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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ASSIMILATION VARIABLES ON THE
LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN THE MISSOULA,
MONTANA HIGH SCHOOLS

By


Patricia M. Ingram

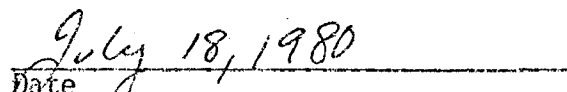
B.A., University of Montana, 1978

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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1980

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Dean, Graduate School


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ABSTRACT

Ingram, Patricia Mae, M.A.

1980 Anthropology

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ASSIMILATION VARIABLES ON THE LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN THE MISSOULA, MONTANA HIGH SCHOOLS (pp).

Director: Frank B. Bessac *F.B.*

Lao Hmong refugees settling in Missoula, Montana are being subjected to acculturative and assimilative forces within the local high schools. This study examines the reactions of the schools and the Hmong to these forces through interviews with administrators, teachers and students and observation of classes and Hmong students completed over a four month period. The high school personnel have reacted to the presence of the Hmong by establishing an English-as-a-second-language program to teach one or two hours of English per day to the Hmong and by mainstreaming the refugees in order to give them as much exposure to American ways and to English speakers as possible. Problems arising are that the Hmong are being placed into high school level classes without a comparable educational history, some never learned to read or write in any language; the Hmong have minimal English skills and do not understand class material; prejudice is increasing among students which inhibits communication and acceptance; little information on the Hmong has been given to teachers or administrators so that their abilities to interpret Hmong student behavior is limited; and students are promoted from classes primarily on their attendance not their completion of class requirements or comprehension of class material of funding and fears of discrimination charges against the school district.

The Hmong students are approaching school with traditional expectations and values about education. They want an education in order to get jobs and to maintain as much of their traditional life and organization in the U.S. as possible. The Hmong students demonstrate an inclination to try less if subjects get too hard. They believe they are either lucky or unlucky and this cannot be changed by the individual through work or anything else.

Conclusions of the study are that the Hmong will not be assimilated. They are actively trying to create a Hmong community to reinforce their identity as Hmong. Increasing prejudice and the inadequate educations the Hmong are receiving set them apart from the rest of the Missoula community.

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CHAPTER I - Introduction

The presence of Lao Hmong refugees in Missoula, Montana allows for initial studies of the process of acculturation, i.e., the change in cultures brought about by continuous first-hand contact between two or more cultures. The Hmong have been in the United States for five years during which time they have made certain adjustments to American culture in their style of dress, housing, food, language and others. These changes are not considered unusual, but, in fact, are expected by the dominant society. It is expected that, in time, the Hmong will become "Americans", sharing the values, norms and behavior of native Americans. If the Hmong reach the point where there is no longer any difference between them and Americans, either in their outward behavior or in their primary relationships, they can be said to be assimilated (Gordon 1975:84-110). In Missoula, the view of the natives is that the Hmong will be 'melted' or assimilated (Missoulia 6/17/80:15). This thesis is a study of the attitudes toward the assimilation of the Hmong, and the extent to which this can be expected based upon the conditions pertaining to the Hmong in the Missoula public high schools. The research objectives are to: 1) discern the reactions of the Missoula, Montana

school system, emphasizing the high schools, to the presence of Lao Hmong refugees and the effects and implications of these reactions; 2) discern the reactions of the Lao Hmong refugees to the Missoula, Montana school situation; and 3) make some predictions about the assimilation of the Hmong in Missoulian society.

Assimilation, the final phase of acculturation, is defined as

"the process through which groups that live in a common territory but are of heterogeneous backgrounds reach a broad-based cultural solidarity that ripens into national unity. It involves homogeneity of schemes of imagery and goes deeper than merely accepting material traits" (Winick 1977:46).

Complete assimilation, as an ideal model, requires that: 1) the new ethnic groups take on the cultural patterns of the host society (acculturation), 2) the ethnic group throws off any sense of peoplehood based on its previous nationality, 3) the ethnic group avoids on moral and practical grounds the formation of any communal organizations made up principally of the ethnic group, 4) the ethnic group changes its religion to that of the host society, 5) ethnic group members are accepted into social cliques, clubs and institutions at various class levels, 6) the ethnic group intermarries freely and frequently with the host society, 7) the ethnic group encounters no prejudice or discrimination, and 8) the ethnic group raises no value conflict issues in public life (Gordon 1964:69).

Milton M. Gordon, a sociologist, has distinguished seven different stages of assimilation (Table I). These he divided into two major types of assimilation, cultural or behavioral assimilation (acculturation), and structural assimilation, in which the ethnic group enters into primary group relations with the host society. Gordon stated that, "once structural assimilation has occurred, either simultaneously with or subsequent to acculturation, all of the other types of assimilation will naturally follow" (Gordon 1964:81). Total assimilation results in the disappearance of the ethnic group as a separate entity and "the evaporation of its distinctive values" (Gordon 1964:81).

The United States has traditionally prided itself on being a melting pot of distinct ethnic groups and immigrants. Studies of Native Americans (Zintz 1963, Spindler 1944, Black Hills 1975, et.al.) and Chinese-Americans (Lee 1960, Weiss 1974, Sih 1976, et.al.) show that for all minority populations assimilation has not occurred. They may adopt outward or secondary appearances of assimilation but often retain their primary relations within the ethnic group (Gordon 1975:84-110, Weiss 1974:13). The major concept behind the notion of a melting pot is that 'a complete mixture of the various stocks (is reached) through inter-marriage' (Gordon 1964:124) or what Gordon calls marital assimilation. Marital assimilation assumes the acceptance of ethnic group members into the host society's cliques,

TABLE I. THE ASSIMILATION VARIABLES ¹.

SUBPROCESS OR CONDITION	TYPE OR STAGE OF SIMILATION	SPECIAL TERM
Change of Cultural patterns to those of host society.	Cultural or Behavioral	Acculturation
Large scale entrance into cliques, clubs and institutions of host society, on primary group level.	Structural assimilation	None
Large scale intermarriage.	Marital assimilation	Amalgamation
Development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society.	Identificational assimilation	None
Absence of prejudice.	Attitude receptional assimilation	None
Absence of discrimination.	Behavior receptional	None
Absence of value.	Civic assimilation	None

¹ Gordon, M.M.
1964 Assimilation in American Life: New York: Oxford University Press, 71

institutions and clubs, or, in other words, structural assimilation. As stated above, if structural assimilation occurs, then total assimilation will take place.

The ideal of America as a melting pot requires that new ethnic groups be totally assimilated. What most often happens in the United States, however, is a form of pluralism, called structural pluralism, in which "primary group contacts between members of various ethnic groups are held to a minimum, even though secondary contacts on the job, on the civic scene, and in other areas of impersonal contact may abound" (Gordon 1964:235). Regardless of differences which may exist between a people's primary and secondary relations they are often viewed as either assimilated or on their way to becoming assimilated. The belief that all immigrants are scheduled to become assimilated is an attitude which can be identified within Missoula and its school system (Missoulia 6/17/80). School administrators and the Hmong elders view the school system as a major force in moving the Hmong into the mainstream of American life. Notions of the future assimilation of ethnic groups in America influence the way the schools in Missoula view their role in educating the Hmong, the types of programs they institute and the manner in which these programs are implemented. Though the Hmong may have changed their secondary behavior they may not have changed their traditional strategies to meet those of the school system (Weiss 1974:246),

e.g., the schools want the Hmong educated and Americanized, the Hmong want to be educated and to be good Americans, but they also wish to retain their identity as Hmong (Interviews, Cherpao 6/20/80).

One of the prerequisites of total assimilation is that discrimination and prejudice are absent. Discrimination is a process, an act or a practice of discriminating categorically rather than individually (Webster 1977:326). Prejudice is preconceived judgment or opinion (Webster 1977:907). The difference between discrimination and prejudice is that prejudice is more feeling and bias whereas discrimination is the overt demonstration of prejudicial feelings (Santiago 1959:8-9). Studies of Native American students have shown that prejudice can take the forms of open hostility, indifference or intolerance. One attitude of white teachers toward Native American students is that they suffer from cultural deprivation. The student may be totally unfamiliar with concepts or objects which teachers assume all children know before they enter school. The teacher's prejudice may surface in the form of low expectations of the Indian's capabilities; she lowers the standards for the Indian student. Since she expects less of the Indian she demands less, and once they meet her expectations she does not push any further. The result is a feedback system in which the Indian is expected to do less, the standards are lowered to meet these expectations, the Indian does what is expected, which is less, thereby reinforcing the

teacher's original notion of inferiority in Indians.
(Black Hills, 1975).

Prejudice is generally thought of as negative, but it may also be an opinion in favor of someone or something. In the case of the Hmong, positive prejudice means exaggerating their good qualities and avoiding recognition of any shortcomings or inabilities. Harold R. Isaacs, as an example of positive prejudice, discussed the United States' view of the Chinese during the periods he labeled, 'The Age of Benevolence' (1905-1937) and, 'The Age of Admiration' (1936-1944). Isaacs concluded that Americans stereotype people as absolutes. These Chinese are often seen to have a sense of duality of the human spirit and experience. Americans view the Chinese according to one side of these dualities depending upon the circumstances of the times (Isaacs 1958:71).

This thesis delineates the present stage of assimilation of the Hmong and the factors resulting in this stage, and predicts future stages of assimilation as influenced by the high school environment.

The educational system was chosen as the focus of this study because the American educational system is the basic exponent of American values. A nation's educational system is based upon aims 'which reflect beliefs concerning the ideal type of individual behavior and the moral ways to foster the development of such an individual' (Bernier and Williams 1973:359). Thus, the school is the

institution created by complex societies to help the child and the adolescent to assume the roles expected of them when they reach adult status (Phonekeo 1975:92). Aside from the conscious efforts by the schools to teach proper American behavior, such as speaking English, dressing conventionally and adopting other American practices, there is another aspect of the educational system which emphasizes specific traits for success which mark the basic character of Americans. This side of the school system may or may not be explicit. The American school trains the student in the behavior, goals and attitudes which exemplify the American way of life. It teaches individual competitiveness, tolerance for delayed gratification and respect for and fear of authority (Postman 1979:35). Therefore, when the Hmong student enters school he/she is confronted with the values, norms and behavior he/she is expected to learn and internalize if he/she is to be assimilated into Missoulian and American society. This thesis concentrates on the Missoula public high schools because the high school students are the ones who are most immediately affected by the success or failure of the school situation to prepare them for future jobs and education, and whether this segment of Hmong society has, in accordance with the function of education, been assimilated. The schools are one of the first institutions in Missoula to deal with the refugees so their responses and impressions may be useful for other agencies involved with the Hmong, presently or in the future.

Methodology

The methods employed in this research are the standard qualitative methods traditionally used by anthropologists. These include interviews, participant observation, questionnaires and comparative materials. The research was not based on any one theoretical scheme nor was it a test of any one theory. Instead, it was a combination of ideas and information gathered from studies in the areas of culture conflict, belief systems, anthropology and education, culture and personality, and acculturation. The most valuable studies concerned Native American students in white administered schools, and acculturation studies of Chinese-Americans (Zintz 1963, Spindler 1955, Lee, 1960, Weiss 1974, et.al.). Though these studies could not be applied directly to the Hmong situation, they allowed for a basic conception of the items to be looked for in the behavior and attitudes of school personnel and Hmong students. No reference study was found which conformed with the adjustment of the Hmong students holding traditional folk knowledge to the concepts and information presented in the classroom, e.g., the earth is round. The Hmong are traditionally a non-literate people; only in recent years were two alphabets devised for the Hmong language. Few of the students can read Hmong though some are able to read, write and speak several other languages which may include Lao, Thai, Vietnamese and French. After the presentation of two programs to the English-as-a-

second-language (ESL) classes at the high school level, the Hmong questioned the speaker at great length about the nature of the world as Americans see it and how we know what we know. Several students expressed doubts as to the validity of certain facts which contradict their earlier training. I think that when the material in class contradicts Hmong beliefs the students must deal with this, either by rejecting what they learn at home, by rejecting what they learn in class, or by integrating the two. The full extent of this adjustment could not be discerned in this research, but an hypothesis about the general approach of the Hmong to what they learn in class, as opposed to that which they learn at home, will be developed.

The research has been divided into three major topics. The first focuses on the history of Hmong culture, immigration, education and their views on education. The second focuses on the Missoula school system, the organization of the schools, their goals towards the Hmong, programs and the predicted results of these factors as they relate to the Hmong. Data was gathered over a five-month time period through a series of individual interviews with principals (4), district administrators (3), teachers (12), school counselors and Title I teachers (8), ESL teachers (4), state advisors (1), and the local social worker, who has been assigned to place new arrivals into the schools. In addition to these, I attended a two-day workshop on Asian Refugees organized by the Western Montana Teachers' Center in Missoula,

Montana in May, 1980. Information gathered in Missoula was compared to that gained from eight interviews in Spokane, Washington which has a similar number of refugees, who have been arriving during the same period as those arriving in Missoula.

The third major topic of this research centers around the Hmong students' reaction to the schools' structure and substance. The data was gathered through observation of Hmong students in class, participation as an ESL aide for two months at five hours per week, and from responses to programs presented by me to ESL classes, questionnaires and interviews (33). Additional data and insights came from Susanne Bessac, a local anthropologist who has worked with and studied the Hmong in Missoula for several years and who is a member of the Lao Family Community, Inc., board of administrators.

The questionnaires were given to the high school students in the three higher levels of ESL who could read and understand the questionnaire (Appendix I). It involved questions dealing with their attitudes towards their classes, their progress, expectations of school and individual background information. This involved forty-nine of the sixty-five Hmong then present in the high school ESL program. During the months in which the research was carried out the population of refugees in the high schools increased from sixty-five in February to eighty-three in May, 1980.

The interviews involved eighteen students in these same three classes of ESL who were the most advanced in their English. I assumed that the data on the students' reactions to class information would be most accessible in students in the United States the longest and those who spoke the best English, as they no longer have to concentrate on just understanding the language and can discuss the subject matter presented to them in class. The data tended to support this hypothesis. To insure as little bias in the data as possible, a Hmong interpreter was used to interview a sample of twelve of the high school Hmong students who do not read or speak English well enough to have participated in the questionnaire. Hmong students included in this research were from two high schools, recent arrivals, as well as longer residents of Missoula; those with previous educational experience and those without previous schooling; and individuals from different Hmong surname groups and with different subgroup affiliations. In addition, three Hmong parents were interviewed about their impressions on the conditions in the schools and their expectations for the students. The participants were allowed to offer any written data in whatever language they could best express themselves, with the hope that this would allow for less contrived answers than if inhibited due to unfamiliarity with English. Only one individual gave an answer in any language other than English. The individuals interviewed for this research expressed the

wish to remain anonymous. Therefore, in accordance with these requests, any references will be cited simply as (Interview: Month/Year).

