

Christianity and Its Effects on Hmong Clan Structure and Family

The Power of **AND**

University of Wisconsin
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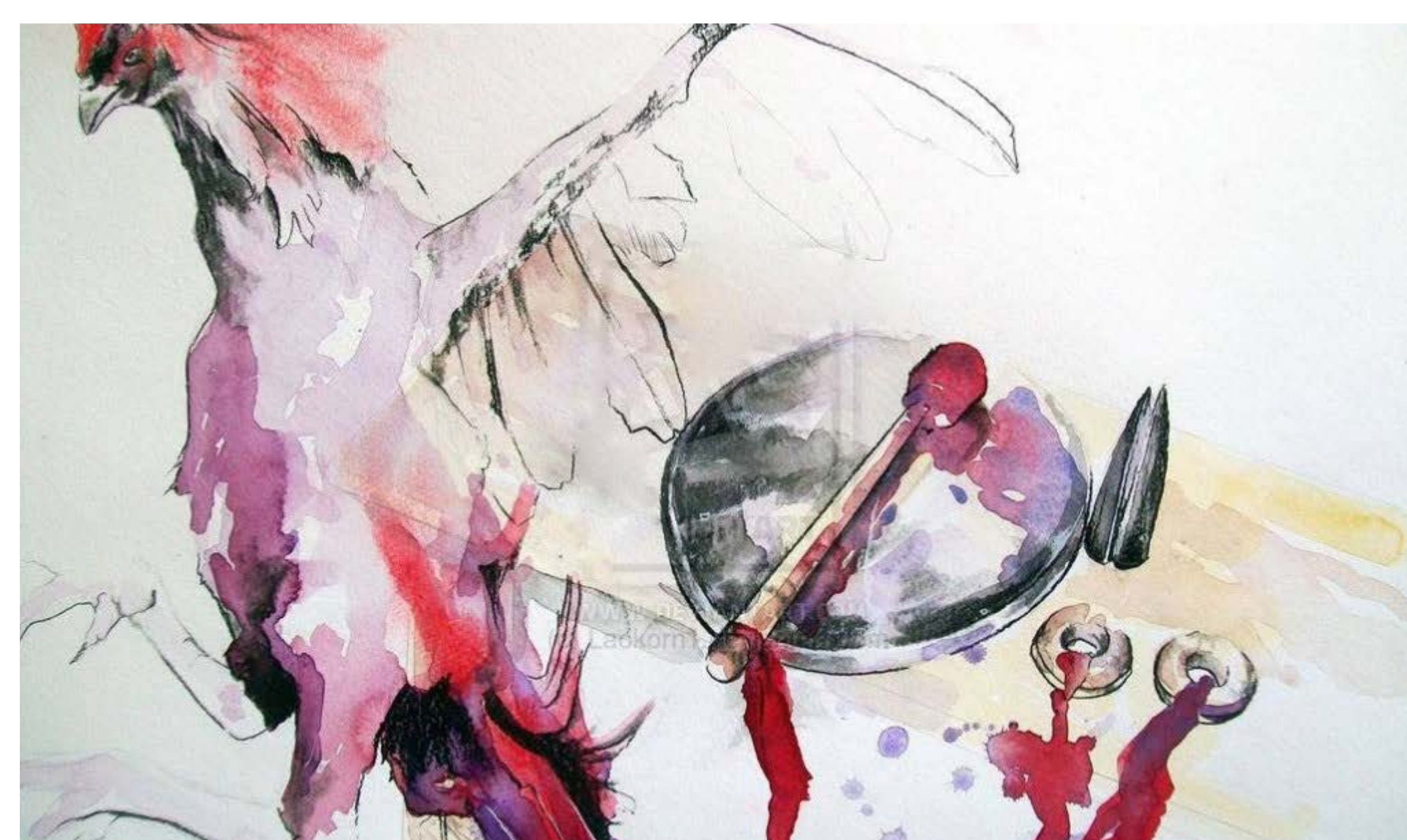
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ABSTRACT

