

Southeast Asians in North Carolina: Settlement Patterns and Socioeconomic Outcomes

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ABSTRACT: The relevance of place characteristics of both sending and receiving regions on the socio-economic success of immigrants constitutes an under examined yet potentially highly important factor explaining differential adjustment outcomes of groups from a similar geographic region. This research looks at major Southeast Asian refugee groups in North Carolina to compare them with each other in the same state and with the success of the same groups in other states. Census figures from PUMA and SF3 files are used to trace education attainment, income levels, and clustering in five demographic divisions from 1990 – 2007, depending on data availability. Interviews with community leaders supplement quantitative sources. Cultural factors, proclivity to settle in an urban or rural location, and the role of leadership are all found to play important explanatory roles.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, refugees, North Carolina, education, occupation

Population patterns in the United States display a highly varied diversity of demographic groups characteristic of a history of receiving immigrants and refugees from around the world.

Responding to the enhanced mobility typical in the U.S., different groups settled over time in different locations from their initial settlement assignment, which it is hypothesized differentially impacted their adjustment outcomes. This examination looks at patterns of settlement by major Southeast Asian ethnic groups from 1990 to 2007 and compares their educational and economic attainment in order to assess the relationship of these factors in a case study of North Carolina, illustrating differences between major receiving areas and concentrations in secondary locations.

By the year 2000 census, major settlement states were California with 705,381 Southeast Asians, Texas with 163,625, and Minnesota with 84,062 (Bureaus of the Census 2000). A Southern regional counterpart to studies done in areas of the largest refugee population concentration in the West Coast and upper Midwest is missing, but could enhance understanding of the flexible adaptation of these groups to different cultural and geographic settings. More widespread studies on a variety of states, regions, and ethnic groups are desirable for improving the applicability of models and policies (Potocky and McDonald 1995). The important degree to which their varied historical experiences and demographic make-up impacted their subsequent socioeconomic outcomes is often obscured by an overly general treatment of refugee populations as “Asian” or “Southeast Asian” (Andrews and Stopp 1985). The experience of refugees like the Lao, for example, is qualitatively different from that of immigrants such as the Thai with whom they are grouped by the census. Immigrants respond more to an economic “pull” than a fear of persecution “push”, and are more likely to embody higher levels of skill and education that ease their readjustment.

On a national scale, the 750,000 Southeast Asian refugees counted in the 1980 census grew to 1.6 million by the year 2000. At the beginning of the 21st century, North Carolina contained the 12th largest population of Southeast Asians (34,087) in the U.S., ranked fourth in Hmong (7,982), fifth in Laotians (6,282), 13th in Vietnamese (17,142) and 17th in Cambodians (2,681) among states in the U.S. Major features attracting this largely secondary relocation population included the availability of basic skill level manufacturing jobs, available farm land, a variety of topography reminiscent of their homeland, an affordable cost of living, and the presence of major volunteer agencies aiding immigration adjustment to new populations, from Catholic, Lutheran, Quaker and Jewish organizations, and the Center for New North Carolinians

(Brown, Mott and Malecki 2007). Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data from 1990, 2000, and American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2005-2007 as well as qualitative evidence are used to test the hypothesis that spatial concentration has a positive effect on successful settlement. A second hypothesis is that the rural or urban sending region setting also impacts socioeconomic outcome and settlement pattern. These factors influence aspirations for attainment of different education levels and occupations, which are reflected in settlement location over time as demonstrated in the following sections.

Qualitative interviews explore reasons for the impact of clustering on two paired groups in particular: the Lao and Hmong from the country of Laos, and the Vietnamese and Montagnard (also known as the Dega) from the country of Vietnam. Upland tribal groups (Hmong and Montagnard) tended to live in related kinship or tribal units, while the lowland Lao and Vietnamese tended to come as individuals and family units. Commonalities include the experience of all groups who initially settled in areas where they were directed by settlement agencies, then subsequently moved to locations of their own choosing (Bailey 2002). Differences include the relatively lower numbers and initially lower educational level of the upland groups, so measurement of subsequent attainment will be on a percentage basis to compare across ethnic groups of different sizes. By applying a geographic examination of the effect of clustering on differential attainment rates of regionally similar ethnic groups, this study provides a new angle for understanding refugee adjustment success. Results could have significant policy application for improving refugee adaptation by heightening understanding of the intertwined roles of location, culture and leadership.

Southeast Asian Refugee Patterns

Refugee populations can be differentiated by origin and migration paths within their homeland, through camps (largely Thai) in Asia, among states in the U.S. and within their current state.

