 explains, “we’re kind of a strange group because we’re still 100% Hmong but then we’re not really Hmong either But then we’re not like truly American we’re kind of stuck in the middle.”⁶²

Another observation of the second generation Hmong-Americans, made by CS2003, was that some of the young Hmong-Americans were marrying spouses of different ethnic ancestry. “The people that marry outside of the Hmong, they go to the Hmong church but then their spouse, they don’t feel welcome, they don’t feel at home,” observed CS2003.⁶³ “When they go to the American church then they miss the whole community too,” added CS2003, “so this is why we believe [CS2] exists, so those people can call us home.”⁶⁴

Although the church planting team had considered planting a multiethnic church, they came to the conclusion that they had limited capabilities to do this. “We want to have a multicultural church,” stated CS2003, “but it’s not going to be because our

⁶⁰CS2004 interview.

⁶¹CS2003 interview.

⁶²CS2003 interview.

⁶³CS2003 interview.

⁶⁴CS2003 interview.

team is not multicultural.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, the church planting team decided that “the target group should be our friends . . . who are part of our circles . . . folks our age and people with young families, just like us.”⁶⁶

Ecclesiastical structure. As a new church plant, the church planting team wanted “to start from scratch.”⁶⁷ They wanted to lay a foundation and establish a church that was different from their previous knowledge and prior experiences of the Hmong Christian church. “We pretty much tried to unlearn everything that we thought we knew about the church,” stated CS2003.⁶⁸ They did not want to re-establish the typical, traditional Hmong worship service or order of worship; “all that we threw out the door.”⁶⁹ Even the “whole DMD [disciplemaking ministry department], Sunday school, we threw out the door.”⁷⁰

Instead the CS2 church planters decided upon a family-oriented, small group, home church model. The original seven families were divided to form two new small groups. The small groups met in people’s homes and rotated from one home to another.⁷¹ Once the small groups were large enough, usually every two years, the small groups were then divided again to form more small groups. However, as the small groups increased, CS2 wanted a facility large enough for all of the small groups to gather together for fellowship and corporate worship. This led CS2 to rent the church facility of an

⁶⁵CS2003 interview.

⁶⁶CS2003 interview.

⁶⁷CS2003 interview.

⁶⁸CS2003 interview.

⁶⁹CS2003 interview.

⁷⁰CS2003 interview.

⁷¹CS2003 interview.

American church in the area.⁷²

Since the CS2 church was officially organized with the C&MA, its church leadership structure was organized according to the C&MA uniform policy. The elder board, comprised of the senior pastor and three elders, and the ministry board, comprised of the ministry leaders, met monthly for prayer, planning, collaboration, and coordination of ministries. The ministry board consisted of the church secretary, church treasurer, assistant treasurer, Media Director, Hospitality Director, Worship Director, Single Adult and Youth Director, and the Children's Director.⁷³

The responsibilities of the pastor included pastoral care, preaching during the corporate worship, teaching a small group, training ministry leaders, and overseeing and directing the small groups. The elders were responsible for leading and teaching small groups and also filling in for the pastor in his absence. Each of the ministry directors were responsible for leadership and oversight of their respective ministries. All of these church leaders were appointed by a Nominating Committee and affirmed by the congregation at the annual congregational meeting. Unlike other Hmong churches who elected its church leaders at different term intervals, CS2 decided to nominate and affirm its church leaders and only nominate a new leader when an existing leader decided to resign from his/her specific ministry. In this way, consistent, long-term leadership would be provided for CS2.⁷⁴

Mission, vision, values. The mission of CS2 is “to glorify Jesus by restoring people to the heart of God through the gospel.”⁷⁵ Being a church that was family-oriented, small-group structured, gospel-driven, Christ-centered, the Word-centered,

⁷²CS2004 interview.

⁷³CS2001 interview.

⁷⁴CS2003 interview.

⁷⁵CS2 church brochure, obtained by author, January 17, 2016.

community service oriented, and multiplication directed was important to the senior pastor, elders, and leaders of the church. CS2003 stated that, “we believe that God calls us to make disciples and to spread out. So we want a church that church planting is in our DNA.”⁷⁶ “There is a certain vision why we have the church,” explained one participant, “that is to send missionaries, to send workers out, to plant churches, to really build disciples.”⁷⁷

Doing life together in community, being a family of families, empowering believers to trust in Jesus as their true mediator, intentionally discipling and mentoring people in their Christian walk, and growing and serving together through missional small groups is at the heart of CS2. Missions, Scripture, worship, community, and family are the four core values shared by the members of CS2.⁷⁸

Strengths of church. Participants described CS2 as being welcoming and very family-oriented. The greatest strengths of CS2 reported by participants were unity (*sib koom tes*), family community, love and care for one another (*sib hlub sib pab*), primary focus on Christ, empowering leadership from the pastor and elders, and active collaboration between parents and ministry leaders. CS2002 stated that, “I think that we’re really good on community Even though we’re not related by blood, because Jesus is the center of what is common between all of us, and with that, we just have wonderful relationships. We are each other’s family.”⁷⁹

Struggles of church. As a new church plant, CS2 has faced a number of ministry challenges. First, the lack of results from evangelism efforts has caused

⁷⁶CS2003 interview.

⁷⁷CS2 Parent Focus Group, interview by author, January 17, 2016.

⁷⁸CS2 Church brochure, 2016.

⁷⁹CS2002, interview by author, January 12, 2016.

discouragement amongst some of the church members.⁸⁰ Second, the busyness of young working families has prevented consistent participation of families in small groups or in Sunday morning worship.⁸¹ Third, the number of new believers and new Christians has outnumbered the number of available spiritual mentors, which makes intentional discipleship difficult to maintain.⁸² This increase has also added more responsibilities upon the existing church leaders, causing some to wear multiple hats, be overscheduled, and feeling overwhelmed, maxed out, exhausted, and burnt out.⁸³ There is simply not enough spiritual leaders to disciple and minister to people.

In addition to these challenges, CS2 has also experienced limitations in ministry due to renting a facility. The times available and rooms available for use are often limited.⁸⁴ The physical weekly set-up and tear-down can become wearisome. “It doesn’t feel like ours,” shared CS2002, “so it’s not like home.”⁸⁵ Lack of financial stewardship may delay the process of purchasing a church facility of their own.⁸⁶ Other challenges have included English language barrier among the first generation Hmong attendees, lack of knowledge by the church leaders of traditional Hmong cultural practices (especially weddings and funerals), and overcoming the emotional loss experienced when small groups divide.⁸⁷

⁸⁰CS2001 interview.

⁸¹CS2004 interview.

⁸²CS2003 interview.

⁸³CS2004 interview, CS2003 interview.

⁸⁴CS2004 interview.

⁸⁵CS2002 interview.

⁸⁶CS2004 interview.

⁸⁷CS2003 interview, CS2004 interview.

Home small group culture. Age-designated, home small group is the ministry culture and discipleship practice of the church. Small groups are the primary means for discipleship, fellowship, community service, and missions. CS2004 emphasized that, “our small groups are the hands and feet that’s doing the work of God as a community.”⁸⁸ Sunday morning worship is just a celebration of what God is accomplishing throughout the week through the small groups.

In CS2, small groups are organized by age in order to be relevant to the life-stages of the members.⁸⁹ There is a small group for first generation, Hmong-speaking seniors, a small group for middle-agers, a small group for young couples with young children, a small group for young single adults, small groups for youth, and then small groups for children.⁹⁰ The adult and youth small groups meet throughout the week in the homes of families, at least once per week, three times a month. And the children’s small groups meet only on Sundays during the congregational worship.

Although children may attend the adult small groups with their parents, the adult small groups are specifically tailored to the needs of the adults. Children may observe and participate as they are able to within the adult small groups. However, most of the time, they are playing with the other children in attendance.⁹¹

Worship space. Family homes are the primary meeting place for the members of CS2 during the week. However, on Sunday afternoons, all of the CS2 small groups meet at a rented church building for a corporate celebration worship from 2:30PM-3:45PM. CS2 uses five rooms for their Sunday afternoon gathering: (1) the hospitality room, with comfortable sofas and refreshments to welcome people; (2) the fellowship

⁸⁸CS2004 interview.

⁸⁹CS2004 interview.

⁹⁰CS2003 interview.

⁹¹CS2001, CS2004, CS2003 interviews.

hall used as a corporate worship space; (3) the children's library, used for the older elementary group; (4) the preschool room, used for the preschool-lower elementary group; and (5) the infant and toddler nursery room.

The fellowship hall is converted into a worship space every Sunday by the CS2 worship crew. Black pipe and drape curtains are hung across the side windows to block out light. Music instruments, sound equipment, and the sound system are transported in, set-up, taken down, and transported back into storage. Folding chairs are set-up in rows across two divided sections. The podium is centered between the two sections of chairs. A small round table is set-up at the back of the room to hold the communion elements.⁹²

Church Demographics

The CS2 church is a young church, comprised mostly of couples in their late twenties to mid-thirties.⁹³ Per CS2004, about 80% of the members are between the ages of 25 to 35.⁹⁴ And for the most part, per CS2001, "90% of the church is Hmong. We have mixed couples as well....either the husband or the wife is Hmong."⁹⁵ CS2 is still very much a homogenous Hmong church.

In 2013, CS2 reported an inclusive membership of sixty people and an average Sunday worship attendance of forty people.⁹⁶ Over the past four years, the inclusive membership of the church has grown. Currently, there are about 100 members, with twenty to twenty-five members being children 12 years old and younger.⁹⁷

⁹²Field observations by author, Sunday, January 17, 2016.

⁹³CS2001 interview.

⁹⁴CS2004 interview.

⁹⁵CS2001 interview.

⁹⁶Hmong District, "Secretary Report: Churches Annual Report 2013," *2013 DS Report* (Hmong District, 2013), 82.

⁹⁷CS2002 interview. CS2001 stated between 30-40 children.

Perceptions of Children

The family and children are very important to the members of CS2. “The Millennials and folks our age, they’re really family-oriented,” observed CS2003.⁹⁸ Children are valued equally, with the same worth, as the adults in the church.⁹⁹ The church enjoys, loves, welcomes, and accepts children.¹⁰⁰ “We want to protect them and invest in them to help grow them We see all the children as our own children,” explained CS2001.¹⁰¹ Another participant stated, “the kids bring so much energy to the congregation. It’s such a joy to have them in there.”¹⁰²

Strengths of children. Children in the CS2 church were perceived as being their own little community. The children enjoy being together, spending time together, and playing together.¹⁰³ They are accepting of others and supportive of one another.¹⁰⁴ The older children love and care for the younger children. They share their personal stories with one another. The children have taken ownership of CS2 as their own church. They have caught on that “we are all one big family.”¹⁰⁵

More importantly, the children “really put Jesus first and foremost and everything they talk about is Jesus.”¹⁰⁶ Children are actively participating in learning about God both at church and at home. They are curious about God. They ask hard questions about faith. They have reminded and held their parents accountable at home to

⁹⁸CS2003 interview.

⁹⁹CS2001 interview.

¹⁰⁰CS2003, CS2004, CS2001, CS2 Children’s Ministry Teachers Focus Group interviews.

¹⁰¹CS2001 interview.

¹⁰²CS2 Parent Focus Group, interview by author, January 17, 2016.

¹⁰³CS2003 interview.

¹⁰⁴CS2 Children’s Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹⁰⁵CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹⁰⁶CS2004 interview.

read the bible together and pray together with their children.¹⁰⁷

Struggles of children. Since the families live quite a distance from one another, it is difficult for children from the church to spend time with one another outside of scheduled church activities.¹⁰⁸ Also since most of the children have direct access to technology and are digital natives, their “attention span is a lot shorter now . . . because they are so used to having everything accessible in like 5 to 10 seconds.”¹⁰⁹ This has made it challenging for some children to stay focused during their small group activities.

Expectations of children. Children are loved by the CS2 church family. Teaching children is an important ministry of the church.¹¹⁰ What is expected of children is that they are involved in as many events of the church as possible, so that they feel like they are “part of the church.”¹¹¹ Children are expected to serve alongside their parents in the adult small groups, so that “they know how to serve.”¹¹² Although children may misbehave from time to time, this was expected. What is important to the CS2 church leaders is that children are led up close to Jesus.¹¹³

Dreams for Children

Knowing Jesus, trusting Jesus, loving Jesus, serving Jesus, and obeying Jesus is the ultimate goal of CS2 leaders, teachers, and parents for all of their children. “Our hope is that we can imprint in their lives the gospel so deeply that it sticks”, that it

¹⁰⁷CS2 Parent focus group, and Children’s Ministry Teachers focus group interviews.

¹⁰⁸CS2003 interview.

¹⁰⁹CS2 Children’s Ministry Teachers focus group interview.

¹¹⁰CS2003 interview.

¹¹¹CS2001 interview.

¹¹²CS2 Parent focus group interview.

¹¹³CS2001 interview.

“sustains them” throughout their entire lives.¹¹⁴ “We want them to grow into disciples and teach these things back unto other children back unto other youth and other adults,” explained CS2001.¹¹⁵

Personal salvation in Christ, growing discipleship in Christ, faithful service to others through their passions and gifts, bold witness about Christ, and extension of the gospel to other nations and subsequent generations were some of the dreams which CS2 participants desired for their children. CS2 participants want their children to grow up and become the next generation of evangelists, pastors, missionaries, and church planters. As one participant poignantly expressed, the gospel should not “just stop with us.”¹¹⁶

Family Ministry Practices

Recognizing that children were very important to Millennial parents, the pastor and leaders of CS2 wanted to create a children’s ministry program that emphasized equal partnership between parents and the children’s ministers. In home discipleship by parents, and parental involvement within the children’s ministry were crucial to the discipleship of children. “Change really happens at home,” stated CS2003.¹¹⁷ “Parents have to be involved,” added CS2004, “they can’t just bring their children for the teachers to teach them.”¹¹⁸ Parental involvement in the Christian formation of their children is an essential and necessary component of the children’s ministry at CS2.

Leadership structure. At CS2, the Children’s Director is the leader responsible for planning, directing, and overseeing the discipleship of children birth to

¹¹⁴CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹¹⁵CS2001 interview.

¹¹⁶CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹¹⁷CS2003 interview.

