

**Hmong Americans: A Review of Felt Needs, Problems, and Community Development**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is intended to broadly explore both the achievements and needs and problems of the diverse Hmong American community across the United States, with a particular emphasis on felt needs and problems. Felt needs and problems are defined as needs and problems "perceived by individuals experiencing the problem, may be equated with want and are phenomenological in character" (Cox, Erlich, Rothman & Tropman, 1984, p. 9). Taken from this perspective, among the problems and needs discussed in this paper are those that were identified by key informants or members of the Hmong American community, who live in the community and are well informed of the acute issues experienced by their fellow co-ethnics.

Felt needs and problems, in addition to other needs, are very important issues for Hmong community gatekeepers, social workers and service providers to know and understand, in order to effectively work with a particular community (Cox, et al. 1984). The phenomena identified in this exploratory paper are intended to provide a departure point for researchers undertaking future relevant studies of social issues important to the Hmong community.

**Introduction**

In the 1980s, Hmong Americans had a very high unemployment rate (Yang, D & North, 1988), experienced many acculturation problems (Sherman, 1985), and were among the poorest and most passive Asian Americans. In some areas, social workers described the Hmong American experience as the worst case situation among recent immigrant and refugee groups (Sherman, 1985). This led this author, in 1999, to broadly explore the successes, felt needs and problems of the Hmong American community.

To gain insight on issues and felt needs of the Hmong American community, this author did several things: tapped into the Hmong American network by talking to key informants, attended group discussions, and reviewed available literature on Hmong acculturation<sup>i</sup>. Additionally, the author attended the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Hmong National Conferences in 1999 and 2001. To conduct the above-mentioned activities, the researcher also spent the summer of 1999 touring the Hmong communities in California, Oregon, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Nevada.

To get needed data for this paper, the author used two of the many approaches to community needs assessment. These two approaches involve key informants and group discussion. In their discussion on related to the selection of needs assessment approaches, Warheit, Bell and Schwab (1984) described the “key informant approach” as

Research activity based on information secured from those in the area who are in a position to know the community’s needs and utilization patterns. Therefore, the selection of a key informant is based on the individual’s knowledge of the community, its people and their needs, and the patterns of services" (p. 41).

The key informant can provide information based on his/her expertise, experience, and perspective. This approach was selected because of the nature of the Hmong American community, in which there are many networks and gatekeepers. This methodology can be used to tap into the network by going to the key Hmong individuals or professionals, who have collected information on their own community, or have worked very closely with members of the community, and are in the position to know the needs of their communities.

Data collected from group discussions is one of many approaches used by community and social workers to assess neighborhood or community needs (Warheit, et al. 1984). Discussing the use of this approach to diagnose community needs, Warren and

Warren (1984, p. 36) state “group discussions are fantastic ways to cover a lot of territory quickly.” Community social workers utilize this approach, in addition to others, to gather data from neighborhood meetings, community gatherings and other similar events for community needs assessment. In this study, the group was usually comprised of many individuals from diverse backgrounds who could provide diverse perspectives on the needs in the Hmong community. This approach was selected for the study, in part, to balance with the key informant approach, and in part to meet the unique cultural practice of Hmong Americans. When a Hmong visitor comes to town, Hmong Americans of that community usually get together to do small talk and inquire about information. They share food, information, and ideas. As such, group discussion is an appropriate approach to use for a Hmong American community needs assessment.

The felt needs and problems discussed in this study are presented from the perspective of Hmong Americans. Perspective, history and culture are three major aspects at the core of interdisciplinary ethnic studies. Presentation of ethnic experience from the ethnic group’s perspective is what makes ethnic studies unique and meaningful. From this aspect, Fong and Shinagawa (2000) stated, “one way of centering the Asian American experience within the broader American experience is to review the dominant literature on race, and ethnic relations from an Asian perspective” (p.3). Fong and Shinagawa used the theoretical frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism, Structural Functionalism, and Social Conflict to frame Asian American experience from an Asian American view. In the first part of this paper, the felt needs and problems of Hmong-Americans are discussed from a Hmong perspective and limited in consideration to migration, adaptation, accommodation, conflict, social interaction, and diversity within

the Hmong American community. Toward this end, this paper is framed within two methodological approaches of community needs assessment: key informant and group discussion. In the latter part of the study, the literature is reviewed related to Hmong acculturation needs and problems to add another dimension to an analysis of documented needs and problems of the Hmong American community.

