



## Chapter 11

# THE SOUTHEAST ASIANS



The Vietnam War created a different set of relations with Southeast Asia. What was once a forgotten and neglected area became a high priority for military action and its effects still linger today, especially because it introduced new Asian populations to our country. They came involuntarily, did not meet visa and quota requirements, and many were totally unprepared for life in the United States. Initially, there were special programs to help them fit into the new country, but by the end of the century, most programs had run their course.

However, because of the circumstances leading to their arrival, studies on their adaptation, including different cultural styles, have become one topic of inquiry. For example, a front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* discussed child brides among the Hmong. Every winter in the Central Valley of California, Hmong men search for brides, often as young as 12 and 13 years of age. There is a male saying, "If you marry a girl your age, by the time she has given you enough children, she will look twice your age."<sup>1</sup>

Early marriage has made Hmong mothers among the most prolific in the world, with an average fertility rate of 9.5 children per woman. One concern among U.S. authorities is that the Hmong have the highest welfare rate of any group in the United States. Another concern is that many young girls who have been doing extremely well in school drop out at an early age in order to marry and to have children.

The pressure "to do something" is high, even though it is difficult to conceive of any intervention that would be effective concerning marriage rituals that have long been a part of the ancestral culture. California law de-

fines sex with anyone under 15 as a felony, and court permission is necessary for marriage under 18 years of age, but the legal system is stretched too thin to pursue a crime rooted more in culture than in vice.

But there is concern regarding this practice, for it runs counter to the norms of the dominant society. Questions of how long this practice might continue and if it will have an effect on the future of the Hmong, especially the young girls, are legitimate concerns. For example, one female respondent said, "Hmong females have no rights. . . . We're just supposed to have babies, be housewives, do what the husband says to do. It's a very sad life."<sup>2</sup>

But if research among the Hmong on this issue were to be conducted thirty or forty years from now, there is a high probability that acculturation would have taken place and marital practices would be more in keeping with dominant-group norms, so that the only remark might well be that once upon a time in the 1990s, there was this quaint custom of taking child brides. The unfortunate consequence of publicizing such "culture conflicts" is that it may tend to reinforce stereotypes of the "strange and alien ways" of the newcomers rather than understanding such conflicts as issues that all immigrants have had to resolve.

Southeast Asians who have entered the United States as refugees include the Vietnamese, Laotians (Lao and Hmong), Cambodians (Kampuchians), and ethnic Chinese. Their refugee status was one result of U.S. intervention in Vietnam after World War II and the subsequent fall of South Vietnam to the communist forces from Hanoi. Before we examine each of these Southeast Asian groups, we will study the differences between a refugee and a "regular" immigrant and discuss briefly the history of U.S. policy toward refugees.

### WHO IS A REFUGEE?

A refugee is a person who flees his or her native country for safety in a time of distress. Thus refugees are a special kind of immigrant; however, they face the same questions that all newcomers must address. Do they attempt to become a part of the mainstream? Are their goals acculturation, integration, and assimilation? Or do they wish to retain a separate identity, maintaining pluralistic structures and awaiting the day that they can return to their homelands? What are the attitudes of the majority group toward them? What are the reactions of other minorities?

Although the major difference between the refugee and the immigrant relates to the type of entry into our country, there are other differences worth noting. In a push-pull model of migration, the refugee is more likely to be pushed out of his or her home. There is often a move from one site to another; an additional element is some type of persecution, based on race, religion, or political ideology. There is a strong dimension of fear and crisis.

Very few refugees have the luxury of thinking about the long-term consequences of their migration. Many harbor the hope of eventually returning to their homes, and hence there is a temporary quality to their migration.

But if past behavior of Russians, Jews, and Cubans is any indication, few refugees will return home. Most students of migration, beginning with Ravenstein, argue that "push" immigrants are less likely to return than "pull."

There is general agreement that the term *refugee* was first applied in the late 1600s.<sup>3</sup> However, the sight of populations fleeing from political and other disasters was a common one long before that time. At one period, refugees were regarded as desirable and made welcome since they brought with them technological, industrial, military, commercial, and agricultural skills. At present, it appears that refugees representing less wealthy and less skilled populations are less desired, especially if they are racially and culturally different from the host society. But the rapid changes in the political and economic spheres over the past several decades have created a massive refugee population, so it can be justifiably argued that the twentieth century is the century of the refugee.

