

Who Are The Hmong?



By Tong Yang, Executive Director
United Hmong Association of North Carolina

In This Presentation, You Will Learn About:

- Hmong History
- The Hmong's Involvement with the Vietnam War
- The Hmong Exodus
- Hmong Social Structure
- Hmong Culture
- Religion
- Healthcare Beliefs and Practices



History

- The Hmong are hill-tribe people from Laos.
- They migrated from China in the 1800's to Laos to escape Chinese oppression and persecution.
- The Hmong took refuge deep in the mountains away from the cities.
- They were farmers and hunters living in groups in small villages.
- During the Vietnam War, the Hmong were recruited by the CIA to fight the North Vietnamese and the Communist Pathet Lao forces.
- Long Cheng, a secret military base established by the CIA became the "capitol" for thousands of Hmong.



The Secret War

- The Hmong fought to defend their homeland and to cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- The U.S. promised to relocate the Hmong should the U.S. not prevail.
- The CIA recruited Hmong for pilot training.
- The Hmong carried out guerilla style ground assaults.
- They rescued downed American pilots.
- They provided intelligence.
- They guarded radar sites.



The Aftermath

- After the Americans left, the Hmong were at the hands of the Communists.
- The Communists vowed to exterminate the Hmong.
- The Hmong faced Communist persecution:
 - Mass killing
 - Rape
 - Torture
 - Incarceration
- 1/3 of the Hmong population in Laos were perished by acts of war, diseases and starvation.
- General Vang Pao led thousands of Hmong to seek refuge in Thailand on May 14, 1975.



Evacuation of a few high ranking military officials.



Thousands were left behind.

The Struggle & Atrocities Continue...

- Thousands of Hmong fled to safety in Thailand.
- Some surrendered to the Communists.
- Other sought refuge deep in the jungle and continued to fight the Communists.
- Today, thousands of Hmong are still being hunted down by the Communist force in Laos.



A "Chao Fah" Hmong rebel

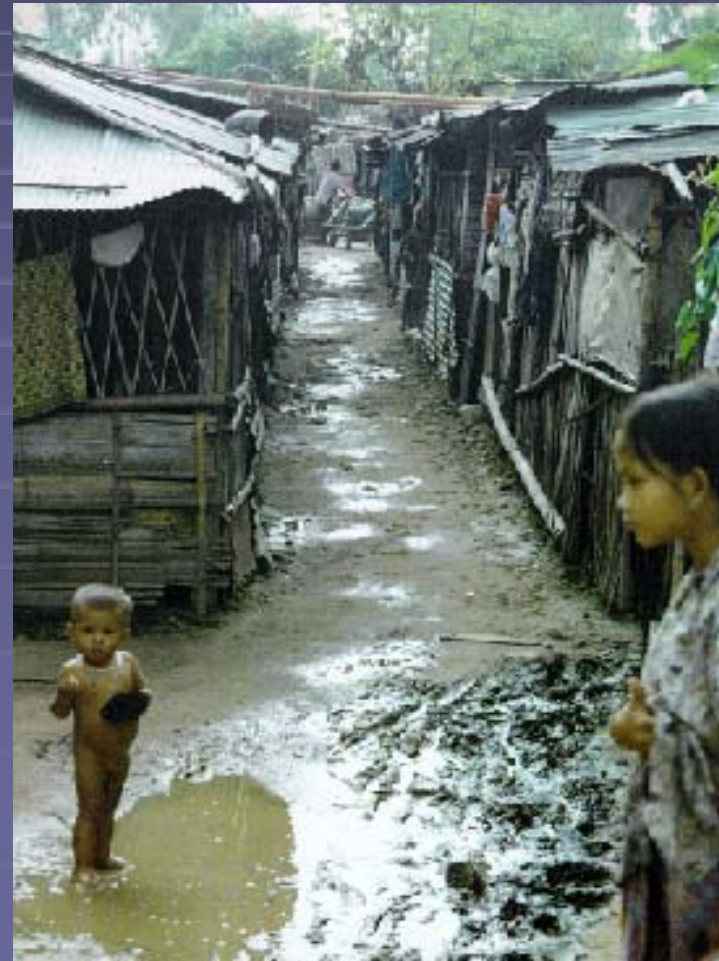
Exodus to Thailand

- From 1975 - 1992, more than 100,000 Hmong crossed into Thailand.
- The fortunate who survived the trip ended up in one or more first-asylum refugee camps: Ban Vinai, Nong Khai, Ban Nam Yao, and Chiang Kham.
- Others remained to rebuild their homes and villages or continue the fight.
- Approximately 200,000 Hmong remained in Laos.