### **Key Informant Approach**

During this author's visits to many Hmong American communities, unstructured interviews were conducted with each local community's selected elders, bilingual/bicultural professionals, students, and staff of Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association. The unstructured interview is rather like an informal discussion on issues related to needs, problems, and successes of the Hmong American community. The author believes that unstructured interviews are most appropriate for this particular cultural group as it is customary in the Hmong community to begin discussions with a small talk. The small talk usually includes the inquiry of information about health and family, and perspectives on developments and progress in the local Hmong American community. The small talk may last a half an hour to an hour or more, depending upon the participants involved. Those who know each other well and are well informed of contemporary issues might have more information to share and to inquire about.

This author began the study with an explanation of the purpose of his visit, and because of the author's unique position in the Hmong American community, many elders, students and professionals were willing to share information while also inquiring about information from the author. While conducting this study, the author met with individuals from many walks of life. Furthermore, the author talked to many elected

Hmong American officials, including Neal Thao, member of the Board of Education of the St Paul Public Schools, Joe Bee Xiong, a former member of the City Council of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and Choua Lee, former member of the Board of Education of St. Paul Public Schools. Furthermore, the author met with many Hmong American entrepreneurs, computer engineers, community workers, academicians, workers, community leaders, and elders.

### **Group Discussion**

In addition to utilizing a key informant approach, the author attended many gatherings and information sharing groups. Many of these events were organized for the author to meet with community members, while at other events the author was invited to attend as a guest. As a general rule at these settings, the author made an introduction and explained the purpose of the visit. Some groups were composed of diverse participants; other groups were made up of young professionals and students. One of the many discussion groups organized in Detroit was made up of several machinists, a community leader, and two unemployed persons who had just moved to the city from California. This particular group lived in the inner city of Detroit and had just begun to talk about buying houses, problems with teenagers, and the demands of their daily lives. Their felt needs focused mostly on poverty, family conflict, youth gangs, and neighborhood safety. In Las Vegas, the author met with two Hmong men who shared their perspectives on the status of Hmong Americans in the local metropolitan area. As of 1999, there were approximately 100 Hmong in Las Vegas, but because of the lack of networks and Hmong organizations, they have not been able to come together as a group. Moreover, many of the local Hmong residents had to work and were not available to meet with the author.

Another example of the group discussions involved in this study is one of several gatherings the author attended in the Twin Cities of St. Paul/Minneapolis, Minnesota. This particular gathering was organized for the author to meet with Hmong-origin participants, who included a school administrator and his wife, a former member of the Metropolitan Council (Twin Cities) and Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and his wife, a medical doctor, three lawyers, a law office manager, an anthropologist, a teacher, and a pharmacist. The gathering lasted about three hours and the group discussed issues, including family, health, mental health, leadership, political participation, social and family problems, Hmong youth, Hmong elders, and strategies to overcome Hmong needs and problems.

The author took notes from these key informant interviews and group discussions and then categorized them into more groups of specific issues and needs as well as successes. In this paper, the author only lists and discusses those felt needs and problems frequently mentioned by key informants and within group discussions.

### **General Observations on Hmong American Ethnic Identity, Community Development, and Progress**

Through the utilization of key informants, group discussions, and a literature review, it was discerned that Hmong Americans may now be found to live in more than 40 states, and with an estimated nationwide population in the U.S. of a bit more than 200,000<sup>ii</sup>. Approximately 70,000 Hmong live in the Twin Cities of St. Paul/Minneapolis, which has recently replaced Fresno as the largest Hmong concentration in the country<sup>iii</sup>. Fresno is now second with a population of more than 20,000, decreasing from a community estimate of 35,000 in 1995. This shifting of population is the result of Hmong Americans' Third Migration, which involved Hmong moving out of California in

the late 1990s. Many Hmong have moved out of Central California cities to Minnesota, Wisconsin and other mid-western states to find viable employment and a safe social environment for their families.

The Hmong American community is not a geographical or ecological system community, but rather an ethnic and cultural community without a geographical boundary. It is a community undergoing the process of bicultural/bilingual socialization. Hmong Americans brought with them their unique cultural, historical and oppressed minority experiences that have no exact parallel with any prior ethnic immigrant group. They have a long history of being a minority within Asia, and do not exactly resemble the early or the post 1965 Asian immigrants to America. They came from a pre-literate society and must adapt to America from the very bottom up (Yang, K. 2001).

