

Aspirations and realities of love, marriage and education among Hmong women

Thi Huong Nguyen, Pauline Oosterhoff &
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Hmong: a special ethnic group

- Transnational identities
 - Moving from Southern China to other Southeast Asian countries
 - From refugee camps to Western countries
 - Converting to Protestantism
- Part of the rich diversity of cultures
- What about 'exotic' and 'backwards'?
 - Resistance to change?

Total population

4 to 5 million^[1]

Regions with significant populations

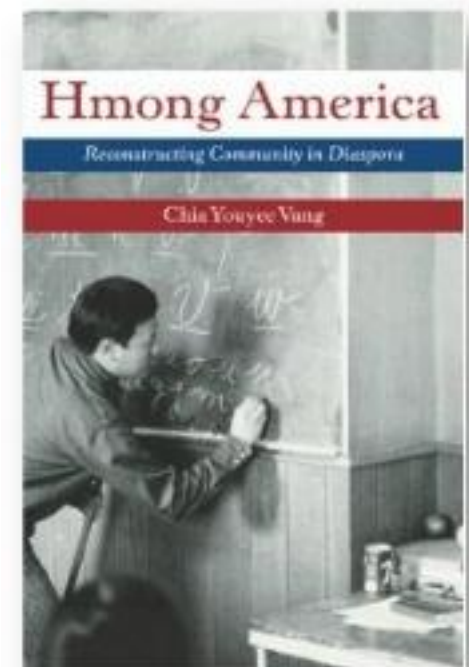
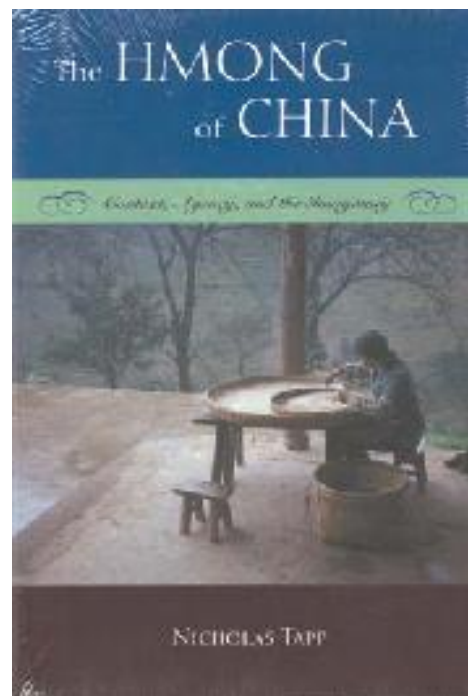
 People's Republic of China	3 million
 Vietnam	787,604 (1999)
 Laos	460,000 (2005)
 United States	221,948 (2008) ^[2]
 Thailand	151,080 (2002)
 France	15,000
 Australia	2,190 ^[3]
 French Guiana	1,500
 Canada	600
 Argentina	600
 Germany	500

Languages

Hmong and Mong

Religion

Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, others



Hmong women: starting point and target

- Hmong marriage
 - Early marriage
 - Bride price
 - Six variants
 - Wife snatching (txhom poj niam yuav)
 - Bride capture (zij poj niam)
 - Arrange marriage (nqis tsev hais poj niam)
 - Initiated by couples (xav sib yuav)
 - Elopement couples (caum txiv)
 - Forced marriages (yuam sib yuav)

Hmong Wife Snatching



Hmong women: starting point and target

- Patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal society
 - Position of Hmong women in the society
 - Particularly disadvantaged in access to education
 - Reported literacy rate of Hmong women was 22% (2002)
- What about the trend of transformation?
 - Recent ethnographic research on young Hmong women
 - Contesting their traditional marginal status
 - Constructing new cosmopolitan spaces for themselves

Why we chose the topic?

- A question in working with minority ethnic groups: what are their actual, not stereotypical features?
- Specifically, in the framework of PMTCT program, understanding of their **love, marriage** and **education** may help to improve access to services
 - Aspirations
 - Realities
- The understanding will be investigated temporally, with changes between the Old and the Young

Methods

- March-April 2010
- Three study locations in Ha Giang province
- Participation of Hmong interpreters
- Data collection:
 - In-depth interviews
 - Focus group discussions
- Data analysis: SPSS 16.0

Methods

- In-depth interviews: personal life history
 - 58 women of reproductive age (15-49 years)
 - Random, proportional, age stratified sample
 - Women of reproductive age delivered at least 1 child
 - Explored key events and processes
 - marriage
 - fertility
 - HIV risks
 - perceived changes in women's status.