The increased use of the passport during World War I, identified by Neal Ascherson as one of the more noxious but lasting mementos of that war,<sup>4</sup> created "stateless persons" and compounded problems of mobility across national boundaries. The Russian Revolution and the steady stream of refugees fleeing from German fascism in the 1930s further contributed to population movement. World War II saw the displacement of many populations from their previous homes; current conditions creating refugees include changes in government, wars, civil strife, and instability.

Although there is general agreement that a refugee is one who flees a country in a time of distress, the question of who is a "true" refugee remains difficult to ascertain. Economic migrants, fortune hunters, opportunists, and those who have consciously planned on immigration are mixed with those who were forced to flee for their lives because of a change in the political structure. Bruce Grant acknowledges the crisis conditions leading to forced migration, but he also notes that some refugees fled to the United States and other countries for a reason common to most immigration—the hope for a better life compared to limited opportunities at home.<sup>5</sup> But no matter what the circumstances, refugees share a common background. They have cut ties with the country of their birth, and they are venturing into a new land with little formal preparation. There are questions of how to make a living, how to fit, and how to manage. Will their norms and values be congruent and functional in the new setting? How helpful will their new hosts be in the transition?

## U.S. POLICY TOWARD REFUGEES

Prior to 1980, the United States policy toward refugees was on an ad hoc basis. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allowed individuals uprooted by World War II and those fleeing Soviet persecution to immigrate; the

Refugee Relief Act of 1953 offered asylum to victims of national calamities and those fleeing communism. After the Bay of Pigs incident, Congress acted to regularize and make permanent the immigration status of all Cubans who had arrived in this country since January 1, 1959, by granting them refugee eligibility through the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1962. Amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 established parole authority for granting asylum on an individual basis. Cuban refugees entering the country between 1961 and 1971 and 100,000 refugees from Indochina in 1976 came under the parole provisions.

In 1980, President Carter signed the Refugee Assistance Act, which for the first time formulated an explicit policy for refugees. It moved beyond Cold War priorities and established annual admission levels of 50,000 and allowances for upward increases. It recognized the principle of asylum and regularized mechanisms for distributing federal aid to refugees and for reimbursing states, local governments, and private voluntary agencies for their refugee-related expenses.

## THE TWO WAVES OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES

Two waves of refugees are generally identified.<sup>6</sup> Many in the first wave were military personnel, civil servants, teachers, farmers, fishermen, employees of the Americans, and Catholics. They recognized that their middle- and upper-class lifestyles would not be compatible with a communist regime; they feared reprisals and personal harm, so escape was a necessity. Educational attainment was generally high; nearly half of the household heads were born in northern Vietnam and had fled to the south after the French defeat at Dienbienphu in 1954. The immigration was primarily in family groups, although there was also a sizable number of unaccompanied single males. There were extremes in wealth; some came with substantial sums of money, while others fled with scarcely more than the clothes on their backs.<sup>7</sup>

The second wave consisted of refugees who arrived in the United States after 1975. Poor agricultural harvests, the economic drain of continued fighting in Laos and Cambodia, loss of jobs, and generally poor economic conditions contributed to the push. Many also feared being sent to "reeducation" centers and work camps and being forcibly moved away from their urban environment. Increased hostilities between Vietnam and China created an additional problem for the ethnic Chinese residing in Southeast Asia; their loyalty was questioned, and their property was expropriated.

To sum up, the first wave was generally composed of refugees from the more "advantaged" backgrounds than the second. In the first wave, 49 percent were under 36 years of age; in the second wave, 58 percent. Family size was four in the first group and four to five in the second. Forty-one percent were Catholic and 40 percent Buddhist in the first wave; 29 percent

were Catholic and 47 percent Buddhist in the second. In terms of education, 48.8 percent of the first wave attended over four years of college, compared to 29.1 percent of the second. The first wave was generally more familiar with Western ways and culture than the second, although the latter also included members of the intelligentsia who had been unable to leave earlier.<sup>8</sup>

The recency of the migration of Southeast Asians can be garnered from the following statistics. Prior to 1970, there were approximately 20,000 Vietnamese in the United States, and the number of Cambodians and Laotians was too small to be counted. By 1980, there were 415,235 Indochinese, of which 78 percent were Vietnamese, 16 percent Cambodians, and 6 percent Laotians. In 1990, these figures had risen to 614,547 Vietnamese, 239,096 Laotians (149,014 Lao and 90,082 Hmong), and 147,411 Cambodians. Although there were official attempts to scatter the refugees throughout the country, the majority have migrated to the Sunbelt states. California has the most Asian refugees, followed by Texas and Washington. By 1990 a significant percentage of these groups was American-born. Twenty percent of Vietnamese were in this category: They had a median age of 6.6 years.

