

**WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION**

Women's History Month 2005

**NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2004 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2004 or Spring 2005 to be eligible.**

(Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor: Professor Stacy Thompson \_\_\_\_\_ Dept.: English \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number and Name: ENGL 484: Feminist Theory and Criticism \_\_\_\_\_ Semester completed: Fall, 05 \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Nominated Work: Hmong Marriage Customs: The Vehicle by Which Hmong Women's Social Status is Subordinated and Male Dominated Social Structure is Established and Perpetuated \_\_\_\_\_

**CATEGORY:**

**Sampson:**

Undergraduate Research Paper

Undergraduate Project

Graduate

\_\_\_\_\_

See \_\_\_\_\_

Olson \_\_\_\_\_

Kessler \_\_\_\_\_

Turell

Belter \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT INFORMATION:**

Name: Jack Scott \_\_\_\_\_

Email: scottje@uwec.edu \_\_\_\_\_ Year/Major: Senior/English Literature \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address: 1324 Sherwin Avenue, Eau Claire, WI 54701

Local Phone: (715) 552-7855

**\*\*WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

.....  
**Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.**

**Submission deadline is February 11, 2005.**



# University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

105 Garfield Avenue • P.O. Box 4004 • Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

---

January 10, 2005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to nominate Jack Scott's essay, "Hmong Marriage Customs: the Vehicle by which Hmong Women's Social Status is Subordinated and Male Dominated Social Structure is Established and Perpetuated," for the Donna C. Turell Award. Jack wrote this essay last semester (Fall, 04) for my ENGL 484: Feminist Theory and Criticism course. The essay strikes me as an incisive description and feminist critique of Hmong marriage customs, written by someone who has experienced them and who continues to live within them.

Although the essay predominantly examines the author's lived experience, it also provides the reader with a compellingly written taxonomy of Hmong marriage customs. And as a member of the Hmong community, the author can comment on his friends' and relatives' experiences within that community, experiences that serve to corroborate his own.

In short, I found this essay provocative on several levels, both as feminist critique, as a well-organized description of particular cultural practices, and as an often grimly humorous examination of traditions to which the author is uniquely positioned: he is both internal and external to them.

For all these reasons, I nominate this essay for consideration for the Donna C. Turell Award. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Dr. Stacy Thompson  
Assistant Professor, Critical Theory and Cinema Studies  
(715) 836-5150

---

*Excellence. Our measure, our motto, our goal.*

Department of English • (715) 836-2639 • fax: (715) 836-5996

**Hmong Marriage Customs: The Vehicle By Which Hmong Women's Social Status  
is Subordinated And Male Dominated Social Structure is Established and  
Perpetuated.**

By:

Jack E Scott

I spent two years of my life as a door-to-door purveyor of a certain brand of religion to the Hmong population in the Minnesota and Wisconsin area. I became proficient in all aspects of the language as well as developed a deep understanding of the culture. There are many things unique about the Hmong culture, as there are about all cultures; however, the most striking aspect of the culture is the Hmong marriage custom. It seems fairly innocent at first, nothing too dramatic: a guy marries a girl and in the process the girl's male relatives do all they can to make the groom die of alcohol poisoning; as with all things of consequence, however, the Hmong marriage customs are so much more than the mere joining of two people in matrimonial splendor. Hmong marriage customs perpetuate the patriarchal hierarchical social system of the Hmong. Because of the marriage customs women were and are trivialized and their existence *had* to be defined by the males in their lives or they would be nobody, and because of this there existed and still exists a gross inequality between males and females. After taking part in many marriages, in one way or another, I grew to understand—besides the best way to getting out of drinking—that the marriage customs were the perpetuators of this inequality, much in the same way my knocking on doors and repeating canned phrases and teachings, propagated the religion I was giving away.