CHAPTER 2 - The Hmong

The Hmong have been an ethnic entity for many centuries, yet relatively little is known about the Hmong in comparison to many of the other Asian peoples. Reasons for this include the fact that few ethnographic accounts have been written on the Hmong and that historic references have been cursory and sporadic. Influencing this general absence of knowledge on the Hmong has been the traditional Hmong way of life and their non-literacy in the Hmong language. Due to social and historical factors, the Hmong have remained separate, if not isolated, from neighboring tribes and the dominant cultures around them in China and Indochina. Through this isolation they have been able to preserve their traditional culture longer than those tribes in closer contact with the Han Chinese or European powers. This is not to say that the Hmong culture has not changed or that the Hmong have not been influenced by the cultures with which they have come in contact. The last two hundred years have been punctuated by wars, rebellions and turmoil for the Hmong. Though they have avoided assimilation over the centuries they have been acculturated by many different peoples to varying degrees. In studying the Hmong, one finds evidence of close association with

Chinese, Man, Lolo and other Tibet-Burmese speakers, Tai speakers, early Christian missionaries, Vietnamese, Lao, French, Japanese, Mon-Khmer, Buddhists and American peoples in their folktales, religion, language and attitudes of the Hmong. Through these associations the Hmong became aware of abilities of these other cultures which they themselves did not possess. One of the most desired traits was literacy. Influenced by the status-conscious societies of China and Laos, the Hmong sought to raise their own status and to gain the power necessary to preserve their identity in the face of continuous pressures by dominant groups to subjugate and to Laoicize or Sinicize them. The Hmong responded to these pressures by the creation of various messianic movements, by rebelling militarily against their oppressors and by becoming educated. To compensate for their lower status the Hmong tell folktales which explain the absence of Hmong books; they became literate in other languages, which gave them higher status among neighboring tribes; they manipulated magical sources to gain knowledge and they sought an education wherever possible. This chapter will explore the concepts, attitudes and expectations of education which the Hmong refugees have brought to Missoula.

Historical Background

Hmong refugees from Laos began arriving in the Missoula and Hamilton areas of Montana in 1975. Previous to this several Hmong had come to Missoula as foreign

students. Others have continued to arrive over the years with the greatest influx occurring in the winter and spring of 1980. They are expected to continue arriving through 1980-1981. As of June 20, 1980, there were six hundred and seventy-eight (678) Hmong in Montana and sixty-eight (68) Vietnamese (Cherpao 6/20/80). The population of Hmong refugees in Montana is the third highest per capita in the United States. Hmong have settled in thirteen states with the greatest numbers in Orange County, California; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; and Missoula, Montana. In Missoula, one resident per one hundred is an Indochinese refugee (Great Falls Tribune 6/23/80).

Most of the Hmong in Indochina originally lived in southern China (LeBar 1964:63) migrating into Laos, Thailand and Vietnam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of the Hmong in Missoula remember stories their grandparents told of moving from China or Vietnam into Laos. By then they were already a traumatized people and their movement into Laos was not necessarily peaceful as they had killed women and children in Vietnam (LeBar 1964:73). At the turn of the century, "Flowery" Hmong sought mass conversion to Christianity in China as an escape from intolerable conditions (Pollard 1919). The Hmong, mentioned in the literature by the Chinese term Miao, which means rice-shoot (LeBar 1964-63), have been recognized in the literature as a distinct ethnic group for hundreds and

perhaps thousands of years (LeBar 1964:63, Vang Tou Fu 1978:10, Geddes 1976:3). They are mentioned in legendary Chinese history in the twenty-seventh century B.C. when their chieftain, Ch'ih-yu was supposedly defeated by the Yellow of Emperor of China in Honan province (Geddes 1976:3). They migrated southward, probably following the mountain ranges in order to locate and cultivate new lands for their dry rice, maize and vegetable crops, as is the custom among most swidden agriculturalists. The Hmong are also noted for their opium crops, but opium was not introduced to the Hmong until sometime around the Opium Wars of China in the 1800's. The movement south was also accelerated by the hostilities of their neighbors and the pressures from encroaching Chinese settlers.

In Indochina the Hmong managed to continue their traditional life ways though they were in contact, some of it hostile, with neighboring tribes. The Hmong made two incursions into the Red River Valley and the Mua family remembers a fight with a Mon-Khmer group before they settled in the Sam Nua area of Laos (S.L. Bessac, Personal Communication 6/80). The different tribal groups of Laos carried on their alliances and battles with each other without much intervention by the national governments. Until the middle of the twentieth century contact with the Hmong was not a priority of the Laos government but, by the end of World War II, the Hmong were involved in associations which would divide the Hmong as a people and

completely alter their traditional economy and way of life. The beginning of the change occurred with the Japanese occupation of Laos, with the change accelerating after 1945. The French gained control of Laos in 1893, which at that time was one of the most racially and politically complex areas in Southeast Asia. The Lao people made up forty-five percent of the population with the rest being Hmong, Mon-Khmer and Tai tribes in the north and about sixty different Mon-Khmer tribes in the south (McCoy 1970:75). There was little contact between the French and the Hmong as the French administered the Hmong through Tai and Lao intermediaries. Conflicts arose when the French attempted to collect a head tax resulting in Hmong rebellions in 1896 and 1919 (McCoy 1970:81).

When the French could not raise enough money from a head tax because the tribes would not cooperate, they tried to develop a government monopoly on the manufacture and sale of opium as a means of raising funds. Opium had been raised by the Hmong for both medicinal use and trade previous to this time. The French interest in acquiring opium promoted improved agricultural techniques among the Hmong, as well as closer contact with them (McCoy 1970:85). The province of Xieng Khouang, primarily inhabited by Hmong, was given a monopoly on legally grown opium. All of northern Laos grew opium for trade though only Xieng Khouang had the authorization to do so. The weakening of the French after their defeat by the Nazis in

1940 brought Indochina under Japanese control. In 1942 Vichi France and Japan shared control of Laos. The war cut off Indochina from its major opium sources in China, the Middle East and Burma as the Japanese used Indochina as a base for attacks on China (McCoy 1970:96). The result of this was that the Lao government began buying great amounts of opium from the Hmong to support the habits of the nation's opium addicts. Because of the large amounts of silver which the government paid to the Hmong for their opium, the Hmong began neglecting their food crops in order to concentrate on raising opium. The effects of this were malnutrition, starvation and conflicts amongst themselves and with the government (McCoy 1970:96).

In an effort to prevent any repetition of the 1919-1921 Hmong rebellion, the French created an autonomous Hmong district near the Plain of Jars centered at Nong Het. The district leader was a Hmong approved by the French. It was his duty to deliver the opium quota to the Lao chief who, in turn, delivered it to the French at Xieng Khouang City. By the late 1930's, the power at Nong Het was shared by members of the Lo clan, allied with the Luang Prabang based royal family, and members of the Ly clan, allied with the French and the Xiong Khouang royal family (McCoy 1970:97). Touby Lyfong, leader of the Lys, assisted the French resistance against the Japanese. This brought attention to the Hmong as guerrilla fighters which would be their function under the Pathet Lao and the CIA fifteen

years later. With the end of the war the Hmong were split in their loyalties between the French and the Lao Issara (forerunners of the Pathet Lao). Laos was declared independent in 1945, though the French remained in power through 1954. Hmong supporting a nationalist movement against the Royal Lao Government's (RLG) quasi-colonial status joined the Pathet Lao. In 1954 the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu by Viet-minh and Hmong forces. This battle resulted in a movement of Hmong from Vietnam into Laos bringing Vietnamized ideas with them, e.g., Yang Dao and his family migrated to Laos. Yang Dao was the first Hmong to receive a doctorate and is considered one of the Hmong's foremost intellectuals (Center for Applied Linguistics #15:45).

By 1960, members of the Lyfong family in Xiong Khouang had achieved high positions within the Laotian government. Another Hmong came into prominence in the Royal Lao Army; General Vang Pao fought first under the French and later as an ally of the American CIA. Part of Vang Pao's success rested on recruiting fellow Hmong tribesmen who became loyal to him. He respected their traditional leaders (in fact, the Vangs are allied with the Lys through marriage), and promised to improve their standing in Lao society. General Vang Pao and the CIA found each other in struggling against North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces in Northeast Laos. Vang Pao's ultimate motive appears to have been to establish an autonomous Hmong state in northern Laos (Branfman 1970:252).

The war intensified and, beginning in 1962, a population

relocation program was enacted to move people out of Pathet Lao zones. Since 1962 more than a half million people were relocated into areas controlled by the Royal Lao Government (Branfman 1970:151). The Sam-Thong-Long-Cheng area thirty miles southwest of the Plain of Jars was the major relocation site. By 1970, an estimated 250,000 Hmong and other tribal people had been relocated to Long Cheng and 50,000 to 100,000 others had been relocated to the west and northwest of that area (Branfman 1970:251).

The consequences of the Hmong involvement in the Vietnam war have been severe. Their losses of family members (30,000 casualties as of 1978) and property are astronomical (Vang Tou Fu 1979:96). Following the fall of the RLG and the withdrawal of American assistance, the Pathet Lao, under Vietnamese leadership, inaugurated an extermination campaign against the Hmong in Laos (Vang Tou Fu 1979:96). This is the reason for the emigration out of Laos into the camps of Thailand and from there to whatever country will receive them. With the fall of Laos in 1975, General Vang Pal bought a ranch near Missoula through his ties with the CIA, which had recruited smoke jumpers from the Missoula-based training school; this accounts for the interest in Missoula. The first refugees to Montana were those with close associations to high-ranking U.S. officials or those who were former employees of the U.S. Government. Because of their intense relations with the CIA, the Hmong brought with them to the U.S. a

sense of secrecy which manifests itself in the minimal information presented about themselves as a people. This sense of secrecy extends to the refugee organizations which hesitate to relay refugee statistics to the public for fear of inciting anti-refugee sentiment. The second wave of refugees consisted of those educated young men who could come ahead of their families, finish school and get jobs. The third major wave, arriving in 1980, consisted of the families of those already here and many of whom have been in refugee camps for up to four years.

Cultural Synopsis ✓

The Hmong traditionally lived in villages above three thousand feet in the mountains of Laos. They participated in a patrilocal extended family organization; they emphasized patrilineal descent, with the closest relations existing between brothers. Villages tended to consist of several hamlets composed of localized patrilineal kin groups. Villages were not permanent, as households moved from one village site to another in search of farm land or to be near relatives. Each household, composed of parents, unmarried children and married sons and families, was expected to be self-sufficient, raising whatever foodstuffs they required.

The Hmong did not have any overriding political structure. Decisions were made through common consent; if consent could not be reached, the dissatisfied parties moved their households to another village. The Hmong were

a collective of many different subgroups. These subgroups were designated by the Chinese according to characteristics of the costumes worn by the women, e.g., the Red, Flowery, Green, White and Magpie Hmong. Some of these subgroups, such as the White and the Green Hmong, who have settled in Missoula, speak differing dialects of Hmong. The Hmong recognize differences among themselves based on song styles which they usually see as localized (S.L. Bessac Personal Communication).

The Hmong extended household was the basic socio-economic and religious unit; polygyny was not uncommon. "Order and authority (were) maintained by respect for age, tempered by recognition of capacity" (Geddes 1976:73). The eldest male was recognized as the head of the house though, due to advanced age, he often performed as arbiter and left the active decision-making to males in their thirties or forties. This allowed for easy segmentation and migration of the household (Geddes 1976:74).

An individuals' enculturation in Hmong society emphasized cooperation, group identity, duty, loyalty to family, harmony with the world, and past, present and future world orientation (Hadas 1979:19). The Hmong were ancestor worshippers who assumed that animate and inanimate objects have souls or an essence with power to interact with other spirits independently of the original body. The Hmong of Missoula, for the most part, seem to have maintained much of their traditional belief system, although several

families have converted to Christianity. The Hmong are also making a conscious effort to retain their traditional family organization and value structure.

Educational Background

In Laos, an education traditionally meant Buddhist religious training. The Buddhist bonze was regarded as the best teacher of boys and the pagoda school or vat was the only formal education in Laos until the arrival of the French. In many rural villages education is still the traditional pagoda type (LeBar and Suddard 1963:78) and represents one of the many different educational systems to which the Hmong were exposed. Several Missoula Hmong attended the vat as regular students, while others took refuge with the monks as children when they were left destitute by the war (S.L. Bessac Personal Communication). Instruction in these schools is predominantly oral and emphasizes memory training, recitation and singing (LeBar and Suddard 1963:79). Further emphasis is given to phrases that seem charged with magic powers instead of gaining an understanding of the Pali words (Condominas 1970:20). Values which the Hmong were exposed to in the vat were respect for all life, understanding, which creates a profound tolerance, deep faith and individualism. "But very often the experience in the monastery also fosters indifference to others, disinterest, nonchalance---in short, ...a block to all real effort" (Condominas 1970:20). This ties in with the Hmong concept of luck. Some children are

born with a "good idea" while others are not. Those who do have good ideas find things to be easier for them and will be more successful than others who, because they do not have good ideas, are not expected to achieve as much and therefore do not have to work as hard. This notion is similar to the low expectation feedback cycle of Native Americans as discussed in Chapter I.

The wars in Laos brought many changes to the traditional Hmong lifestyle. Traditionally, the Hmong child learned what he/she needed to know as an adult by helping parents and from the stories and traditions told by the elders. Contact with the French and Americans provided educational opportunities for the Hmong. Touby Lyfong is reported to have been the first Hmong to have received a modern education (Kourmarn Unpublished Manuscript) though his ancestor could read and write Chinese. Touby Lyfong and his brothers had been sent to school and this was one of the reasons why the French switched their support from the Lo clan to the Lys. Their literacy represented power and status in a very status-conscious Laos. It was also at school that Touby Lyfong formed a close friendship with a prince of the royal house of Xieng Khouang (Barney 1967:274).

Schools for the hill tribes were established by the French. There were six of these schools by 1944. The French de-emphasis on education for native peoples was exemplified by the fact that, by 1940, only 7000 primary school students were in attendance in a colony of one million

(McCoy 1970:82), and no high school had been constructed. By 1946 there were 175 elementary schools in all of Laos (McCoy 1970:82).

In 1951, a law was passed making elementary school compulsory, "but the enforcement of the law, which tied to the requirement that all villages must construct their own schools, is lax, probably realistically so, since many communities are poor and remote and in any case the government is unable to provide teachers in sufficient numbers" (LeBar and Suddard 1963:83). Complimentary school (the second three years of elementary school) was not compulsory and only about one-fifth of elementary school graduates went on to any further education. Schools were likely to be one room of thatch and bamboo with a dirt floor. The teacher was usually a Lao with six to nine years of schooling and a brief teachers' training program. French schools emphasized the student's ability to recite memorized passages from the text; attention was also given to neatness, obedience and respect for the teacher.