SarDersai provides a historical look at the Southeast Asians. The region is not a cohesive unit of similar backgrounds.<sup>9</sup> There are at least four different religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Five non-Asian powers have ruled the region: the British in Burma and Malaya; the Dutch in Indonesia; the French in Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam; the Americans in the Philippines; and the Portuguese in Timor. Only Thailand remained free. Japan had control of the area during World War II.

As a consequence, each of the colonies had different spheres of administration, education, trade, and currency, and, most important, these differences created barriers against easy and effective communication.

## THE VIETNAMESE

### Background

Foreign influences on Vietnam have included the Chinese, French, Japanese, and American. The history of Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia extends over 2,000 years. Some came by land, to Cochinchina and Cambodia; more came by sea, to Vietnam. The Chinese influence has been long and pervasive, yet relationships between the two cultures have seldom been positive. The Chinese lived in their own segregated communities and were subject to numerous repressive measures.<sup>10</sup>

The French entered Vietnam in 1777 at a time when European powers were colonizing most of the world. Their initial influence was primarily cultural and religious. Their conquest of the region began in 1858 under Napoleon III. France saw the growing influence of the British and Dutch in

this area and seized the opportunity by aiding the ruling families to suppress peasant uprisings. The Treaty of 1787 gave the French exclusive trading rights and access to the ports. French Catholic missionaries became a significant factor in the country, and the ruling group, fearing a foreign takeover, passed an edict of death against the missionaries. The French responded by landing troops but did not gain control over Vietnam until the 1890s. Civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech, participation in the political process, and travel, were denied the Vietnamese.<sup>11</sup>

There were continuous rebellions against French rule. The most significant was the Revolutionary Youth Movement, which was founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1925 and evolved into the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930. The strikes and rebellions that occurred during the worldwide depression of the 1930s were crushed by the French; most of the surviving resistance leaders went underground.

The Japanese moved into Vietnam in 1940. For the most part they tolerated and cooperated with existing French colonial institutions, substituting Asian imperialism for European. The defeat of Japan in August 1945, the last episode of World War II, left a power vacuum that was partially filled by the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, who had resisted the Japanese and would resist the French, the Americans, and, eventually, his ideological cousins, the Chinese. All, in his eyes, were foreign intruders.<sup>12</sup>

The French, with American assistance, reoccupied Vietnam, but their defeat at Dienbienphu accelerated a departure that had been sure to come. In an international conference at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1954, France conceded the independence of Vietnam and the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. Free elections were to be held in all of Vietnam in 1956, but these never took place. Instead, two rival regimes, the Republic of Viet Nam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (North Vietnam), evolved under a Catholic Nationalist, Ngo Dinh Diem, and the Communist Ho, respectively. An artificial division at the seventeenth parallel with a demilitarized zone, similar to the Korean model, was declared but proved unavailing. In both North and South Vietnam, separate but highly suspect elections were held, although few scholars now doubt that Ho had much more support throughout the country than Diem, whose religion in a nation overwhelmingly Buddhist and whose Western support in a highly nationalistic country tarnished his credentials. Throughout the period from 1945 to 1975, a bloody civil war went on in Vietnam, with each side receiving significant foreign support.

The United States entered this conflict almost imperceptibly. Aid was given to the French by the Truman administration (1945-1949), and by the end of the Eisenhower administration (January 1961) there were approximately 600 American advisers in Vietnam. When President John F. Kennedy died in November 1963, there were more than 16,000 American soldiers in Vietnam, and they were beyond the advising stage. Under President



Lyndon B. Johnson the number grew to almost 475,000 at the end of 1967, not counting perhaps 60,000 men in the offshore fleet and another 33,000 stationed in Thailand. Only when the generals asked for another 206,000 men did Johnson stop the troop buildup, but not the war or the bombing that went with it. Although it was clear by 1968, if not before, that the war could not be won without sacrifices that neither the American government nor its people were willing to make, the fighting went on until April 1975 and was extended into the former French colonies of Laos and Cambodia.