¹¹⁸CS2004 interview.

age twelve and also for the equipping of parents. The Children's Director has two other leaders who serve on the CS2 children's ministry board; one of them coordinates the nursery workers. The CS2 children's board meets regularly to "think of ideas, our purpose, vision, what we want to accomplish this year."¹¹⁹

Age-segmented small groups. Children's Sunday small group is the primary children's discipleship program at CS2. Infants and toddlers, birth to age 3, are placed in the nursery for child care. The two children's small groups are the preschool-early elementary group (ages 4-8), and upper elementary group (ages 8-12). These children's small groups meet on Sunday afternoons from 2:30 PM to 3:45 PM during the congregation's corporate celebration worship. The small group leaders for the children are mostly young adults, at least 18 years and older.¹²⁰

The CS2 children's Sunday small group gathering utilizes a large-group, small-group format. All of the preschool and elementary children gather first in a large group to learn the main Bible story, watch a bible video, and then have praise and worship together. After the large-group time, the children are then divided into their respective small groups. During the small group time, children are engaged in relational conversations and creative activities which reinforce the main Bible story. The Gospel Project for Kids by Lifeway is the curriculum used by CS2.¹²¹ Occasionally, the children will worship together with the adults and youth on Sunday afternoons. But most often, the children remain in their age-designated small groups.

Other secondary discipleship events include special children's events, family events, and intergenerational events. Soccer camp vacation bible school for kids, Easter

¹¹⁹CS2002 interview.

¹²⁰CS2001 interview.

¹²¹CS2002, and CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interviews.

egg hunt, and outside trips for older elementary children are examples of children's events. Family events have included family camping, and family small group challenges. And intergenerational events have included infant dedication, children's baptism, graduation from the children's ministry to the youth group, church picnics, and small group fellowship and service events.

Perceptions of Parents

CS2 parents verbalized and acknowledged that parents are the primary spiritual leaders of their family and bear the primary responsibility for the Christian discipleship of their children. The role of the pastor and of the church is to support the parents and to partner with parents. "Pastor is here to support the parents," voiced one participant.¹²² Thus the parents at CS2 have actively participated, supported, and invested time, effort, and finances into the children's ministry. "You can really tell that parents really are invested in their children's lives spiritually," observed one participant.¹²³ "The parents are heavily involved in the children's ministry," added another participant.¹²⁴

In addition to supporting and being involved in the children's ministry, parents were actively engaging their children in spiritual practices at home. Key spiritual practices reported by participants included: teaching their children how to pray, praying together; reading the bible together; and engaging children in faith conversations. One of the participants observed that, "a lot of parents would talk to their kids on the way back home and they fill in the gaps and answer any questions that the kids might have had at the time, so you can tell that the parents are very involved."¹²⁵

Disciplining with grace was another area of parenting which parents attempted

¹²²CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹²³CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹²⁴CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹²⁵CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

to practice at home. Through grace-based discipline, one participant explained, parents “show them [children] a little glimpse of how Christ is like we try to show them that you can always go back to God for repentance That there’s always forgiveness for them.”¹²⁶

As a church comprised of young Christians and young families, CS2 participants reported that some of their parents struggle with faith in God, with marriage, with parenting, and with managing their finances. Individuals have doubts about God and questions about various faith issues.¹²⁷ Couples find it difficult to manage their differences.¹²⁸ First time parents are striving to learn how to parent,¹²⁹ and young adults struggle with high debts, high expenses, and high spending.¹³⁰

Being physically exhausted from work, lacking a deeper prayer life, lacking personal obedience to spiritual disciplines, and lacking biblical knowledge were some of the reasons parents gave for not consistently engaging in Christian discipleship with their children. New believers especially “feel that they’re inadequate because they lack bible knowledge they feel inadequate that they can’t lead their family to know Christ.”¹³¹

Parent-equipping Practices

CS2001 stated that, “what we have been doing as a church is to move away from the church or the children’s ministry from being the main source of a child’s growth and we’ve emphasized that the church is a supplemental and a resource to assist the

¹²⁶CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹²⁷CS2003 interview.

¹²⁸CS2004 interview.

¹²⁹CS2003 interview.

¹³⁰CS2004 interview.

¹³¹CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

parents, who are really the ones who are supposed to grow their children.”¹³² Some of the parents “think that it is the job of the church to make sure that my children accept Christ,” explained CS2001.¹³³ However, the CS2 leaders strongly believe that parents are to raise their children to love Jesus, to raise their children to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, and to raise their children to serve Him. The greatest task of the children’s ministry is “really training our parents to love Christ and then they can in turn teach that to their children.”¹³⁴ The children’s ministry is to “be there to support the parents and to provide resources to make sure that the kids are being led at home.”¹³⁵

To assist and equip parents, the children’s ministry at CS2 has focused primarily on hosting a quarterly brunch for parents. All of the parents are invited to attend. There is usually a short parenting video and then follow-up questions and discussions.¹³⁶ “We talk about how to parent our kids . . . how to help each other with our children,” expressed CS2001.¹³⁷ Parents have given positive feedback about this quarterly brunch.¹³⁸

Impact of Family Ministry on Children

Children at CS2 have been positively impacted by the joint partnership between parents and CS2 ministers. CS2004 commented that he has seen children respond in faith to the gospel.¹³⁹ CS2001 commented that he has seen God’s working in

¹³²CS2001 interview.

¹³³CS2001 interview.

¹³⁴CS2001 interview.

¹³⁵CS2002 interview.

¹³⁶CS2002 interview.

¹³⁷CS2001 interview.

¹³⁸CS2 Children’s Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹³⁹CS2004 interview.

the hearts of children, teachers, and parents. CS2001 expressed that:

I have seen the growth in all the children. One of the children was asked in school, 'Are you afraid of death?' And he answered, 'No, because I will be with Jesus in heaven.' Children know that death is bad, but I don't have to worry because I will be with Jesus. I think that those things are really amazing. God is doing a mighty work.¹⁴⁰

Family Ministry Grade

The average grade given by CS2 participants for the church's ministry to children and parents was a B plus. The grades ranged from a C to an A minus. Some felt that the family ministry was already very impactful to children and parents. "I think we're doing a good job," commented one participant.¹⁴¹ "I think what we're doing is great, every year I see progress," commented another participant.¹⁴² "I like to observe the teachers and they do very well ministering to the kids and really teaching them God's truth," added another participant.¹⁴³ Yet a few participants also recognized that "we still have a way to go."¹⁴⁴

Changes Needed

Intentional involvement of parents in the Christian discipleship of their children at home and at church was the most significant change desired by participants. CS2003 expressed that, "I think we are relying too much on the children's ministry to get the parents involved."¹⁴⁵ Motivating, encouraging, and equipping parents should also be the responsibility of the church leadership. Doing more to intentionally help parents

¹⁴⁰CS2001 interview.

¹⁴¹CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹⁴²CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹⁴³CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹⁴⁴CS2001 and CS2002 interviews.

¹⁴⁵CS2003 interview.

learn about parenting and discipline is an area that needs to be further developed.¹⁴⁶ Two groups of parents that needed more intentional mentoring were parents who are new believers, and fathers.¹⁴⁷

CS2004 also expressed that he would like to see more parents involved in teaching children at the church, instead of just young adults. “I would like the parents to be teaching kids . . . since parents have children, they have a little more experience in that,” explained CS2004.¹⁴⁸ On-going communication with parents and on-going collaboration between all of the church ministry departments were two essential processes necessary to reach parents.¹⁴⁹

One unplanned change that CS2 is currently undergoing is the leadership transition of the Children’s Director. The previous Children’s Director, who was part of the original church planting team and who has served in this role for the past four years, has just resigned. A new Children’s Director has been appointed and confirmed. However, this will be his first year of serving in this role. The leadership and influence of the new Children’s Director will shape the future vision, direction, and impact of the children’s ministry at CS2.

Resources Needed

Consistent training for the children’s ministry director, leaders, and teachers is “something that we need and really lacking of.”¹⁵⁰ Children’s ministry teachers, in particular, expressed their need for further training in children’s development, communicating with children, disciplining children, and teaching children using the

¹⁴⁶CS2003 interview.

¹⁴⁷CS2003 interview.

¹⁴⁸CS2004 interview.

¹⁴⁹CS2 Parent Focus Group interview.

¹⁵⁰CS2001 interview.

learning styles of children.¹⁵¹ In the past the children's ministry team has attended national children's ministry training conferences. However, the financial resources of CS2 will determine the level of training that will be accessible to the children's ministry department.

More training and resources for church planting was also desired by CS2 participants, especially for the core church planting team. Coaching and mentoring from experienced church planters was highly desired, yet not always available. Having outside mentors to challenge, refine, and guide young church planters will be of extreme value.¹⁵²

Case Study 3 Report

Case Study 3 (CS3) is a large Hmong C&MA church located in the mid-southern portion of the United States. A case study was conducted in February 2016 to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices within this church. Four key informant interviews, two children's ministry teachers focus group interviews, and two parent focus group interviews were conducted at CS3. Twenty-three participants were interviewed: four church leaders (senior pastor, two elders, children's ministry director); seven teachers; and twelve parents. Of the participants, 47.8% were male, and 52.2% were female.

The age distribution of the participants were: 8.7% ages 21-25; 26.1% ages 26-34; 47.8% ages 35-44; 13% ages 45-54; and 4.3% ages 55-64. All of the participants were of Hmong ancestry, with 52.2% born overseas, and 47.8% born in the United States. Of the foreign born, 11 were born in Laos, and one was born in China. Those who were born overseas have resided in the United States for varying lengths of time: 8% between 0-20 years; 8% between 21-30 years; and 83% between 31-40 years.

¹⁵¹CS2 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group interview.

¹⁵²CS2003 interview.

English is the primary language spoken at work (91.3%), and with children (60.9%). Both English and Hmong are spoken in the home (56.5%), at church (78.3%), and with a spouse (52.2%). Of the participants 91.3% are married, and 8.7% are single adults. Of those who have children, their children ranged in age with 34.8% between ages 0-4, 60.9% between ages 5-12, and 34.8% between ages 13-17.

Education wise, 30.4% have completed vocational school, 56.5% have completed college, and 13% have completed graduate school. In terms of employment, 4.3% are employed part-time, 91.3% employed full-time, and 4.3% are retired. Their church membership varied between 17.4% being church members for less than one year, 26.1% being members between 2-4 years, 13% being members between 5-9 years, 26.1% being members between 10-19 years, and 17.4% being members for over 20 years.

Church Background

In 1975, after the Vietnam War, five Hmong Christian refugee families had been resettled in a city in the mid-southern region of the United States. The American sponsors of these families attended a Baptist church. Thus the Hmong Christian families organized themselves under the Baptist church.¹⁵³ By 1979, there were ten Hmong Christian refugee families in the area. These families were from the same Her clan, who had lived in the same village in Laos.¹⁵⁴ Instead of remaining with the Baptist church, these families re-established themselves as an official church with the C&MA in 1979.

By 1980, due to the increasing arrival of Hmong refugees, the membership of CS3 grew dramatically to over 400 members. The first senior pastor of CS3 was a graduate of the C&MA bible institute in Laos. Because he valued the Christian education of children and youth, the age-segmented Sunday school program was started at CS3 for

¹⁵³CS3 website, accessed by author on February 12, 2016. Confidential.

¹⁵⁴CS3002, interview by author, February 15, 2016.

children, youth, and adults. “When we first started, it was hard to find people to serve,” stated CS3004, one of the founding members of CS3.

Between 1982 to 1983 many Hmong Christian families moved out of the city and relocated to the state of California, due to cuts in the refugee resettlement program.¹⁵⁵ However, the remaining members of CS3 banded together. In 1983, CS3 became the first Hmong church to purchase its own church facility.

In 1986, CS3003 and his family arrived from Thailand and joined the CS3 church when he was nineteen years old. CS3003 shared that when his family joined the church, “I felt like home, because the majority of the people were my clan [Her] relatives whom I have always known . . . the church was my family.”¹⁵⁶ At that time the youth group was over 50 people, and very active in gathering together for Bible study and worship.¹⁵⁷

By the late 1990s, church attendance began to decline. There was decreasing interest in the adult Sunday school classes.¹⁵⁸ In 2004, the inclusive membership of CS3 remained steady at 481 people, with an average worship attendance of 300 people (62%), and an average Sunday school attendance of 185 (35%).¹⁵⁹ In 2006, the adult Sunday school program and the Wednesday night prayer meetings were both discontinued, due to a lack of participation. Instead, under the leadership of a new senior pastor, age-designated, adult, home small groups (called care groups) were started.¹⁶⁰ When the care groups began, there was only 3-4 groups meeting in homes. Eventually the small groups

¹⁵⁵CS3004, interview by author, February 16, 2016.

¹⁵⁶CS3003, interview by author, February 16, 2016.

¹⁵⁷CS3003 interview.

¹⁵⁸CS3003 interview.

¹⁵⁹Hmong District, “Hmong District 2004 Church Membership Report,” *DS Report 2005* (Hmong District, 2005), 65.

¹⁶⁰CS3002 interview.

grew and multiplied. By 2013, the inclusive membership of CS3 had increased to 539 members, with an average worship attendance of 285 people (53%).¹⁶¹

Mission, vision, and values. The mission of CS3 is “to love God and to express His love to others.”¹⁶² Its vision is “to be a church that changes lives for Jesus Christ.”¹⁶³ Christ-centeredness and the knowledge of Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King is a hallmark of CS3; as well as other C&MA churches.

Church leadership. Organized under the uniform policy of the C&MA, the church leadership is comprised of the Board of Elders (senior pastor and six elders), the Church Governing Board (pastors, six elders, secretary, treasurer), and several ministry departments. The ministry departments include age-segmented ministries: children’s ministry; nursery ministry; senior adult ministry; adult care groups; men’s ministry; Great Commission Women; and the youth ministry. The ministry departments also include other congregational care ministries and administrative committees: deacons; deaconess; missions committee; trustee; greeter; activity team; safety team; ushers; maintenance team; auditors; hospitality team; rules committee; worship committee; scholarship committee; by-laws committee; video recording team; prayer team; short-term mission team; and church website ministry.¹⁶⁴

In the past thirty-six years since its inception, CS3 has been pastored by seven successive senior pastors and three successive youth pastors. The current senior pastor has served for the past eight years. The average senior pastorate at CS3 has been five to

¹⁶¹Hmong District, *DS Report 2014* (Hmong District, 2014), 81.

¹⁶²CS3 website, accessed by author, February 12, 2016.

¹⁶³CS3 website.