Beginning in the early 1960's, changes in the Lao education system were brought about with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), which established departments of agriculture, education, rural development, refugee relief, health, etc., to parallel Royal Lao Government bureaus. From 1962 to 1970, fifty million dollars were spent annually for schools, roads, buildings and vehicles. America financed Thai-written textbooks for

Lao primary schools. An Education Reform of 1962 sought to "Laocize" teaching at all levels and branches of education in Laos. Its goals were to remove European influences in education and to train students in careers applicable to rural Laos. It focused on practical subjects and systematic use of local resources (Phonekeo 1975:90). This program, however, was halted in 1967 by hostilities. As of 1975, few of these Lao schools were still functioning and those that were tended to relapse into following the curricula of the conventional French type of schooling. As of 1963, elementary schooling in Laos was the financial responsibility of the local communities (LeBar and Suddard 1963:82). The schools were ordered in the French pattern with a primary education of two cycles of three years, a secondary education of colleges for three years, and one year of lycee. Subjects taught were ethics and civics, history, geography, arithmetic, drawing or manual work, singing and physical culture. Lessons were given in Laotian the first cycle and in French the second (LeBar and Suddard 1963:82). These schools were the ones attended by the more educated Hmong now in Missoula.

During the French colonial period, many Hmong served in the French army and, when the Americans went to Laos in the early sixties, they trained the Hmong as guerrilla fighters. Through this contact the Hmong learned French and English and began sending their sons into the cities to go to school. The U.S., A.I.D. provided materials, and the

Hmong provided the labor to build schools. Some of the Hmong went to Vientiane to the French high schools or other equivalent schools. Girls attended school as well, but seldom if the family lived at a distance from the city where the school was located. The relocation of the Hmong in the 1960's grouped the Hmong together for security purposes instead of allowing them to remain in their independent, scattered villages. This stimulated further emphasis on education (Koumarn No date) and provided the basic elementary education which many of the Missoula Hmong refugees received.

Once in the refugee camps of Thailand the Hmong have been able to attend makeshift schools established by international service organizations and church groups. The classes are usually held in Thai or Laotian. To learn English the Hmong must pay as much as ten dollars per day for short lessons in English (Interview 5/80). Because of the cost of such lessons, many of the Hmong who have arrived in Missoula could not afford them and so came to the U.S. without any language skills. Associated with the flight from Laos and life in the refugee camps is the presence of health problems which affect the learning abilities of the Hmong once they reach the U.S. A major health problem is nutritional deficiency. Vitamin B deficiency, if left unchecked, may lead to permanent sight damage. This problem is present in at least one Hmong family in Missoula (S.L. Bessac Personal Communication, Missoulain 6/16/80).

Ethnicity

The underlying theme of this paper is the assimilation of the Hmong. This section looks at some of the factors which give the Hmong their ethnic identity and explores views which the Hmong hold concerning education and their future in Montana.

The Hmong have managed, over many centuries, to remain a distinct ethnic entity within the nation-states of other more populous and powerful peoples. One of the reasons for this is the practice of cultivating opium. Opium must be cultivated at altitudes of at least 3,000 feet. Living at the highest altitudes in the mountains of southwest China and Laos helped keep the Hmong isolated from the dominant lowland ethnic groups (Geddes 1976:257). A fear of contracting diseases such as malaria or some supernatural disaster kept the Hmong's travels to the lowland markets brief, at least until 1945 (Barney 1967:289). The Hmong marriage practices also served to keep them separated from other peoples. The Hmong practiced clan exogamy but preferred marriage to other Hmong. Geddes reported that Hmong groups in China were similar in many respects to the Chinese in their economies and cultures, yet the Hmong remained a separate entity "...reinforced particularly by a lack of intermarriage" (Geddes 1976:11).

The Hmong have been a messianic people at least from the time of the Taiping Rebellion in China (S.L. Bessac 6/26/80). According to a present Hmong legend, Ju-Cha, of

mythical birth, became a great leader and led the Hmong against the Chinese about the twenty-seventh century B.C. It is believed by some that he was still among them until recently. This concept related to Buddhistic beliefs in Boddhisattvas with which Lao influenced Hmong beliefs, although they are not outwardly Buddhists. According to one prophecy, the Hmong who left Laos to learn to read and write would return to Laos to save Southeast Asia. The Hmong tendency to believe in messiahs may have influenced the large scale conversions to Christianity as a means of distinguishing themselves symbolically from the Buddhist Lao (1967:292). One view holds that the Hmong became involved with western military forces and with western religion in order to gain some of the power of the West in an effort to retain their own identity and freedom (Duncan 1980). Halpern and Kunstadter related some of the methods employed by various ethnic groups of Laos to avoid assimilation. Messianic movements among the Hmong served this purpose. One such movement sees Jesus Christ as the messiah, "appearing among them in a jeep, giving them arms and summoning them to action. According to this myth, the Hmong will depose the local Lao officials, and then will take over the national capital" (1967:242).

A new religion is developing now (1980) among the Hmong, particularly among those still in Laos and the camps. Some Hmong in Missoula (S.L. Bessac 6/26/80) explain that it centers at Phy Bia, Laos. The originator is said to

have been a male farmer whose twin boys died. The boys returned to their father in a dream. This is common, as the Hmong perceive the universe as being in three levels which are quite fluid with interchange between the levels. The boys gave their father flags of unity, leadership and education, as well as a new writing system. These gifts make the Hmong who follow this religion powerful enough to withstand the poison gas dropped on them by the communist government. It is said that the Chinese have heard of their powers and want the Hmong to teach them their supernatural knowledge. Some Hmong have opted to resettle in China from the refugee camps in Thailand. The interesting aspect of this religion is the new writing system given by the twins. It is supposed to be better than the Romanization of Hmong developed by missionaries, Wm. Smalley and Linwood Barney, and can be used for all the languages of the world. This new religion states that all the people who go overseas from Laos will be destroyed and only those who hold out in Phy Bia will survive the holocaust. Those that survive will use the new writing system to unite the world. This new writing system reportedly resembles a system used by Pollard, a missionary in China, in 1909 for the Flowery Hmong (Pollard 1919).

The Hmong language belongs to the Miao-Yao branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Though the Hmong have become literate in other languages, we know of no official writing system for their language. The Hmong have a

tradition which states that they once had a Hmong kingdom with a written constitution and laws which were lost when the Chinese burned all their books. This tale and others demonstrate the Hmong's awareness of writing and its importance and their desire to gain the benefits of education which was difficult to obtain in China and later in Laos due to the social stratification and social unrest. Over the years several alphabets have been developed by missionaries but none has yet been accepted officially by the Hmong. In 1953, western Protestant and Catholic missionaries developed a phonetic Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) for Hmong. In 1968, Protestant missionaries developed a Lao-based alphabet for Hmong. Following this the Lao government refused to let any primers be written in the RPA script. The government wanted the Hmong to study like Lao children and thus establish closer ties with the Hmong and allow for better control over the Hmong (Center for Applied Linguistics #14). In the meantime, the Pathet Lao also designed a Lao-based script. Hmong supporting the Royal Lao Government (RLG) used the RPA script and those on the Pathet Lao side of the war used their Lao-based script. And now, those who practice the new religion use the script of the twins. It is believed that the present Lao government is in the process of granting official status to the Pathet Lao alphabet (Center for Applied Linguistics #14).

// An important difference between Americans and the Hmong, which arises in the educational system, is the Hmong

emphasis on the family's or the group's desires over the individual's desires. "The major point to remember is that a Hmong person is never an individual. He is always part of a family" (Vang Tou Fu 1979:101). This becomes most apparent when the individual must put his personal desires aside if the family has other expectations of him/her. This is exemplified in the training and education given to the sons and nephews of General Vang Pao. Vang Pao wanted his family to be educated in order to aid in the development of the Hmong autonomous region in Laos. Vang Pao selected the careers his family should enter. He sent his eldest son, Francois, and his nephew, Paul, to study law in France. Van Xue, another nephew, studied in the U.S.; his son, Chong, was sent to West Point, and his nephew, Vang Cheng, was sent to Hawaii to study medical technology; none of these individuals finished his course of study except Xue. Intertwined in the subjugation of the individual to the family and respect and obedience to authority, is the view the Hmong have of their children as being malleable. The Hmong (1980) are very much concerned about the effects of relocation on their elderly as far as their losing status and a sense of their individual roles and values. The Hmong do not feel as concerned about the adjustments which must be made by the children and young adults. They see the children as being able to adjust to any changes without any real problems. This can be seen in the above example of Vang Pao's family where the young

were sent all over the world to study, and were expected to be able to adjust from life in the hills of Laos to life in France or the U.S. Unfortunately, some of them did not make the adjustments easily and have suffered personally because of it. The students in Missoula are expected to go to school all day, whether it is day-care or high school, and then return home at night to a traditional household without conflicts between the two cultures. (Cherpao 6/20/80). The more fluent students help with evening ESL classes as volunteers with other students and parents. It is assumed that the students do not need to be given time and encouragement to study hard (Bessac, Personal Communication). Again, if they are lucky, they will do alright and if they are not, studying will not help.

The Hmong's very positive attitude toward education is reflected in the progress achieved and efforts extended by the Hmong students in school. The Hmong have been self-conscious about their lack of books and have made up for it wherever the situation presented itself, or they have explained the absence through various folk tales. One reason for not having books is that some things lose their magic by being written down. In comparing themselves to the Chinese, who have books, the Hmong of Szechwan said they can count things from memory which is magically more powerful (Graham 1954:115). The Iu Mien recognize the superiority of the Hmong even though they do not have books like the Iu Mien, because the Hmong have sent their

children to school and have learned important foreign languages (Kandre 1967:621). One tale related by Larteguy and Yang Dao tells of the Hmong being chased by a Chinese emperor. The Hmong came upon a river and had to choose between carrying their weapons or their books across the river. They choose the weapons which is why they have no books today (1954:45). Magical inferences appear in a story in which the Hmong ate a book with rice. In this way they absorbed the knowledge which is better than reading it (Geddes 1976:20). This attitude may be related to the Chinese practice of using writing for medicinal purposes by drinking a tea mixed with religious sayings on bits of paper.

The Hmong view an education and being able to read as a great source of power for the individual and for the Hmong as a people. One story told in China by Hmong is about Star Girl, one of the Seven Sisters (of the Big Dipper) who has a son by a Hmong orphan whom she befriended. This son received high rank through the Chinese examination system but was taunted because he was part Hmong. He retaliated by using his knowledge of reading to travel up to the sky to find his mother (Graham 1954:250-2).

In viewing education as a source of power, the Hmong also see it as a finite thing which can be learned in total and taken back for the benefit of the Hmong. One story tells of a tiger father (ghost) who helped his orphaned son by kidnapping teachers and taking them to his son. After they

taught him all they knew they were set free. The son then has all the knowledge (S.L. Bessac 6/20/80).

The Hmong first came to the U.S. with the idea of getting an education and returning to take over Laos and Southeast Asia (Halpern and Kunstadter 1962:242). Due to the deteriorating conditions in Laos, the Hmong in Missoula have come to realize that they cannot go back. They have turned their attentions to making a life for themselves here, which also requires an education. In adapting their goals to the U.S., the Hmong want to become American citizens, but they want to remain Hmong at the same time. As a people, the Hmong have survived the centuries of living in pluralistic societies and they expect the same in the United States. Their goal is not to be assimilated, but to be both American and Hmong (Duncan 1980). As a means to reach these ends, the Hmong want to retain their form of the family. They want to live near each other, brothers near each other and sons near their parents (Duncan 1980). To maintain their religion, the Hmong want to build a culture center where any Hmong may go to hold individual or community ceremonies. They want to retain their language. Cherpao stated that the older Hmong must speak Hmong to ensure its survival (Cherpao 6/20/80). In maintaining the large extended family of the Hmong, and the Hmong language, they need to keep themselves separate from other Americans and marry amongst themselves, which is the case about ninety-nine percent of the time now (Cherpao 6/20/80). In order to support the extended

family, the Hmong are going to need good jobs, and to get good jobs they need an education. The Hmong are well aware of this and emphasize the necessity for the young, especially young men, to get an education so that they will be able to support their families later on. "Most of us want our own farms, but we can't; no money to buy land or equipment. Those with better educations will be able to get a job more likely than those who do not speak English" (Cherpao Unpublished Manuscript).

The Hmong name for themselves means 'free' and that is the way they see themselves, free and independent of other peoples. Because of the Indochina War the Hmong found themselves divided as a people and deprived of their homes and livelihoods. Upon entering the U.S. they have received financial assistance. This bothers them greatly and adds further to their desire for an education as a means for attaining power and status, and for freeing themselves from the auspices of the American welfare system.

"The Hmong know welfare assistance is not good to be on but there is no choice for daily survival. By the time people have had an opportunity to learn English for a better communication relationship and a new trade to assist them in adapting to a new society, they will no longer need public assistance...We have been degraded on public assistance" (Cherpao Unpublished Manuscript).

|| In summation, an exact description of the Hmong, either historically or culturally, is not possible due to an absence of complete accounts on the Hmong, their own non-literacy, their varying subgroup experiences and their

sense of secrecy. The Hmong are composed of many different subgroups, but prefer to present a unified, homogeneous impression to the public. Thus, much of the information gained on the Hmong must be inferred from tales, scattered histories and past contacts. Though the Hmong have maintained their ethnic identity, their culture has changed and adapted through time, sometimes radically, as in the last forty years. In spite of the years of change and adjustments certain trends can be delineated from the history and culture of the Hmong which reflect and influence their perceptions of education. Many of these trends demonstrate Hmong acculturation to certain aspects of the other cultures with which they have been in contact.

Hmong values stress respect for elders, male dominance, obedience and the good of the group over the individual. In the classroom the Hmong student may not admit to not understanding something, out of respect to the teacher. If the student has personal goals these must be put second to the goals of his family. Many Hmong students spend their evenings helping other Hmong with English or helping new arrivals get settled. Their studies are put aside until the needs of others are seen to. This relates to the Hmong concept of luck in which the lucky one will succeed and the unlucky one will not, no matter what. Hmong students who find their studies hard may not study as they assume it is beyond them. Instead, they concentrate on things they can do. Some of the complacent attitude may

stem from the Buddhist religious schools. The student may also be affected by the Hmong attitude of child malleability. Students are moved from one task to another as the family needs them with the assumption that the children are capable of adjusting to any new condition.//

Hmong students' experience with formal education, such as under the Buddhists, the Lao and the French, emphasized memorization and recitation rather than understanding. These study habits may be present in the Missoula Hmong. In camps the price of English language lessons excluded many from learning any English before arriving in Missoula, though some did participate in the Thai schools set up in the camps. Because of the nature of their flight from Laos many Hmong suffered from physical side effects of the war such as wounds; diseases including malaria, tuberculosis and malnutrition; as well as emotional problems from the trauma of the war and the overwhelming problems of adjustment to life in the U.S. All of these may affect the learning progress of the students.