During my two years as a teacher of religion I contacted a girl named Pa Nhia who lived in downtown St. Paul, a place called Frogtown. She was seventeen and enjoyed learning about religion, and really enjoyed the attention my partner and I showed her. For four weeks we taught and worked with her, helping her understand our religion and why it was the best when she suddenly disappeared. We didn't know where she had

gone, her younger brothers wouldn't tell us anything; her father, who didn't like us, and only allowed us to teach her because he saw us as some kind of freak show—white guys who speak an obscure Asian language—wouldn't tell us anything either. For four days she was missing and we were the only people who seemed to care, until one day we were walking across a soccer field and someone from the other side started coming towards us; when she was about ten feet away from us we realized who it was. She was covered in bruises, had a black eye and her once long black hair had been shorn off her head. We asked her what happened and in between sobbing she told us that one night she and her boyfriend had gone to his house, once there he grabbed her and started beating her while his mother and father looked on, then he took some scissors and cut big clumps of her hair off, and when it was all done, with his mothers help, he took her to his room and raped her. That was that. She was used goods and she now belonged to this young man. If she went crying back to her father he'd lose face in the community, as would she. This happened twice to us in the four months we worked in down town St. Paul. The other time the girl was fourteen. These were extreme examples, but even in the cases where nothing violent happens the circumstances may not be too different. Bullying, from men, is common, as is abuse—emotional and physical; these practices aren't inherent in *all* Hmong men although, and may be more a direct result of individual socialization than anything else.

In this essay I'll be using mainly experiences and observations I've had over the past seven years living among the Hmong Americans in the Midwest. There is not a lot of information out there about the socialization of Hmong women to become Hmong women that is useful, except for a decent book by a woman named N.D. Donnelly. I will

briefly explore and explain the three most common types of marriage rites as well as exploring the dowry and its use value in Laos and possible uselessness here in America as well as the bartering for the dowry which is a power paradigm to show the female how useless she is without the male. Polygamy is another marriage system that I will discuss. Throughout this essay I will attempt to develop the Marxist train of thought that Hmong marriage customs merely perpetuate divisional labor constructions that force the woman to work at home while the man goes out and works creating an economy that must subjugate women (in Southeast Asia) in order for a clans success and survival—in order to do this a historical exploration of the Hmong in Laos and even America is necessary.

What exactly is it about Hmong customs of marriage that could allow my first example to happen, even if it may have been an isolated incident? It's easy to say that a Hmong female is socialized to be inferior to her male counterparts; she serves as the Woolfian "looking glass" for the male to view himself and thus doing she defines herself by her husband, father, brothers, uncles, male friends of family and what they think of her; through marriage customs and rites a Hmong marriage is the epitome of the male dominated hierarchical system in the Hmong culture. This severely impairs the potential that the female may have in Hmong society since it creates a lack of trust and possible pent up anger towards her husband. This is something that I suspected when I first started working with the Hmong populace in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but I wasn't able to confirm my suspicions until my language skills were better and I had made enough Hmong female friends who were comfortable talking about such issues. When I asked them what was good about their marriage, they said that it was when their husbands got so incredibly drunk that the first thing he did when he reached the marital bed (if he made

it that far) was to fall asleep and have no interest in sex. When asked, “What was the most sexist thing about Hmong marriage customs,” most said, “everything,” and one said, “the most sexist thing about a Hmong marriage is that a girl is born,” or in other words the worst thing for a woman to do in the Hmong culture is to be born a woman. These are younger women though. When I asked an older Hmong woman—someone who before has told me time and time again that her husband was a “niag tsov tom” equivalent to a “Fucking asshole”—if the *way* in which women are married to men could be seen as a detriment to the culture, it was beyond her frame of reference. The most unequal thing she saw about marriage customs was the division of labor: the men talk and drink, the woman cook and clean. To her it was as if I was asking her why she breathed.

There are three main types of Hmong marriage customs. The first is called, tshoob zawj.<sup>1</sup> This is the most expensive and most formal type of marriage custom. A male finds the female he’d like to be with, talks to his parents who find two Mej Koob<sup>2</sup> who are sent to the bride’s house and begin bartering for the bride price. After deliberation the mej koob will return to the groom’s house to relay how much the father/uncles/nearest male relative wants for the girl and the groom’s parents can either accept, refuse, or ask the mej koob to return and barter some more. In Laos an average bride price might be around ten to twenty silver bars (I’m not sure what this equals in American currency). Here in America this one would cost the groom and his family anywhere from ten thousand to twenty-five or thirty thousand plus, depending on where they were—brides in California cost much more than the rest of the world for some reason, maybe because California breeds better women. Maybe not. This custom is used

---

<sup>1</sup> Tshoob literally means marriage, and there is no English equivalent for the word zawj.