¹⁶⁴CS3 website.

seven years.¹⁶⁵ In addition to the senior pastor, CS3 has a youth pastor on staff. And in March 2016, CS3 will accept its first children's pastor. Biblical preaching and the spiritual leadership of all the previous and present pastors have strengthened and grown CS3.¹⁶⁶

Strengths of church. CS3 is a traditional Hmong church that has endured well throughout the years. It is a multigenerational church, with four generations of long-term families. CS3001 expressed that, "most of the families we have here are children growing up in the church and have been in the church for a long time....A few new families too, but the majority are children growing up in the church; families that have been born and raised here."¹⁶⁷

The older generations are described by participants as being "very humble, no one that is really critical or too hard to get along with."¹⁶⁸ They are understanding of the younger generations, and are willing to adjust and accommodate to the younger generations in order to reach them for Christ. CS3001 shared that it was "the older generation that had asked to see if we could speak more English [during the worship service], because they were more concerned that the younger generations might not understand Hmong."¹⁶⁹ Although Hmong is still the primary language used by the senior pastor for his sermons, English is also used during the corporate worship, i.e. English worship songs and the youth pastor's sermons. The younger generations, though they are not able to speak Hmong fluently, are able to understand Hmong, so language has not

¹⁶⁵CS3002 interview.

¹⁶⁶CS3004 interview. Also CS3 Parent Focus Group 2, interview by author, February 19, 2016.

¹⁶⁷CS3001, interview by author, February 15, 2016.

¹⁶⁸CS3 Parent Focus Group 2, interview by author, February 19, 2016.

¹⁶⁹CS3001, interview by author, February 15, 2016.

been a major barrier for the adults and youth.¹⁷⁰

The majority of the families at CS3 continue to be from the Her clan, however this has not caused division. Instead this family clan bond has promoted unity, cooperation, and servanthood amongst its members. Most of the members have been Christians for many years and are of mature faith. This maturity in faith has allowed CS3 to raise up a number of full-time pastors and missionaries from its congregation. Its financial giving to worldwide missions has increased.¹⁷¹ Its financial investment in the youth and children's ministry has also increased.

The CS3 pastors and church leaders have invested heavily in the youth and children's ministry.¹⁷² From its early beginnings, the church leadership has established Sunday school classes for children and youth. It has invested in training for children's ministry leaders and teachers. It has also brought on additional pastors to shepherd the next generations of the church.

Church struggles. Even as CS3 has strived to disciple every generation in the Christian faith, CS3002 and CS3003 reported that there is one generation that has distanced themselves away from the Christian faith. This lost generation are those who are currently in their 30s to 40s. CS3003 shared that, "Here in our church there is one generation that since their teenage years have been lost from an early age."¹⁷³ "The reason they are lost is because we were not able to minister to them when they were still young," added CS3003, "those that remain active in the Christian faith are those whom faith was instilled upon them from childhood, to youth, to adulthood."¹⁷⁴ CS3002 also

¹⁷⁰CS3001 interview.

¹⁷¹CS3004 interview.

¹⁷²CS3 Children's Ministry Teachers Focus Group 1, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

¹⁷³CS3002, and CS3003 interviews.

¹⁷⁴CS3003 interview.

shared that, “I believe that at that time the parents were not involved with their children like now and days the faith of the parents have great influence upon the faith of their children, if parents are actively bringing their children to church, those children usually continue in the faith.”¹⁷⁵

CS3001 observed that of the parents in the church, “those in their 40s are very good in helping with their children both educationally and spiritually.”¹⁷⁶ However, those parents who are in their thirties “are not very involved with their children spiritually.”¹⁷⁷ It is the grandparents who are bringing their grandchildren to church. CS3001 noted that, “right now the younger parents are pretty involved, they want to do more and learn more, more family focus and it’s a good thing.”¹⁷⁸ CS3002 shared that, “I see that this church has existed for a long time, but there are areas that can still be developed and has the potential to grow one of those areas is our ministry to children.”¹⁷⁹ By adding a children’s pastor to the pastoral team, CS3001 hopes that “the church will be able to serve the younger families much better Having someone working full-time to help the children and their parents to know the Lord is needed, and the church realizes that as well. We have a lot of kids here that need to know the Lord and if we can provide that, it’s a great thing for them.”¹⁸⁰

Besides discipleship of the younger generations, evangelism was another area of struggle reported by participants. CS3003 reported that, “the problem is that most of our members have been Christians for a long time and they have gotten very

¹⁷⁵CS3002 interview.

¹⁷⁶CS3001, interview by author, February 15, 2016.

¹⁷⁷CS3001 interview.

¹⁷⁸CS3001 interview.

¹⁷⁹CS3001 interview.

¹⁸⁰CS3001 interview.

comfortable.”¹⁸¹ Being too comfortable in their Christian life has led some to be stunted in their spiritual growth. Participation in prayer gatherings has decreased. Active involvement in evangelism has also decreased.¹⁸² Although the Hmong population in the city is continuing to grow, the church has not been regularly engaged in sharing their Christian faith with others.¹⁸³

A third area of struggle, voiced by participants, was a culture of fear, which they sensed was still present at CS3. In the recent past, CS3 has experienced a traumatic incident which led to the tragic loss of life. Since this incident, the fear of casualty, liability, and loss has deeply influenced the ministry policies and procedures and the ministry culture of CS3. “I know that things happened in the past and that’s why we have all these concerns about liability,” expressed one participant, but “can we move beyond that our ministry is suffering because of that.”¹⁸⁴

Church Demographics

The membership of CS3 is homogenously Hmong in ancestry. The current inclusive membership of CS3 is 546 members. Of the members, there are 38 people (7%) who are above 62 years of age. There are 184 people (34%) who are between the ages of 31 to 61. There are 120 people (22%) who are 19 to 30 years of age. There are 71 people (13%) who are 12 to 18 years of age. Then for the children, there are 47 children (9%) under the age of four, and 87 children (16%) who are 5 to 11 years of age.¹⁸⁵ The largest percentage of people in CS3 are the middle-aged adults (34%) and the

¹⁸¹CS3003 interview.

¹⁸²CS3002 interview.

¹⁸³CS3004 interview.

¹⁸⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group, interview by author.

¹⁸⁵CS3003 interview.

children (25%). The average attendance of the children is about 70 children per week.¹⁸⁶

The number of first generation Hmong have slowly dwindled over the years. The largest generations in the church are the 1.5 generation (born overseas and raised in the United States) and the 2.0 generation (born and raised in the United States). There are a few attendees who are married to spouses from another ethnic background. However, these couples have attended irregularly and have not become members of CS3.¹⁸⁷

Perceptions of Children

Within CS3 children are highly valued by church leaders, parents, and children's ministry teachers. Children are welcomed and accepted by the church.¹⁸⁸ Participants describe children as being a gift from God, and a blessing from God.¹⁸⁹ Children bring joy to the lives of parents and make their lives complete. One participant expressed, "there is a part of you that cannot live without your kids . . . in a sense, you feel incomplete without them."¹⁹⁰

Participants expressed that children have the same importance and the same equal value as adults.¹⁹¹ So the older generation need to disciple the next generation. The Christian discipleship of the next generation must begin in childhood. As CS3003 expressed, "it's very important to start when children are very young so that when they are grown they will be committed and remain close to God."¹⁹² "We need to start from

¹⁸⁶CS3001 interview.

¹⁸⁷CS3002 interview.

¹⁸⁸CS3001 interview.

¹⁸⁹CS3 Parent Focus Group 1, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

¹⁹⁰CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

¹⁹¹CS3002 interview.

¹⁹²CS3003 interview.

our children,” added another participant, “they are our future.”¹⁹³ “If we don’t teach them and lead them, we have no future,” another participant voiced.¹⁹⁴ “We love our children” was a unified theme amongst all of the participants.¹⁹⁵

Strengths of children. Participants describe the CS3 children as being very bright, friendly, excited, enthusiastic, energetic, and eager to learn.¹⁹⁶ They have strong personalities, each with his or her own unique character. They are a digital generation: visual-oriented, hands on, tech savvy, and quick to understand and retain new information.¹⁹⁷ They actively participate in learning about God, and are willing to share their personal stories in class. They enjoy coming to church and ask hard questions about faith and God.¹⁹⁸

Struggles of children. Most of the children speak only English, so English is used in the children’s ministry.¹⁹⁹ Some participants reported that their children had difficulty conversing with their grandparents at home and also with listening to the Hmong sermons at church. One participant stated that, “a lot of teenagers they don’t understand Hmong, like my kids.”²⁰⁰ The language barrier is a concern for participants who have preteen children, especially as their children transition from the children’s church into the corporate worship.

¹⁹³CS3 Children’s Ministry Teacher Focus Group 2, interview by author, February 19, 2016.

¹⁹⁴CS3 Children’s Ministry Teacher Focus Group 1, interview by author, February 18, 2016.

¹⁹⁵CS3002, CS3001, CS3 Parent Focus Group 1, CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interviews.

¹⁹⁶CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

¹⁹⁷CS3004 interview.

¹⁹⁸CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

¹⁹⁹CS3004 interview.

²⁰⁰CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

Expectations of children. The two primary expectations for children are that they “be safe” and “be respectful of one another.”²⁰¹ The children’s ministry does not have any ministry-wide rules of behavior for the children. Each teacher usually determines his or her own expectations and consequences for the children.²⁰² This has communicated inconsistent expectations for the children and caused some behavioral issues for a few of the teachers.²⁰³

Dreams for Children

Ultimately, the desire of CS3 participants is for all of the children to develop a lifetime faith in Jesus Christ. “We want every child to know Jesus Christ, to have Christ in their lives, so that from childhood, to when they are teenagers, to adulthood, God’s Word will have remained in them,” stated CS3003.²⁰⁴ Instead of chasing the things of this world, CS3 participants want their children to pursue God, to know God, to obey God, to be accountable to God, to grow in Christ-likeness, to identify and use their gifts and talents to serve God, and to be part of the church.²⁰⁵

As children mature in their faith, participants desire children to become goal-directed, self- confident, and bold witnesses for Christ. Eventually, participants desire children to one day to become full-time ministers and future leaders of the church.²⁰⁶ “We want to impact their lives so that they can continue ministry to the next generation,” stated one participant, “one day they can come back and be a Sunday school teacher.”²⁰⁷

²⁰¹CS3001 interview.

²⁰²CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁰³CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁰⁴CS3003 interview.

²⁰⁵CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 and CS Parent Focus Group 2 interviews.

²⁰⁶CS3001, CS3002, CS3003, CS3004, CS3 Teacher Focus Group 3 interviews.

²⁰⁷CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

Family Ministry Practices

“Faith has to begin in childhood,” expressed CS3002, “we have to teach and assist children so that they can come to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord when they are young.”²⁰⁸ If children develop faith when are young, more than likely, their faith will continue to grow as they become teenagers.²⁰⁹ Giving opportunities for children to learn about Jesus and to receive Christ as Lord and Savior is the primary role of the church.²¹⁰

Leadership structure. The ministry to children at CS3 is divided between two ministry departments: the nursery ministry and the children’s ministry. The nursery coordinator oversees the childcare of children birth through two years of age.²¹¹ The children’s director, and soon the children’s pastor, is responsible for the Christian education of children ages 3 through 11. Serving alongside the children’s director (pastor) is the children’s ministry team, which is comprised of the treasurer, secretary, and teacher coordinator. Each children’s class is staffed by two teachers who switch off every quarter.²¹² The children’s ministry team meets once a month to plan and coordinate events for the children. It also plans teacher training workshops twice a year.

There are twenty-five children’s ministry teachers, the majority of the teachers are adults with three or four that are youth members.²¹³ The children’s ministry teachers are recruited every year through a volunteer sign-up and through personal invitations. Prior to the year 2000, CS3003 reported that most of the children’s ministry teachers were high school students only. Back then it was only the youth teaching and leading

²⁰⁸CS3002 interview.

²⁰⁹CS3002 interview.

²¹⁰CS3002, CS3003 interview.

²¹¹CS3001 interview.

²¹²CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

²¹³CS3001 interview.

children.²¹⁴ Since then the number of adult teachers have increased. The number of male adult teachers has also increased.²¹⁵ Currently, children's teachers are required to be at least 18 years of age or older, be background checked, and profess personal faith in Jesus Christ.²¹⁶ One participant commented that, "what I have noticed about our teachers is that they are made up of college students . . . and people with lots of training, so their faith is not like a small child, but mature."²¹⁷

Age-segmented programs. The principle method of discipleship at CS3 are age-segmented discipleship programs. The main corporate worship for adults and youth occurs on Sunday mornings at the church from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Adult discipleship occurs through care groups that meet in homes and gender-segmented events that meet at the church, e.g., men's ministry, women's ministry. Discipleship of the youth and children are predominantly located at the church facility.

During the week, there are eight to nine adult care groups that meet in peoples' homes, eight to nine couples, two to three times per month. These care groups are adult-oriented and age-specific: senior adults; middle adults, young couples, single adults, etc.²¹⁸ Though children are welcome to attend with their parents, there are no planned activities for the children during care group meetings.²¹⁹ The care group curriculum is selected by each group leader with the approval from the senior pastor.²²⁰ Once every quarter, the men's ministry and Great Commission Women's ministry meet at the church

²¹⁴CS3003 interview.

²¹⁵CS3001 interview.

²¹⁶CS3002 interview.

²¹⁷CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²¹⁸CS3003 interview.

²¹⁹CS3001 interview.

²²⁰CS3002 interview.

for fellowship, bible discussion, and prayer.²²¹

The youth ministry, under the leadership of the youth pastor, have their own ministry programs as well. On Sunday mornings, the middle school group participates in the corporate worship singing and then leaves prior to the sermon to have their own bible study in the fellowship hall. The high school students remain in the corporate worship with the adults. Then once or twice a month, the middle school and high school students all gather together after church in the fellowship hall for their own youth worship service or youth group bible study.²²²

For the children, Sunday mornings are the main children's ministry program. At 10:00 AM, upon arrival at the church, infants and toddlers are dropped off in the nursery room, adjacent to the main sanctuary foyer. The preschool and elementary children gather in the fellowship hall and sit down on rows of adult folding chairs. There is a half hour time of worship, offering, devotion, and prayer. After the children's worship, the children line up and then proceed to their age-graded Sunday school classes with their teachers. The children's Sunday school classes run from 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM, or whenever the corporate worship ends.²²³

The preschool classrooms are located in the church basement. In order to access their classrooms, the preschool children and their teachers have to walk outside, back through the main entry door, into the main foyer, then down the basement stairs. Two of the participants expressed how deeply afraid they were of the basement classrooms when they were growing up in the church. "As a child I am really afraid of the basement . . . and I still have dreams about that," revealed one participant.²²⁴

²²¹CS3002 interview.