// Education has been highly valued by the Hmong. It has been seen as a means of acquiring power and status, and of revitalizing their culture. The Hmong came to the U.S. because the war made it impossible for them to survive in Laos. Education was seen as a means of returning to Laos, but now it is seen as a means of providing the capital and security needed to retain the Hmong way of life in the United States.//

CHAPTER 3 - Missoula High Schools

The reaction of the Missoula school system to the presence of Lao Hmong refugees plays a vital role in the acculturation processes of the Hmong and the degree of Hmong assimilation into American society. This chapter emphasizes the Missoula public high schools and the adjustments made by their administrations to the influx of non-English speaking students into the school system. The refugees are not affected solely by the conscious efforts of the administration to bring the refugees into the mainstream of the schools, but also by the organization of the schools, individual personalities and social attitudes characteristic of this era in the United States and in Missoula.

Missoula city schools fall under the jurisdiction of two different boards of trustees; one board administers schools containing grades kindergarten through eight and the other administers the high schools, grades nine through twelve on a county-wide basis. This dual system affects the coordination of policies and programs and their funding. The school systems apply separately for funds from local, state and federal sources. For instance, this spring (1980) the grade schools' mill levy was voted on at a different election than the funding of the high schools. At an Asian Refugee Workshop, sponsored

by the Western Montana Teacher Center in May, 1980, the lack of funding for refugee programs was discussed. A state office to gain funds was sought, but the state reaction, presented by visiting state officials, was that the Missoula refugee situation was a local, not a state problem and, as such, the funding should be from local sources or federal grants.

A part of the local problem in applying for funds was the planning of programs for the refugees. The administrations did not know how many or when refugees would arrive until they were already here. The year 1980 brought a great influx of refugees. Three hundred and fifty-eight Hmong and sixty-eight Vietnamese have arrived in Missoula since November, 1979 (Cherpao, 6/20/80). The relief agencies hesitated in informing the schools of the large numbers expected because they were not certain if the refugees could leave the camps in Thailand and they hesitated to frighten the administrations (S.L. Bessac: Personal Communication 1980.) As a result the administrators have been slow in responding in developing programs and procedures for dealing with the non-English speaking students. This absence of detail on refugee arrivals is combined with a fear of being accused of discrimination either for or against the Hmong. This in turn is caused by and affects community prejudice against the refugees. These factors have created ambiguous placement, evaluation and processing procedures for the Hmong students throughout their high school career. Adding to these difficulties is a poor communication network among the administrative personnel and the teachers as to

what is expected of them and of the students (Interviews: April 14, 15, 29, 1980, May 1, 1980).

Organization and Policies

The Missoula County High School Administration governs the two local public high schools and a third high school to open in the fall of 1980, as well as one farther away in the country. Grade school and high school systems in Missoula employ their own superintendents, as well as separate personnel, budgeting, instructional materials and curriculum officers. Beneath these offices are the individual schools under the direction of a principal, vice-principal and their staff. The chain of command within the high schools, as it pertains to information about the refugees, follows from the superintendent to the instructional materials officer, where the major decisions are made, to the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers, principals and counselors. When necessary, the teachers are informed of new policies or changes and the students may be told as well.

Ten schools within District I, grades kindergarten through eight, have Indochinese refugee students, the majority of them Hmong. As of January 2, 1980, one hundred four refugees were enrolled in District I, of whom seventy-two were involved in the District I ESL program. By May, 1980, eighty-two students participated in the District I ESL program. There are additional students in several of the outlying schools which are not included in these figures. The high schools

enrolled eighty-three Hmong students, only three of whom were exempted from the ESL program. The high school enrollment of refugees rose by twenty students between February, 1980 and May, 1980.

Historically, the Montana high schools have set as their objective the production of good American citizens. Section 70 of the Rules and Regulations of the Missoula Public Schools, District I, Missoula County, 1911 reads:

It shall be the duty of all teachers to endeavor to impress on the minds of their pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice and patriotism; to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity and falsehood, and to instruct them in the principles of a free government, and to train them up to a true comprehension of the rights, duties and dignity of American citizenship (R&RMPs 1911:11).

This supports the function of the educational system of a nation-state as stated previously in Chapter I.

The goals of the Missoula County High Schools at the present time are to:

...produce a happy, efficient and informed citizenry, loyal to the ideas of democracy, as able and willing to bear the inherent responsibilities as they are eager to share its blessings (Rules and Regulations of Missoula County High Schools, 1978:2).

"We must provide a dynamic educational program so that the real purpose of education, the protection and promotion of the well-being of this community and of American, may be achieved" (R&R OF MCHS 1978:3). The success of this goal requires that the students be supplied with basic skills, social understandings and skills, and experiences in creative expression (R&R of MCHS 1978:5-7).

The immediate objective of the administrative personnel in achieving the long range goal above is to get the refugees who do not speak English to do so. To do this they mainstream the refugee students as soon as possible. This means the Hmong are put into the regular curriculum classes with the rest of the students. The premise behind mainstreaming is that the sooner and the more the Hmong are around American students the faster they can progress. Teachers estimate that it takes the grade school students one and a half to two years to become fluent in English. It takes older students longer; the older they are the longer it takes. Only three Hmong students have acquired enough English to take core English classes instead of ESL and they have been in the United States for at least four years.

The teachers interviewed did not know what the goals of the administrators were for the Hmong. When questioned about the policy of mainstreaming the students, the teachers generally agreed that mainstreaming is a good idea once the Hmong knew enough English to keep up with the rest of the students. They thought that mainstreaming Hmong when they did not speak English was not doing them any good and might in fact cause emotional problems. The Hmong need a more protected environment on arrival in the United States. Only if the Hmong get a great amount of individual attention will their mainstream placement be satisfactory. Under present conditions there does not seem to be any retention of the material presented in class (Interview: May 2, 12, 1980).

One teacher explained that she allowed the Hmong to take the tests home to work on and then would regive them in class. The Hmong could not pass the tests the second time around.

The administrators' support of mainstreaming is reflected in the opposition to employing bilingual aides for the ESL teachers. Part of the reason for the absence of bilingual aides is the lack of grant money, but the major factor is the attitude of the administration. The administrators feel that a bilingual aide would only be useful to help with bicultural class instruction, not with the initial teaching of English. Their opinion is that they prefer to make the Hmong proficient in English as soon as possible which can best be done through mainstreaming (Interview: April 11, 14, 15 and March 19, 1980). The administration for District I stated that if they were to hire a bilingualaide he/she must be proficient in Vietnamese, Hmong and Chinese, and having teaching credentials. The officials of District I are convinced that no one in Missoula would qualify. The District I ESL teacher voiced these same opinions, adding that he did not need any help in teaching English. Two months after expressing the above views the District I ESL teacher was suddenly adamant about hiring bilingual aides. His change in attitude was apparently brought on by a tour of the Spokane, Washington school system which employs bilingual aides.

Spokane, Washington schools are under one administration for all grades, kindergarten through twelve. Refugees are placed in assessment centers for six weeks where they receive

an orientation toward school behavior and are given enough English to survive basic instructions in school. These assessment centers are valuable because many of the Hmong have never been to school and are not only unfamiliar with English, but with the expected behavior patterns of students and teachers, as well as the fundamentals of holding a pen and the concepts behind writing. Bilingual aides are used in the assessment centers and in the ESL program as needed with specific individuals. Before entering regular schools the teachers are given full psychological, emotional and educational reports on each student so that they know what to expect and how the student was placed in their classes (Interview: March 19, 1980).

Another reason why Missoula schools will not hire bilingual aides is that the Montana State Bilingual Coordinator (Interview: Helena 4/4/80) states that the law requires more than forty percent of the students to be non-English speaking before a bilingual program can be included, and that all the available funds are put into a program on the Crow reservation. Missoulians have not distinguished between hiring bilingual aides for the teachers and developing a bilingual-bicultural program.

Placement

One of the continuing concerns surrounding the Hmong is the placement of non-English speaking (NES) students into grades and classes. In grades kindergarten to eight, students are

into regular classes with thirty minutes a day for with Title I teachers, if they are available, and minutes every other day with an ESL teacher. The actual of the students is done by the school counselor school principal. Until April, 1980, a social worker lived but, as of that date, the position was discontinued. able, Hmong students are placed into classes with at one other, but not more than two or three, Hmong, so that teacher can handle the load and the newcomer has someone to associate. An attempt is made to place the Hmong into a class near his/her own age. If the student is enough in size, then placement may be made into a lower without attracting too much attention from the other. The Hmong will remain in the lower level class if she has learned enough English to be placed with age mates (Interview: 3/21/80).

At the high school level, new Hmong students are placed in social education, home economics, shop and art classes. They learn enough English to move into mathematics, history and government, and science classes. They are placed into one or two ESL classes and a reading class (Interview: 2/24-3/23, 1980).

High schools have changed their placement procedures in the past year. Through the winter, any new refugee was placed into classes as soon as he arrived. As refugees began arriving in large numbers from January through the policy changed at both high schools. At one, the

students are placed into classes only at the beginning of the quarter. At the second high school they are not admitted until the beginning of the semester, which is fall, 1980. In the meantime they are enrolled in one or two ESL classes and a reading class. The Hmong who arrived in March or later are placed only in ESL classes. The teachers favor this practice because it does not disrupt their teaching schedule and it fits with the policy followed for regular students.

Many of the refugees placed in high school are several years older than their classmates. The age limit for admittance into high school is twenty-one but the Missoula principals have allowed into high school any refugee who really wants to be there. Several of the Hmong students are in their early twenties and one is in his late twenties. Some of the Hmong have had from six to twelve years of school in Laos, while more recent arrivals have had very little, from none, to a few months, to three years. Examples of these students can be found in the high schools placed upon arrival into grades as high as eleventh grade. Students with an educational background are allowed at one high school to have waived credit requirements which correspond with classes taken in Southeast Asia. With this exception, the Hmong are expected to complete the same graduation requirements as the rest of the students.

There are several problems with these placement procedures: first and foremost is the Hmong's lack of English skills; second, the processing of the Hmong after they are placed; and third, the ambiguity of the processing procedures following

placement. Two teachers interviewed were very angry with the presence of refugees in their classes. They had received no warning (as had no one else) that they were receiving refugee students and then found that the students did not speak nor understand English. The high school teachers are particularly concerned because the Hmong cannot make up the background information expected of the American students. In such classes as shop, the teachers are afraid of accidents because the students do not understand the directions and precautions presented about the machinery. This places a great burden on the teacher who has twenty to thirty other students requiring attention.

The teachers do not know how to evaluate the refugees as the Hmong are unable to complete much, if any, of the written work expected of the American students. The teachers feel frustrated at failing students who try, but they do not feel justified in passing them when they have not met all of the class requirements. One teacher said that she was told to pass the Hmong because they had completed her class but she said that they had done no paper work and she knew that they had no understanding of what had been discussed. These students were to be passed on to the intermediate level of that subject the following quarter.

The teachers comment that they do not get to know any of the Hmong very well. They have observed that the Hmong will try anything asked of them whether they understand it or not. This is in contrast to the attitude of white and Native

American students who are more reticent. Teachers' comments on the Hmong are that they are very quiet and do not ask questions in class. When they do ask questions, in their free time, they do not ask 'why' questions, but center around the meaning of vocabulary or the truth of certain information. Teachers say they can spend little extra time with the Hmong and since they do not ask questions, teachers are not sure how much they know or understand.

The ambiguity of the placement procedure leads to problems in determining the time and place of advancement for the Hmong. There are no standard tests for evaluating non-English speaking (NES) and illiterate Hmong. Placements are made on the basis of the student's size and the potential class load. The ESL teachers are not consulted about the placement of students, nor is the Lao Family Community representative. The District I ESL teacher listed several cases in which he thought the student was having adjustment problems because of his/her placement. He suggested the formation of a student evaluation committee be set up to evaluate each student which would include the principal, the social worker, ESL teacher, a psychologist and the parents. The high school ESL teachers would like to see standard tests given to the students upon entering the school system and, periodically thereafter, before they are admitted into core classes. Upon admittance into core classes, the teachers should be informed as to the capabilities and needs of the Hmong student. None of the teachers interviewed knew how the Hmong were placed in their

classes, or even how many there were in the school or the community. Several of the teachers had no idea where the refugees in their classes originally came from whether it was Thailand, China, Cambodia, Vietnam or Laos.

Programs

To meet their responsibilities of making effective citizens of the Hmong, the Missoula County High School administrators have developed a set of programs. One program which is available is Title I which provides remedial help to those with reading skills below forty percent of the nation's average. Where these programs are present, the school must also demonstrate a below average income for forty percent of the families within the school's attendance area (Title I of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): Public Law 89-10).

Title I teachers may work with the students in small groups for one half hour per day in the grade schools and for forty-five minutes per day at the high school level. Title I teachers are not supposed to teach English, but may help the students with reading and understanding their classwork. Two high school teachers reported that they automatically put their refugee students' work in the mailbox for the Title I teacher to go over with the student because the teachers do not have time to explain it to the Hmong.

A Title I program is in effect at one high school and will be at the high school opening in the fall of 1980. The other high school does not have a Title I program but does have its

own reading program which performs similar functions. Title I teachers do not think that the Hmong should be placed in their programs; instead they prefer that the Hmong should be placed in a separate, self-contained ESL reading class.

Though the refugees have been in Missoula since 1975, an ESL program has only been in operation in the high schools since October, 1979, and in the lower grades since January, 1980. The high schools finally developed their program after a federal government audit of one high school for sex discrimination in sports discovered that they had not made any provision for the refugees to learn English. As a result of this audit, one ESL teacher was hired to teach all high school refugees or foreign students English. In order to participate, the students are bussed across town for an hour or two each day; as new students arrive, they are placed into ongoing classes. As of April, 1980, forty students were in the beginning class. Most of these were recent arrivals with so little English experience that much individual time with the teacher was necessary to determine their abilities and requirements. This was demanding when eighteen of those students arrived at the same time and space demands exceeded the facilities. At the time there was only one ESL teacher to deal with Hmong and Vietnamese students from both high schools. In addition to the beginning class, she had four others, ranging from eight students in the advanced class to thirty in an intermediate level class. Shortly after the March influx of Hmong, a part-time teacher and a student teacher were hired for spring

quarter. Since then, the teachers have received word that the program would be cut back to one teacher in the fall, 1980, with almost all of the eighty percent students returning. In addition to these students, Hmong will be expected to enter the system throughout next year.