<sup>2</sup> Middle man, the guys who barter for the bride price, they do not have to be related to the groom.

less frequently because of the amount of money and time that is required, and the geography of America and extra money it would take to fly two guys you hardly know from Minnesota to California. Whether or not the bride agrees to marry the man who wants her is little matter.

This was the way in which a very close friend of mine got married. Even though she told her father that she didn't want to marry the guy, he told her to just try it out (which to her translated into, "do it, so you and I don't lose face"). The guy she married turned out to be extremely abusive, thought it was perfectly fine to get some on the side, and also thought it perfectly fine if he neglected the daughter they had together. She divorced him. Her father was initially disappointed because he held some clout in the Hmong community, but knew the kind of man her husband was—he threatened her in front of him a few times—and knew that his reputation wasn't as important as his daughter and grand daughter. In my experience with older Hmong men, her father was an exception; most fathers would feel that their daughter did something wrong in order for the divorce to occur. Sadly, even though the divorce was because of the husband, she was the one who faced the ridicule of the Hmong community, and even though it happened almost ten years ago people will still come up to her and mention it and give her and her second husband the look that says, "is he the one your ex-husband claimed you had an affair with?" even though her ex was the one having affairs.

The second and most common type is called tshoob coj.<sup>3</sup> In this one a boy and girl mutually agree that marriage is a good idea for them. This one is cheaper because it doesn't require as much protocol as tshoob zawj. The boy and girl agree on a place to meet, and after meeting someplace neutral she follows him to his house, where his

---

<sup>3</sup> Coj, meaning to lead.



mother or father (depending on the clan) takes a live chicken and takes it around the girls body three times (a spirit rite to keep her spirit from returning to her home). After three days the girl is allowed to return to her parents where she can either refuse to marry the boy, and lose face, or marry him. If she chooses to marry him (which happens ninety-nine percent of the time since it was a mutual thing at first) his parents find mej koob and send him, his phib laj—best man—the bride, her niam tais ntsuab, a female relative of the groom whose duty it is to baby-sit the bride so she doesn't mess around with someone she might really love (it had to have happened before in order for such a position to have been created), and hopefully a designated driver, since everyone except for the bride and her niam tais ntsuab are going to be drunk. Depending on a number of factors i.e. education, obedience factor, etc, in this marriage rite the groom can expect to pay anywhere from three to twenty thousand dollars here in America. My brother-in-law paid six for his wife, and my niece went for eight.

The third is tshoob zij, kidnapping. The first two examples I gave in the introduction were examples of a combination of tshoob zij and tshoob coj. A male, old, young or whatever, sees a girl he likes a lot; he grabs some of his male relatives and they kidnap her. Characteristically, the male will “ruin” the girl as a way of shaming her and making her afraid to go home. He may beat, his father may beat, or any male relative may beat the girl, even the future mother-in-law may beat the girl all as a way of subjugating her. This marriage rite is looked down upon, thanks to westernization. But even though it is looked down upon it still happens and in most cases, unfortunately, even with its rare rate of occurrence the chances of a girl's parents saying anything to the police are rare to nil. The parents may, however, elect to have the groom pay a higher price. Since this

one doesn't happen that often I'm unsure what the going rate is for a girl who is kidnapped.

There are two other types having to do with a widow and another dealing with the adulterous woman, but I'll not go into these because as far as Hmong culture in America is concerned the first three have the most relevance. Of the three marriage rites tshoob coj seems to be the only one that allows the woman to make some sort of decision as well.

The marriage itself may be divided into three or four parts. The first part is when the men from both families meet and begin to discuss the bride price, at most this will take about four or five hours. The groom's representatives will sit on one side of a table, while the bride's sit on the other. Depending on the dominant religion there will either be one case of forty ounce Budweisers (Christians) or five or six cases (traditional animists)—the more booze the longer the deliberations take. Most of it is protocol; they say things such as "she's worth this much because of her education," except they have to say it in about fifty different ways. Most often the groom and bride will be present, but that again depends on the clan. While all the men are in one room talking, the women will be in the kitchen or at the store buying things for the men to eat. When the food is ready the men will stop for a moment, and food will be brought out; the men will sit down and eat, and talk about whatever they desire, while the women will remain in the kitchen occasionally peeping in to make sure that there is enough rice and food. This first part always takes place in the bride's parent's home and usually happens in the evening.