Discrimination continues to occur in Southeast Asian populations on many levels: from the white majority population, among other Asians, and among different national sending areas based on upland or lowland, political wartime affiliation, wealth status, rural or urban home setting (Bonus and Vo 2002). It is therefore important to take a wide set of factors into consideration when evaluating refugee adjustment experiences. Emigration out of Southeast Asia generally came in two waves. The first period of movement out of refugee camps and entry into the U.S. took place from 1976 to 1993, when Thailand stopped accepting people into the camps. The second wave began in 1988 with refugee secondary relocation to areas with better jobs and/or newly located family networks, and accelerated in 1996 when the welfare reform act provided even greater motivation to move to areas of economic opportunity. This spurred many refugees who were former agriculturalists, for example, to acquire less expensive available land to start their own farms, becoming capitalist entrepreneurs in non-urban settings.

Several models describe the socioeconomic experience of refugees and immigrants. One of the most commonly used is segmented assimilation, which highlights movement through different steps in the adjustment process (Portes and Zhou 1993, Portes 1995, Fu and Hatfield 2008), economic advancement reflecting social capital stock as seen in economic attainment which is frequently linked to education level completed (Zhou 1997), and a migration chain perspective linking initial placement by agencies with secondary migration based on communication concerning job, education and other factors (Brown, et.al., 2007). Southeast Asian identities are portrayed as “fluid, multilayered, and situational” (Jeung 2002, 60),

frequently reconstructed to reflect changing circumstances across time and space. Identities are maintained by language and reenacted customs of a group, especially when an older generation is present and practices are culturally distinctive. A “we, therefore me” identity of self is characteristic of these Asian origin societies, emanating from the importance of the link with an associated group to a far greater degree than is the case in the U.S. host culture (personal communications). The following study contributes a more nuanced examination of how a process of gradual adjustment – rather than assimilation – varies by cultures of origin (including within a country, such as the Hmong within Laos) and locations of resettlement within the host country, culminating in the realization of different American dreams.

Many studies from the West Coast involve urban settings, which shape the types of behaviors depicted. Pan-ethnic largely Southeast Asian urban underclasses of immigrant neighborhood youth (Khmer, Hmong, Lao, Chinese, and Filipino) are portrayed as associating largely with each other. They demonstrate largely symbolic sub-ethnic identities in a racialized, impoverished commonality (anti-Khmer Rouge Cambodians among other Asians) and relate to stories of marginalization told in school as part of Black culture. Asians in these circumstances banded together as protection from the violent antagonism of African Americans, seeing themselves as pan-Asian, non-majority American whites (Jeung 2002). Nationally, linguistic isolation among Southeast Asians decreased from sixty percent in 1990 to 34.8% in 2000. Educational attainment rose from a 1990 average of 11% with a high school degree and 3% with a BA, to year 2000 levels of 27.2% high school graduates, 11.7% with a BA, and 1.5% with a Masters degree. Income levels reflected the trend, from a median in 1990 of just over \$14,000 to a year 2000 median income of \$32,074, but with wide variations by state.

In the 1990 U.S. census, the highest poverty rates were found among Cambodians, Hmong and Laotians. The Southeast Asian median age was 30 years of age, with an important “Generation 1.5” emerging as the bicultural/bilingual transition group (Potocky and McDonald 1995). By the year 2000 census the Vietnamese were doing the best on a national scale. They came with the highest social capital in a first wave (pre-1975) that represented individuals with ties to power and wealth, and built on cultural values for a second generation whose attainments reflected those of an underlying Chinese ethnic: Confucian, hierarchic, Mahayana Buddhism group centered, valuing educational attainment and parental involvement. With a higher level start, they lived in better areas, went to better schools, were already more urban and westernized, and tended to be small business owners. They also contained a number of Catholics and individuals who had long worked with and were familiar with Americans (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Wood 2006).

Cambodians in the year 2000 census were faring the worst of the Southeast Asian settlement groups, largely attributable to their highly disruptive pre-refugee experience under the murderous, anti-elite Pol Pot regime. Refugees therefore tended to be rural farmers or families of fishermen. Their poverty in the U.S. led them to reside in areas with low achieving schools, in which their performance was most like that of their majority African American classmates (R. Kim 2002, W. Kim 2006).