After more than two challenging decades, the majority of Hmong youth in many cities have now identified themselves as Hmong Americans, emphasizing their ethnic and cultural identity as a combination of Hmong and American. Boshier (1997) studied Hmong American students' self-perception of their identity, and found that the majority of Hmong students in her study identified themselves as Hmong Americans, and that these students have a strong desire to be Hmong. This finding reflects a new desire in the Hmong American community to take the best of both the Hmong and American cultures. There is a newly emerging Hmong American linguistic and cultural identity, which deserves further research attention. Inui (1998) studied the Hmong in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and found that the Hmong have acculturated to the community, gradually becoming Hmong Americans. Her findings also indicate that most Hmong do not have any desire to permanently return to Laos. Duchon (1997) conducted an ethnographic

study of the Hmong in Georgia and found that the Hmong adapt well economically and socially to Georgia, despite the lack of social and mutual support services. Robinson, Freaks, Schema and Heu (1999) studied Hmong teenagers' self-reported HIV/STD knowledge, attitudes, and risk behaviors, and found that Hmong teenagers in the sample have a high level of knowledge and a low level of risky behaviors. Gendler (2000) reported for the Minneapolis Star Tribune that there has been an explosion of Hmong homeownership in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, along with increasing evidence of a growing Hmong middle class who have purchased homes in the price range of \$300,000 to \$500,000.

In the realm of education, teachers in one study rated Hmong young people to be more cooperative, self-controlled, and presenting fewer classroom behavior problems compared to other groups of students (Mueller, 1996). Hmong students of parents who retain more Hmong culture appear to have higher educational achievement (Vang, 1998). McNall, Dunnigan and Mortimer (1994) studied Hmong students in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis and found that Hmong students generally have higher educational aspirations than non-Hmong students, and place a greater emphasis on education. Yang, (2000a) noted that the Hmong American community had earned more than 120 doctorates, and Hmong students were enrolled in many prestigious American universities, including Harvard, Yale and Stanford.

### **Diversity in Local Hmong-American Communities**

Within the Hmong American community, there are many local and regional Hmong American communities, such as the Hmong community in Fresno, the Twin Cities of St. Paul/Minneapolis, Detroit, Portland, Wausau, WI, and so on. There is



diversity among all, and within each of these Hmong American communities. For example, the Fresno Hmong community is quite different from those found in St. Paul, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Las Vegas. The Fresno Hmong community is influenced by Fresno's economy and social-political environment. For example, the Fresno economy, which is based on agriculture, has strongly influenced the experiences of local Hmong. There are basically two types of employment in the Fresno area: high and low skilled jobs (Ranard, 1988). Very few Hmong qualify to apply for the high skilled jobs, and they are forced to compete with other minority groups for the low skilled and seasonal jobs. Many Hmong in the Central Valley of California have turned to farming, but their slash-and-burn agricultural skills have not been compatible with agribusiness in Fresno. Those Hmong who want to survive in farming have had to start where the early Chinese and Japanese left off in earlier decades: growing strawberries and other specialty crops, such as lemon grass, Bok Choy, Daikon, and so on.

The Hmong community in Georgia has evolved into an almost Hmong Christian community and they are reportedly well adjusted to Georgia, despite the lack of available government social services (Duchon, 1998). According to key informants, the Hmong in Michigan have taken a different approach to earning returns from the American free market system. They own and operate more than 100 restaurants, and make use of their diasporic multicultural heritage by offering in their restaurants American, Chinese and Thai foods. Conversely, in Washington State, according to informants, the Hmong are involved primarily in the flower business. They have learned to grow and sell flowers, an industrial sector with which they had no familiarity before coming to Washington. Many

Hmong residing in the growing communities in North Carolina own and operate egg and poultry farms.

There is also considerable diversity within every Hmong American community. An example is the Fresno Hmong community, which Hmong have spread throughout the city and have become employed in many sectors of the Fresno labor force. Yang (1995) states that the Hmong have dispersed to many parts of the city, ranging from the well to do northeast Fresno to the economically and socially depressed downtown and other areas, such as “sin city” and “chemical city”. Moreover, the Fresno Hmong are employed in various professions, including university teaching, medicine, dentistry, engineering, anthropology, business enterprises, fast food services, and farming (Yang, 2000b). Yang,(1997) studied Hmong men in Fresno and found that based on their outlook and adjustment to their new lives, they can be categorized into three groups, including past oriented, present oriented, and future oriented. The above evidence from a variety of sources indicates that members of the Hmong American community, like other communities, have become increasingly diverse in outlook, economic and social status, and political opinion.