The Refugee Camp

- Refugees poured into crude, overcrowded camps with food and water in short supply.
- Malnutrition and diseases in the confined spaces caused many deaths.
- No job, no education.
- Some Hmong refugees were given the opportunity to resettle in other countries such as the U.S., Canada, France, Australia, etc.



The Last Sanctuary

- Wat Tham Krabok is a Buddhist temple complex.
- 80 Miles north of Bangkok
- From 4,000 refugees in 1990 to over 30,000 thereafter.
- 15,000 were allowed to come to the U.S.
- 4,000 remained ineligible to come to the U.S.
- 2,000 more escaped Laos to Northern Thailand now.



Hmong in the U.S.

- There are approximately 300,000 Hmong living in the U.S. now.
- Most of them are in CA, MN, WI, and NC.
- There are about 15,000 Hmong in NC now. Most of them are in Catawba, Burke, McDowell, Caldwell, Alexander, Iredell and Mecklenburg Counties.
- About 95% of Hmong adults in NC are working.
- About 60% of the Hmong in NC own their own properties.



Hmong Social Structure

- Patriarchal Society
- The oldest male is the head of households.
- Males settle disputes.
- The Hmong have 18 clans.
- Each clan consists of everyone with the same last name.



Many Types of Hmong



- Types of Hmong:
 1. White Hmong
 2. Green/Blue Hmong or “Hmong Leng”
 3. Stripped Hmong
 4. Black Hmong
- Two dialects:
 1. White Hmong – “universal Hmong language”
 2. Green/Blue Hmong



Hmong in different types of costumes

Hmong Language

- Two dialects: White Hmong and Green Hmong dialects
- The Hmong lost their written language for centuries. History were told in the forms of stories, songs and folklores.
- The Hmong did not have a written language until the 1950's when the French missionary invented one for the Hmong.
- Now the Hmong have two forms of written language—Hmong Latin and Hmong Pa Hoh.
- Hmong Latin—which used English alphabets—is the widely known form of written language for the Hmong.



Hmong dance



Hmong woman & child

Hmong Culture

- Family is the center of Hmong life.
- Male and female have different roles.
- Reciprocal obligations are integral parts of Hmong life.



Corn grinder, a traditional Hmong tool

Concept of Family

- A family consists of more than just parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, etc.
- A family includes all extended family members and clan members of both sides.
- In-laws are also parts of a family.
- Members of two different clans may be considered as the same family.

Gender Roles - Male

- Men have more status and power than women.
- A newly married woman goes to the home of husband's family.
- Family history traced through male line.
- Men settle disputes.
- Family decisions are conveyed to outsiders through the men.
- Men have shared responsibilities as members of a particular clan.
- Men perform ancestral rituals, etc.



Contemporary Hmong men



Hmong boys with their "qeej"

12.21.2004

Gender Roles - Female

- Women are less socially active than men.
- Women have more private than public power.
- Their power and respect increase with age.
- Women tend to play a greater parental role than men.



Traditional Hmong girl



Contemporary Hmong girls

Marriage

- Hmong cannot marry someone with the same surname.
- The bride becomes a member of the groom's family.
- Hmong marriage involves an elaborate ceremony and a dowry.
- A married Hmong woman takes her husband's name preceded by "Mrs."
- It's inappropriate to call a married Hmong woman by her first name, unless you are a member of her family.



A Hmong couple in traditional costumes

Marriage Continued...

- A married person is considered an adult regardless of age.
- It is inappropriate for unmarried people to live together.
- Getting married at young age is common in the Hmong community.
- Infidelity is a serious “crime” in Hmong culture.

Marriage Continued - Dowry

- Dowry is a sum of money given to the parents of the bride as gratitude.
- Dowry serves as a medium to bond the two families together.
- Dowry serves as a protection for Hmong women.
- If the marriage fails and the bride is at fault, her family “is supposed to” return the dowry to the groom’s family.
- If the marriage fails and the groom is at fault, he gives up the rights to reclaim the dowry and the claims to their properties and children.
- If the groom abuses the bride and his family fails to protect her, they will be penalized at subsequent marriages between the two families or clans through hefty dowry, fines, or refusal to grant consent to such marriages.