District I (Kindergarten to eighth) established an ESL program in January, 1980 due to the overwhelming numbers of refugees entering the schools. Again only one teacher was hired. He teaches more than eighty students scattered among seven schools. He spends about an hour a session with the students in grades four through eight who are bussed to a common school three days a week. He spends his mornings traveling to each of the schools with students in grades from kindergarten to third, which gives him about two hours or less a week with each student. This program has been marked to be cut next year unless the District receives federal funding. As of June, 1980, the District is paying for the entire program and feels that it is discriminatory to pay for these kinds of services for the refugees and not provide similar monies for other groups of children. If no federal money is received, the refugee students will simply be placed into regular classes with the hope that they learn English sooner or later.

Other programs for the refugees include tutoring services which are organized by various community volunteer groups. One high school set up a program using honor students to tutor Hmong students in mainstream classes. Occasionally tutors are

used in place of the assigned class; however, it shows on the transcript that the core class was taken by the Hmong student. The more advanced Hmong students spend a great portion of their time tutoring others with their work at school and at home. Hmong students at the high schools are organized, with representatives elected by them to take their problems to, and who are to take the students' views to the administration.

Influencing which programs will be instituted and which will not is the administrators' fear of being accused of discrimination, either for or against the Hmong. Except for summer classes in American history and government offered only to the Hmong and Vietnamese refugees, there are no core courses available just to the Hmong. The administrators are opposed to creating self-contained classes for the refugees because of the fear of being accused of favoritism. They do not want to make the Hmong or Vietnamese refugees appear to be special. Based on a doctor's suggestion that stomach troubles appearing in the Hmong were due to stress and nonadjustment to American foods, District I principals began offering rice meals every day for the Hmong. The principals, afraid of being accused of discrimination, offered the same meal to all students. The principals report that after about two weeks, the refugees stopped eating rice meals and preferred the regular lunches.

Related to the problem of discrimination are the impressions of the administrators, teachers and students about the Hmong and the resulting prejudice. The administrators know very little of what is going on in the classes and between the

students. When administrators were called for interviews they consistently referred the interviewer to the ESL teachers, the social worker or to the administrators who had referred the interviewer to them, thus completing the circle.

Both high school administrations know of no problems between Hmong and American students; they do not report any friction. One high school's administrators and teachers considers its students very open-minded, which is exemplified by the tutoring of Hmong by honor students. The principals feel that their programs are functioning smoothly. Once the Hmong learn English, and that is only a matter of time, there will be no difference between the Hmong and American students as far as the administration is concerned.

None of the administrators had much, if any, information on Hmong history and culture. The administrators said they learned by doing. Their impressions of the Hmong are that they are hard-working, industrious and polite. The belief is that they will be assimilated. One school principal felt that they were already assimilated, as they dress like Americans, eat American food and speak English. Another principal expected one generation to pass before the Hmong are "Americanized." One high school principal did express doubts as to whether the most recent influx of Hmong would ever be fully mainstreamed because many are illiterate and are having a tough time learning the concepts behind reading and writing and learning English. One administrator had heard that, of course, they would be assimilated because they do not have any culture that they

would want to retain. Regardless of the time limit the administrators place on the assimilation of the Hmong, they do see the Hmong as becoming Americans because of their desire to achieve, their determination and their willingness to work.

Teachers of the required core classes and electives saw the Hmong in a different perspective than did the administrators. Even more than the administrators, they view the Hmong as industrious, hard-working, quiet and polite. The teachers, however, are quite upset at the lack of English skills of the Hmong and, for many, their lack of literacy in any language and lack of school experience. The teachers react by not giving the Hmong written assignments, by letting them take tests home, or by sending assignments to the reading teachers.

Teachers have been given little information on the refugees. Most of what they know they have ferreted out themselves. One high school reading teacher has tried to provide some information to the teachers, as has one ESL teacher, but this material is scant and can be misleading because of its briefness, particularly in the area of cultural description. A source of some of the misconceptions about the Hmong may be a booklet put out by the District I school system to help acquaint the teachers with ESL teaching methods. This contains some information on the Hmong. It included such statements as, "very adaptable people, always on the move; leaders determined by their sex and clan - not necessarily their intelligence; sexuality - none between brothers and sisters. No restrictions on ages for marriage. Can have older boy with very young girl

(18-10). Be aware of this in all classes" (PASIL 1979:26).

Teachers have seen or heard of few incidents of trouble between white and Hmong students. They have heard of some vandalism of Hmong bikes and property and some name calling. Students in both primary and secondary grades have been heard to call the Hmong "Chinks" and "Little Nippies", and several Hmong students have been beaten by American students. Teachers also reported comments made by other teachers that the Hmong should go back to wherever they came from; that they remind the teachers of the Vietnam war which we (America) should not have been involved in in the first place and, therefore, should not be helping the Hmong. Teachers, as well as others in Missoula, are concerned about who is financing the Hmong until they get jobs. And when they do, whose jobs are they getting?

On the whole, the teachers see the Hmong as isolated from the other students and the people of Missoula. Within some classes there are a few students who will help the Hmong but other entire classes will not interact with them at all. The teachers estimate that the refugees understand about twenty-five to fifty percent of what is said in class. The teachers emphasize the Hmong's ability to do assignments which do not involve any interpretation of English. Most of the Hmong are placed into classes involving as little reading and discussion as possible. One concerned teacher inquired among her fellow teachers the ways in which they were helping the Hmong and learned that they simply acted as if the Hmong were not there.

A teacher at one high school found he had to explain everything at least twice, once to the class and once to each Hmong. He had tried to simplify his language in his lectures to the class, but that did not seem fair to the other students. He depends on the Hmong to ask questions if they do not understand. Often the Hmong will not admit to not understanding something out of respect to the teacher. The teachers think the Hmong have much to add to the community, but because of their isolation and the unavailability of work due to the state of the economy, the teachers fear that the Hmong will create their own version of Chinatown.

The prejudice in Missoula is increasing. In the schools it can be seen in the overt expressions of dislike for the Hmong by students, but it is also present in the administrators and the teachers, though more covertly. Teachers express their disapproval of the Hmong presence in their classes by ignoring them or commenting to others in the schools their dissatisfaction with the Hmong; one teacher even made her comments to her class with a Hmong student present (Interview: 5/5/80). Other teachers and administrators are also prejudiced, but in favor of the Hmong (Isaacs 1958). They are impressed with the Hmong willingness to work and their politeness. Administrators view the Hmong education problems as temporary. Special programs are not necessary as the Hmong will work hard and learn English themselves. This reinforces their hesitation in developing programs which might promote accusations of discrimination.

In response to the difficulties in the schools, the Title I teachers at one high school and the high school ESL teacher developed a program proposal for next year (May 15, 1980), however, there does not seem to be any funding for it or support from the administration. The objectives of the proposed program are to provide the Hmong with an orientation and needs assessment program and to provide students with an effective English learning program. The English skills should prepare the foreign student to perform in regular high school classes to the best of his/her ability; help the student with problems he/she faces in adjusting to a new culture; prepare the student for the type of instruction, discipline, testing, etc., that he/she will encounter in regular classes; and introduce the students to the fundamental vocabulary and curriculum of required high school classes.

This proposed program involves the use of bilingual aides to teach survival English skills and community orientation, and to make a primary language assessment and interview. Additionally, an intensive ESL program is expected to allow the students to be mainstreamed into mathematics, history and science classes when they have mastered basic vocabulary and concepts required for the particular class. The major emphasis of this program calls for at least one qualified ESL teacher for each fifteen students and one hourly bilingual aide in each NES class. The counselors also advocate ESL coordination of ESL teachers of District I, the high schools, the Vo-Tech counselors and the Lao Family Community, Inc., quarterly in

order to evaluate the program and to assess the needs.

Summary and Conclusions

The goal of the Missoula County High School Administration is to get the Lao Hmong refugee students into the mainstream of the schools as quickly as possible and to eliminate as many structural differences between the Hmong and the other students. The major inhibiting factor is the Hmong's lack of English skills. To solve this problem an ESL program was created to give the Hmong enough English to pass through school. Problems emerging from the Hmong and Vietnamese presence in the schools may be outlined as follows:

1. Problems in content-area classes include
 - a. Class size inhibits the teacher's ability to spend time attempting to communicate with those refugees with limited or absent English skills;
 - b. Grading is a problem because teachers do not want to fail the Hmong when they work hard in class, yet the teachers do not feel that it is fair to pass them along with the rest of the students who have completed the class requirements;
 - c. Determining which classes Hmong should be mainstreamed into and when. Being mainstreamed without good English skills causes emotional problems for the Hmong student as he/she attempts to keep up with the class and yet understands only twenty-five to fifty percent of what is being said.

2. A bilingual program is nonexistent. The ESL program does not have proper materials for testing and evaluating NES and non-literate students.
3. Placement procedures are vague and offer no frame of reference. Opinions of administrators and teachers are divided among mainstreaming Hmong students according to their age. This poses its own problems as age is assigned arbitrarily in refugee camps (S.L. Bessac: June, 1980). Placing Hmong into grades according to their previous educational experiences, or developing at the high school level self-contained core classes for the Hmong until they can be placed into mainstream classes without any problems. Fears of creating emotional problems or bringing on accusations of discrimination have prevented anything but mainstreaming from being attempted thus far.
4. Poor communication between administrators and teachers has resulted in an absence of common goals, methods, procedures and programs.
5. There has been no in-service training for mainstream teachers in the cultural background of the refugees or any special learning styles which they may possess. An in-service workshop on the Hmong, organized by the Western Montana Teacher Center was held in May, 1980. It was well attended by ESL teachers from Missoula and neighboring towns, but no mainstream teachers were given the time off to attend.
6. The biggest problem, as I see it, is the increasing prejudice throughout Missoula. Resentment amongst the Hmong's

presence is growing, resulting in name calling, letter writing, vandalism and violence. Another form of prejudice, positive prejudice, takes the form in Missoula of naive and patronizing attitudes toward the Hmong. An example is the social worker, who appeared to be accepted by the school systems as an authority on the Hmong until her position was eliminated in April, 1980 (Duncan 1980), and who took it upon herself to buy their clothes, determine their housing expenses and legalize their marriages because she liked the Hmong so much. Another example is the attitude of the administrators and the majority of the teachers who view the Hmong as wonderful people who will have no problem assimilating because they are so industrious. The general attitude is that once the Hmong are taught English their assimilation is inevitable. This attitude provides protection against any possible charges of discrimination for creating special programs for the refugees. This attitude also provides an escape for the administrators from actively becoming involved in the refugee situation by placing the future success of these people solely on the Hmong students themselves.

The effect of all of this is a kind of warehousing of the refugees until they can be passed through the system at the appropriate time or they manage to learn enough English to pull themselves through. The high schools require the refugees to take core courses for graduation, including English, mathematics, science, American history and government. The students are

taking these classes but, except for mathematics, there are serious doubts as to whether they are learning the concepts behind the subjects. After being in school for several years the Hmong are bound to gain some familiarity with English but, except for a few individuals, their English skills are minimal and their understanding of concepts presented in class are uncertain.

There is a developing dissatisfaction with the school conditions among teachers, the Lao Family Community, Inc., and finally, among Missoula community members and parents. A church group put together a slide show on the Hmong to take into the classrooms in response to the increasing tensions in the schools. The Lao Family Community, Inc., organized a volunteer ESL program in the evenings to help anyone with their English and homework assignments. The counselors at one high school and the high school ESL teachers have been studying the situation and have proposed changes in the program for next year (1980). All of this will help, but will not solve the problems of the refugees in the schools until the school system can set up larger and better manned programs for educating and training the Hmong in preparation for entering the school system itself and for qualifying for college or technical schools after their departure from high school. As it now stands, the high school Hmong students are not receiving the educational benefits they need to insure their ability to secure jobs which will support them and their families. In the long run this means that at least one generation, with the

exception of a few individuals, will have to be supported in part by various forms of welfare which increases the general populace's prejudice against them. This, in turn, will keep them isolated from the rest of the community. Under these circumstances, assimilation becomes difficult.

CHAPTER 4 - The Hmong High School Students

The Hmong high school students are in a very tentative position. They have been raised in Laos and the camps of Thailand in the midst of war, great cultural change and relocation. Once in the United States, the Hmong try to organize as a unified people with the aims of helping each other relocate, readjust and begin to become self-sufficient; they also attempt to define and maintain the Hmong culture. The high school students have been enculturated in Hmong society and are now in one of the major acculturative and assimilative institutions of the United States, the school system. The Hmong are confronted both by their identity as Hmong and their need to be accepted as Americans. The major problem they face is the language barrier, which creates misunderstanding in the classroom and between American and Hmong people. The Hmong goal is to be self-sufficient through education and jobs. They try not to draw attention to themselves and to do what the other students do. This may lead to behavior more American than Hmong, but it may not affect their identity.

This chapter examines the extent to which the Hmong high school students are adapting American ways and to what

extent they are retaining Hmong goals and identities. They have the best opportunity to learn English, to get a further education or job training and to take the first steps towards achieving the Hmong goal. At the same time, they are being exposed to American ideals, goals, opportunities and behavior.

In discussions, many of the Hmong students, although always polite and cooperative, had very little to say in response to my questions. A few, however, had quite obviously been thinking seriously about situations at school and the future of the Hmong and gave thoughtful answers. Their answers provided the basis for interpreting the limited information the others had given. The information in this section is based on observation, questions asked by the Hmong, the informal conversations, stories written by the Hmong and interviews, as much as from what the informant did not say as from what he did say.

There are eighty-three Hmong in high school, almost equally divided in number between the two high schools. The majority say that they are from the towns of Xieng Khouang, Lon Chien (a war time relocation camp), Vientianne, Houa Phau, Sam Neau (an area around Houa Phan) and Nasu in Laos. The ages the high school students gave ranged from fourteen to twenty-seven. The ages the Hmong indicate on their entry visas to the United States are not necessarily comparable to our age designations. Of the thirty-four who completed the questionnaire, six were age nineteen or older. As of

April, 1980, the enrollment in the ESL classes was as follows: nineteen were in the non-reader classes...these were students who arrived in the third wave of immigrants and who had little, if any, educational experience. They were unable to read or write in any language. For the most part their lives had been spent in the middle of the war. Many had been in the refugee camps for as long as four years. In the beginning ESL classes, there were thirty-six students which included all of the non-readers. The beginning intermediate classes had twenty-nine students. The intermediate classes had fourteen students and the advanced class had six students. These numbers fluctuated from week to week as students arrived from the camps, dropped out to join the Job Corps or moved to be reunited with family members scattered across the country. The total in the ESL classes was 104, which included those students enrolled in two classes.