Although each local Hmong American community may have developed some of its own characteristics, all of them also hold many things in common. They all share the continuity of attempting to preserve the perceived best features of the Hmong language and culture, while they are also in the ongoing process of developing a new Hmong American culture. They have in many ways become Hmong Americans, preserving intrinsic elements of their culture while adopting many America cultural mores and customs.

### **Felt Needs and Problems**

The author's informants and discussion group participants tend to agree that while the Hmong American community has achieved much, there are certain serious felt needs experienced by many Hmong and considerable challenges still ahead for the community. They mentioned many needs and problems, and some were identified more often than others. Those felt needs and problems often mentioned may be grouped and categorized into seven major categories. They are listed below:

1. Family conflicts
2. Youth delinquency
3. Generation gap
4. Poverty
5. Health and mental health
6. Education
7. Lack of know-how, and accessibility to information and resources.

Issues most mentioned as very pressing needs include family conflicts, youth delinquency, health and mental health. The small talk with an individual key informant or group often began with life stories related to family conflict, disputes due to divorce or adultery, youth delinquency, and health. Health and medical problems have recently become one of the most talked about topics. Hmong Americans have developed terms and language to identify many illnesses not commonly known to them prior to their resettlement in the United States. Hmong terms, such as Taw Vwm (crazy foot = gout), Tes Vwm (crazy hand = gout), Ntshav Qab Zib (sweet blood = Diabetes), Ntshav Siab (blood high = hypertension) have emerged during the last decade, and are now commonly

used. The Hmong individual key informants and groups that this author met rarely brought up the issues of discrimination and prejudice as pressing needs and problems, although these important issues continue to be confronted by many Hmong Americans. It appears that Hmong see concerns pertaining to the family as the most pressing issues.

### **Literature review on Needs and Problems of the Hmong American community**

With assistance from Laura Boyer, Librarian of California State University, Stanislaus, and Anne Frank, Librarian of University of California, Irvine, the researcher was able to locate many books and articles related to Hmong acculturation in addition to those already within his considerable personal collection. The literature indicates both considerable achievements and ongoing felt needs within the Hmong American community. A summary of group needs and problems commonly presented in the literature are presented below:

**Family conflict:** Although no specific identified study mentioned family problems among Hmong Americans as a pressing issue, many articles in the news media reported cases of tragic family violence within Hmong American communities across the United States. Many of these cases have been the result of family related conflicts and problems. For example, on September 29, 1999, a Fresno court found a Hmong American man guilty of slaying his wife's lover (Lopez, 1998). The same year, a Hmong man in Sacramento, who was not happy with his wife, and his life, killed his five children and then himself (Warren, 1999). On August 22, 2000, Maria Heu was found shot to death in her home in St. Paul, Minnesota, and her husband, Joseph Heu was arrested and charged with the homicide (Donovan, 2000, September 4). The couple had separated for about a year prior to this tragic incident. A month later, a 34 year old Hmong American

man in Broomfield, Colorado, shot his wife three times and then turned his gun on himself. Reportedly, the couple were separated due, in part, to their cultural differences, which were described as resulting from the fact that the wife was more Americanized than the husband, and, also in part, due to their disagreement on a decision to move the family back to California (Huntley, 2000). In 2001, Youa Lee of St. Paul stabbed her husband to death for his infidelity and bigamy (Allan, H., 2002, September 22). These tragic incidents present evidence of increased problems and conflicts within Hmong American families.

**Generation Gap:** In the realm of the generation gap, Rick and Forward (1992) found that young Hmong perceived themselves to be more acculturated than their parents, suggesting a gap between parents and children. Parker (1996) studied Southeast Asian elders (including Hmong), and found that many elders feared a loss of status roles, ways of life and culture within their families. Since 1998, eight Hmong teens have killed themselves, accounting for nearly half of all teen-suicides in Fresno (Ellis, A.D., 2002, August 11). These cases might have stemmed from many factors, including the generation gap in Fresno Hmong families and a lack of school counselor and mental health services for Hmong youth.