Loss of life was tremendous. In addition to more than 50,000 Americans, perhaps 2 or 3 million Vietnamese were killed. (These figures do not count the postwar bloodbath in Cambodia.) This carnage created many millions of refugees, internal and external. Within South Vietnam one official estimate was that just between 1965 and 1968, as many as 3 million people became refugees. Many were housed in squalid refugee camps with minimal sanitary facilities; others crowded into Saigon and other cities. By 1969, South Vietnam had changed from an 85 percent rural country to one that was nearly half urban.<sup>13</sup>

Although tens of thousands of Vietnamese had come to the United States before 1975, the total U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in early 1975 set off the first part of the second wave of Southeast Asian refugees. Between then and the end of the year, more than 130,000 were admitted. That number dropped to 17,000 over the next two years. Then, starting in 1978, it surged again as hundreds of thousands of so-called boat people sought desperately to leave Southeast Asia. Not only Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese but also Cambodians and Laotians began to fill the refugee camps in the countries of first asylum, particularly Thailand. The United States agreed at first to accept 7,000 a month from the camps and then doubled this to 14,000. This second part of the second wave peaked during the fiscal year October 1, 1979–September 30, 1980, when over 166,000 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted, some 70,000 of whom were not from Vietnam. In all, from April 1975 to September 1984, more than 700,000 Southeast Asians were admitted to the United States. They represented about one Asian American in seven at that time. And it should be noted that only about half of all Southeastern Asian refugees came to the United States. At the end of 1981, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), China had taken more than a quarter of a million, France and Canada more than 80,000 each, Australia nearly 60,000, West Germany over 20,000, and Great Britain some 16,000.<sup>14</sup>

### In Transit

Peter Rose describes a number of ways that refugees arrived in the United States.<sup>15</sup> For some, there was an initial move from their homes to first-asylum camps in Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Papers had to be

checked and essential information transmitted to New York. Next came a search for sponsors. The selection of a sponsoring agency was more or less arbitrary, unless friends and relatives could be found. When a match had been made and medical clearances obtained, the next move was to a transit center. Special chartered planes would take the refugees to West Coast airports. A final trip would then be made to a prearranged residence in a nearby city.

For others, there were additional waystations prior to reaching America, such as the Refugee Processing Centers in Indonesia and the Philippines. The purpose of these stations was to regulate the flow of refugees and to orient them to the manners and mores of their future homes. For example, at Bataan in the Philippines, caseworkers updated files and assigned all refugees between the ages of 16 and 55 to English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes. Refugees were required to attend eight weeks of ESL classes, as well as four weeks of cultural orientation classes, before moving on to their final destination.

These temporary centers were under the jurisdiction of the UNHCR and the local governments, with the United States playing no official role but providing most of the funding. Since other countries were also involved, the curriculum was not limited to the English language and the American culture. Language training and learning a new culture are difficult steps under the best of conditions; an evaluation of the courses indicates neither outstanding success nor dismal failure.<sup>16</sup>

A recital of the bureaucratic steps that a refugee must go through hides the pain, suffering, and anxiety that each person experiences. Stories about the boat people and their experiences of starvation, drowning, rape, and robbery were not uncommon. Although almost every refugee has undergone terrible experiences, those of the boat people, escapees from Vietnam trying to get to Thailand or Malaysia by sea, were perhaps the worst. In 1981 vicious attacks on these helpless people by pirates reached epidemic proportions; some 80 percent of all boats were apparently attacked at least once. One survivor later told her story in Seattle. Vo Thi Tam was the wife of a former officer in the South Vietnamese air force. After he had been released from "reeducation" by the new government, he and Vo, who was pregnant, decided to try to escape. Somehow they became separated; Vo still does not know what happened to him or whether he is dead or alive. Here is her story:

When we reached the high seas, we discovered, unfortunately, that the water container was leaking and only a little bit of the water was left. So we had to ration the water from then on. We had brought some rice and other food that we could cook, but it was so wavy that we could not cook anything at all. So all we had was raw rice and a few lemons and very little water. After seven days we ran out of water, so all we had to drink was the sea water, plus lemon juice.

Everyone was sick and, at one point, my mother and my little boy, four years old, were in agony, about to die. And the other people on the boat said that if they were agonizing like that, it would be better to throw them overboard so as to save them pain.