The second part, here in America, starts the day after the bride price has been set. The women wake up and start cooking right away, making sure that the pig(s) or cow(s) get slaughtered and that the meat gets divided properly with some set-aside for the Mej Koob and other contributing relatives. The men, depending on how much they drank or how long they stayed at the dance club, are either still really hung over or still sleeping. Some trivialities are exchanged at the actual celebration. Both the bride and the groom are required by tradition to sleep at the bride's house<sup>4</sup>. The bride is decked out in full Hmong regalia, usually to denote how much she is worth as it is covered with hundreds of silver coins and beautifully sewn bags; the groom either dons a cheap wrinkled suit, here in America, or a Hmong outfit, in southeast Asia, on which few coins and accessories are necessary. The bride's brothers or male relatives will put the groom through the gauntlet; each will have a shot glass of beer (rice wine in southeast Asia) and for each glass they drink the groom must drink one and if he spills any he will have to do it all over again. The gifts and the money will be divvied up and the bride is officially not a member of her family, but neither is she an official member of the groom's family, yet. During the entire time the bride need not drink, and her participation in the entire process is entirely passive she answers, "yes," at certain points and, "no," at others. Her most active role in *her* family's role is to help cook.

The third part is directly after the second part. The groom takes his bride to his house, where the gifts and money are re-counted to make sure the bride's family didn't stiff them. There will be more drinking as is called upon by protocol, this time it's the

---

<sup>4</sup> Everyone I've talked to was unsure exactly why this happened, and I haven't been able to find any explanation. More than likely it is the remnant of an older Chinese tradition, which no longer exists, or it may even be the remnant of something more ancient and inherent to the Hmong culture before they were assimilated into Chinese culture.

groom's friends and brothers and male relatives who play the exact same drinking game with him. The bride, again, is in the kitchen, this time with the groom's female relatives, helping them cook. These parts have many different variations depending upon the region and the clan but the main gist has been expressed. Why drinking is such a heavy part of the ceremonies has been described to me in such a way as to make me believe that it is just one way the guys beat their chests and claim their manhood. And certain clans, my wife's included, necessitate the male relatives' participation in making a certain dish called "lah," minced raw pork with rice flour and cilantro.

I've often heard the Dowry described as a way the groom shows respect for the female and her family, as well as a way of paying back the family for taking one of its laborers. While in one way this may be true, the bride price is more than just that. The payment of the bride price (nqi mis)<sup>5</sup> to her family allows for the patrilineal continuance of the clan unit. All males in the family are expected to help pay, in some way or another, for the bride price of whichever brother is going to marry. From a Marxist perspective then, the unmarried and married women—in the event of becoming a widow—become an exchange value. In order for one to be taken some sort of monetary value must be paid to compensate for what has been taken from the bride's family. Looking at it in this light makes sense for a culture that relies heavily on the amount of people within the clan in order for the clan, and more pointedly, the culture to perpetuate. It still objectifies the Hmong woman and turns her into a commodity, not unlike a cow, chicken or horse; she is bought and contributes to the patrimonial clan by working in the

---

<sup>5</sup> Nqi meaning price, or worth. Mis means milk or breast. Translated straight into English it is, breast/milk price.

field, cooking (allowing for the male to work in the field) and bearing children, which equals more people able to contribute to the clan's success.

Because of the way America is set up economically, the Hmong use of the bride price has little value except as a way of subjugating and objectifying the female clan member. Be that as it may, the bride price tradition is hundreds if not thousands of years old, and while it may serve to instill attitudes of inferiority for women and superiority for men, most people, unless formally educated to recognize such patterns, will not recognize this. They will likely see the bride price as an honored tradition that must be perpetuated to show filial piety. That does not, however, mean that it is a good thing, and that it shouldn't be changed. In one way the bride price acts in the same manner that pornography subjugates women by making them objects to be acted upon. In southeast Asia, and the clan systems of the Hmong, the bride price makes sense (still not a good thing) because if a husband were to marry without some sort of compensation for the amount of work that will be lost from the bride's clan eventually the system will collapse, less work equals less food and less chances for survival. Here in America, for the most part, the clan system has a hard time perpetuating itself already because of the emphasis on "American" individualism. The definition of Clan in Laos was a group overseen by either one man or group of men, usually older married male members, and it was structured to propagate the clan through intermarriage with other clans. That same clan system in America isn't working for some reason—I'm not a social scientist so I don't know why—if a person, man or woman, is willing to work hard enough there is no need for support from family members after a certain point.