**Youth Gangs:** While most Hmong community leaders believe that the number of Hmong youth gangs are decreasing, youth gangs continue to exist in the Hmong American community. For example, the Associated Press reported in October 1999, that there were 40 gangs operating in Minnesota alone. Hmong youth gangs, however, have many conflicting characteristics. In February 1999, a judge in Fresno sentenced a leader in gang rapes to 86 years (The Fresno Bee, 1999, 19 February). In early October 1999,

four Hmong girls from out of state were abducted at gunpoint and held for more than two weeks in Detroit. A dozen Hmong boys and young men in Detroit repeatedly raped them (The Associated Press, 1999). In November 1999, the Sheboygan police suspected Hmong and other Asian gangs were making money by selling drugs and guns (Ingersol, 1999). On the other hand, Detective Marv Wong of the Fresno Police Department stated that “the Hmong are hard-working, honest people. Their kids joined gangs for a sense of identity and respect, but there was no organized criminal network. Just street level stuff”(Emery, 1999).

**Poverty:** In the area of poverty, the 1990 Census, for example, indicated that 65 percent of Hmong Americans were unemployed, and more than 60 percent lived below the poverty line. In recent years, the unemployment and welfare participation rate has decreased rapidly. In Wisconsin, for example, the rate of welfare participation among the Hmong dropped from 77 percent to 12 percent between 1987 and 1997 according to one study (Schaefer, 2000). Unfortunately, because of the low wage earnings and lack of education, employment for many Hmong has not translated into self-sufficiency. Consequently, many of them have continued to live in poverty. Chung and Bemak (1996) found that those Hmong who remained on welfare actually reported a higher median income than those who were no longer receiving public assistance.

**Health and Medical Problems:** Kunstadter (2000), who studied the Hmong in Fresno and Central Valley of California, found that mortality among Hmong children has been reduced, but lifestyle changes have led to increases in chronic diseases and other medical problems. He observed that Hmong in his study had high rates of hypertension, obesity, and self-reported illnesses. His analysis of death certificates indicated that death

due to cardiovascular disease and violence had increased. Johnson (1995) studied Hmong diabetic patients and found that these patients have experienced multiple diseases unrelated to their diabetes.

**Health Care:** Health care is another issue facing the Hmong American community. Kunstadter (2000) observed that the criteria many Hmong use to select health care providers tends to be based on their linguistic needs rather than the expertise or competency of available providers. Fadiman (1997), in her work, *the Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, portrayed occasional incidents of serious cultural conflict between a Hmong family and health care providers. In many cases well-documented throughout the literature, Hmong patients and their U.S. trained health care providers possess different health belief systems (Barrett, Shadick, Schilling & Spencer, 1998), leading to potential barriers and mistrust.

**Mental Health:** Chung and Bemak (1996) studied the effects of welfare status on psychological distress among Southeast Asian refugees, and found that, unlike other Southeast Asian groups, those Hmong who had stopped receiving welfare were more likely to report depression and anxiety than those who continued. The findings of these researchers also indicated that Hmong were more likely to report having experienced depression compared to other Southeast Asian groups. Nicholson (1997) studied the direct and indirect effects of pre-emigration and postmigration factors on mental health status among 447 Southeast Asian refugees (including Hmong) and found that stress created by acculturation was the strongest overall predictor of mental health.

Mouanoutoua, Brown, Cappelletty, and Levine (1991) observed that important factors that serve to buffer Hmong against depression include the quality of available social

support and years of education, but not the length of time spent in the United States. In his written testimony to the Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Kundstadter (2000) indicated that Hmong have high rates of mental health problems, and that death due to violence in the Hmong community has increased.

In 1999, a Hmong American man in Sacramento killed his five children and then himself. It was documented that this individual had experienced difficulty with cultural adjustment in his family and in his job (Warren, 1999). A year later, another Hmong American man in Sacramento walked to the Office of Social Security Administration and shot the security guard. He had been known in the Hmong community as having had a long history of mental illness as a result of his refugee and acculturation experience. Similar cases have been well-documented in other Hmong American communities. The media focused considerable attention on a case involving a Hmong mother in Minnesota who strangled her six children to death (Taus, 1998). After serving two years of her 50-year prison term, this mother began to recover from her depression, and disclosed past experiences that might have triggered this tragedy. In her story published by the Hmong Times (2000), she described her tragic life as having started with the experience of growing up with an abusive stepmother and weak father, and enduring countless physical and emotional abuses at a very young age. She ran away from home at the age of 8, and was raped at the age of 12. She recalled her young adult life as a very sad one; she encountered difficulties and tragic events one after another, include her escape from Laos to Thailand, miserable conditions in the refugee camp, as well as later mistreatment by her mother in-law and a relationship with an uncaring, abusive and womanizing husband.