During this time we had seen several boats on the sea and had waved to them to help us, but they never stopped. But that morning, while we were discussing throwing my mother and son overboard, we could see another ship coming and we were very happy, thinking maybe it was people coming to save us. When the two boats were close together, the people came on board from there—it happened to be a Thai boat—and they said all of us had to go on the bigger boat. They made us all go there and then they began to search us—cutting off our blouses, our bras, looking everywhere. One woman, she had some rings she hid in her bra, they undressed her and took out everything. My mother had a statue of Our Lady, a very precious one, you know, that she had had all her life—she begged them just to leave the statue to her. But they didn't want to. They slapped her and grabbed the statue away.

Finally they pried up the planks of our boat, trying to see if there was any gold or jewelry hidden there. And when they had taken everything, they put us back on our boat and pushed us away.

They had taken all our maps and compasses, so we didn't even know which way to go. And because they had pried up the planks of our boat to look for jewelry, the water started getting in. We were very weak by then. But we had no pump, so we had to use empty cans to bail the water out, over and over again.

That same day we were boarded again by two other boats, and these, too, were pirates. They came aboard with hammers and knives and everything . . . we could only beg them for mercy. . . . So these boats let us go and pointed the way to Malaysia for us.

That night at about 9:00 P.M. we arrived on the shore and we were so happy finally to land somewhere that we knelt down on the beach and prayed, you know, to thank God.

While we were kneeling there, some people came out of the woods and began to throw rocks at us. They took a doctor who was with us and they beat him up and broke his glasses, so that from that time on he couldn't see anything. . . . They searched us for anything precious that they could find, but there was nothing left except our few clothes and our documents. They took these and scattered them all over the beach.

Then five of the Malaysian men grabbed the doctor's wife, a young woman with three children, and they took her back into the woods and raped her—all five of them. Later, they sent her back, completely naked, to the beach.

After this the Malaysians forced us back into the boat and tried to push us out to sea. But the tide was out and the boat was so heavy with all of us on board that it just sank in the sand. And so they left us. . . .

In the morning, happily, the local police came, and Vo and the other survivors were taken to a refugee camp from which she—one of the lucky ones with relatives already in the United States—was soon able to come to the United States as a refugee.<sup>17</sup>

William Liu interviewed refugees who discussed their experiences in temporary camps in Guam and Camp Pendleton. Problems included boredom and the lack of counseling and guidance. One of the most serious complaints

was the lack of serious concern about mental health needs. The refugees also criticized the assumption that they would assimilate to American ways without difficulty; they feared that resettlement policies might lead to the breakup of family and extended-family units; and they resented the lack of sensitivity to Vietnamese cultural values and existing social networks.<sup>18</sup>

In summarizing the experience of the first wave, Liu indicated that from the point of view of education and skills, the refugees were desirable immigrants. However, he predicted that they would face problems of status loss because so many would have to settle for lesser jobs than in their pre-settlement lives.<sup>19</sup>

### LAOTIANS: HMONG AND LAO

Refugees from Laos may be divided into two distinct groups: the highland and lowland Laotians. The highland Laotians are primarily Hmong, but include peoples called Mien, Tai Dam, and Lao-theung. The lowland Laotians are ethnic Lao whose experience in the United States is similar to that of other less modernized refugees from the region. Our treatment here will focus on the Hmong whose experience is quite different. The Hmong are a people indigenous to China who spread southward into the hills of Laos early in the nineteenth century. Some Hmong (the word means "free man") also populated parts of Thailand and Vietnam. They are referred to in Chinese history as a race who lived in the mountains, speaking a particular language, wearing special clothes seen nowhere else, and dating as far back as 3,000 years. Modern authorities have described them as an industrious, independent, and peace-loving people who became involved in the Vietnam War primarily because of their strategic location.<sup>20</sup>

### Background

Laos was influenced by the French brand of colonialism, though the French invested even less in terms of transportation, education, or health care in Laos than they did in Vietnam. The Japanese occupied the nation during World War II, but it was reoccupied by the French in 1946. In 1954 the Geneva Accords established Laotian independence under the Royal Lao government. However, a political split in 1949 resulted in the creation of the Progressive People's Organization, a forerunner of the Pathet Lao and an ally of the Viet Minh. Thus, by the time the Royal Lao government came to power, the Pathet Lao was in control of perhaps half the countryside.