Marriage customs are the way in which patriarchal systems are perpetuated. The young girl is raised by a mother who works and she helps her work. She has chances to play but as she grows more emphasis is put upon her to perform the gender that has been constructed for her, which means that she takes care of the younger children, begins to cook the food (usually at a very early age), clean the house etc. When sexuality comes into play Donnelly describes the “sex adventures” of the younger girls and boys as something looked upon with little disdain and that sexual acts between young girls and boys were commonplace and she also wrote that unintended pregnancies were not looked upon as dire moral flaws(120). The young girl looks upon each sexual partner as a possible husband. If she gets pregnant the male’s relatives will generally push him towards marrying the girl (as happened with a brother-in-law of mine), and if he doesn’t want to he has to pay a fine of sorts to her family. The Hmong system of life revolves around marriage, the young girl is taught to act like a proper Hmong wife<sup>6</sup>. The adolescent learns proper rituals and courtship songs as a way of winning a good husband. Donnelly says, correctly, that most of these songs are infused with an “overwhelming tone of sadness” (123). I randomly picked a song out of a book to test this (even though I know it’s true I’ve never really thought about it till I read it in her book), and what follows is a rough translation of that song.

**Marry another’s son; they don’t want to love (me)**

1. Mother’s daughter’s mother and father bore one daughter. Mother’s daughter will work hard beside her mother.

---

<sup>6</sup> I have Hmong guys come up to me at random and tell me how lucky I am to have married a Hmong woman because she will “listen to you,” and be obedient, to which I am unsure how to respond.

2. Mother's daughter's mother and father desire something of worth.  
(They) will put her in the middle of the dark path.
3. Mother's daughter went to be a daughter-in-law while still young.  
Why, (listen) one can hear her husband's grandmother waking her to work.
4. Mother's daughter is a daughter-in-law (who does everything) she'll work till she's dizzy from moving about the house so much. (She'll) birth a boy whose good but she'll fear his grandmother and grandfather's dark faces that won't brighten.
5. Mother's daughter will be quiet and pious, making her mother and father praise her good luck. In reality she wastes away her life like the one of a pair who is neglected.
6. (Husband's) mother leads her to die in rags. Someday her body will be so rotten her parents won't even recognize her.

(her spirit) will be angry till it is released. The way of a daughter-in-law is not fun. (*Kwv Txhiaj* 88-89)

After marriage the couple will have children and they will socialize their children the same way that their parents did. The boy learns from observing his life around him that his mother(s) and sisters are to support him as they do his father. As an adolescent he may be promiscuous and it is looked upon as a rite of adulthood; in addition to this aspect of sexuality a boy may be praised by his father/male relatives for his "cleverness" in

getting a number of girls to sleep with him. Depending upon his clan's status and his talent in a trade he may have his pick of whomever he wants to marry. If she declines he can still force her to marry him through different ways. They marry and the process repeats.

Another aspect of Hmong marriage that has use value in Southeast Asia but no value in America is the practice of polygamy. In Southeast Asia a man marries more than one wife for the purposes of insuring the future of the clan. For instance a man may marry again if his first wife cannot bear children, or he may marry another if his first wife is mean and hateful—in other words if she doesn't live up to what he believes a wife should be then he will marry someone more complacent. There is an old lady named Pog Zam Teeb (grandmother zah deng) who lives in a high-rise in St. Paul. She is ninety-two years old, very spry and especially strong for her age; she could beat me in an arm wrestle if she wanted to. When she was twelve years old an older gentleman approached her parents and said he wanted to marry her. According to her, her husband was in his sixties, which I didn't believe until I saw the pictures, her, a beautiful young girl and he an old corpse like and scary looking old man. She was wife number nine for this man, and I think she bore him eight or nine kids. His was a case in which he married to immortalize his name by siring many offspring. And he was successful, I've been as far away as Rhode Island staying with some of my wife's family and I've met people with the particular surname of Pog Zam Teeb's husband and I've asked them if they happen to be related and they are. I've even been invited to gatherings that involve this man's offspring where they had to use a full size gymnasium, the one with three or four basketball courts, and there were hundreds of people that owe their life to this man who