Nationally, the Hmong were doing the best of the second tier refugees. They demonstrated the biggest improvement and best psychological adjustment, lived in tight communities, and frequently maintained traditional practices (Kim 2006). In the 2000 census, fully 75% of the Hmong were still in only three states (CA, MN, WI), with North Carolina fourth. Secondary migration frequently involves targeted destinations to reunite extended family/

clan members (Faruque 2002). Ethnic exclaves were traditional in Hmong sending areas, the isolated rural parts of three Laotian provinces. Many came as pre-literate refugees of the U.S.'s "Secret War" preceding and continuing through the main Vietnam conflict, with 300,000 arriving by the 2000 census. In 1975 Hmong General Vang Pao sought to create an educated elite by sending a few young men to the US to study. They were supposed to return to Laos, but this did not happen due to the civil war in Laos. Educational challenges of low attainment are a large concern of the Hmong community, averaging the lowest of Asians in U.S., with almost half of their population lacking schooling (Miyares 1998, K. Yang 2003). Some interesting gender observations: though males started off doing the best, over the decade females closed the gap even while becoming young mothers and males drifted into extra-curricular activities that depressed their educational attainments (Pfeifer and Lee 2001). Overall, Hmong assimilation inevitably increased over the generations, but maintenance of customs is enhanced by maintenance of social networks with which they came (Her and Buley-Meissner 2010). Living within a half day commuting range of other Hmong enables participation in community events, continuation of social network bonds, and communication bridging various generational experiences.

Laotians had the lowest wages of the Southeast Asians. Laotian parents tended to be less likely to push education attainment than in Hmong families. A Southern California-based study found that Laotians were also the most likely (more than half) to live in an enclave setting (Allen and Turner 2002), in part due to the affordability of housing in locations experiencing successive waves of low income new occupants. The function of enclaves in retarding or hastening the transition of immigrants remains an open question, beyond preference for access to familiar products in retail clusters. Movement into higher priced housing, usually indicating better

adjustment and ability to integrate with the majority society, usually signifies the lessening of enclave dependence and increasing socioeconomic progress. This is particularly the case in terms of access to better education. The size of California enclaves, however, permits a stability that is not present in the South for all Southeast Asian ethnic groups.

In national level studies, education was the factor most closely correlated to an improved economic standing. Thai immigrants tend to come from a wealthier, more educated background, and like the Vietnamese they pass these on to the socioeconomic aspirations of the next generation. Also similar to the Vietnamese, they tend to have a much higher proportion of ethnic Chinese in the refugee population. Due to their relative success, this segment was the first to be exterminated in Pol Pot's Cambodia, rather than targeted for discriminatory expulsion as occurred in other Southeast Asian countries.

The Montagnard (also known as the Dega), the upland Vietnamese group who is highly represented in North Carolina's Southeast Asian refugee population but not in separate census statistics, fall into five different dialect subgroups. Almost all were settled in North Carolina by State Department design. Originally arriving in 1986 as a very isolated group of 30 among thousands of other immigrants, keeping them as a cluster seemed to be the best way to assist their adjustment (CNNC 2010). An upland group on the geographic periphery of Vietnam, they were heavily converted to Christianity in order to benefit from increased education opportunities provided by access to Western missionaries. This also enabled the socially disfavored group to transcend their impoverished status. Their upland rural counterparts the Hmong were much less inclined to conversion, combining basic Shamanic beliefs with Buddhism instead. Modern Christian Hmong are seen as similar to what was known in mid-19th century China as the "rice Christian" effect of "fill the bowl, save the soul". Conversion of young professionals to

Christianity is in part a response to the encroaching time demands of complex traditional practices, thus accelerating their assimilation to mainstream American society.

The overly simplistic attribution of causality for observed ethnic differences in resettlement outcomes underlines the often cited need for qualitative data to provide locally valid explanations for statistically observed ethnic differences. Observations concerning the impact of the type of Buddhism practiced by various groups – a more group oriented Mahayana for the Vietnamese, a more individualistic Theravada for Thai, Laotian and Cambodians – was less likely to impact refugee adjustment patterns than the relative percentage of ethnic Chinese in the refugee population, with their cultural emphasis on education attainment as the route to wealth accumulation (Zhou and Gatewood 2000).