Methods

Table 1: IDI sample

Age	Village A		Village B		Village C	
	Women of reproductive age with at least one child	Sample	Women of reproductive age with at least one child	Sample	Women of reproductive age with at least one child	Sample
<20	1	1	4	1	0	0
20-30	35	12	32	10	7	2
31-40	20	7	45	13	8	0
>40	17	7	18	5	2	0
TOTAL	73	27	99	29	17	2

* Source of data: List of Hmong women of reproductive age with at least one child from CHC/THC health workers, January 2010

Methods

- Focus group discussions: audiotaped
 - Three FGDs at village level
 - Purposively selected women aged 30-70
 - Range of issues
 - changes in cultural practices pertaining to courtship and marriage
 - transformation of gender roles
 - reproductive health behaviour.
 - Three further FGDs in Meo Vac town
 - Young women, both in- and out-of-school
 - Cultural context, experiences and personal aspirations related to
 - marriage,
 - gender roles,
 - education
 - livelihoods

FGD with Hmong women



FGD with Hmong girls in school



Methods

Table 2: FGD sample

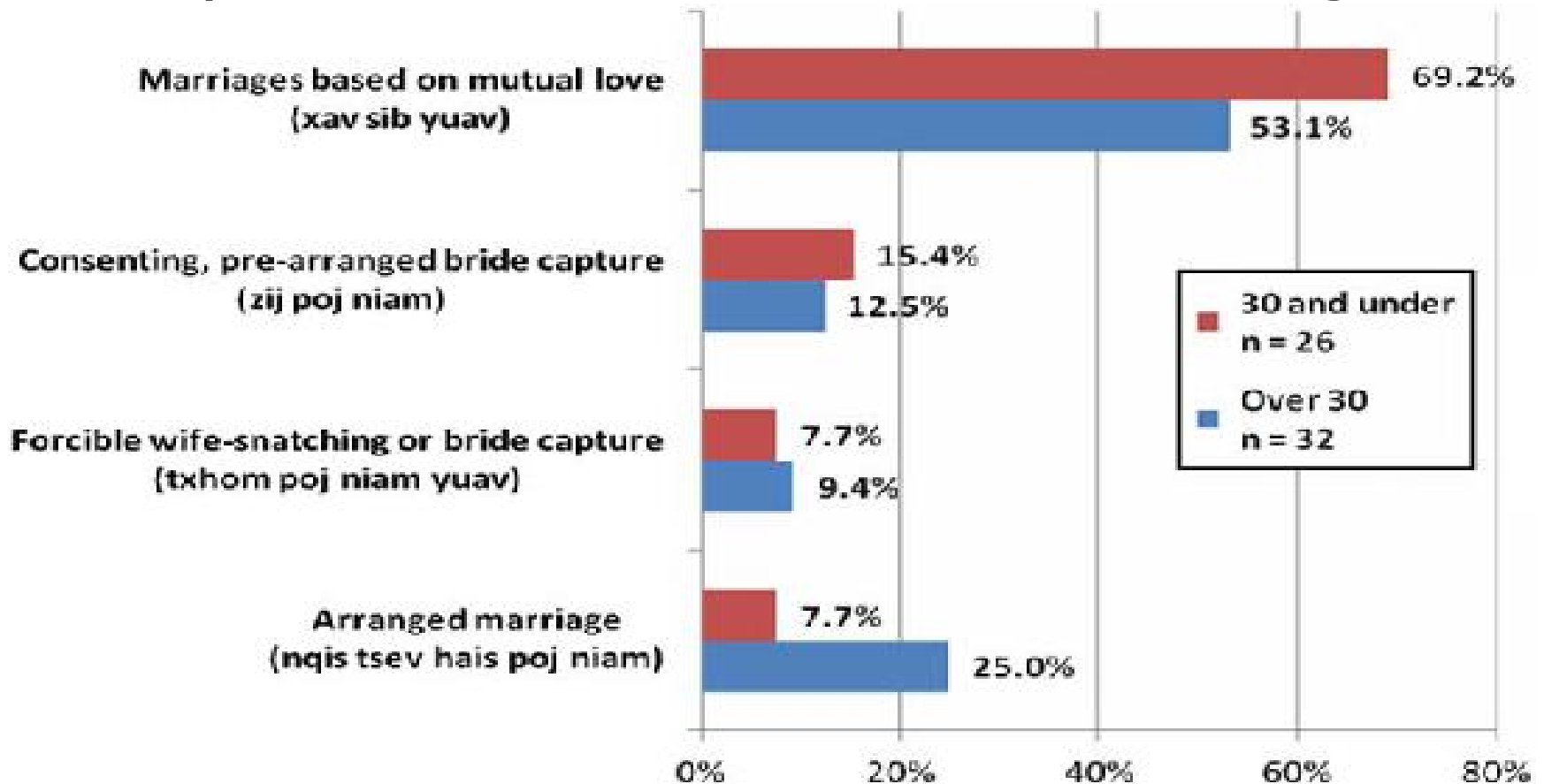
FGDs with Hmong women	Total number of participants
FGDs with villagers of different ages	24 participants (3 FGDs)
FGDs with secondary school girls	9 participants (1 FGD)
FGDs with high school girls	9 participants (1 FGD)
FGDs with Hmong drop-out girls	7 participants (1 FGD)