²²²CS3002 interview.

²²³CS3 Field observations by author, February 19, 2016.

²²⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

“Downstairs used to be one of the scariest places because it was so dark, so cold, and not in the best condition,” revealed another participant, “but now it’s decorated and more welcoming and inviting.”²²⁵

For the elementary children, there are three Sunday school classes: (1) first and second grade; (2) third and fourth grade; and (3) fifth and sixth grade. The children’s ministry has been using the C&MA Discipleland curriculum for the past six years. The teachers appreciate the progressive biblical scope and sequence of the curriculum. CS3004 observed that when the children’s ministry switched over from the Hmong District’s Hmong children curriculum to the Discipleland English curriculum, the children seemed to grow more in their bible knowledge.²²⁶

On Sunday mornings, the children are normally always in their own separate classes. Only on special occasions, such as Easter or Christmas, do the children join and participate with the corporate worship of the church. But as one participant explained, “we don’t usually keep them there for a long time, they usually come back here for their classes.”²²⁷ On occasion, with coordination with the CS3 worship director, some children are permitted to sing a special music piece during the corporate worship. While participating in the CS3 corporate worship, I observed three young sisters perform a Hmong worship song. People applauded in appreciation after their song was completed.²²⁸

Outside of Sunday mornings, the children’s ministry also hosts a variety of ministry events for children and for families. In the past, the children’s ministry has hosted Hmong language and culture classes for children, holy day events (e.g. Easter egg

²²⁵CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²²⁶CS3004 interview.

²²⁷CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

²²⁸CS3 Field participation and observation by author, February 19, 2016.

hunt at the park), and vacation bible school (VBS). They have also conducted fun family events during Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Halloween night.²²⁹ CS3002 stated that, "on Halloween night . . . the whole family comes. The youth, the adults, and the children all come to have fun together, play games together . . . this has been a longstanding family event at our church."²³⁰ Other family-oriented events hosted by the church include the annual church picnic and family camping trips.

Ministry struggles. Recruiting and maintaining children's ministry teachers has been a challenge in the past. "Long term commitments made the teachers burn out and get overwhelmed," stated a participant.²³¹ "When I first started teaching," added another participant, "the expectation for the teacher is to teach all year long, no breaks or assistance because it's hard to find teachers."²³² Under the leadership of a new children's director, the teaching schedule was changed to a quarterly teacher rotation, allowing teachers to have a break and to renew themselves. However, even with this quarterly change, some teachers do still feel worn out and exhausted.²³³

Adjusting to fluctuating Sunday morning worship times, teaching classes with combined age levels, disciplining children, and teaching in crowded classrooms are some of the teaching challenges expressed by participants. "Sometimes Sunday service has a special event and lasts longer, the little kids just can't handle being in a room for so long, they just want to go outside," stated one participant.²³⁴ "My struggle now is the different grades put together . . . I'm trying to reach the middle ground of how to reach out to

²²⁹CS3001, CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1, CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interviews.

²³⁰CS3002 interview.

²³¹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²³²CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²³³CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²³⁴CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

both of my age group when they are in different learning stages,” expressed another participant. Combining different grade levels into the same classroom was a necessary decision for the children’s ministry leaders due to limited classroom space. Since the middle school group also needed the fellowship hall for their bible study on Sunday mornings, the elementary children had to be divided into the three small classrooms adjacent to the fellowship hall. Lack of space for the children is a dominant concern of the CS3 teachers and CS3 church leaders.²³⁵

Yet an even greater concern for the CS3 participants is the lack of parental follow-up at home and the lack of parental involvement in the children’s ministry. CS3003 observed that even though significant progress has been made in the children’s ministry, parental involvement has lagged behind.²³⁶ There has been a mixed response from parents. Some parents are consistently involved in their children’s Christian formation both at home and at church. However, some parents have been and continue to be spiritually disengaged.²³⁷

Only half of the children who attend on Sunday mornings attended the summer vacation bible school.²³⁸ The majority of parents did not follow-thru with children at home when the children’s ministry coordinated a home bible reading program. “Before you know it,” expressed one of the teachers, “the ideas of reading the Bible and keeping each other accountable, just didn’t work.”²³⁹ “Parents don’t come and ask how their kids are doing,” reported another teacher.²⁴⁰ Another participant also sadly shared that, “I

²³⁵CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1, CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2, CS3003, CS3002 interviews.

²³⁶CS3003 interview.

²³⁷CS3001 interview.

²³⁸CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²³⁹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁴⁰CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

think a lot of the parents still see Sunday school for kids like a day care. Like you come here, it's done, then you go home and that's it."²⁴¹ One parent related that, "these teachers do hope that parents are teaching their kids at home as well, because the teachers here can only do so much . . . some of them are stressed and frustrated because the kids come back the following Sunday and they don't remember anything."²⁴² "I don't know if the other parents think that we are just babysitters for them," commented one of the teachers.²⁴³

Perceptions of Parents

Not only are teachers becoming frustrated with parents and their lack of spiritual involvement, CS3 parents reported being frustrated with themselves. "As my kids have gotten older," remarked one parent, "I have started to feel that I am failing more and more as a parent."²⁴⁴ Parenting issues which participants struggled with included: parenting a strong-willed child; managing their high expectations for their children; understanding the different personalities of their children; accepting the uniqueness of their children instead of comparing them to one another; and balancing parental control and the individual freedom of their child.²⁴⁵ Some couples reported struggling with their different parenting styles. Learning to cooperate and be united as a couple in disciplining their children has been difficult. The absence or lack of spiritual leadership by the father was an area of deep concern for one of the mothers.²⁴⁶

One couple acknowledged that they have financially spoiled their children, and

²⁴¹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁴²CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁴³CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁴⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁴⁵CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 and CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interviews.

²⁴⁶CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

now their children are having problems transitioning to a lower family income.²⁴⁷ Living off of only one income has been very stressful.²⁴⁸ Another parent confessed that since she grew up with a very strict, authoritarian parent, she has chosen to be more lenient and permissive with her own children. However, this has caused her children to become more demanding and less respectful of her.²⁴⁹ Another parent confessed that since he was orphaned at a young age and grew up with no father to be a role model for him, he didn't fully understand how to be a good father to his own children.²⁵⁰ One mother admitted that because she was married at such a young age and was still very immature, she lacked the parenting skills to bond with her firstborn child, which negatively impacted their relationship when her child was still young.²⁵¹ Yet another parent voiced a concern that living in the United States has influenced his children to become more individualistic and less community-oriented. "We are living in a society that has gone away from the communal aspect that we used to live," he stated.²⁵²

When asked about their family faith practices at home with their children, the answers of the parents were mixed. Some parents reported being actively involved with their children's Christian discipleship at home. These parents reported reading the bible with their children, praying with their children, watching bible videos with their children, having family devotions together, having faith conversations with their children, serving together with their children, and attending church together with their children. One

²⁴⁷CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁴⁸CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁴⁹CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁵⁰CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁵¹CS3 Parent Group 1 interview.

²⁵²CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

parent even found bible apps for her children to listen to at home.²⁵³

Other parents reported doing very little at home to nurture their children's faith. Being exhausted from work, not having enough family time due to both parents working different shifts, engaging in individual distractions at home, lacking in one's own spiritual walk, lacking parental role models, lacking consistency, and plain laziness were some of the reasons parents gave for not engaging in faith practices at home. "We know how important it is," stated one participant, "if we don't take the first step to actually do it, then we will never do it I think we as parents just do only the minimum in terms of helping our kids to understand God, which we should be doing the max."²⁵⁴ "Bringing them to church every Sunday" was viewed by one parent as the single most important thing that he could do for his children's faith development.²⁵⁵

Parent-Equipping Practices

As a church leader, CS3003 was unsure as to what parents did at home to train their children in the Christian faith.²⁵⁶ CS3004, another church leader, stated that, "of those that I have observed and visited them in their homes, only 50% of parents spiritually teach and train their children at home."²⁵⁷ As the children's director, CS3001 is concerned that parents still do not fully comprehend how important they are to their children's faith formation.²⁵⁸ "Even though the younger generation is very family orientated I think the parents are not aware of how important they are to their children's spiritual life. This generation of parents care a lot about their children, but

²⁵³CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 and Parent Focus Group 2 interviews.

²⁵⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁵⁵CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁵⁶CS3003 interview.

²⁵⁷CS3004 interview.

²⁵⁸CS3001 interview.

more on the physical side and not enough on the spiritual side,” asserted CS3001.²⁵⁹

To equip parents, the leadership of CS3 have already provided different opportunities for parents to learn and grow in their role as spiritual leaders for their children. The senior pastor has preached a number of sermons on spiritual parenting. These sermons have been digitally recorded and made available to the parents within the church and to those in the Hmong community.²⁶⁰ The young couples care group has already studied a series on parenting.²⁶¹ The children’s ministry has hosted workshops on parenting, and invited guest speakers to train parents.²⁶² The church has also encouraged and sponsored couples to attend national conferences on marriage and family.²⁶³

Impact of Family Ministry on Children

Repeatedly, participants have stated how much the church leadership of CS3 has invested in the Christian discipleship of children and the equipping of parents. “I think the pastors and leaders really value the children’s ministry, and it’s at the top of their list,” expressed one participant.²⁶⁴ CS3004 noted that, “since the inception of this church to today, about 90% of the children who have grown up in this church have continued to remain active in their Christian faith.”²⁶⁵ CS3001 affirmed this observation stating, the CS3 church “has been pretty stable in bringing their children to come to church and to learn about Christ.”²⁶⁶ CS3004 credited the historical growth of CS3 to the

²⁵⁹CS3001 interview.

²⁶⁰CS3002 interview.

²⁶¹CS3002 interview.

²⁶²CS3001, CS3003, and CS3 Parent Group 2 interviews.

²⁶³CS3004 interview.

²⁶⁴CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁶⁵CS3004 interview.

²⁶⁶CS3001 interview.

generations of children that have grown up in the church and have continued to remain members of the church.

Replicating disciples of Jesus Christ, from one generation to the next generation, has been a long-standing vision of the members and leaders of CS3. The continuation of the children and youth Sunday school programs, the financial investment in training adult children's ministry teachers, the acquisition of a biblically sequenced children's curriculum, and the training of parents as spiritual leaders have produced generations of faithful believers at CS3.²⁶⁷ The faith story of one of the participants testified to this generational discipleship at CS3. She stated that:

The reason I want to teach children is because it played a huge role for me when I was growing up. I actually accepted Christ at a VBS camp. It was during one of those summer camps that I accepted Jesus Christ, and actually started to grow my faith when I was in 4th and 5th grade. At that time there was a teacher...He was so great, and really focused on memorizing the Bible. He taught lessons that were relatable. He just really spoke to all of our lives. There was a big group of us, and we're still talking about it today I would love to help these children understand who Jesus is, and to see them grow up in that. Because someone has done that for me in this church.²⁶⁸

Family Ministry Grade

The overwhelming majority of the participants gave CS3 a grade of "B" for its ministry to children, with A being excellent and F being very poor. Areas of strength mentioned by participants included: (1) strong support from the pastor and leaders; (2) a sound children's ministry structure with sufficient funds and good quality teachers "who are willing to step in and devote their time to teach the children."²⁶⁹ (3) a strong and approachable children's ministry leadership team;²⁷⁰ and (4) a strong children's ministry

²⁶⁷CS3002 and CS3004 interviews.

²⁶⁸CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁶⁹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview, CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁷⁰CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

worship leader who leads the children to worship.²⁷¹ “We are right in the middle of improving,” declared CS3004. “That is why we have looked and budgeted for a children’s pastor.”²⁷²

Changes Needed

Acknowledging that improvements are still needed, CS3 participants pointed to four main areas of needed change. First, parents wanted the partnership between parents, the church leaders, and the children’s ministry team to be strengthened. They desired more communication from church leaders and children’s ministry leaders. They wanted to be notified of important changes to the children’s ministry. They also wanted ministry leaders to seek out and listen to the opinions of parents, and to involve parents in making major ministry decisions that would impact their children. Parents also wanted to create a shared vision for the discipleship of their children with the new children’s pastor.²⁷³ “I feel like we don’t always share the same vision for our children,” stated one of the participants, “I hope that as the new children’s pastor comes, he would consider open communication to allow the parents to speak up.”²⁷⁴ Other parents desired more training seminars and parent coaching or parent counseling to help grow their spiritual parenting skills.

Second, increasing parental involvement was the fundamental change desired by church leaders and children’s ministry teachers. “About 50% of the parents do not bring their children to Sunday school,” stated CS3004, “I would like to see 70% of the children attending.”²⁷⁵ Parental involvement in the children’s ministry and within their

²⁷¹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁷²CS3004 interview.

²⁷³CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview and CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁷⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁷⁵CS3004 interview.

home are important to participants. As a teacher, “you only get 30 minutes with them [the children], but the parents get more . . . yet parents don’t seem to realize that they are the most influential people in their children’s lives.”²⁷⁶ Parents need to be awakened to their children’s spiritual needs. They need to value and prioritize the spiritual development of their children and consistently model faith for their children at home.

“It can’t just be Sunday dependent . . . It has to start at home,” reiterated one of the teachers, “the family has to be comfortable praying together, and talking about what Jesus is doing for them.”²⁷⁷ CS3001 echoed similar desires, stating, “Parent are responsible for their children’s faith in God. They can’t just bring their children to church and end there, but parents need to remember that even at home, parents are the spiritual teachers for their children, to teach their children to know God.”²⁷⁸

Making children’s ministry a high priority for the church was shared desire of CS3 participants. “Right now the number of children has increased greatly in our church,” declared CS3003, “we have to work very hard so that we can reach them.”²⁷⁹ CS3003 continued that, “if we teach them well right now, then 20 to 30 years from now, this generation will not be lost.”²⁸⁰ Suggested improvements in the children’s ministry included: creating a safer check-in system; changing to a curriculum with more learning activities; increasing the number of male children’s teachers;²⁸¹ providing more consistent teachers; and asking teachers to commit to the long-term discipleship of children.

²⁷⁶CS3 Teacher Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁷⁷CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁷⁸CS3002 interview.

²⁷⁹CS3003 interview.

²⁸⁰CS3003 interview.

²⁸¹CS3002 interview.