Religion: Animistic or Ancestral Worshipping

- Existence of the soul
- Existence of spirits that inhabit objects
- Reincarnation
- “Judgment” in the after life
- Healing power of Shaman
- Ancestral Worshippers:
65%
- Christians: 35%



Animal sacrifice usually involves chickens, pigs, or cows.

Beliefs about Illness

- Causes of illness fall into 4 groups of etiologies:
 1. Natural – germs, etc.
 2. Supernatural – spirits
 3. Social – curses; e.g. The Yang males cannot eat animal hearts.
 4. Personal – failure at cultural or religious proscriptions
- Beliefs influence choices of treatment.
- Hmong have little or no knowledge about mental health.

Hmong Traditional Healers

- Traditional therapeutic practices include:
 - Home remedies
 - Medicine doctors/herbalists
 - Ritual or magic healers
 - Soul calling
 - Shaman
- Medicine doctors/herbalists are usually women.
- Shaman can be both men and women.
- Shaman can only heal, not harm.
- One cannot learn to become a shaman. S/he must be chosen by the spirit.



A Hmong Shaman



A medicine woman

Important Cultural & Religious Events

- New Year Celebration is the most important cultural and religious event for the Hmong.
 - Most religious rituals take place during the New Year Celebration.
 - Young men and women use the ball tossing and traditional chanting to meet new people – potential future spouses.
- Funeral is another important religious event for the Hmong.
 - People from all over the places would gather at the home of the deceased as well as attending the funeral.
 - Hmong would donate money to help with the expenses.
 - Hmong funeral service lasts many days.



Other Religious Events

- “Caiv” is religious confinement, usually last one day, imposed by a Shaman to keep a person away from “evil spirits” or to keep the “evil spirits” from coming in.
- You should not enter someone’s house during religious confinement or “caiv”.
- “Caiv” or religious confinement is marked by some green leaves or a cross on the door.

Health Issues

- Heart diseases
- Cancer
- Diabetics
- Hypertension
- Gout
- Kidney diseases
- Liver diseases
- Dental cavities – children

Mental Health Issues

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – Among veterans of the Secret War
- Stress – working Among adults
- Depression “Home sick” – Among elderly
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – Children
- Suicide – young adults and the elderly

What Can Healthcare Professionals Do To Help?

- Be sensitive to our values and beliefs.
- Be patient and really listen.
- Reach out and educate us.
- Partner with our community leadership to create “trust” before intervention can take place.
- Train and hire Hmong professionals to help us.
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services

For More Information: United Hmong Association

- Established in 1994 to be the voice of the Hmong community of North Carolina
- Non-profit 501(c) 3 organization
- Our board members are representatives from each Hmong clan.
- United Hmong Association is considered the “parent” of the huge Hmong family – the Hmong community of North Carolina.

United Hmong Association Continued...

- Our mission is to improve the quality of life for the Hmong of North Carolina.
- We work hard to ensure successful acculturation and integration of the Hmong into American society without losing our culture and language.
- Membership to our Association is open to all Hmong living in North Carolina and anyone who shares our vision and supports our mission.

Programs & Services

- Conflict Resolution
- Health Access & Education
- Hmong Literacy
- English Language Training (ELT)
- Citizenship and Immigration Services
- After School Program – Mentoring & Youth Development
- Language Access – Translation & Interpretation
- College Scholarship
- Leadership Development
- Advocacy – Education, Healthcare, Public Policy, Workers' Rights, etc.
- Economic Development
- Job Referrals
- Radio Programming

Where Do We Go From Here?

- Tell others about the Hmong.
- Visit our community.
- Include our needs in your programs and service delivery plan.
- Together, we can make a difference!

Contact Information

- Tong Yang, Executive Director
- Email: Tyang@uhanc.org
- Website: www.uhanc.org
- Office: (828)324-2322
- Mobile: (828)201-3290
- Mailing Address: P.O. Box 9683, Hickory, NC 28603
- Office Location: 737 12th St, SW, Hickory, NC 28602