Methods

- Limitations
 - Young female Hmong interpreters from the local urban settlement
 - Biases in how the research team was perceived and may have influenced answers
 - Study sites were easily accessible by foot from a paved road
 - Not represent the situation amongst Hmong living in more isolated mountainous areas
 - Limited size of the study sample
 - Not representative

Results

Changes in procedures and expectations of love and marriage



Women entered their husbands' households in diverse ways around the age of 19 years

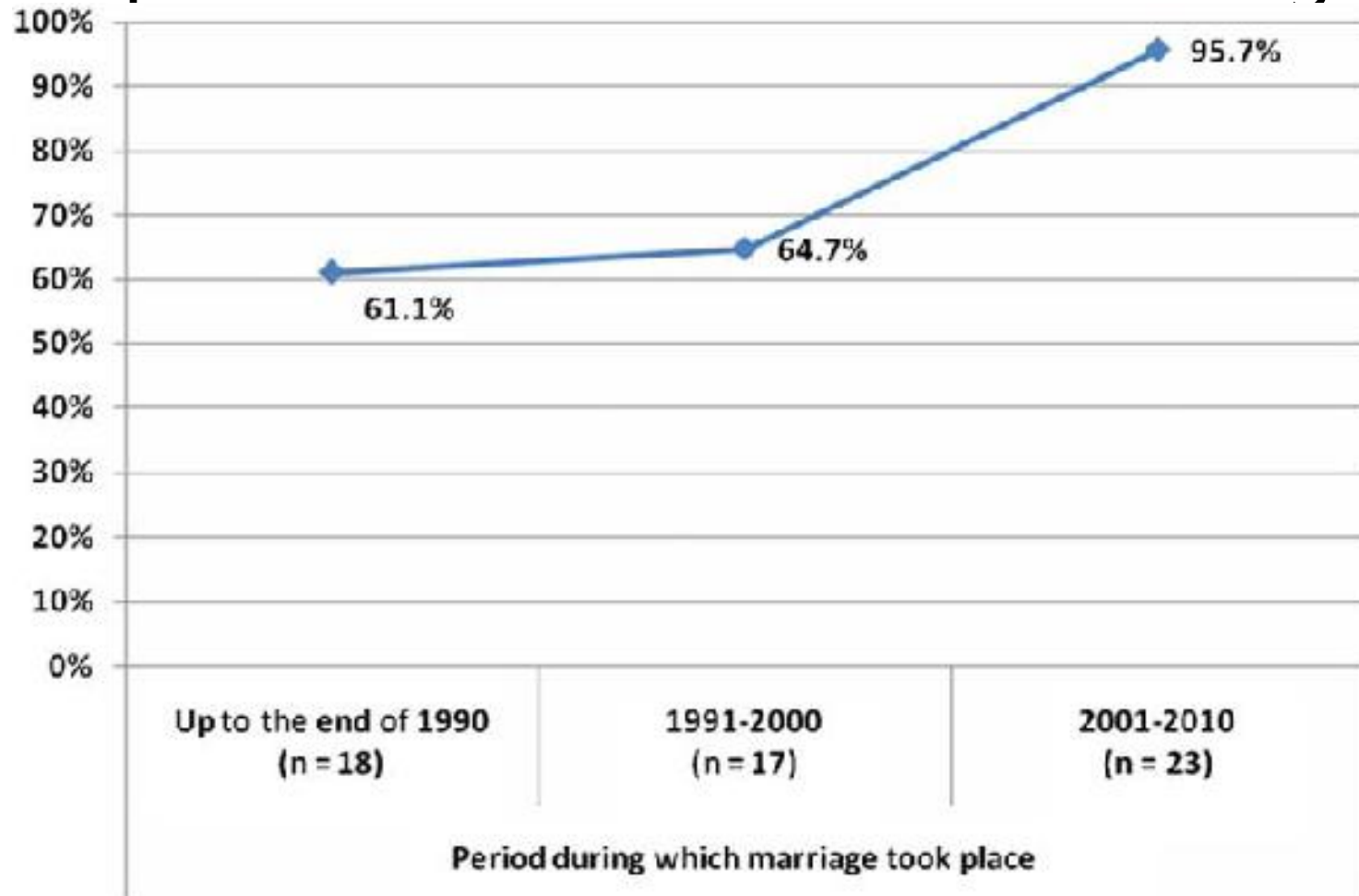
Results

Changes in procedures and expectations of love and marriage

In the past, if boys like/love girls, they used to catch the girls any way. But now, it is more modern, marriage just comes from love; no love, no marriage. (Vu Thi Cho, 25-year-old woman, FGD with school drop-outs)

Results

Changes in procedures and expectations of love and marriage



Changes in proportion of Hmong girls allowed to choose a husband

Results

Changes in procedures and expectations of love and marriage

- Avoiding traditional clothing in order not to be a candidate for forced wife snatching
 - Modern clothes protect us against rude male behaviour, such as slapping girls' bottoms, or touching girls' breasts. With my modern look they do not know if I am Hmong or maybe a mix, or Kinh, and so if they do it [rude behaviour] to me, I can feel free to hit them. (Lo Thi Lien, 17-year-old woman, Grade 11, FGD with high school students)
- An explicit link between education and enabling women to reject traditional marital practices and sexual harassment

Results

Persistence of bride price payment as cultural practice

- Common among interviewed women (94.8%)
- Bride price in rural areas was higher than in urban areas and has increased over recent years
 - Mean reported bride price was over two million VND (103 USD, from 10-308 USD)
 - Be considered a substantial outlay of household income
 - *Some families sell land to 'buy' a wife for their son*
 - *A daughter is worth a motorbike. Today, a daughter will make you richer. In contrast a son will make you poorer.*
- Insurance for the individual woman and her family of the quality of the family she is marrying into
- It appeared not necessary to be eradicated

Results

Changing views on sexuality, marriage and personal aspirations

- Younger girls know much more information about sex and reproductive health
- It is not only the older generation that holds these views and norms of pre-marital sex
 - Old people do not accept a daughter-in-law who is considered naughty, and the marriage won't be accepted. (Vu Thi Cho, 25-year-old woman, FGD with school drop-outs)