Of the students interviewed, the range of residence in the United States was from two months to four years. Many were living with uncles, brothers or sisters while their parents or other family members were still in Laos, Thailand, or other parts of the United States, France, or had died. The range of previous schooling among the high school students was from no experience at all to fourteen years as the maximum experience. The majority of the Hmong had been placed at the freshman or sophomore level with three juniors and one senior, who graduated at the end of winter quarter, 1980. Most of the students (81%) were at the beginning

intermediate level of English or below, which was barely enough to carry on a conversation. When conducting the interviews an interpreter was needed with these students, as well as with several intermediate level students. Questions asked of the Hmong centered around their perceptions and expectations of school. A questionnaire (appendix) was given to the students in the three upper levels of ESL and consisted of questions about their individual background, their families, where they had lived in Laos, with whom they lived in Missoula, what schooling they had before coming to the United States, their classes in school and what they liked about school or would like changed.

The major difficulty the Hmong have is understanding English and, therefore, with their class lectures and assignments. Because the Hmong are placed into high school level classes and seem to be progressing through the system, it seemed necessary to find out how they perceive their progress and abilities. Estimates have been made by the Lao Family Community, Inc. director and teachers that the Hmong students understand about 25% of what is said in class. The students themselves gave estimates of 10%, 30%, 40% and the highest at 50%. Twelve of those who had not had any mathematics answered that they understood only 'a little bit'. Three remarked that they could read fairly well, but could not understand what was written. The Hmong efforts to gain an understanding varied. They found the teachers easy to talk to and helpful when asked for assistance; however, the

Hmong did not always ask for help. One said that when he did ask for help the teacher would try to explain the material to him, but he still did not understand and did not want to keep bothering the teacher. He would write down as much as he could and then take it home to figure out. None of the Hmong found American students easy to talk to and would not start a conversation with them if they could help it. In studying their assignments the Hmong concentrated on memorizing the material or reading it over repeatedly. When other students were available they would talk over the assignments with them. One Hmong student even read one or two books a week in an effort to improve his English.

To find out how much studying the Hmong do and whether their time after school is expected to be spent in family matters, the students were asked what they did after school. The majority spent their time cooking, working in the family garden, playing at such things as soccer or bowling, watching TV, helping younger children in the family and doing some studying. Only two were expected to, or were able to, spend the greater portion of the evening studying. It was suggested by several Hmong adults that Hmong parents do not know if the students need to study, what they should study, or if they want to study (Interview May, 1980). The overwhelming majority of those students interviewed were staying with parents or relatives who could not speak English and did not know how to help them with their work. The students, therefore, did not get much practice speaking English. They spoke Hmong

at home so that the parents and grandparents could understand them and at school the Hmong students spoke in Hmong to each other and refrained from speaking in class. The Hmong students who were fairly fluent, on the other hand, were actively sought out by the Hmong community to serve as translators. Their English improved, but they are given little time to study.

The Hmong attitude toward their studies affects their progress. I asked them what they thought made one successful and what reasons were responsible for their receiving poor grades, if, in fact, they did. They saw success as depending upon hard work. Hard work is one of the major traits desired in a potential mate among the Hmong (Duncan 1980) but because one was a hard worker it did not mean that one was guaranteed success. The notion of luck or predestination was noticeable among the students even if they did not verbalize it. Four did say that success depended upon luck. Others accounted for their poor grades as a result of not studying enough. Other answers for not doing well were that they tried too hard, they did not read English well enough to know what to do, they studied enough but did not understand the material, and they did not memorize well enough. One said he always studied and never did badly. One Hmong informant, who was the student representative for the Hmong at one high school, said the students did not study as much as they said they did. He said the Hmong students work hard if they know the subject, but if they do not know it they will not work at it. He said

that if they studied harder their English would be better. Hmong who had come to the United States before him, or at the same time, could not speak as well as he. Another informant said that some liked to study, but that if they found it too hard they quit school to go to the Job Corps. Their attitude seems to be that if it is easy for them then they were meant to do it and if it is too hard, then they were not meant to be any good at it, so they do not try. Several students commented on their desire to learn various musical instruments, but would not take any classes in music because it was too hard.

The Hmong students considered English as the most important thing for them to know, followed by mathematics, history and science. Other individuals listed sewing, French, social studies and geography. The desire for English was based on the fact that they needed English to find out how to get a job. Mathematics was seen as easy and could teach them many things. They wanted American history because it was so different from the history of Laos and because it was seen as a good thing to know what happened in the past. One Hmong thought French was an important subject because so many Hmong had settled in France and he hoped to be able to go there to see them.

The Hmong were asked if the facts they were told in class were different from the facts their parents or elders told them at home. They all said yes, but most could not give an example of a difference in information. As to whom

they would believe, their family or teachers, five said the teachers and three said their parents, two said they did not know and said they believed both. One student said he believed his parents because such scientific beliefs as that the earth is round and rotates did not seem plausible. Another student said they should listen to their elders because they may be right. One student said that at home he was told to be a good person and a farmer, but at school he was shown how to understand many things. One student favored what was learned at school because the information came from books while information at home was verbal and had no evidence. He thought education was better than just talking. This idea corresponds with the traditional Hmong attitude toward books and education.

The Hmong were divided in their opinions as to whether school had been easier in Laos than in the United States. Some thought Laos was harder because one had to pass a test before one could go on to the next level and because there was much stricter discipline and formalized behavior, such as standing when the teacher entered. The rest viewed Laos as easier. There was one teacher for all the classes and he was responsible for the success or failure of the students. A class president kept order when the teacher was gone. One student said there was not much control in classes here. There was broken glass and broken chairs from roughhousing that were just left where they fell. In Laos the students wrote and worked together which was easier than the emphasis

on working individually in the United States. In Laos the subjects were shorter so they did not have to learn as much. Most of the students thought school in Laos was easier because the Laotian alphabet was easier and the language was closer to Hmong. Another major difference between schools in Laos and those in the United States which made Laos schools easier was that the teacher wrote the lessons on the board and then explained them. The Hmong think the teachers in the United States talk too much and they cannot understand them. The teachers do not write enough on the board. The emphasis in Laos was on writing the lessons down and memorizing them. In the United States the teachers try to avoid having the students memorize the work, but try to get the student to understand the material, thus concentrating more on lectures than writing on the board.

The Hmong expressed no complaints about their classes or teachers, or anything else. Only two students said that they were unhappy with one or two of their classes. One did not want to take P.E. or art because he did not do well in them. One student was against P.E. because it did not tell him how to speak English. He would rather go to the library. Some said they wanted classes other than the ones they were taking, but their English was not good enough. Some wanted more reading, more English, and more mathematics. Some just wanted more classes. One student did express a concern that only the girls were learning about family planning.

The students demonstrated a great interest in finding

out what American views were on such things as religion, ghosts, embalming, reincarnation, the universe, and what other places and people in the world were like. They were also very interested in how Americans got their information on history, archaeology, the universe and languages. One student asked why the Hmong did not have a good alphabet. He kept referring to some alphabet he had heard about which was better than the RPA or the Lao based alphabet for writing Hmong. This must be the alphabet of the 'new religion'. The Hmong were also very curious about how Americans explain certain phenomena which occur in Laos, such as animals which sense lightening storms or trees that do not die when struck by lightening, etc.

The Hmong could not think of any changes to be made in the schools, but said they would agree to any changes that were made. When speaking to a student representative he said that the Hmong students were not, in fact, happy with their classes. They wanted more ESL, mathematics and history. Those just in ESL, or ESL and reading, wanted more English because they had only a few hours of class per day and wanted more. The student representative did not think that mainstreaming helped the Hmong learn English if they did not know it in the first place. He had had ESL for five hours per day for six months in California before he went to regular classes. He said that allowed him to be able to express his questions when he did not understand something in class. He said that the students here often have questions, but do not know how to ask them.

The Hmong students try not to be very different from American students and try to imitate them. Teachers noted the Hmong, especially the girls, watching the way American students dressed. Hmong girls started wearing the same kind of necklaces, earrings and matching their clothes like the American girls. The Hmong quit bringing the book bags embroidered by their mothers in order to be like the other students. A group of Hmong boys were talking about being teased by American boys and said that some day they would be able to speak English well enough to understand what do do. They would be able to act like Americans and be able to swear like Americans, too. The desire to be like American students can be seen in a story written by a Hmong girl about a picture of a female basketball player. The student made up a story about the girl. She had practiced playing since she was six years old and her parents were happy with her for being on the team. She was very skinny and could run fast. "She is never weak on her team". The Hmong had been shy about joining in the P.E. sports because they did not know the rules or understand the games. This story shows some of their frustration at always being among the poor players. Another story by a Vietnamese girl also has the same theme. The girl in the picture was a poor basketball player and felt badly about it. She tried hard and after a few days her teammates told her how much she had improved and how happy they were that she was on their team.

Though the Hmong try to blend into the schools and become like the other students, they are isolated from the rest of the students because of the language barrier, prejudice and cultural differences. Only two of the thirty students interviewed said they had American friends with whom they did anything after school. The rest said they did not have American friends because they could not speak English well enough or that they have American friends but only associated with them in class. Adding to their isolation and separation from other students the Hmong have a tendency to gather together in certain areas of the school, such as the cafeteria, away from the other students.

Prejudice acts as a barrier between the Hmong and American students. The Hmong related problems with Americans teasing them, swearing at them, throwing food, stealing or vandalising their bikes and starting fights. About half of the Hmong thought the teachers and administrators know what is going on. Those that thought the teachers did not know did not want them to. The Hmong say they must handle the problems themselves. One girl commented that school was better in California because there was a greater variety of ethnic groups and the Hmong were not discriminated against as they are in Missoula. One Hmong parent viewed the trouble in school as characteristic of any country and that they would work themselves out. In the meantime, the Hmong do not feel easy starting a conversation with American students and so, keep their distance.

Some of the cultural differences which help keep the Hmong separated can be seen in stories written for their ESL classes based on a picture from a magazine. One Hmong student created a story from a picture of a man sitting in a chair in front of a building. The story tells how the man's wife had died and he took a job in another town from his sons and daughter. He was very sad because he was not with his family. In a month there will be a company layoff and then he can move back home to his children and be happy. Many of the students are separated from their families in the United States which causes emotional problems among the family-oriented Hmong. When asked with whom they wanted to live after their marriage, the students wanted to live with the husband's parents, his brothers or by themselves near their families. Duncan also found this in her research of the Missoula Hmong goals (1980). The above story relates a conflict the Hmong have to face, whether they would move to take a job or stay with their families. One Hmong parent said the students will stay with their parents until they can learn English. One Hmong said he would stay with his mother because she could teach him and his children many things and make them happy. One girl expected the Hmong in Missoula to begin spreading to other towns and states in search of jobs. This division of the Missoula population would be of extended family groups, not individuals or nuclear families.

Another story tells of differences in ways Americans and Hmong speak to each other. Americans may say things

they do not feel in order to make an impression. Hmong are expected to be polite, but also sincere. In a story about a girl basketball player, the girl is described as being skinny and fast. When she talks to someone her voice is 'too sweet'. "Everybody loves to talk to her. I think when she is getting old she'll get a bad sore throat in her throat." When the Hmong describe someone as talking 'sweet', it means that they are insincere (Interview July, 1980). One Hmong commented on the way American students talk to each other and tease and swear at one another. The Hmong said if they talked like that in Laos there would be a fight.

The immediate focus on the Hmong is finding a job. Besides the language problem, there is a lack of job skills among the Hmong. Before their involvement in the war, the Hmong were farmers. In more recent years they became taxi drivers or ran small markets. With the war the majority of the men became guerrilla fighters and radio operators. Unlike the Vietnamese who were trained in such skills as auto mechanics, the Hmong came out of the war without any marketable skills. Once in the United States, the Hmong need to learn English, acquire a job skill and then adapt to a foreign work-a-day world. The anxiety of finding a job and the unfamiliarity with its requirements are apparent in a story written by a Hmong student about a picture of a couple sitting in front of a house. "...They are a family and they are thinking about a new job and maybe they haven't had a job to do in their lives...They are talking about jobs and they

are sad and angry, too. Now they will decide where they will have a job to do." Another story about the same picture had the man going to work and falling asleep. The boss found him, called him a bad man and fired him. The couple was deciding what work he could find next.

Many of the Hmong have not decided if they will finish high school or not. Ten said that they would; three of these wanted to go on to college. Six thought they would not finish high school but would join the Job Corps instead. Only three Hmong mentioned any job they would like to get. This reluctance to reveal their personal goals may stem from the Hmong notion that if one were to relate one's aspirations and then not reach them, it would be embarrassing (Duncan 1980). The lack of information may also stem from the fact that many of the students arrived within the last year and really have no idea of the options available to them. The ESL teacher brought in a career counselor to speak to them on local jobs and job training programs and their requirements. The Job Corps offer to help put the students through college after completing the Job Corps program. This draws the greatest interest from the Hmong. They see it as a chance to learn English, a skill, and an opportunity to go to college all in one.

Except for a few of the more fluent, the students were also hesitant to make any predictions about the future of the Hmong. One view is that the Missoula Hmong will split up in search of jobs. This view is promoted by the Lao Family

Community, Inc. and the International Rescue Commission which helps the refugees relocate. One young man saw a good future for his children, but a hard life for himself and his contemporaries. Another student saw the Hmong eventually losing their language; the Hmong would get more education and not stay together. One said the Hmong would become Americans, but still be Hmong. The parents hypothesized that the Hmong would retain both cultures.

The students were asked if the Hmong had changed since they came to the United States and if that change was good or bad. Again, most would not elaborate on their answers, but confined themselves to saying that there had been changes and that these were good or both good and bad. One student said that the change was bad because the Hmong tried to act like Americans; they rode around in cars, acted tough, chased people and insulted the Chinese and Vietnamese. The general impression of the students was that any changes were good because the Hmong must do like the host country or not live here. One Hmong commented on the fact that they could only have one wife. He thought that was good and bad. One young man thought the changes were good, in particular, he was glad that they did not have to pay a bride price anymore. One thought the relationships between people were better here. In Laos they had to pay people to help them if they needed it. Here they can depend on other Hmong to help them without cost. One student liked being able to travel and to go see others often. In Laos, the country, the war and the poor roads

made travel difficult. Here the young men can get a car and travel to Spokane, Denver or elsewhere to visit relatives and girl friends with little difficulty or without taking much time. The students seem to view the changes as good and that the best life would be half American and half Hmong.