Within the church, some of the participants recognized that there needs to be some paradigmatic shifts in the church culture. Healing from its past, decreasing the fear of liability, and lifting some of the policy restrictions on ministry activities will allow ministries to grow and flourish.²⁸² Shifting from a culture of “being perfect” to a culture of “being open and honest” with one another will create greater intimacy and mutual sharing amongst parents.²⁸³ Increasing collaboration and communication between all of the ministry departments will align every ministry in the church to work better together.²⁸⁴ Adding more intergenerational worship will also integrate children more into the corporate worship of the church and enable parents to see that children, just as adults, can also genuinely worship God.²⁸⁵ Families worshipping together, families serving together, and families growing in faith through all stages of life is a vision for the future which CS3 participants shared.²⁸⁶

Resources Needed

The major family ministry resources needed and wanted by CS3 participants were: (1) spiritual parenting materials to train parents and on how to spiritually disciple their children at home;²⁸⁷ (2) easy to use family discipleship materials for parents to use at home with their children; (3) increased financial investment into the children’s ministry;²⁸⁸ (4) a larger pool of children’s ministry teachers;²⁸⁹ (5) the new children’s

²⁸²CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁸³CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁸⁴CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁸⁵CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁸⁶CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁸⁷CS3 Parent Focus Group 2 interview.

²⁸⁸CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁸⁹CS3003 interview.

pastor;²⁹⁰ and (6) a new facility with bigger classrooms for the children.²⁹¹

Many of the participants were anxious for the new children's pastor to begin ministry at CS3. This will be the first children's pastor that CS3 has ever had, and a new learning experience for everyone.²⁹² Training for the children's pastor and continued training for the children's ministry teachers were considered essential to the on-going effectiveness of the ministry.²⁹³ Areas of training that children's teachers desired most were biblical theology, the discipline of children, and the leading children in worship.²⁹⁴

Cross-Case Analysis

CS1, CS2, and CS3 provided three examples of Hmong C&MA churches in the United States. CS3 is an example of a first-generation immigrant church that has continued to endure through four generations. CS1 is an example of a first-generation, secondary migration, church plant. And CS2 is an example of a second generation church plant. Since all three churches are organized and affiliated with the C&MA, they share many commonalities. However, because of the local church context (leadership, membership, culture, etc.), each church is also different. In this cross-case analysis, the researcher will explore the significant themes or patterns that have emerged from these three case studies, paying particular attention to how these patterns have impacted the family ministry perceptions and practices within these local Hmong churches.

Homogenous Churches

CS3 was established as a church during the immigrant refugee period of

²⁹⁰CS3001, CS3003, CS3004 interviews.

²⁹¹CS3 Teacher Focus Groups 1 and 2 interviews.

²⁹²CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

²⁹³CS3002 interview.

²⁹⁴CS3 Teacher Focus Groups 1 and 2 interviews.

Hmong church history. Its founding members were first resettled in the area and have remained in the same area for decades. CS2 was planted due to a secondary migration of Hmong immigrants. And CS3 was planted as a second generation daughter church.

The first obvious similarity between all three churches is that almost all of the church members are of Hmong ancestry. Both CS1 and CS3 are homogenously Hmong. Even CS2 is comprised of majority Hmong members. Even though CS2 has some families that are of mixed ethnic marriage, one spouse is usually of Hmong ancestry. So the Hmong church has remained relatively mono-ethnic in composition, preferring to worship and be in community with other Hmong. The Hmong language continues to be the dominant language used in first generation churches (CS1, CS3).

Collective Community

Unity (*sib koom siab*), cooperation (*sib koomtes*), love and care for one another (*sis hlub sis pab*), and being one big family (*ua ib tsev neeg*) are some of the key perceived strengths of these churches. That sense of collective community, which has existed in traditional Hmong culture for centuries, is one of the factors which continues to draw second and third generation Hmong Christians to remain in a Hmong church. As CS2003 explained, “we stepped out of the Hmong church for about 2 years to go to an American church, but when we went to the American church we were really missing the Hmong, the community and the fellowship with each other . . . we didn’t really have that with the American church.”²⁹⁵

Increasing Generational Differences

The membership of CS1 was comprised of three different generations, with the majority being the first generation. CS2 was predominantly comprised of two generations, predominantly the second generation Hmong. And CS3 was comprised of

²⁹⁵CS2003 interview.

four generations, predominantly the 1.5 and 2.0 generations.

As the generations have lived here in the United States, the language and cultural continuum within the Hmong churches have continued to widen. At one end of the continuum are the Hmong speaking, first generation Hmong who tend to hold on to the traditional Hmong cultural values. At the other end are the English-speaking, third or fourth generation Hmong who tend to embrace more Americanized cultural values. In the middle are the 1.5 generation and the 2.0 generation who have become either bi-cultural or third culture people.

CS2 participants acknowledged that even though CS2 uses English as their primary language, they are still very much Hmong at heart. But instead of being totally Hmong in culture or totally American in culture, the second generation have blended these two cultures together to form a third culture. CS2003 spoke this so clearly when he said, “we’re kind of stuck in the middle.”²⁹⁶ On the other hand, the third generation of Hmong have been observed by participants as becoming more “individualistic” and “less communal” than the first generation.²⁹⁷ As the Hmong-American church continues to exist in the United States, the impact of individualism upon the Hmong church will be worthy of further research and study.

How church pastors and leaders navigate the increasing generational and cultural differences will influence the health and growth of their churches. CS1, due to generational conflicts and leadership conflicts, has experienced a painful church split, losing many second generation young couples. The Hmong-speaking members of the CS2 second generation church have felt lost at times due to their lack of English proficiency. CS2004 stated that the CS2 church may need to establish a Hmong worship service in the future in order to minister more effectively to the Hmong-speaking

²⁹⁶CS2003 interview.

²⁹⁷CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

Christians.²⁹⁸

The four generations at CS3 have continued to be unified due to the humility and flexibility of the older generations. Through their mutual concern for the spiritual life of the younger generations, the older generations have cooperated with the younger generations, consenting to necessary changes in order to impress faith upon the next generation.²⁹⁹

Denomination Impacts Family Ministry

The parent denomination, its ecclesiology, discipleship paradigm, and church ministry practices, has tremendous influence over its ethnic, cross-cultural church plants. As the parent denomination in this study, the C&MA has imparted many of its church structures and discipleship practices unto the Hmong churches.

Elder-led church. In all three case studies, church governance was structured according to a Presbyterian – Congregational model, reflective of A.B. Simpson’s Presbyterian background. The highest decision-making authority in the church was the congregation, who met annually to make important corporate decisions. After the congregation, it was the board of elders, the church governing board, and the ministry boards who have oversight of all the ministries in the church.

Church-centered, age-segmented ministries. Church-centered, age-segmented discipleship was the discipleship paradigm and the discipleship practice which was established in the Hmong churches by the early C&MA missionaries. The age-segmented Sunday school program, the youth ministry, the women’s ministry, and the men’s ministry were first established in the Hmong churches in Laos to disciple the new

²⁹⁸CS2004 interview.

²⁹⁹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2.

Hmong converts. With these ministries, the church became the center of Christian faith, learning, and practice. The pastor and teacher became the new religious instructors.

Even as the Hmong C&MA churches were organized in the United States, the age-segmented ministries and age-segmented discipleship paradigm continued to be practiced within the Hmong churches. Both CS1 and CS3, first generation churches, have continued this model of discipleship within their churches. Although CS2 is a second generation church plant, its small group discipleship is also age-segmented: adult small groups, single-adult small groups, youth small groups, and children's small groups.

Segmented classes for children taught within the church facility (e.g. Sunday school children's church, children's small groups, vacation Bible school) was the main recurrent children's discipleship practice at CS1, CS2, and CS3. Even though children may have attended small group meetings with their parents, the small groups were adult-oriented and not inclusive of children.³⁰⁰ In CS1, CS2, and CS3, the adults and youth were in usually in corporate worship together. However, the children only participated in the corporate worship on special holy days, such as Easter or Christmas.

The Church Impacts Family Ministry

The church, its culture, its senior pastor, and its ministry leaders play a key role in the effectiveness of its ministry to children and families. The quality of ministry to children and families is influenced by the vision, priorities, and investments of the church and its leaders.

Church culture. Participants described CS1 as a first-generation, adult, and youth oriented church. The majority of the programs, budget, and spiritual leaders have usually been invested in the adult and youth ministries. The children have often been separated away from adult and youth activities and left for the high school students to

³⁰⁰CS3003 interview, CS2004 interview.

teach and to babysit. Even during intergenerational events, the children usually only interact with other children.³⁰¹

CS2 on the other hand is a more family-oriented church. Families fellowship together in homes. Families serve together in missional service projects. And families celebrate with one another during intergenerational picnics, camps, and faith milestones. Yet, in the area of worship and discipleship, children are usually separated from the rest of the congregation into their own groups. Only on occasion do the children participate in the adult and youth corporate worship.

CS3 is a multigenerational church with many long-term families who mostly belong to the same clan. The clan relationships have helped the church to be an extended family for one another. The generations fellowship together at family celebrations, church picnics, and special holiday meals. The older generations invest financially into developing the children and youth ministries in the church. Yet, in the areas of worship, discipleship, and service, children are usually separated from the adults and youth.

Senior pastor. The vision and leadership of the senior pastor plays a crucial role in cultivating a church culture which values children and invests in ministry to children and their families. Since the senior pastor is the chief religious leader for the Hmong church, the senior pastor's cultural and biblical perspective on children influences the perception of children within the church, the role of children within the church, the role of the church in children's discipleship, and the role of parents in children's discipleship. His perspective directly impacts the discipleship paradigm of the church.

At CS2, the senior pastor viewed the discipleship of children as a partnership between parents and the church, with parents being the primary spiritual trainers of their

³⁰¹CS1001 interview and CS1002 interview.

children.³⁰² Because of this view, he counseled the children's director that the most important role of the children's ministry was to equip parents to disciple their children at home.³⁰³ At CS3, the senior pastor valued children as equally important as the adults and youth. He saw parents as the first teachers of children. Because of this, he advocated for the hiring of a new children's pastor, so that the children's pastor can help teach and equip parents and teachers to minister effectively to children.³⁰⁴

Interdepartmental collaboration. The leadership structure of all three churches consisted of the board of elders, the church governing board, the various segmented ministry boards. The main variation between the case studies was the frequency in which these leadership boards met and which boards met with one another. For example, in CS1, the ministry board met quarterly and separately from the church governing board. In CS2, the ministry board met monthly with the board of elders. Whereas in CS3, the ministry board only met once at the beginning of the year for training and orientation. Afterwards the CS3 ministry teams met separately on their own for the rest of the year and reported any changes to the senior pastor.

Increased interdepartmental communication and collaboration was a perceived area of change needed at CS3. Lack of meeting time together between the different ministries may be a reason why one CS3 participant stated that, "right now our church leaders don't meet together . . . there is a lot of disconnection within the departments."³⁰⁵

Turnover in children's ministry. Long-term consistent leadership and

³⁰²CS2001 interview.

³⁰³CS2001 interview.

³⁰⁴CS3002 interview.

³⁰⁵CS3 Parent Focus Group 1 interview.

involvement in children's ministry was problematic. Recruiting children's ministry volunteers was a challenging task at CS1 and CS3. Lack of parental involvement, finances, teaching resources, adequate learning environment, and adequate breaks from teaching caused discouragement, exhaustion, and burn-out.³⁰⁶

At the time of this research, CS1, CS2, and CS3 were all experiencing a change in the children's ministry leadership. The children's ministry directors at CS1 and CS2 were both resigning from ministry. Their range of ministry was 2 to 4 years. The children's director at CS3 had served four years and was stepping down due to the arrival of the new children's pastor. Both of the newly appointed children's directors at CS1 and CS2 and the new children's pastor at CS3 were brand-new to children's ministry.

Parents Impact Family Ministry

The faith of parents influenced their faith practices with their children. Those parents who saw themselves as the primary spiritual leaders for their children, and those who felt spiritually responsible for their children's faith tended to engage in faith practices at home. Prayer, bible reading, family devotions, and faith conversations were the four most frequently reported faith practices that parents did with their children at home. Bringing their children to church was the fifth faith practice that parents engaged in with their children.

Parents who felt spiritually inadequate to disciple their children in the Christian faith often relied heavily upon the pastor and Sunday school teachers to be the main disciplers of their children. Lack of biblical knowledge, marital conflicts, parenting issues, financial stress, lack of family time, fatigue, busyness, distractions, lack of self-discipline, and laziness were some of the reasons parents gave for not sharing faith with

³⁰⁶CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

children at home. In all three case studies, some parents were spiritually engaged with their children, and some were spiritually disengaged with their children.

If a church has a strong children's ministry, as CS2 and CS3 (who graded themselves at a B), then the children's ministry helps to introduce children to the Christian faith, even if parents are spiritually disengaged. In this way, the church is evangelizing children. However, if parents are spiritually disengaged, parents are not involved, and the children's ministry is weak, then children suffer spiritually.

At CS1 (who graded themselves at a C-/D+), the lack of parental involvement in the children's ministry, the lack of parental discipleship at home, and the lack of spiritually mature adult teachers have negatively impacted the children of their church. Many young adults who have grown up in the church have drifted away from the Christian faith and caused much distress for their parents.³⁰⁷ At CS3, the lack of parental involvement and lack of spiritually mature adult children's teachers have also negatively impacted a generation of children, whom CS3003 called the "lost generation" but are now in their thirties.³⁰⁸ Lack of parental involvement by this particular lost generation has been challenging to ministry leaders. A more in-depth study of CS3's intergenerational processes can provide further insight into the generational impact of one generation's faith upon the next generation.

To equip parents, CS2 provided parenting small group studies, and quarterly parent brunches so that parents can learn, discuss, and share about spiritual parents. CS3 provided intentional parenting workshops, seminars, guest speakers, sermons, and small group studies. CS2 and CS3 were more actively engaged in equipping parents. Their primary method of equipping parents was through adult-oriented classes, not family-oriented learning activities.

³⁰⁷CS1001, CS1003, CS1004 interviews.

³⁰⁸CS3003 interview.

Mixed Perceptions about Children

The perceptions about children varied from one case study to the next. At CS1, there were mixed perceptions about children. CS1 participants reported that children were sometimes viewed as distracting, bothersome, and less valuable than adults or youth. Children were often not acknowledged or welcomed personally.³⁰⁹ And ministry to children seemed to be of low priority in the church.³¹⁰ While other CS1 participants reported that children were a joy and a delight to parents and to the congregation.