married so many women. If he were still in Southeast Asia and still living he would have very high status among the Hmong population. Not many Hmong women who've been part of a polygamous marriage were very happy, in fact most I've talked with have held a deep resentment for their husband. Another old woman I know still constantly complains of her late husband's "tham hluas nkauj."<sup>7</sup> It demoralized women in Southeast Asia, allowing the patriarchal system to go on because it allowed men to think of themselves as superior because if their wives weren't producing then they could go and purchase another who could. The system is worse in America since there is no need for a man to have many wives in order to survive. A friend of mine, Maiv<sup>8</sup>, swears that the reason her mother died young (at age forty-nine) was because her father went and married another woman. The father of another friend of mine, Nkauj,<sup>9</sup> recently came back from a trip to California and announced that he had married another wife. He happens to be a shaman as well. From their perspective, their fathers marrying again while living in America, the reason they remarried was because they weren't satisfied in their current relationships and didn't really love their mothers, and wanted to marry someone younger and "prettier" who would be willing to do more for them and take care of them when they eventually cannot take care of themselves.

The labeling of the daughter-in-law after she is married is another way the woman is demoralized. The husband's family calls her by her husband's name, I'll use my Hmong name as an example, and if I were Hmong my family would call my wife, Nyab Txawj Zoo, or daughter-in-law jack. She is identified by her relationship to her husband in all aspects except when she meets someone who is related to her. All who aren't

---

<sup>7</sup> Dating or philandering depending on the context it is used.

<sup>8</sup> Name has been changed

<sup>9</sup> Name has been changed

related to her will either call her “Mrs. Jack,” “daughter-in-law Jack,” or “the wife of Jack.” It is another way of saying that she “belongs to Jack.” And if I felt like a piece of property I know I wouldn’t be the happiest person in the world. This is not just a Hmong construction but happens all over the place and here in America as well, what is different though is that the Hmong bride keeps her last name; for instance, if a bride with the surname Vang marries a guy with the surname Xiong she will remain a Vang for the rest of her life; however, her children are identified by her husband’s surname. From the bride’s family’s perspective the bride may still be called by how they knew her, the husband is simply called Vauv which means groom, he isn’t called “groom May” or anything matching the way his wife is called by his family.

Most Hmong in Southeast Asia depend on farming as the main means of subsistence; they use the slash and burn method, moving on to different areas after a field has used up its usefulness. As I explained before the Hmong marriage customs are the main way they perpetuate this male dominated hierarchal clan system. Women are generally not seen as having much use except as far as they can bear children, and work in the house. A common lament among the Hmong, even today, is that their daughter-in-laws are too lazy. In Laos a lazy daughter-in-law meant that food wasn’t prepared or prepared poorly, the house was a mess and the children weren’t taken care of, therefore the quality of labor performed by men declined and the entire clan suffered because of this lazy daughter-in-law. The use value of a woman, even though extremely sexist and negative is useful in Southeast Asia as a means of perpetuating the race. This use value, generated by the bride price and basic socialization of female and male youth, demoralizes the woman by turning her into a commodity and making her a subhuman,

she has no say in anything. Occasionally there might be a strong woman who has taken part in something that mainly males take part in, but those instances are extremely rare. In a family, if the first born is a girl even if she is ten or twenty years older than her younger brothers, she will always have to defer to them in decision making processes. And while it seems to have its place in Southeast Asia, in a more westernized society a woman has to be seen as having more use than merely the one who bears children and takes care of them and the house. Most women I know do not try to break out of this pattern of degradation either because they don't know it exists, they refuse to acknowledge it or because they don't mind taking the path of least resistance.

**Bibliography.**

Donnelly, Nancy D. *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*. Seattle and London:

University Of Washington Press. 1994.

*Kwv Txhij phau ib, chants de cour d'amour vol.1*. Association Communauté Hmong:

1985.