**Discrimination.** Inui (1998) studied the Hmong in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and found that Hmong high school students had negative attitudes toward being involved in activities with Hmong peers. The study of Hein (2000) in Wisconsin indicated that Hmong had experienced similar types of personal discrimination to those that have been well-documented as part of the African American experience in the United States. Goodkind (1999) observed that discrimination is one of many barriers that limit Hmong's involvement in the multi-ethnic community in Lansing, Michigan. In 2001, the home of a Hmong family in Manitowoc, Wisconsin was set on fire and destroyed by a group of young white men (Schuldt, G. 2001, October 23). In May 2001, three Hmong were beaten by a young white male in the Chico, California community. The police subsequently only charged the perpetrator for public drunkenness. A year later, a Hmong fruit stand was burned down in Chico, California (Cameron, E., 2002, May 8).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The first issue that should be discussed here is that the felt needs and community achievements identified in this paper may be too broad and superficially encompassing as the Hmong American community is now very diverse. Each local Hmong American community might have slightly different needs and successes. Diversity in the growing Hmong-American community is a topic requiring extensive additional study. A second issue stems from a consideration of possible reasons key informants and group discussion participants tend to focus on needs and problems related to the Hmong family as the most pressing felt needs in the community. This might stem from the Hmong perception of the family. The Hmong see the family as a primary and basic social unit of Hmong society (Yang D.1992), and it has been a strength of Hmong culture from the past to the

present. The Hmong have survived from many thousand years past to the present, due in part to their strong family units. Moreover, the divorce rate in traditional Hmong society is very low, family conflict usually becomes a priority of elders and tends to be dealt with quickly to avoid major problems. After two challenging decades in America, Hmong Americans are experiencing an increasing rate of divorce and family conflict. Many Hmong believe that the family can defend itself and cope with external forces and influences, but not internal conflict. Internal conflict is like a chronic illness within one's own body and it makes one weak and ill. When one is weak and ill, everything will fall apart.

The last issue to be discussed here is discrimination. Hmong American informants and groups rarely mentioned discrimination and prejudice as one of the community's most pressing needs and problems. This does not imply that Hmong Americans do not experience discrimination. They have a very long history of being an oppressed minority within Asia, where they have experienced worse discrimination than that encountered in America. When asked directly, many young Hmong professionals will discuss their experience with discrimination, but they rarely make it a pressing issue. In the United States, the Hmong, like others, can address their concerns of discrimination, and take discrimination-related cases to court, if needed. For example, 32 Hmong families were illegally evicted from their apartments in Fresno in 1982, and these tenants fought back in a very American way. They took the landlord to court and the case was settled out of court (Rios, 1989). In many other countries where the Hmong reside, addressing discrimination through the legal system would not have been possible. Another possible reason that Hmong Americans rarely talk about their experience of

discrimination is that their priorities continue to center around their basic needs, such as food, clothes, shelter, safety, family and community. Consequently, other issues have become secondary. It is likely that Hmong Americans will attempt to more fully address issues related to discrimination and prejudice in the years to come when their basic needs are no longer their pressing issues of priority, and other barriers, such as those tied to language and culture have largely been overcome.

In concluding this paper, I would like to say that the felt needs and problems of Hmong Americans are very broad and might require further study to get to other specific needs, causes of problems, and additional issues. On a positive note, the Hmong Americans' age-old wisdom and spirit of independence have, in many ways, empowered them to adapt well in many aspects of their new lives in America. But the gap between Hmong and American cultures is very large, and it is beyond the coping skills of most Hmong to quickly bridge the gap. Their minority experience in Asia might have served to both help and hinder to their adjustment to a new life in America. Being a minority for many thousands of years, they have developed a strong adaptability, flexibility, and sense of self-reliance. These qualities have been helpful in the process of adapting to life in America. Moreover, Hmong have not had to learn to be a minority. On the other hand, being a minority for many thousands of years has denied many thousands of Hmong accessibility to resources, information, technology, education, and political power. Consequently, they were unprepared to quickly adapt to life in America. While Hmong Americans have enjoyed many success stories achieved during the last two decades, there are many problems and barriers that they must overcome at the turn of the century. Their journey to becoming American will continue.

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ii The 2000 US Census counted the Hmong American population as little more than 186,000. The 200,000 comes from the estimate of many Hmong American community leaders.

iii The 2000 US Census counted the Hmong in the Twin Cities to be more than 40,000.