Since the Hmong way of life was changing, the students were asked if there was anything they especially wanted their children to know or remember about the Hmong culture. They all wanted their children to speak Hmong. One said simply he would have his children speak Hmong because he was a Hmong. The students also want their children to know Hmong folktales, the history of the Hmong, their own backgrounds and those of their grandparents, the reason for the Hmong exodus from Laos, their music, costumes, art, religion and the way Hmong believe. One student took art classes so that he could paint pictures of his relatives left in Laos and his impressions of the war. He felt that that way he would not forget what the Hmong have been through. Songs and poetry have been important to the Hmong as a means of passing on traditions and attracting girls. Several Hmong boys have organized a rock band to play Hmong music using modern instruments. The emphasis is on loud drumming and amplified guitar at very high volume to accompany a male or female singer. This singer seemingly continues the tradition of the girl singer at the wedding filmed by Geddes in "The Year of Tu Miao". They write songs about individuals in the community and their experiences. These become a very strong force in retaining the Hmong

identity and serve to remind them of their common bonds. The desire to make sure they do not forget their losses and trauma can be seen in a story written by a Hmong student about a picture of a sad-looking black boy.

He was an African boy. Many years ago this boy lost his parents in the war. He couldn't find his parents and relatives. He came to a village with not many people. One old man saw the boy walking house to house, then he went to question the boy. The boy was very hungry and sad. The man pitied him because their life was hard at that time. The old man put his hand on the boy's chest and said, "Please, God, help us because our life is unusually sad." They both thought, and their tears fell.

A few years later the boy was 18 and he was strong enough to work. Americans went to take him to the U.S.A. to be a slave. Later he said to his little boy, who was born in the U.S.A., "You must remember how sad it was for your father in his life."

The boy was thinking and he was sad. Later, after a few years, he became a football player. They paid him \$500,000 per year. Now, I think he has forgotten everything about his poor father's life. I think he's maybe on the Dallas football team now, but I don't know his name because almost all of the players are black and good players.

In March, 1980, the students organized a Youth Committee for youth up to age twenty-five to serve as an orientation center for new student arrivals and to assist their adjustment to school. The group's functions are to help the new student get acquainted with school, hold discussions to help individuals plan their future goals and to discuss plans for the Hmong, get and supply information on job training, and sponsor social activities such as dances, which are largely paid for by the few students who have jobs and extra money.

The Youth Committee also provides services for the Lao Family Community, Inc. by supplying volunteer transportation for the community, volunteer aides for the nightly ESL classes, and volunteers to distribute clothing to parents. These services are available at any time and result in students spending their evenings, weekends and some days away from their studies and classes to fulfill the committee's obligations. The goals of the committee are to meet the immediate needs of the students and the community; in doing so, the committee also fosters a sense of obligation to the Hmong community and to each other.

The students expect to stay in the United States, though not necessarily in Montana. Their view of America is that "the people who live in the USA have the best houses and the biggest country. They have everything important." The Hmong view of freedom is that it allows one to do what one wants to do, stay where one wants to, be free to do what one believes and be free to work. Freedom is against communism and means being able to get away from somebody---a good place to stay and be safe where no one harms you. One student said that in Laos they were called Meo (barbarian), but now they are called Hmong, which means free.

In talking to the Hmong students and observing them, one gets the impression that the students are unaware of the problems they face and do not yet understand what is expected of them in this new life in Montana. The few who are aware of the changes their culture faces and the future implications

of these, have expressed their obligations to their families, to get jobs and maintain the major features of their culture. They are eager to accept the benefits of American society, especially the availability of an education. A few of the Hmong students exert themselves more than the others to get an education, not for themselves, but for their families, and to help other Hmong. Many of the students do not appear to be overly exerting themselves, which may be because they do not understand how or where they should be making the most effort; they are still adjusting from their relocation and the relative boredom of life in the camps, or they are finding it too hard in school and feel they were not meant to be doing school work. This encompasses the concept of luck.

The impression of Hmong students which came through the interviews has been one of secretiveness, ambiguity or confusion. The few who were willing to express themselves suggested that the students were involved in groups like the band in order to reassert their identity as Hmong. They have traditional goals as far as the organization of the family and marriage. Their desire for an education conforms to the traditional Hmong reverence for reading and writing and the status an education confers. The students are aware of the differences between American and Hmong cultures and demonstrate a flexibility in accepting and rejecting behavior and values from both. At this point the Hmong students show a willingness to attempt anything in school...to accept changes in their behavior, in order to get along better in

high school. Yet, at the same time, they do not intend to substitute what they do at school for their identity as Hmong, as symbolized in their language, music and family ties. They show evidence of acculturation, but not of changing their primary relationships from Hmong to 'American' or of being fully assimilated.

CHAPTER 5 - Assessment and Conclusions

The presence of the Lao Hmong refugees in and around Missoula, Montana has created problems for the school system, the Hmong and, ultimately, for the community. The large influx of Hmong and Vietnamese refugees in 1980 into Missoula schools found the school administrators unprepared. Over the past year when the number of Hmong increased rapidly, the school districts reluctantly began to respond to the problems developing in the classrooms due to the Hmong's inability to understand English. Both school districts established an ESL program, but because of minimal funding these programs are less than satisfactory, employing only one full-time ESL teacher per district. The high schools gained a part-time teacher and a student teacher in the spring which greatly improved the ability of the program to adequately teach English. Unfortunately, the plans are to eliminate those two extra positions next year and to continue with only one ESL teacher for the eighty-plus students returning this coming year, along with the refugees expected to arrive throughout the 1980-1981 academic year. For Missoula as a whole, the Hmong population is expected to increase in number from eighty to over two hundred (Cherpao 6/20/80).

The high schools' administrators have justified their

approach to the refugee situation by arguing the validity of mainstreaming the refugees. The high schools have hesitated to enact the comprehensive programs of other school systems, such as Spokane, Washington or Monterey, California for several reasons. They hope that the English problem can be worked out, in time, by bringing the refugees into close contact with the American students and by maximizing the refugees' exposure to regular student behavior. The administrators are afraid of accusations of discrimination in favor of the Hmong if they create special classes or programs to assist the Hmong and do not provide similar services for other student groups. The immediate problem is funding. There always seems to be some federal money on its way, but it has not yet arrived, and everyone is understandably afraid to initiate a new program without guaranteed funding. However, an active effort to apply for money to create a comprehensive program for non-English speaking students is not evident. Funding for refugee programs came through the Social Rehabilitation Services and the Department of Education. Through the Indochinese Children's Act, Montana received \$40,000.00 for fiscal year 1980. \$8,000.00 of this went to Missoula County High Schools and \$18,000 went to Missoula District I based upon their numbers of refugee students. The number of refugees changed greatly throughout 1980, but the money did not. Missoula appealed to the state for funding and organizational help, but the state did not consider it necessary at the state level. Later in the spring of 1980,

the state developed a position to deal with programs for refugees and to distribute available Social Rehabilitation Services' funding.

The actions of the administrators and teachers within the schools portray the range which prejudice may take, from open hostilities to indifference to positive patronizing assistance. These perceptions stem from a pronounced lack of information about the Hmong. A few individuals have made considerable personal effort to learn about the Hmong. Others have access to a certain amount of basic background information; however, this knowledge does not appear to be circulating. Most of the teachers are unaware of the ethnic identity of their refugee students and have been unable or unwilling to spend their own time finding out about them. In the course of this research, individuals commented on the fact that teachers do not generally get to know the background of any of their students. This may be true, but they can assume a common cultural awareness and communicate with their regular students, whereas the Hmong student's difference from Americans is not only linguistic, but cultural as well.

Schools operate under the concept of the U.S. as a melting pot of ethnic groups. Through time, ethnic groups will dissolve as distinct groups and meld into the American culture, which will become richer by adopting selected traits from the new group. This idea tends to project the view that a new ethnic group is a temporary entity. Given

natural contact with American society an ethnic group will acculturate and finally assimilate. The Hmong seem to be treated as a temporary problem. Once they learn English, all other differences can be worked out or ignored. In light of this, the development of elaborate programs around refugee services would consume too much time, energy and resources for their projected limited utilization.

The situation in the high schools is not as productive or as helpful as it could be. The students are placed in classes they cannot comprehend, they are placed into classes for which they do not have the educational background and they are passed from class to class on the basis of good attendance, good attitudes and for making an effort, more often than an adequate understanding of the students' comprehension of class materials and concepts.

In short, the schools have reacted to the refugee presence with inadequate planning. Programs initiated have been insufficient due to timidity and hesitation on the part of administrators to pursue a course which might induce allegations of discrimination in favor of the Hmong. Funding has been deficient and that has curtailed expansive programming; however, determined efforts to acquire grants have not been evident. The major problem within the school system, from administrators to teachers, is a matter of attitude. The refugee problems are seen as temporary and as long as this view is held impetus to combat them is allocated to other priority problems. Prejudice and vandalism

among high school students is rationalized as being characteristic of that age group. The apparent sincerity and industriousness of the Hmong students further enforces the opinion that the bulk of the burden to gain the necessary educational and English skills rests with the individual students. While the school administrators and teachers must accept responsibility for the ultimate conditions within the schools, the problems are not all their fault. The lack of preparedness for the students as they arrived in 1980 can in part be credited to the vague or nonexistent information the school systems received from the relief agencies dealing with the refugees, and the Hmong representatives, concerning the numbers and expected arrival of refugees. Also, the hesitation to create vast new programs for the Hmong because of possible discrimination charges must be respected as a real danger with today's emphasis on absolute equality and the inflationary economic conditions which demand justification for any additions to publically funded institutions. Also, a portion of the educational difficulties must be shared by the Hmong themselves.

The Hmong came to Montana originally with the intention of returning to Laos. Their goal while in the U.S. was to get an education in order to further themselves in Laos. The Hmong concept of education, reading and writing were influenced by the Chinese. The Hmong reverence for reading relates to the absence of a known writing system for the Hmong language. Books possess power, and the individual who can

read gains status. The Hmong have taken advantage of educational facilities when available. They continue to assess the value of written information in terms of their traditional ideology, e.g., the student who believed school material over traditional knowledge because it is written down.

Through much of this research, the Hmong appear as the innocent victims, yet many of the difficulties encountered result from cultural conflicts, Hmong attitudes about children and luck, and their designation of their community's priorities in their relocation adjustment to American life and their fluctuating dealings with Americans. Hmong concepts of correct and respectful behavior have created misunderstandings between teachers and students. The Hmong will say they understand when they do not just to be polite. The teachers do not have the time to spend discovering if the student does or does not actually understand. The teachers have to take the word of the student and concentrate on the ones who do request assistance.

The Hmong view children as capable of adapting to changing circumstances rather easily. Because of this the Hmong community is concentrating its efforts on supplying aid and reassurance to the elders as they are experiencing problems in adjusting to their secondary roles in the U.S. The children and young adults may have some difficulties, but the attitude is that they will handle the problems and successfully manipulate their options on their own.

The Hmong have a notion of luck so that any individual

may be hit with misfortune or failure in whatever he tries regardless of his effort or intelligence, due to a state of being unlucky. Another individual, on the other hand, may always be in the right spot at the right time because he is naturally lucky. When students find certain studies too difficult, they may rationalize their lack of progress as the result of their not having a 'good idea', i.e., being unlucky. Hard work will not change it, so the students relax their efforts or quit completely and try something else. This attitude impedes their educational progress.

Students are expected to help other Hmong when called upon as interpreters, drivers or whatever. Their parents and elders do not seem to stress their studying. Emphasis is placed on family or group requirements, not individual goals. The more fluent students are constantly called upon to give their services, which prevents them from studying though it improves their English. The majority of the parents, being non-English speaking, do not know how to help the students or when they should encourage studying, because they do not understand the school structure. There is little contact between the teachers and the Hmong parents, so that the parents' understanding or expectations are not conveyed to the teachers, nor are the teachers' to the parents.

The Hmong also have a temporary notion of the educational problems. They assume that if they just keep working they will succeed. They are very confident of their ability to make a living for themselves and do not wish to appear special

in any way. Therefore, they approach the school problems as unfortunate, but not something to which they will draw attention in order to remedy them.

Hmong students are reacting to stress in the schools through an organized group to lend whatever assistance or support they can to each other and to help each other pursue future job and educational options. Hmong students segregate themselves from the rest of the students which promotes a sense of self and other among the Hmong and maintains mistrust between American and Hmong students. As a group, the Hmong students emphasize Hmong values, language and customs, yet they philosophically accept the many changes they are undergoing as the price they must pay for living in a host nation, and even express their approval of the majority of these changes. A few students displayed great perceptivity of some of the more subtle differences between Hmong and Americans; they appear to be able to objectively view each and then choose the one they think is best for themselves without threatening their identification with other Hmong traits.

In sum, the Hmong students find themselves in a foreign environment within the schools often without an adequate educational background or behavioral orientation. Their English acquisition is delayed because of minimal services and an absence of bilingual aides from whom primary concepts and expectations could be gained. The Hmong react to the school situation in traditional ways, by working hard, but only if

they feel confident of success in that particular subject. To prevent as much public attention as possible, problems are dealt with by themselves. Emphasis is put on presenting a good impression, so problems or differences are glossed over. Students are not a major concern of the Hmong community, which draws on the students' time and energy for family or community services. The students' poor English skills serve to alienate them from the rest of the student body, and the alienation is reinforced by voluntary segregation of the Hmong.

This thesis began with a discussion of the qualifications and variables of an ideal model of assimilation in which the ethnic group ceases to exist as a separate entity and becomes indistinguishable from the host society. The research for this paper was based on the assumption that the Missoula, Montana high schools have, as part of the United States nation-state, the objective of creating effective citizens capable of assuming expected adult roles in this society. In describing their aims, several administrators used the term assimilation to describe the desired outcome of their dealings with the Hmong. While the term assimilation was used, they did not apply it as defined above, but qualified it in some way. They predicted that the Hmong would eat, speak and dress like Americans, but retain a minimal number of their arts and personal habits at home. They would retain Hmong things, but be Americans. This does not seem to be what is happening as there exists a conflict of goals between

Americans and Hmong. The Americans want to make Americans of the Hmong, while the Hmong do not want to be just American citizens, but to continue as Hmong within America. The distinction here is only one of degree or emphasis, but it is a crucial distinction since ethnic identity depends upon a people's definition of themselves in relation to other groups of people. If the Hmong see themselves as different, then they have not been assimilated.