This research examines the impacts Christianity has had on Hmong family/clan structures over the last several decades. Christianity has impacted Hmong families and has brought tensions to Hmong families through a change in cultural practices. Considering that Hmong communities have historically stressed collectivism over individualism, tensions often arise when an individual's beliefs and practices are transformed without consideration of the family and clan units. Christianity has also impacted family/clan structures by creating a conversation among Hmong communities on how to enact traditional cultural practices such as weddings and funeral rites. Religious conversion thus allows researchers to bring to light unspoken rules among Hmong about the role religion has played in the transformation of everyday life. On a larger scale, this research allows Hmong communities to reflect on the ways in which they can measure their progress while deconstructing their cultural beliefs as it relates to religion and life in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Hmong family structures have been influenced by their religious practices. One of these religions that has greatly impacted Hmong clan structures or family is Shamanism. However, another religion came into play as in the mid 20th century. The surfacing of Christianity among Hmong has caused a big change in how family structures work with clan practices. Specifically, there has been many stories of conversion from Shamanism to Christianity and these conversions tend lead to clan tensions. This research analyzes how Hmong family structures throughout the last several decades. This research also examines how the two different religions have come to play such a strong role in how family and clan structures work within the aspect of traditional practices, such as funeral or marriage practices. Ultimately, this research examines the roles of both Shamanism and Christianity in shaping Hmong traditional practices and rituals.



<https://anunusualpath.com/altar-of-a-hmong-shaman/>

METHODS

An anonymous self-report survey was administered to Hmong individuals who are between the age of 18 to 30 years old. The survey incorporated various questions that asked the participants to state their religious beliefs and their opinions on the religious beliefs that they do not part take in. These questions look deeper into what the individual's perception of each religion is and what they perceive the religions have done to their own family structure or those of others in the Hmong community.

I also conducted two interviews. These interviewees were between 18 to 30 years old. One interviewee is a youth pastor and the other is a shaman. The youth pastor was chosen due to their background of being a leader within the Hmong Christian community. The young Shaman was chosen because of their extensive knowledge of the Shamanistic beliefs and rituals. The individuals were chosen because of the political power and authority they have within their respective religious communities.

Questions Asked:

- What does family mean to you? What religion do you identify with?
- What does Christianity mean to you? What does Shamanism mean to you?
- What has been your experience with Hmong Christians and Hmong Shamanism?
- What challenges do you see between the different religious views in the Hmong community?
- Do you see religion as an issue within the Hmong community?

PARTICIPANTS

- 22 participants that took the anonymous survey regarding their views on religious beliefs and association with the Hmong community.
- Of the 22 participants half were in college and half was not.
- 11 of the 22 identified as Shamanism/Animism, while 7 identified as Christian, and 4 marked "other."
- All 22 participants were within the age range with 18—27.
- 2 interviewees as well.
- Pseudonyms are used for the 2 interview participants. The interview participants are Simon, who is a young 21-year-old Shaman within the Hmong community and Jordan, a 24-year-old youth pastor within a Hmong church.

Table 1: Demographics of Survey Participants

College Student	11
Not in College	11
Shamanism/Animism	11
Christian	7
Other	4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some major findings from the survey and interviews include:

1. One similarity is that both religions do not take the time to understand one another. They don't fully understand what the other stands for.
2. The survey data reveals that both religious communities feel sorry for the other for not having a deeper understanding of life, accusing the other of wrongdoing. This suggests that both religious communities are ignorant about each other.
3. A survey quote, "The acceptance however the method, that people getting together is still going to be together. It's a give and take system of practices. Everyone will not be satisfied but there needs to be a middle ground of acceptance and moving forward."
4. This reveals that Hmong families are willing to put aside their own differences for the sake of "family." They will find a way to negotiate religious differences.
5. A survey participant stated, "Older generations believe it. Younger generations don't understand it." This means that different generations have different religious values.
6. Jordan and Simon spoke of how each of them has experienced being shunned when it comes to religious conversion.
7. In Simon's case, there is plenty of communication among different religious communities, but the communication seems to be misinterpreted. Hmong individuals from both religions have misconception of the other, but want to be able to co-exist.
8. Jordan and Simon highlight that families struggle about which religion they should follow. The conflict isn't how the two religions affect families, but rather the very idea of "family" is what is at stake in being negotiated.
9. Jordan has seen the younger generation shift towards atheism or secularism. This poses the question, how does family structure change when youth become more secular?
10. A majority of the responses indicate that it is possible for both religions to co-exist. This reveals that while religion effects how one structures their families, there seems to be a bigger influence related to Jordan's observation of how some Hmong Christians may still adhere to the Hmong culture more than the Christian religion.

CONCLUSION

The interviews and survey participants reveal to us that religion has indeed affected families and clans. However, it has not diminished the strength of how a family can be structured. Both religious views are not in communication with one another; they are shouting over one another. However, both religious communities want to work together in order to co-exist peacefully. The difficulty lies within the ignorance and stubbornness in wanting to uphold their own religious beliefs. Overall, religion has had significant effects on the structure of Hmong families, which has brought division, but also has brought new ways of negotiating religious diversity.

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