The escalation of the war in Vietnam affected Laos; the country was used as a major supply line for North Vietnam (the Ho Chi Minh Trail ran the length of eastern Laos). There was massive American bombing there, and by 1970, two-thirds of Laos had been bombed, creating more than

600,000 refugees. The CIA trained counter guerrilla forces among the Hmong; their missions included collecting intelligence on North Vietnamese movements and rescuing American personnel, especially downed American pilots. An estimated 15,000 Hmong were killed in combat. They gained the reputation of being courageous and knowledgeable jungle fighters.<sup>21</sup>

The fall of Vietnam and the withdrawal of American forces saw thousands of Hmong fleeing Laos. They fled to different parts of the world—to the United States, to France, to French Guiana, a few to Canada and Australia, and many more to Thailand. As late as 1983, more than 76,000 Laotians were in Thai refugee camps; more than 75 percent of these were mountain people.<sup>22</sup>

### Resettlement

The experiences of the Hmong in transit were similar to those of other Southeast Asian refugees. At first the resettlement programs attempted to scatter them throughout the United States, but most voluntarily moved to the warm-weather states, though a group of perhaps 10,000 has settled in and around Minneapolis. The northeastern cities were too cold, and rents were too high. Other areas proved too isolated and lonely. Even understanding sponsors could not take the place of extended family and familiar faces.

One story relates how many Hmong relocated to the Fresno area. There was a rumor that a Hmong family became prosperous by raising cherry tomatoes in Fresno. Word got around, and the combination of climate, fertile agricultural land, and a community of fellow ethnics drew many Hmong to the San Joaquin Valley. In 1985 an estimated 20,000 of the 60,000 Hmong were reported as living in the valley, approximately 15,000 of them in Fresno.<sup>23</sup> The story is familiar to groups who have little access to reliable information and are dependent on rumors and personal information networks. Stories of one of their group "making it" are often followed by a mass migration to that area, with the hope that similar good fortune awaits them.

Peter King and David Holley in 1985 focused on some of the problems the newcomers faced. The Hmong came as an immigrant group with very few tools with which to adapt to the American society. They had no written language until the 1950s, when missionaries came to their villages. They strongly believe in evil spirits, they trust their shamans, and they distrust modern medicine. The arrival of the Hmong has strained social service agencies. Nearly nine out of ten Hmong were reported to be on welfare, and the clustering of the population has created several ethnic ghettos. Although Fresno lies in the heart of an agricultural area, it is the home of agribusiness, not the kinds of small family plots that characterized the for-

mer Hmong homes in the highlands. Furthermore, in the old country there were no taxes and few bills. In Fresno, at the first of the month, everything comes due.<sup>24</sup>

The situation has reached the point where no direct resettlement is allowed from Thailand to Fresno, yet it is estimated that perhaps one-half of the Hmong refugees who enter the United States will end up in the Fresno area. Bad feeling against the refugees runs high; minority groups who previously suffered prejudice and discrimination also feel threatened by the newcomers.

King and Holley also report several unusual cases involving the Hmong. One was the suicide of a Hmong who was apparently overcome with shame and confusion following arrest for a traffic violation; another was the attempted prosecution of some Hmong men as criminals in what to them was the customary way of claiming a bride. There were also mysterious deaths of middle-aged men who just went to sleep and never woke up.<sup>25</sup>

Faderman, in interviews with a variety of Hmong, provides a sensitive account of the problems of the older and the younger individuals. The elderly narrate how lost they have become. They had never used a flush toilet, nor were they familiar with radio and television. They despair of ever learning English; they are afraid to drive and have to be driven by the young. They have become increasingly dependent on their American born and educated children where roles are reversed; in the old country they were in charge and were in control; here they suffer the humiliation of ignorance, dependence, and alienation.

The young have their own issues. There is the complex process of becoming an American and being saddled with immigrant parents. There is the conflict of cultures; of shamanism and modern medicine; of gender and parent-child relations and how to deal with conflicting demands between the old and the new. Her young interviewees appear to have bought the American dream, fantasizing about big houses and fancy cars and struggling for the MBAs and medical degrees. Some even talked about big gang heists. Then there are the other young who came here as adolescents who speak of feeling lost and betrayed. They feel unprepared, and their meager exposure to American education does not prepare them for life in a world so different from the one they experienced in the old country.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the only solace for the Hmong is that these experiences are typical of most immigrant groups.