At CS2 and CS3, the dominant perceptions of children were positive. Children were viewed as gifts of God, and blessings of God, bringing joy to parents and to the church. Children were valued equally as adults and youth. Ministry to children was also equally important as ministry to adults and youth. These churches loved their children and intentionally invested in developing, growing, and improving their ministry to children and families.

The dreams that each church had for their children also varied. At CS1, their collective dream for their children was more of a practical nature. Together they wanted children to have faith in Christ, grow in Christ, become people of moral character, and be committed to serving and leading the church. At CS2, their collective dream for their children was more of a church-planting nature. Together they wanted children to know Christ, believe in Christ, love Christ, serve Christ and His church, and expand the kingdom of Christ as future missionaries and church-planters. At CS3, their collective dream was more of an intergenerational nature. Together they wanted children to receive Christ, believe in Christ, grow in Christ, serve Christ with their gifts and talents, and continue to impact the next generation for Christ. Each church's dreams for their

³⁰⁹CS1001 interview.

³¹⁰CS1 Teacher Focus Group interview.

children reflected the collective values of their respective members.

Spiritual Neglect in the Home

Throughout the study, children were identified as being smart, bright, curious about God, eager to learn about God, excited to attend church, and desiring to pray and read the Bible with parents. Often it was the children who were holding parents spiritually accountable for engaging in faith learning at home. Their spiritual openness to the Christian faith was observed by pastors, children's ministry teachers, and parents. Yet, due to the many reasons stated thus far, the spiritual needs of children have been neglected by many parents within their own homes. Lack of spiritual leadership by fathers was identified by a few participants as an area of concern, which needed change.

Participants identified parents as the most influential people of children's lives. Parents acknowledged that children often are a reflection of their parents. Children imitate parents. Yet repeatedly, parents still verbalized a lack of spiritual engagement with their children in their homes. For some parents, family discipleship is a new family ritual. Their parents did not model family discipleship for them. For some parents, family discipleship in the home will take more intentional effort, time, and prioritization. For some parents, they may need on-going training, mentoring, coaching, and accountability.

On-Going Training and Encouragement

In the area of family ministry and family discipleship, all three case studies reveal a common thread: everyone has struggles. Churches have struggles. Parents have struggles. Even children have struggles. On-going training and encouragement for churches, pastors, ministry leaders, children's ministry teachers, and parents is desired by many participants. Resources desired include more affordable training for smaller churches who are struggling financially, spiritual parenting training materials for

churches, easy home discipleship materials for parents, and outside coaching and mentoring.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research study was to explore the family ministry perceptions and practices within the Hmong C&MA churches. Through review of the existing literature, and through the empirical study of three Hmong C&MA churches, this study has uncovered the following observations: (1) the Hmong Christians have experienced a paradigm shift in the religious education of children upon conversion to Christianity; and (2) the age-segmented discipleship paradigm first established in the early Hmong church has continued to be perpetuated in the Hmong churches today. In this final chapter, I will review the findings from this research study, discuss implications for a contextualized family ministry within the Hmong church, make recommendations for further research, and conclude with some biblical principles on the worth and value of children.

Paradigm Shift in Religious Education

In the traditional Hmong worldview, deities, spirits, ancestors, and humans coexist together in a continuous cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. Religion and daily life are intertwined together through home rituals, clan rituals, community rituals, and rites of passage rituals. The home was the shrine, the dwelling place of the spirits. The father was the spiritual leader who instructed his family on the rites and rituals of his ancestral clan. The clan spirit father, the shaman, and other religious specialists in the community socially reinforced what was instructed in the home. Religious education of children in the Hmong traditional religion was home-centered, father-led, and clan and community reinforced. Religious beliefs were informally taught, experientially learned,

and inter-generationally passed down to children through daily rituals and communal practices.

As the Hmong converted to Christianity under the ministry of the C&MA, dramatic shifts occurred in the Christian education of children. Formally and semi-formally trained pastors became the new religious experts on the Christian faith, the Christian life, and the Christian church, while fathers became religious novices. Thus the pastor immediately replaced the father as the principal religious teacher of the Hmong Christian family. The pastor also replaced the clan spirit father as the religious leader of the Hmong Christian community. Additionally, the pastor replaced the shaman as the new spiritual mediator. Instead of mediating with the spirits, the pastor was now mediating with God on behalf of the new Hmong converts.

With the training of young, literate, and educated Sunday school teachers, the father was once more displaced by the Sunday school teacher. Since age-separated Sunday school was the dominant discipleship model used by the C&MA, the Sunday school teacher became the chief Christian instructor of Hmong children. The church building and the children's Sunday school class on Sunday morning became the central place and time for the Christian instruction of children.

Unintentionally, immediately, and repeatedly, the father, the home, and daily faith practices in the home became marginalized. In the new Christian faith, the pastor, the Sunday school teacher, and the church on Sunday mornings became the new religious way of life. No longer was the religious education of children home-centered and father-led. In the new Christian faith, the Christian education of children shifted and became church-centered, pastor-led, and church reinforced through Sunday classes and Sunday rituals.

Perpetuation of Age-Segmented Discipleship

Although CS1, CS2, and CS3 were planted at different times and for different

generations, all three Hmong churches were homogenously Hmong, community-oriented, multigenerational, elder-led, and segmented. Church-centered, age-segmented discipleship is the principal paradigm for the Christian formation of adults, youth, and children. Age-segmented worship and the age-segmented Sunday school program for adults, youth, and children have been the two dominant discipleship programs utilized within the Hmong C&MA churches. This was the discipleship paradigm that was instituted in the early Hmong church upon conversion to Christianity and has continued to be perpetuated by the existing Hmong churches.

Although the discipleship program for adults has varied, i.e., shift from Sunday school to small groups, the segmented children's church and children's Sunday school continue to be the preferred models of children's discipleship. The church has remained the primary center and the primary religious instructor of children, particularly children's Sunday school teachers. The principal day for the Christian discipleship of children at the church is Sunday morning. The main environment for Christian education is in the children's classroom at the church. Through the use of various children's ministry curriculums, children are engaged in semi-formal learning, with knowledge of Jesus and the bible as the central focus of content instruction.

In Laos, the Sunday school teachers were the youth and young adults who were educated and literate. At that time the youth were considered to be the backbone of the Hmong church. This continued practice and reliance upon the youth to teach children's Sunday school has led to some negative consequences for churches. At CS3, a generation was perceived to be lost due to the lack of mature Christian adults teaching children and lack of parental involvement. Learning this painful lesson, CS3 has shifted away from youth-teaching children to adults-teaching children. CS2, as a new church plant, has made it a priority to recruit adult children's teachers. Participants at CS1 verbalized that it too must shift to adults-teaching children if CS1 is to effectively

minister to this generation of children.

Lack of adult children's teachers, especially male teachers, is an area of major concern for all three churches. Children's teachers play an important role in the discipleship of children within the church. The effectiveness of the children's ministry is influenced by the spiritual maturity, the shepherding capabilities, and the dedication and long-term commitment of these teachers. Discouragement, exhaustion, burn-out, and constant turn-over in children's ministry are the realities faced by children's ministry leaders at CS1, CS2, and CS3.

Another major challenge faced by pastors, church leaders, and children's ministers is the lack of parental involvement. Some parents are very supportive and involved with the children's ministry within their local church, as reported at CS2 and CS3. Some also engage their children in Christian discipleship practices at home. However, some are neither involved with their church's ministry to children, nor are they engaged at home in the Christian instruction of their children. Bringing their children to church has become the sole Christian practice for some parents. Even then, some parents do not value the children's ministry, but see it merely as a babysitting service. Parental, home-centered, family discipleship was an area of weakness reported by all three churches.

Valuing children equally as adults and youth, and equally investing time, people, and resources into the children's ministry were priority changes that needed to be made.¹ In addition, the churches needed to reshift some of its practices: from youth teaching children to mature Christian adults teaching children; from church-centered discipleship to home-centered, church-supported discipleship of children; and from pastor-led to parent-led discipleship of children. The parent and the church need to become partners in the Christian education of children. Intergenerational discipleship of

¹CS3 Teacher Focus Group 2 interview.

children within the multigenerational church community needs to occur more frequently.

Contextualized Family Ministry

Contextualization is an important concept in the field of missiology. The term “contextualization” first entered into the missional lexicon in 1972 through the ecumenical missions movement.² Pratt et al., defines contextualization as “communicating the gospel, planting churches, discipling others, training leaders, and establishing Christianity in other areas of the world while being both faithful to God’s Word and sensitive to the culture.”³ Moreau defines contextualization as,

the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith as a whole – not only the message but also the means of living out of our faith in the local setting – understandable.⁴

Moreau asserts that contextualization should not only be important in missions, contextualization should be important to all Christians, for “every one of us lives in a cultural setting and has to incarnate the Word of God and the Christian faith appropriately into that setting.”⁵ Communicating the Christian message and fully living out the Christian message in different cultural contexts are two key components of contextualization.

In 1978, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, asserted that “the gospel must be contextualized, so must the church.”⁶ In establishing contextualized

²A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2012), 20, 34.

³Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 149.

⁴Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 36.

⁵Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 36.

⁶Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, “The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture,” accessed November 3, 2014, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-2>.

churches, the Lausanne Committee recommended a dynamic equivalence approach to church planting, where the church “would preserve the meanings and functions which the New Testament predicated of the church, but would seek to express these in forms equivalent to the originals but appropriate to the local culture.”⁷ Forms of worship, methods of evangelism, and forms of church government and ministry should be determined by the local church “to accord with biblical principles and to suit the local culture.”⁸ Nicholls affirms the contextualization of the church stating,

The New Testament gives us a ground plan rather than a blueprint for church life The structures and government of the church, the forms of her worship, sacraments and communal fellowship, the methods of communicating the gospel and patterns for service in the world, ought to reflect the cultural variables and meet the particular needs of each community.⁹

Western Models of Family Ministry

In *Family Ministry Field Guide* (2011), *Perspectives on Family Ministry* (2009), and *Training in the Fear of God* (2011), Timothy Jones describes the four major approaches or four models of Christian discipleship that have been developed and utilized here in the Western American church context: (1) segmented programmatic model; (2) family-based model; (3) family-integrated model; and (4) family-equipping model.¹⁰

Segmented programmatic model. The first and most dominant model of Christian discipleship is the segmented programmatic model. In the early colonial period (1600 to 1700), the majority of people lived on the frontier in rural farming communities. The home was the center of work, school, faith, and family life. The family and the

⁷Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, “The Willowbank Report.”

⁸Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism, “The Willowbank Report.”

⁹Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 65.

¹⁰Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 127.

church were an intergenerational faith family: a family of families. However, with the onset of the industrial revolution in the late 1800s to early 1900s, family life and church life began to change. Nuclear families moved into urban areas to obtain factory employment. Families often worked together in factories, even children. On Sundays, the children and youth were allowed to take a break from work.

To evangelize and disciple these growing numbers of urban children and youth, various Christian societies and associations were formed: children's Sunday school associations; young people's prayer meetings; young people's associations; etc. Jones noted that, "each society ran parallel to others while the goals and curricula of each group remained unrelated. The church's connections to the societies was often loose and informal."¹¹

In the early 1900s, churches became influenced by the efficiency movement (pragmatism) and began to reorganize, systematize, and reprogram themselves internally so that they could also do what the Christian societies had been doing.¹² Centralization (doing everything under the same roof), professionalization (hiring of experts), and segmentation (experts working with particular segments of people) were three of the core principals of change. Jones observed that "the societies of the previous generation became the church-based programs of this generation. In this initial movement toward the segmented-programmatic church, programs were streamlined, combined, and centralized."¹³

From the mid-1900s and late 1900s, post-World War II and Great Depression Era, major societal shifts began to occur. Suburbanization, the rise of the middle class,

¹¹Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 127.

¹²W. Ryan Steenburg with Timothy Paul Jones, "Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation: Family Discipleship in Modern and Postmodern Contexts," in *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective*, ed. Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 153.

¹³Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 127.

the rise of the adolescent culture, the secularization of public education, and the increasing generation gap between parents and teens were important changes of this time period. In response to these societal changes, parachurch youth ministries began to emerge, e.g., Youth for Christ, and Young Life. In fear of losing their own youth, churches also began to duplicate and establish their own youth ministries. Churches hired youth pastors to create programs to attract more youth to their churches. This trend sparked a growth in specialized conferences, training, curriculum, programs, events, etc., for youth ministry, and later on also for children's ministry.¹⁴ Eventually the youth and children's ministries were separated and segmented away from the adult ministries in the church.¹⁵

Family ministry models. After years of segmented ministries, increasing tensions and frustrations began to emerge. Parents and churches began to assume that “specialized church ministries can and should become the main means by which Christian children mature in their faith . . . the discipleship of children is perceived to be the task of the church's programs, not of the children's parents.”¹⁶ Churches were becoming spiritual drop-off centers for parents. “Ever-increasing percentages of parents released responsibility for their children's spiritual formation to professional ministers,” stated Jones.¹⁷ Youth groups developed their own distinct Christian communities, disconnected from their parents. Age segmentation became “so systematic that the organizational structures in many churches complicated or even eliminated the possibility

¹⁴Steenburg with Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 158.

¹⁵Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 127.

¹⁶Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 22.

¹⁷Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 35.

of different generations interacting with one another.”¹⁸ Age-segmented discipleship was contributing significantly to the generational fragmentation in the life of the American Christian church.¹⁹ As Steenburg noted,

The segmented-programmatic approach dominated the organization of evangelical churches in the twentieth and even into the twenty-first centuries. At best, this approach allows each family member to experience Christian training in age-appropriate ways in the context of the faith community. The problem is, parents may never spiritually engage with their children. Adolescents receive their training in youth group, children go to children’s church, and adults have Bible studies and worship celebrations tailored to their particular preferences. At worst, this approach can function like “an octopus without a brain.” The various programs may loosely connect with one another, but each works independently of the others.²⁰

Frustrated with the segmented-programmatic model of discipleship, many children and youth ministry leaders recognized that “a few hours in church each week are insufficient to train children and youth . . . churches must partner with mothers and fathers,” stated Steenburg.²¹ In order to re-establish parents as the primary disciple-makers of their children and to equip parents for this momentous task, ministry leaders started to construct new models of discipleship for the entire family. This was the birth of the family ministry movement.

To help put the family back together, three different models of family ministry were constructed: the family-based ministry model; the family-integrated model; and the family-equipping model.²² All three family ministry models share the same foundational

¹⁸Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 128.