 - The problem is that the parents-in-law of girls who become pregnant before marriage really hate them. (Sung Thi Mai, 18-year-old woman, Grade 12, FGD with high school students)
 - If one of my friends got pregnant before marriage I would be very disappointed. (Sung Thi My, 18-year-old woman, Grade 12, FGD with high school students)

Results

Changing views on sexuality, marriage and personal aspirations

- Access to formal education was low across all generations of women
 - Over 30 years: 97% no formal education
 - 30 years and under: 50% no formal education
- Main factors influencing their school abandon: marriage and family poverty

Results

Changing views on sexuality, marriage and personal aspirations

- Although a number of women aspired to higher education, they expressed a lack of confidence in their abilities
- Inequity in access to sustained formal education
- Their independence may be greatly curtailed following marriage
 - They have to request permission to go out, often first from their parents-in-law and then from their husbands

Conclusion

- Distance between the 'modern' Kinh and the 'traditional' Hmong
- Current, biased focus on the supposedly 'backward', 'exotic' and static nature of Hmong society does not reflect the reality
- Young Hmong women are stating a preference for love marriages and rejecting other arrangements as outdated
- Hmong girls were also found to have detailed knowledge about sexual and reproductive health from a variety information channels

Conclusion

- Bride price is a continuing practice amongst families across generations
- Dressing in modern clothes shows their aspirations of personal autonomy and unavailability for traditional marriages
 - Also reportedly afforded them protection from immediate undesired sexual attention
- The continuing patriarchal nature of Hmong society severely limits women's autonomy and ability to realize their aspirations.

Perspectives

- HIV among Hmong people – what we think and the reality?
- More understanding Hmong people to improve their access to health care services and other social activities
 - especially who live in more isolated mountainous areas.
- Any interventions based on research findings?
- The role of traditions/customs/folkways in term of health
- Matrilocality and matrilinearity; feminist anthropological debate on empowerment and gender equity
- Identity and adaptation of Hmong people?
- Others???

Acknowledgements

- Medical Committee Netherlands Vietnam
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- Sunflower group members
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Pictures of Hmong marriage



Pictures of Hmong market



Pictures of Hmong life





Thank you!

Questions and comments?