Tou-Fou Vang offered a more cheery perspective. He reported in 1981 that on the whole, the Hmong were being successfully resettled. Goals of self-sufficiency had been accomplished, and the majority were holding manual jobs. The major problem was the English language; Vang emphasized that long-term goals could not be fulfilled without a mastery of English.<sup>27</sup>



The Hmong arrive with a strong family and clan system. By tradition the families are large, and they follow a model of male dominance in which the role of the wife is devotion to her husband and clan and kinship ties are strong. The clans serve as mutual aid associations, and the household, rather than the individual, serves as the primary unit.

Older Hmong still dream of going home to the Southeast Asian highlands. Many are forced to rely on their children for an understanding of American ways, of which they do not necessarily approve. It is likely that the younger Hmong will take the initial steps toward understanding the new society; the older ones may be forced to tolerate the new ways or simply give up.

### CAMBODIANS (KAMPUCHEANS)

The Khmer are the majority group in Cambodia, constituting about 85 percent of the population; Chinese and Vietnamese make up most of the rest. They are primarily Buddhist and similar to the Laotians in terms of their kinship systems, animist beliefs, modes of production, and world views.<sup>28</sup>

#### Background

Khmer culture has been influenced by the Thais, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Burmese. It was also influenced by the West, first through the Spanish and the Portuguese, later the French, and then the Americans.

Cambodia was at one time one of the great civilizations in Southeast Asia. Centered in the royal city of Angkor, the empire lasted from 802 to 1432, when it became a part of the Vietnamese and Siamese kingdoms. It remained a vassal state until the French took control in 1863. French rule was indirect and used indigenous authorities when possible. French investment was very small. By 1939, only four Cambodians had graduated from senior high school, and in 1941, of a population of nearly 3 million, there were only 537 students in the secondary schools. There were a number of rebellions against the French; in 1916 as many as 100,000 peasants demonstrated against the French in Phnom Penh.

Cambodian independence was declared by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1944 when Southeast Asia was still controlled by the Japanese. In 1946, Cambodia was declared an autonomous state within the French union, but the French retained control. In 1955, Sihanouk defeated a French-backed candidate and remained prime minister. Problems with the United States led to an increased dependence on Soviet and Chinese aid. There was also increased cooperation with the North Vietnamese, and by 1966, Cambodia was indirectly involved in the Vietnam War. The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong were regularly using the border area for food and as a sanctuary

from South Vietnamese and American air attacks. Prince Sihanouk was aware of the situation but tried to pursue a course of neutrality. His country was caught between Communist China and North Vietnam on one side and the United States and South Vietnam on the other. However, according to Robert Shaplen, Sihanouk's gravest fear was to be taken over by the Vietnamese.<sup>29</sup> When Cambodia came under formal control of the Provisional Revolutionary government in 1969, the American response was to begin bombing Cambodia, including a program to defoliate the rubber trees.

In 1970, General Lon Nol, with the approval of the United States, overthrew Sihanouk's government. Relations with North Vietnam and the Viet Minh were broken off. Between 1970 and 1975, the United States dropped over half a million tons of bombs. The war created more than 3 million refugees.

Lon Nol's rightist government controlled the urban areas, but the extreme-left wing Khmer Rouge controlled the countryside. In 1975, just before the American exodus from Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot entered Phnom Penh and overthrew Lon Nol. Pol Pot, born Saloth Sar, was a mysterious figure. He spent some years in Paris with a Khmer student group called the Marxist Circle, which had loose ties with the French Communist Party. He took over leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Cambodian branch in 1962 and charted a course that would be independent from Vietnam.

Pol Pot's victory was followed by a reign of terror, which ended with the murder of at least 1 million Cambodians by Cambodians and the forced relocation of many others. The book *The Killing Fields* and the motion picture made from it depicted this horror graphically. More than 150,000 Cambodians fled to Vietnam and 33,000 to Thailand. Pol Pot's primary targets were intellectuals, government officials, and urban dwellers, but Cambodians of all classes suffered.

In 1978, Vietnam, by then under communist control and aided by the Soviet Union, which sought to control Chinese expansion in the area, invaded Cambodia and replaced the Pol Pot regime with a new puppet government. The invasion was followed by another mass exodus from Cambodia. An estimated 100,000, fearing the traditional enmity between the Khmer and the Vietnamese, fled to Thailand. Continued famine, along with the Vietnamese offensive, drove nearly 500,000 to first-asylum refugee camps along the Thai border.

#### In Transit

Paul Strand and Woodrow Jones estimated that in 1985 close to 300,000 Cambodians remained in Thailand, and along its borders, 94,000 were in Thai holding centers, and another 200,000 lived in border camps under the