The Hmong have demonstrated a very interesting willingness to change and adapt, i.e., to acculturate. These changes do not appear to threaten their sense of identity as Hmong. There are certain aspects of Hmong culture which they are making strong efforts to retain; their language, religion, family unity and the emphasis on the group over the individual. The Hmong are being pressured to define their culture to Americans, which is extremely difficult for any people. Their desire not to offend Americans and to retain "face" in the public acknowledgement of their customs, which differ from ours, has resulted in a front of unity and homogeneity among all Missoula Hmong even though they are from varying subgroups, religions, linguistic dialects and clans. This has cultivated an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery around the Hmong and has promoted a boundary between Hmong and Americans, a sense that one cannot get to know the Hmong, let alone absorb them. On one occasion the Hmong are very open and explicit in their explanations of their ways and another time they suddenly become vague, polite and assume characteristics which they hope will please the Americans without

emphasizing cultural differences. This fluidity of the definition of 'Hmong' lends some justification to the principal's comment that the Hmong have no culture to retain. Their culture changes to meet the immediate needs of the people. Perhaps this explains the success of their ethnic identity for centuries through numerous acculturative influences and culture change within other dominant cultures. Thus, the defining boundary mechanisms of being Hmong become elusive, but are no less real. The Hmong work together to help each other and are developing a sense of a Hmong community where they collect for social events, ceremonies, information and where their major obligations lie. Through the efforts of the schools the Hmong high school students are being acculturated to American life. The students are consciously taking on American behavior and attitudes and greet most of them as positive changes. This Americanization seems to serve as a means of preserving the core elements of Hmong culture. The students go to school to get an education, a job and to learn how to be accepted in American society in order, ultimately, to be able to preserve their traditional family organization, religion, language and identity as Hmong.

The function of the schools is to produce good citizens, which requires enculturation in American ideals, as well as a basic education so that the students can be productive economically and as informed citizens. It must be questioned whether the Hmong are receiving this education. The

unstructured methods for evaluating their fulfillment of class requirements for promotion to the next grade and eventually out of high school allow for the Hmong to pass through high school, for the most part, on their attendance record. Their lack of background information, minimal English skills and their emphasis on memorization make the comprehension of concepts and problem solving formidable. Without these skills the Hmong do and will have very real problems in achieving the further education or acceptance into profitable job training programs needed to reach and maintain a self-sufficient life.

In conclusion, I see the Hmong as becoming acculturated, but not assimilated. If their student and community organizations continue to function the Hmong will have a constant source of reference toward ethnic identity. The Hmong may acculturate to the point that their values, beliefs, behavior and even goals become those of the greater American society, but I predict that their primary sense of self will stem from being Hmong and their primary relationships will evolve around other Hmong, similar to the Chinese-Americans. They may become Hmong-Americans. That, I think, is the optimistic result. It allows for a productive life for the Hmong, minimal prejudice and discrimination between groups and generates viable citizens for the U.S. But another result may occur just as easily. The Hmong will retain their identity, but as the result of negative factors. The less than perfect educational support they are receiving at present plus the

effects of increasing prejudice by Americans in a conservative, relatively homogeneous, Montana population during economically tight times emphasize the Hmong presence as refugees, welfare recipients and an economic burden to the community. If the Hmong do not get good comprehensive aid now to facilitate their movement to self-sufficiency, their independence will be delayed and their separate status will be the effect of prejudice and fear and will, in turn, promote prejudice and fear. The Hmong intend to continue teaching their children to speak Hmong and if they are successful, will require a continued ESL program or a bicultural program. If the Hmong are not helped now we shall be supporting them for some time to come at a great loss to their esteem and at a great disservice to our own cultural growth and enrichment.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

1. What is your family name and lineage? _____
2. What is your sex? Male _____ Female _____ Age? _____
3. Are you single _____, married _____, widow(er) _____
divorced _____?
4. Do you have any children? _____
5. Where did you live in Laos? _____
6. Did you live in a town or in a country before your
move to refugee camps? _____
7. How many brothers and sisters do you have? _____
8. How many are older than you? _____ Are they boys or girls?

9. Who are you living with in Missoula? _____
10. What is your religious preference? _____
If you have been baptized, when was that? _____
Were your parents also baptized? _____
11. Are your parents alive? _____
12. Are they still in Laos or Thailand? _____
13. Did your parents ever go to school? _____ Where and for
how long? _____
14. Did your grandparents ever go to school? _____

15. If you are staying with relatives other than your parents, did they ever go to school? _____
16. How are they related to your parents? _____
17. Had you ever gone to school before you came to Missoula?

18. Where, when, how long, and what classes did you take if you have gone to school before you came here?

19. What grade in school are you now in? _____
20. How long have you been in the U.S.? _____
21. How long have you been learning English? _____
22. What other languages can you speak? _____
23. What other languages can you read? _____
24. List the classes you are taking this quarter. _____

25. What are your favorite classes and why? _____

26. Do you watch T.V.? ___ What programs do you like? _____

27. How do you get to school? _____
28. Do you eat the school lunch? _____
29. What do you like to eat? _____
What is good about the lunches? _____
What is bad about the lunches? _____
30. What do you want to do when you finish school? _____

31. Do you plan on graduating from high school? _____
32. Will you teach your children Hmong? Why or why not?
.....

33. Are you taking the classes you want to take? If not,
why not?

34. Do you like P.E.? Why or why not? _____
35. What changes would you like to see in school? _____
.....

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEWS

Hmong Parents

1. What do you think is most important for the students to learn?
2. What kinds of things should boys (girls) learn in school?
3. Do boys and girls need the same amount of education? Why?
4. Is there any trouble with American students in schools?
5. Why should the Hmong go to school? What can school do for them?
6. What do you like about school? What is there that you do not like about school?
7. What does freedom mean to you?
8. Do Hmong parents help their children go to school? In what ways?
9. Is schoolwork the most important activity for the student or is helping relatives most important?
10. Is there anyone in your family, in particular, who is expected to get an education?
11. Do students learn things different from what you or the elders have told them?
12. What does it take to do well in school?
13. What is the reason for not doing well?
14. Have the Hmong changed since they came to the United States? Is it good or bad?

15. What about the Hmong do you want the children to remember?
16. Are there any problems because the children are going to school here?
17. How much education do they need?
18. Is knowledge an infinite or finite matter?
19. Do the students study after school?
20. Would you move with your children if they found a job somewhere else?

APPENDIX III

INTERVIEWS

School Administrators

1. How many Hmong are in your school?
 - a. ages --
 - b. classes --
 - c. sex --
2. How are they doing?
 - a. progress --
 - b. are they understanding the assignments, lectures, reading --
 - c. how are they placed --
3. Do you have any special programs for them?
 - a. what programs --
 - b. how were these developed --
 - c. are they successful; if so, why so --
 - d. if not successful, why not --
4. Are there any behavior problems with the Hmong?
 - a. relations with other kids--
-fighting, teasing
 - b. discipline --
 - c. attendance --
 - d. dress --
 - e. attitudes --

- f. work --
- g. do they ask 'why' questions --
- 5. Do they show any special characteristics or tendencies?
- 6. Are there any differences in the work and behavior of boys and girls?
- 7. Do you have contact with the parents?
 - a. on what basis --
 - b. are they actively involved, do they support and encourage their children --
- 8. Have you any Indian students in school?
 - a. how does your experience with them compare with the Hmong--
 - i.e. - talking, peer pressure, family --
- 9. How do you feel about the Hmong?
 - their education, abilities, attitudes, reliability, stability, assimilation, future --
- 10. Are there any reoccurring comments by teachers?
- 11. Any special incidences?
- 12. Others you suggest I might talk with?

APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEWS

Hmong Students

- A1. What did you hear about school in the U.S. while still in camp in Thailand?
- 2. Did you discuss with other young people what school would be like?
- 3. Did you prepare yourself for school here? How?
- B1. How are you doing in each of your classes? Do you understand your classes? If not, is the problem English, or the subject?
- 2. How much would you say you understand of what the teacher says in class?
- 3. How do you expect to learn the material presented in class? By memorizing? By discussion and comparison? By reading many books? Through inspiration?
- 4. What do you think is most important to learn?
- 5. What kinds of things should boys (girls) learn in school?
- 6. Do boys and girls need the same amount of education? Why?
- C1. Who are your closest friends? Are any of your friends Americans? Do you feel free to start a conversation with American kids or your teachers?

2. Is there any trouble with the other kids in school?
 3. What is the difference, if any, between Hmong and American students? Between Hmong and Americans?
 4. How do Missoula schools compare to your conception of what schools should be like?
 5. What do you like about your teachers here? What do you dislike?
 6. Why are you going to school? What can school do for you?
 7. What about school do you like? What about school do you not like?
- D1. What does freedom mean to you?
2. How do your parents help you go to school? Do your parents consider your school work your most important activity, or do they think that helping your relatives is most important? Do they scold you when you do not do well in school? Do they reward you if you do well? Do they compare your achievements with those of other young people in the family or among close relatives?
 3. Is there anyone in your family, in particular, who is expected to get an education?
 4. Do you believe what you are told in class?
 5. Is what you learn in class different from what your parents or grandparents ever told you? Give an example. Which do you think is correct? Why?
 6. Have you ever been told stories about the Hmong getting an education?

7. Do you think it is your parents' fault if you do not do well in school? Do you think it is the fault of the ancestors for not sending you a more intelligent soul? Do you think it is because you are not working hard enough? Do you think it is because you are lucky or unlucky? If the last, is there anything you can do about it?
8. Is knowledge a finite body of data that exists already and it is for you to acquire this from appropriate sources? Or is knowledge an infinite possibility of understanding life and the universe to which each generation, and each individual, contributes, building on what has gone before, but never exhausting the possibilities?
9. What is the future of the Hmong?
10. Have the Hmong changed since they came to the U.S.? How? Is this change good or bad?
11. What about the Hmong do you want your children to know and remember?
12. Who do you want to live with after you are married?
13. If you went to school in Laos, what are the differences between school there and here in Missoula?
14. What do you do after school and on weekends?
15. What are you doing this summer?

APPENDIX V

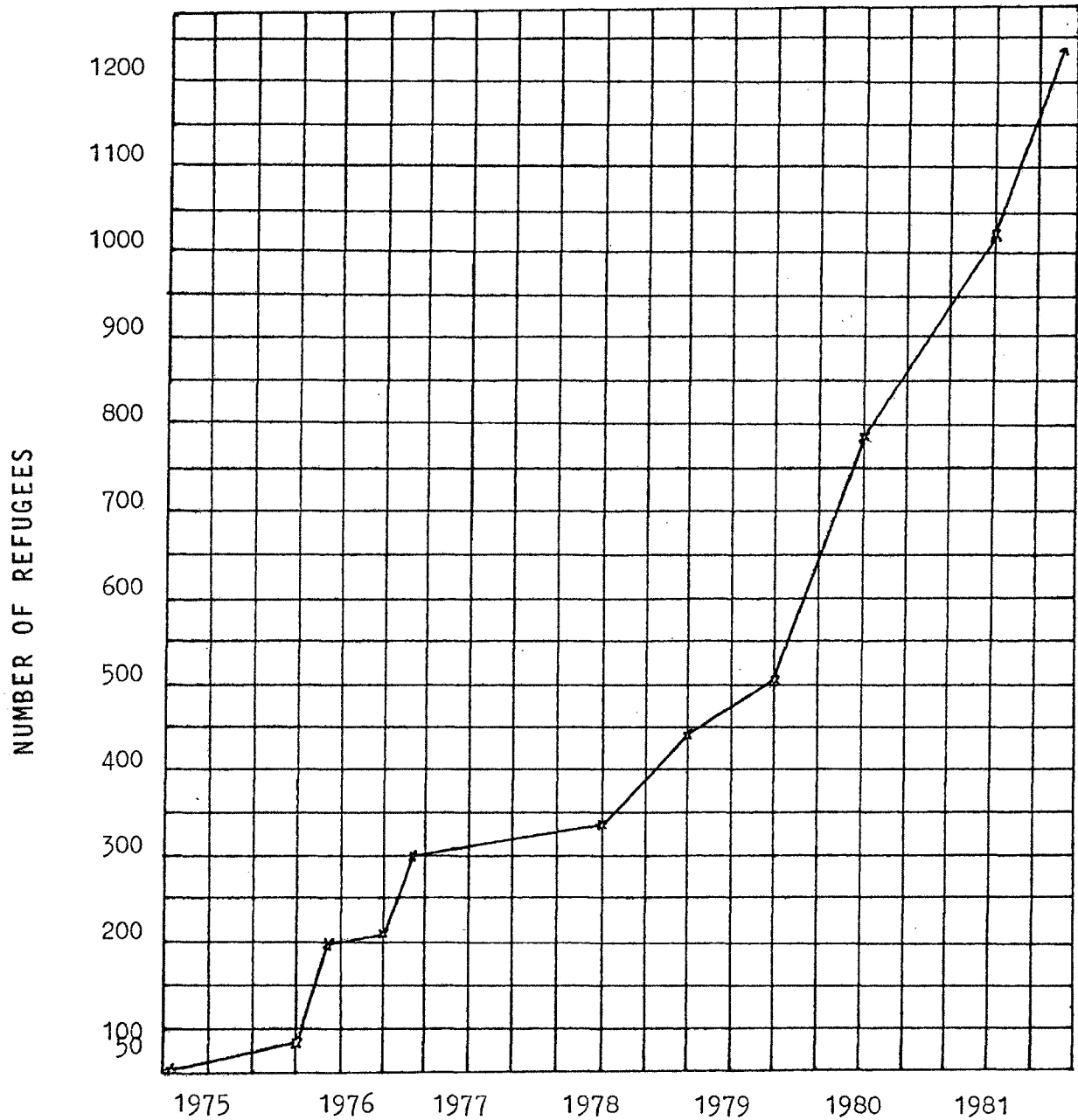


Figure 1. Montana Refugee Population 1975-1980 Breakdown by ethnic group (figures represent approximations). Lao (Hmong)... 90%, Vietnamese...10%, Khmer Cambodian...0%. Compiled by the Lao Family Community, Inc., Missoula, Montana. May, 1980.

Appendix VI

TABLE 2. WESTERN MONTANA REFUGEES

Statistics May, 1980*

	CAMBODIAN	VIETNAMESE	LAO/HMONG
EMPLOYABLE AGE:		15 15	43 Employed 396 Unemployed
PUBLIC ASSISTANCE:		24 0 6 5	525 Cash Assistance 2 Medical Only 9 Food Stamps Only 14 SSI
OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS EMPLOYED:		2 11 4	5 Secondary Wage Earner 21 Full-Time 11 Part-Time
EDUCATION ENROLLMENT		9 8 21	120 Vocational School 63 High School 132 Elementary
AGE DISTRIBUTION		15 14 15 11 10 3	136 Over age 30 198 Age 21-30 97 Age 16-20 78 Age 11-15 74 Age 6-10 95 Age 0-5
		39 29 68	337 Male 341 Female 678 TOTAL

*Compiled by the Lao Family Community, Inc., Missoula, Montana - May, 1980.