¹⁹Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 30. Allen and Ross list a number of key contributing factors for age-segmentation within the church: (1) Protestant Reformation – adoption of the universal modern age-segregated, developmental school model as a Christian education model; (2) the Enlightenment – individualism; and (3) rise of youth culture and parachurch youth associations in the 1940s, post WWII era.

²⁰Steenburg with Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 158.

²¹Steenburg with Jones, “Growing Gaps from Generation to Generation,” 159.

²²Timothy Jones, 2013, Models of Family Ministry, SBTS9375 Course Lecture (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Louisville, KY, May 28, 2013).

assumptions: (1) “Scripture is the supreme and sufficient standard for how to do ministry;” (2) “God has called parents – and especially fathers – to take personal responsibility for the Christian formation of their children;” and (3) “the generations need each other.”²³ However, each model provides a slightly different family ministry strategy.

In the *family-based* model, age-segmented programs (children and youth ministries) are not eliminated, but are instead supplemented with additional family-oriented programs. In the *family-integrated* model, age-segmented programs are eliminated all-together. Families worship together. All activities involve the integration of people of all ages. Evangelism and discipleship of children and youth occur in and through the family home. In addition, Christian home school education is emphasized within the family-integrated model.²⁴

In the *family-equipping* model, all age-organized programs are completely restructured and redesigned so that the generations are drawn together and parents are intentionally “acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children.”²⁵ Parents and churches become co-champions of the emerging generations, who are not only the future of the church, but also a vital part of the present church.²⁶

Mark DeVries, Brandon Shields, Dave Rahn are strong proponents of the *family-based* youth ministry. Voddie Baucham, Paul Renfro, Malan Nel and the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches are strong proponents of the *family-integrated* model.

Timothy Jones, Jay Strothers, Steve Wright, and Ben Fruedenburg are strong proponents

²³Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 46.

²⁴Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 193-98.

²⁵Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 52.

²⁶Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 145.

of the *family-equipping* ministry model.²⁷

Implications for Family Ministry in Hmong Churches

The segmented programmatic model is the Western family ministry model that was first established in the early Hmong church by C&MA missionaries. The C&MA and many other Christian denominations practiced this model of family ministry in the early 1900s. As observed through CS, CS2, and CS3, this church-centered, pastor-led, segmented Christian discipleship paradigm has continued to be perpetuated today by Hmong C&MA churches in the United States.

In utilizing the segmented programmatic model within the Hmong church, the already existing religious paradigm of home-centered, father-led religious education was replaced by the church-centered, pastor-led Christian education. The home as the spiritual shrine was replaced by the church. The father as spiritual leader of his household was displaced by the pastor. The daily faith practices within the Christian home were neglected and substituted with Sunday church attendance. This shift has led to unintended consequences and issues within the Hmong churches: disengaged parents, lack of home family discipleship, lack of involvement by fathers, children's ministers struggling to be the primary spiritual teachers, increasing segmentation among the generations, etc. Although the segmented programmatic model has been utilized in the Hmong C&MA churches for decades, the on-going negative side effects from the segmented programmatic model causes one to wonder: "Should the Hmong churches continue to propagate this segmented programmatic model, or is there a different model of discipleship that will be better suited for the Hmong people?"

In ministering to diverse ethnic people groups, Pratt, Sills, and Walters assert that some methods of disciple making are more appropriate than others for certain people

²⁷Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry*, 52.

groups.²⁸ Methods and models of disciple making must be critically contextualized. Therefore, Pratt, Sills, and Walters advocate for contextualized strategies of disciple making that are biblically grounded, culturally sensitive, reproducible, and sustainable within a particular people group.²⁹

For the Hmong church leaders, and other ethnic church leaders, this study on family ministry within the Hmong church should prompt leaders to critically reflect upon their own discipleship paradigms. How has the influence of Western models of discipleship positively or negatively impacted the spiritual growth of their ethnic churches? What are the biblical principles of family ministry and family discipleship that they should follow and apply to their ethnic-cultural context? How can they develop a contextualized discipleship paradigm that reflects Christ and the authority of Scripture within their own particular cultural context?³⁰ Hiebert writes that:

Not everything in human culture is condemned. Humans are created in the image of God, and as such they create cultures, each of which has much that is positive and can be used by Christians But, because of human sinfulness, all cultures also have structures and practices that are evil The gospel serves a prophetic function, showing us the way God intended us to live as human beings and judging our lives and our cultures by those norms.”³¹

Sills, in *Reaching and Teaching*, acknowledges that “in the early days of the modern missions period, missionaries followed their countries’ colonization path around the world and sought to plant churches like the ones they had back home with little regard for or study of local cultures. The result of such ethnocentrism and theological

²⁸Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 202.

²⁹Pratt et al., *Introduction to Global Missions*, 203.

³⁰For more information about the critical contextualization process, consult Paul Hiebert’s text, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

³¹Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 56.

imperialism was a very foreign-looking religion on the surface and profound syncretism within.”³² Lingenfelter agrees with Sills and writes that “it is difficult to find in the two-thirds world a truly indigenous church. Most churches reflect more the culture of the missionaries who planted them than they do the culture of the new believers.”³³ Thus, it is crucial for parent denominations, missionaries, cross-cultural church planters, and multiethnic, intercultural leaders, to continue the challenging task of critical contextualization of the whole Gospel to all aspects of the Christian life and the Christian church.

So what would a contextualized family ministry look like in the Hmong church? In order to align the Christian discipleship of children with Scripture as well as maximize on the redemptive, image-of-God-bearing aspects present in traditional Hmong culture, I propose a reverse paradigm shift of the segmented programmatic model. In order to develop an effective and sustainable family ministry in the Hmong church, critical changes need to be made, particularly in regards to children, parents, the home, the intergenerational church community, and the mission of the family and the Hmong church.

Children. First, the biblical value of children must be upheld in the local Hmong churches. Children must be consistently viewed from a biblical perspective as created images of God, yet also fallen, prone to sin, in need of personal salvation in Christ, and set-apart by the Holy Spirit as God’s redeemed people in Christ. Both boys and girls are equally important, equally worthy, and equally valuable in the sight of God. In addition to tending to the physical, psychosocial, emotional, and intellectual needs of

³²M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 205.

³³Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 12.

children, parents and the church must also tend to the spiritual needs and the Christian formation of children. In fact, the spiritual needs of children, the eternal salvation of their souls and their transformation into Christlikeness, should be of highest priority.

Parents. Parents must once again be biblically elevated to the role of spiritual religious leaders for their families. The care and nurture of children, including their Christian formation, is the primary responsibility and God-ordained calling of parents. The family is the basic relational unit of human society.³⁴

Mothers and fathers are the “apostles, bishops, and priests to their children.”³⁵ Parents need to be the first ones trained and equipped by pastors in the knowledge of God’s Word. They need to be trained and see models of how they can teach God’s Word daily to their children within their homes. They need to be held accountable for the Christian formation of their children and family. Like God, the Heavenly Father, fathers are especially called to be humble servants who model, lead, shepherd, serve, and sacrifice for their family in order to bring their wives and children to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The home. The home, must once again, be re-established as the primary center for the Christian discipleship of children. “The home was the primary center of religious training and education in Israelite families,” writes Karen Jones.³⁶ Dennis Rainey, in *Ministering to Twenty-first Century Families*, affirms that faith formation begins at home, for children and adults.³⁷ The family and the home is God’s principally

³⁴Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 63.

³⁵Karen E. Jones, “The Family in Formational Years,” in *A Theology for Family Ministries*, ed. Michael and Michelle Anthony (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 25.

³⁶Jones, “The Family in Formational Years,” 25.

³⁷Dennis Rainey, *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families: Eight Big Ideas for Church Leaders* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2001), 82.

designated context for Christian formation. Rainey states that, “Family is the place where faith is forged, where life and truth collide. Family is where we apply what we’re learning in the Christian life.”³⁸

Daily Christian faith rituals are to be learned and practiced by children within their homes. Christian faith needs to be modeled for them by their fathers and mothers so that they may imitate and follow after them. Daily life should be the setting to worship God, to read God’s Word, to pray to God, to learn about God, to talk about God, and to encounter and experience God.

Intergenerational church community. Being an intergenerational covenant community was “a distinctive feature of the faith communities in both the Old and New Testament eras,” observes Harkness.³⁹ Pazmino and Kang assert that “For the Hebrew tradition and Christian traditions down through the ages, intergenerational life and intentional faith education presupposed and required exchange and mutual teaching-learning processes across the generations in the context of a covenant-community.”⁴⁰ Harkness adds that intergenerationality displays the communal nature of God, the church is inclusive and comprised of all the generations, and intergenerational processes are integral to personal faith development.⁴¹

A deep sense of collective community is an endearing trait within the Hmong people. As a covenant people of Christ and His kingdom, the Hmong church must continue to be a multigenerational faith community, a family of families, a Jesus clan, which reinforces and supplements what is taught in the Christian home. Intergenerational

³⁸Rainey, *Ministering to Twenty-First Century Families*, 82.

³⁹Allan G. Harkness, “Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations,” *CEJ* 9, no. 1 (2012): 127.

⁴⁰Robert W. Pazmino and S. Steve Kang, “Generational Fragmentations and Christian Education,” *CEJ* 8, no. 2 (2011): 380.

⁴¹Harkness, “Intergenerationality,” 125.

worship, intergenerational fellowship, intergenerational service and missions need to be re-established and increased so that mentoring and shepherding occurs from one generation to another generation, throughout the lifespan, via semi-formal as well as informal learning methods. Children need to be rooted in their Christian ancestry as well as their genealogical ancestry. Children need to identify themselves in relationship to Christ as well as in relation to their ethnic identity. From a sociocultural theory perspective, Haight asserts that children are not lone seekers, but are “born into relationships, family, and community that shape and are shaped by his or her development.”⁴²

The mission of the family and church. The Christian family and the Hmong church are part of God’s global, multiethnic kingdom people: a Jesus people, and a new humanity. True Christian conversion to new life in Christ is a radical and total transformation of the individual person, family, people group, and culture into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ. As part of God’s global kingdom, the Christian family and the Hmong church are ultimately called to live out, proclaim, and display the goodness and greatness of God in Christ to all the peoples of the world. Christian parents and the Hmong church must connect the subsequent generations to God’s greater redemptive mission in the world (*missio Dei*) so that their faith in Christ will not be neutralized by the larger Western society or be hindered or held captive by their own Hmong ethnocentrism and cultural syncretism.⁴³

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the three case studies in this research were not a representative sample of

⁴²Wendy Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff, 108-119 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 110.

⁴³Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 28-29.

the Hmong C&MA churches, generalizations could not be made about the discipleship of children within the Hmong District churches as a whole. Further research will need to be conducted in order to make such generalizations. To build upon this research study and to expand the scope of this research, I would recommend the following:

1. Continued research on the family ministry perceptions and practices within the rest of the Hmong C&MA churches. From this research study, a family ministry survey can be developed which can then be utilized to survey the rest of the Hmong C&MA churches.
2. Expand the research of family ministry perceptions and practices to Hmong churches in other denominations and other countries where the Hmong reside. A cross comparison of similarities and differences between denominations and countries will help to identify other variables which impact the discipleship of children within the Hmong Christian context.
3. Conduct an in-depth, longitudinal case study of a multigenerational Hmong church. This in-depth case study can provide insights into the intergenerational processes that may help or hinder the transmission of Christian faith from one generation to the next.
4. Expand the research of family ministry to other ethnic people groups; to hear their stories, perceptions, practices, strengths and struggles.
5. Create a survey to discover the reasons for Hmong conversions to Christianity. In the existing literature, Nicholas Tapp, Timothy Vang, and Naolue Kue present multiple reasons for the conversion of the Hmong to Christianity. However, to date, there has not been a comprehensive research survey completed on this topic.

I hope that this research study will serve as a catalyst to propel other researchers into the area of contextualized ministry, whether that is contextualized worship, discipleship, evangelism, or missions.

While conducting this case study research, I was deeply moved by the love, dedication, and commitment that some parents and churches had for their children. I was also deeply grieved by the spiritual neglect of children and the mixed perceptions about the worth of children that existed within the local churches. In conclusion, I wish to provide some biblical principles on the value of children to the family, to the Christian

church, and to the human society.

Conclusion

From Scripture, God has revealed that He loves children. Throughout the Bible, there are over 569 references to children.⁴⁴ In Psalm 27:3, King David stated that “sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.” In Psalm 8:1-2, King David stated that “from the lips of children and infants you [the LORD] have ordained praise.” King Solomon in Proverbs 17:6 stated that “children’s children are a crown to the aged.” Not only did God create children to be able to praise Him, God also created children to be a blessing to their families and to be set apart and used for His kingdom.

Each and every child is a living human being, a full human person, an embodied spirit, fearfully and wonderfully formed by God in the womb (Ps 139:13-15). Created in the image of God (Gen 2:27), each and every child is created with structural capacities, gifts, endowments, characteristics, attributes, and capabilities of God, i.e., rationality, morality, aesthetic sense, will to choose, freedom, wisdom, and virtues.⁴⁵ As moral beings and moral agents (Prov 20:11) “even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right.”

Each child is created to mirror God and represent God in creation through dominion and stewardship (Gen 1:28). Each child is also created for intimate relationship with God and with other human beings. Being a child and experiencing childhood is a divinely ordained phase of human life (Ps 139:16). Children and childhood possess an intrinsic worth of themselves, and not just for who or what they will become in the

⁴⁴R. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 13-15.

⁴⁵Gregg R. Allison, “Humanity, Sin, and Christian Education,” in *A Theology for Christian Education*, ed. James R. Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 179.

future.⁴⁶

Through children, God blesses the family. The conception of a child in the womb, and the birth of a child is a gift and a blessing from the Lord (Gen 49:25; Deut 7:13). In their precious way, children give delight to the human soul (Prov 29:17), joy to a mother (Ps 113:9; John 16:21), and pride to grandparents (Prov 17:6).

Through children, God blesses the church. Children can hear God, respond to God, be instruments of God's divine revelation (Joel 2:28), be moral agents used by God to lead and impact their community, and be divine partners in accomplishing God's redemptive plan for humanity, e.g., Miriam as a young girl assisting to save baby Moses (Exod 2:5-9); the boy Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-21); the Israelite servant girl (2 Kgs 5:1-19);⁴⁷ and a boy with 2 fish and 5 loaves who fed over 5,000 people (Luke 10:21). God has and will continue to reveal Himself, His visions, His purposes, and His great power through the lives of children.

For through children, God blesses the human community. It is God alone who has blessed humanity to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth (Gen 1:28). Children bring satisfaction to human beings (Exod 23:26; Ps 17:14, 119:9) and fulfillment of God's promise to multiply the peoples and nations scattered over the face of the earth (Gen 2:28; 11:10-32). Like arrows in the hands of a warrior (Ps 127:4), children provide peace, security, and hope for the future.

Ultimately, each and every child belongs to God. God is the Creator and former of each child from within the womb (Ps 139:13). God is the ordainer of the days of each child's life (Ps 139:16). Yet God, in His infinite wisdom and plan has entrusted children to the care and nurture of the family (Gen 4:1-2, 17, 25), the church (Deut 31:13;

⁴⁶Dawn DeVries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 55, no. 2 (April 2001): 163.

⁴⁷Esther M. Menn, "A Little Child Shall Lead Them: The Role of the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1-19)," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35, no. 5 (October 2008): 340-48.

Ps 78:4-6), and the human community. As God's stewards, we are called to love, protect, teach, train, and empower all children to fulfill God's plans and purposes for the world. In welcoming and ministering to children, we minister to Jesus himself. As Jesus stated in Mark 9:37, "whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

APPENDIX 1

CASE STUDY CHART

Table A1. Case study cross comparison chart

	Case Study Site 1	Case Study Site 2	Case Study Site 3
Church Background	<p>(1) Establish 1994</p> <p>(2) First generation Hmong immigrant church plant, secondary migration</p> <p>(3) Members of multiple clans – nine clans</p> <p>(4) Adult-youth oriented church</p> <p>(5) Leadership: elder board, church governing board, ministry board</p> <p>(6) Strengths: Christ-centered, a learning church, unity, love, close relationships</p> <p>(7) Struggles: generational conflict, leadership conflicts, church split, lingering bitterness, losing young couples and young adults</p>	<p>(1) Establish 2012</p> <p>(2) Second generation, Hmong-American church plant</p> <p>(3) Target: second generation Hmong-American families, third culture, mixed ethnic marriages</p> <p>(4) Family-oriented church, home small groups</p> <p>(5) Leadership: elder board, ministry board</p> <p>(6) Strengths: Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, family-oriented, missional small groups, welcoming, love and care for one another, do life together</p> <p>(7) Struggles: discouragement, busy families, lack people for intentional discipleship, overwhelmed leaders, limited facility use</p>	<p>(1) Establish 1979</p> <p>(2) 1st Generation Hmong immigrant church plant</p> <p>(3) Members predominantly of same Hmong clan</p> <p>(4) Multigenerational church, long-term families</p> <p>(5) Leadership: elder board, church governing board, segmented ministry</p> <p>(6) Strengths: Christ-centered, enduring, 1st gen adjusts to younger generations, unity and cooperation, long-term investment in children and youth</p> <p>(7) Struggles: lost generation (30s) – lacked adult children's teachers, too comfortable - decreased evangelism, culture of fear</p>

Table A1 - continued

	Case Study Site 1	Case Study Site 2	Case Study Site 3
Church Background	(8) Rebuilding phase	(8) Church-planting phase	(8) Enlarging phase – new children’s pastor
Church Demographics	(1) Ethnicity: homogenously Hmong (2) 3 Generations (3) Hmong as primary language, mixed with English (4) Membership: 149	(1) Ethnicity: majority Hmong, some mixed marriages (2) Mainly 2 generations, young families (3) English as primary language (4) Membership: 100	(1) Ethnicity: homogenously Hmong (2) 4 Generations (3) Hmong as primary language, mixed with English (4) Membership: 546
Perceptions of Children	Mixed: Low value, distracting, bothersome vs. delight, future leaders of the church	Equally valued as adults, loved by parents and church, welcomed	Equally valued as adults, loved by parents and church, welcomed
Family Ministry practices	(1) Church-centered discipleship (2) Age-segmented ministries: DM Director, Nursery Director (3) Age-segmented programs: Sunday school & children’s church, VBS (4) Occasional intergenerational events	(1) Family, home-centered discipleship (2) Age-segmented ministries: Children’s Director (3) Age-segmented small groups: adults, youth, children (4) Family events (5) Occasional intergenerational events	(1) Church-centered discipleship of children (2) Age-segmented ministries: Children’s Director (3) Age-Segmented programs: adult care groups, youth, children’s Sunday School, children’s church (4) Family events (5) Intergenerational events

Table A1 - continued

	Case Study Site 1	Case Study Site 2	Case Study Site 3
Perceptions of Parents	(1) Parents feel educationally & spiritually inadequate to instruct their children in the Christian faith. (2) Parents depend upon the church as the primary disciple-maker of children. (3) Parent's role is to bring children to church for pastor/church to teach. Minimal, inconsistent faith instruction at home.	(1) Partnership between parents and church (2) Parents are primary spiritual leaders of the family and are primarily responsible for the Christian discipleship of their children. (3) Parents engaged in faith practices with children at home. (4) Some parents feel spiritually inadequate, some parents inconsistent	(1) There is a mix of parental involvement: some spiritually engaged, some disengaged. (2) Parents are viewed as being role models and spiritual leaders for children (3) Some parents engaged in faith practices with children at home, some rely on church (4) Some parents struggling with parenting, inadequate, failing as parent
Parent-equipping practices	(1) Parenting workshops (2) Pastoral training, in-home visitations	(1) Quarterly parent brunch	(1) Sermon series & CD (2) Parenting training seminars & guest speakers (3) Young couples care group parenting study (4) Conferences
Impact of Family Ministry on Children	Positive in past, currently declining in effectiveness	Positive, see visible signs of God's work in the lives of children and parents.	Positive, see generational discipleship and replication of disciples
Family Ministry Grade	C-/D+	B+	B

Table A1 - continued

	Case Study Site 1	Case Study Site 2	Case Study Site 3
Dreams for Children	Know God, personal salvation, become disciple of Jesus	Know Jesus, trust Jesus, love Jesus, serve Jesus, share Jesus	Know Jesus, grow in Christlikeness, serve with gifts, multigenerational replication
Changes Needed	<p>(1) Shift to partnership between church and home</p> <p>(2) Shift from church-only to church-and-home discipleship</p> <p>(3) Shift from youth-teachers to adult/parent-teachers of children</p> <p>(4) Increase the church's priority and investment in the discipleship of children and equipping of parents as spiritual teachers.</p>	<p>(1) Increase the involvement of church leaders in equipping parents, not just rely on children's ministry</p> <p>(2) More intentional mentoring of parents, especially new believers and fathers</p> <p>(3) More adult parents involved in teaching children at the church</p> <p>(4) On-going communication, and collaboration between departments</p>	<p>(1) Strengthen partnership between parents, church leaders, & children's ministry</p> <p>(2) Increase parental involvement at home and within children's ministry</p> <p>(3) Increase home discipleship – parents as primary spiritual teachers</p> <p>(4) Make children's ministry a high priority</p> <p>(5) Church culture change – less fearful, more open, collaboration</p>
Resources Needed	<p>(1) Children's ministry resource library</p> <p>(2) Family discipleship materials for parents</p> <p>(3) Affordable training for children's ministry leaders and teachers</p>	<p>(1) Consistent training for children's ministry leaders and teachers</p> <p>(2) More church planting training and resources, coaching and mentoring</p>	<p>(1) Spiritual parenting materials to train parents</p> <p>(2) Easy to use spiritual parenting materials for parental home use with kids</p> <p>(3) Increased financial investment in children's ministry</p> <p>(4) Develop larger pool of volunteers</p> <p>(5) Children's Pastor</p> <p>(6) Larger facility</p>

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

A. Agreement to Participate

Thank you for meeting with me today for this interview. The research in which you are about to participate is designed to learn more about what your church is doing to help children become disciples of Jesus.

This research is being conducted by Lou Y. Cha for the purposes of a dissertation research. In this research, you will answer interview questions about your church's ministry to children and parents.

Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research. Do you also consent to the audio-recording of this interview?

Thank you for your consent. And thank you for your willingness to be a part of this research. Let's begin with some basic background information about yourself...

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Gender? ___Male ___Female

2. Age? ___Under 20 ___26-34 ___45-54 ___65-74
 ___21-25 ___35-44 ___55-64 ___75 or older

3. Ethnicity? ___Hmong ___Other

4. Birthplace?
 ___USA
 ___Foreign born: Country of origin:_____

Number of years in the USA_____

5. Primary Language(s): What language(s) do you speak?

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| a. At home? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |
| b. At work? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |
| c. At church? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |
| d. With children? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |
| e. With spouse? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |
| f. With others? | _____Hmong | _____English | _____Both |

6. Marital status? _____Single, never married _____Married
 _____Separated or divorced _____Widowed

7. Do you have children in any of the following groups?

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------|---------|
| a. Birth – 4 years old | _____Yes | _____No |
| b. Five-12 years old | _____Yes | _____No |
| c. 13-17 years old | _____Yes | _____No |

8. What is your highest level of formal education?

- _____Less than high school graduate
_____High school graduate
_____Some college, trade, or vocational school
_____College degree
_____Post graduate work or degree

9. Are you working?

- _____Retired
_____Full time student / houseperson
_____Employed part time, occupation: _____
_____Employed full time, occupation: _____

B. YOUR CHURCH PARTICIPATION

1. How long have you been a member of this church?

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| _____Not a member | _____2-4 years | _____10-19 years |
| _____One year or less | _____5-9 years | _____20 or more years |

2. How have you been involved in this church?

3. What is your current role/position in the church?

4. Do you work directly or indirectly with children in the church? In what capacity?

C. YOUR CHURCH INFORMATION

1. How was your church started?
 - a. When?
 - b. Where?
 - c. Who?
 - d. Why?
2. How many pastors/staff does your church have? Roles?
3. How is your church organized/structured? Who makes decisions?
4. Where does your church meet? ____Home church ____Rental ____Own facility
5. Who uses which part of the building?
 - a. Adults?
 - b. Youth?
 - c. Children?
6. How would you describe your church?
7. What are the strengths of your church?
8. What are the struggles of your church?
9. What are the successes of the families in your church?
10. What are the struggles of the families in your church?

D. PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN

1. How many children do you have in your church?
2. What are the successes of the children in your church?
3. What are the struggles of the children in your church?
4. How do people feel about the children in your church?
5. What are the expectations for children in your church?
 - a. Where should children be?
 - b. What should they be doing?
 - c. How should they behave?
6. What does your church do to welcome children into the church family?
7. In what church-wide activities/events do children participate in? Why?
8. In what church-wide activities/events are children not allowed to participate in? Why?
9. How important is children's ministry in your church?
____Very important
____Somewhat important
____Not important

E. FAMILY MINISTRY PRACTICES

1. How is your children's ministry organized/structured?
 - a. Children's ministry structure?
 - b. When organized?
 - c. Who organized?
 - d. Why organized in this way?
 - e. What do you like about this structure?
 - f. What do you dislike about this structure?
 - g. How has this structure/model helped your church over the years?
 - h. How has this structure/model hurt/hindered your church over the years?
 - i. What would you like to change about this structure?
2. What is your church doing to disciple children?
 - a. What activities, programs, events for children? When?
____ Weekly?
____ Monthly?
____ Yearly?
____ Church-wide? Intergenerational?
____ Age-separated?
 - b. What content do you emphasize?
 - c. What curriculum do you use?
 - d. How much money do you spend?
 - e. What is the ultimate end goal for your children's programs and events?
3. Where is your church discipling children?
____ Church building ____ homes ____ other: _____
4. How is your church discipling children? What methods are you using?
____ Formal? Classroom teaching?
____ Semi-formal? Conferences?
____ Informal? Camps/retreats? Trips?
____ Others?
5. Who is leading, teaching, and discipling the children in your church?
____ Staff?
____ Volunteers? Adult volunteers? Student volunteers?
____ Parents?
____ Others?
6. What is the goal of your church in discipling children? Primary objectives/outcomes?

F. PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS & PARENT-EQUIPPING PRACTICES

1. What are the expectations for the parents in your church?
2. What are the struggles of parents in your church?
3. What do parents need?
4. How is your church supporting parents?
5. How is your church equipping, or training parents to disciple their own children?

G. LAST QUESTIONS: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

1. How have children been impacted in your church over the years?
 - a. Positively impacted?
 - b. Negatively impacted?
2. What grade would you give your church in helping children to follow Jesus? A-F? Why?
3. What is your church's desire (dream) for the children of your church in the future?
4. What necessary steps does your church need to take to fulfill this dream?
5. What resources does your church need?

End Interview.

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts and insights with me during this interview.

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ABSTRACT

FAMILY MINISTRY PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN HMONG CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE CHURCHES: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

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In this holistic, multiple-case, replication study, key informant interviews, focus group interviews, documents, and field notes were gathered, coded, and analyzed from three stratified, randomly selected Hmong C&MA churches to discover the family ministry perceptions and practices of these Hmong churches. These family ministry perceptions and practices were then compared to the religious education of children within the traditional Hmong religion in order to identify areas for contextualization.

The Hmong are a collective, clan-kinship, indigenous people group of southern China and Southeast Asia who converted to Christianity in 1949 through the missionary work of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). Prior to conversion, the Hmong practiced animism, shamanism, ancestral worship, and reincarnation. Children were religiously instructed through informal, oral, experiential, and intergenerational learning. The home was the central shrine for religious instruction via altars, offerings, sacrifices, and rituals. Fathers were the primary religious instructors of children, followed by clan spirit fathers, and the shaman and religious experts.

Through this research, it was discovered that since conversion, the Hmong churches have experienced a paradigm shift in the religious education of their children:

from an oral, informal, ritual-oriented, home-centered, father-led religious education paradigm to a literate, semi-formal, classroom-oriented, church-centered, pastor-led Christian education paradigm. The segmented programmatic model of family ministry was established in the early Hmong church by C&MA missionaries, and has continued to be perpetuated in the three case studies. The age-segmented children's church and Sunday school were the principle Christian education programs utilized in these churches.

The effects of the segmented programmatic family model in the Hmong churches have been both positive and negative. Some children have been evangelized and disciplined in the Christian faith. Some have drifted from the Christian faith due to lack of parental involvement, and the lack of mature adult teachers. To develop a more contextualized family ministry within the Hmong church context, children need to be equally valued, fathers elevated as primary spiritual leaders, the home re-established as the center for Christian education, and intergenerational mentoring increased so that Christian faith can be transmitted to the next generations.

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