Data and Methodology

This study uses a multimethods approach to more fully address underlying questions in the proposed hypotheses as to the relationship of spatial clustering, cultural frameworks, and socioeconomic performance in education and/or income as proxies for desirable adjustment outcomes of refugees in a new setting. Although much of the literature on ethnicity in the U.S. utilizes broad census categories, such an approach can blur important distinctions reflecting place-based cultural frameworks from the sending area. Census data provides the most accurate comparable statistics over time, but still hampers analysis by frequently acknowledged shortcomings such as ethnic categories that reflect incomplete understandings of within group relationships, size of groups, and political visibility. Within-country distinctions can be captured at a finer level of PUMS SF3 data, such as upland Hmong contrasted with lowland Lao, but only in the American FactFinder series (Brod 2004). These distinctions are unfortunately not available

for a similar geographic-cultural distinction in Vietnam involving the upland Montagnard who also immigrated in notable numbers to the U.S., though it is hoped that this will be partially rectified in the 2010 census. Speculation exists within immigrant communities that census figures represent a large under count, largely due to the marginalized situation (poverty, suspicion of government based on previous alienating experiences) of reluctant refugees. While supplemental funds were apportioned in the 2010 census for outreach to reportedly under-represented groups within the Southeast Asian community, not all groups chose to be involved.

This research draws on census data in three basic areas. The “language” variable is used for ethnic identity in order to separate out better immigration effects, avoiding the “blurring” of ethnicity effects due to generational remove and intermarriage (Perez and Hirschman 2009).

Location maps of ethnic Southeast Asian groups in North Carolina are based on county areas tied to the census data. This research explores strategies for economic advancement of Southeast Asian immigrants to North Carolina using educational attainment and income proxy measures (Jeung 2002). Education levels by last finished for each of the four census grouped Southeast Asian ethnicities (at a 5% sample, representing a 1-in-20 census response representation) were divided into nine categories: none, lower elementary (K-4), upper elementary/ middle school (5-8), high school (9-12), some college, and the three degree levels. Income levels for 1990 and 2000 were divided into ten levels, corresponding to their proportional natural divides in the range. Particular focus fell on the poverty line cutoff, as set based on a family of four (it should be noted that refugee families tend to have larger households, as the family of six Hmong average size, including a larger number of children and elders) in the year of census enumeration. In 1989 this was \$5,980, and in 1999 it was \$8,240. Comparative results are displayed in Table 2, discussed further in the North Carolina section.

Qualitative evidence was accumulated through a dozen interviews with members and leaders of various refugee communities, volunteer agency representatives, and religious figures. Although distribution was necessarily random rather than strictly representative, given constraints of availability, narrative evidence was sufficiently overlapping and reinforcing to sufficiently supplement the primarily quantitative data upon which this study is built.

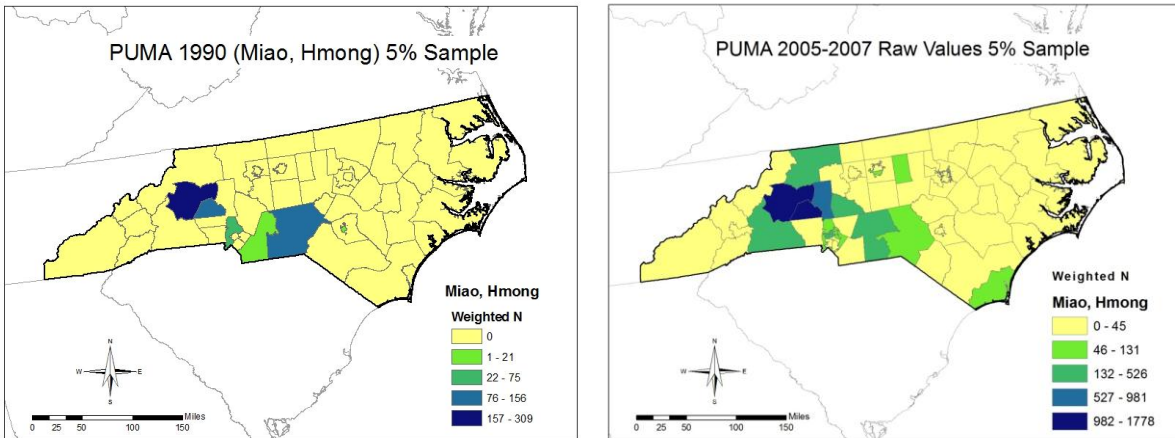
Southeast Asian Refugee Adjustment Patterns in North Carolina

The composition and behavior of the five ethnic groups previously discussed varied in North Carolina by group and in some cases from settings in other states, reflecting both the segment of the sending country's population and the circumstances in the receiving region and counties. The next section discusses the cluster maps for each group based on the census data enumeration county areas, using language to identify the refugee population. The second section discusses the socio-economic measures of education attainment and income level for each ethnic group. The order in which each group is treated follows the census category order: Hmong (4420), Thai (4710), Lao (4720), Vietnamese (5000), and Cambodian (5120).

Cluster maps

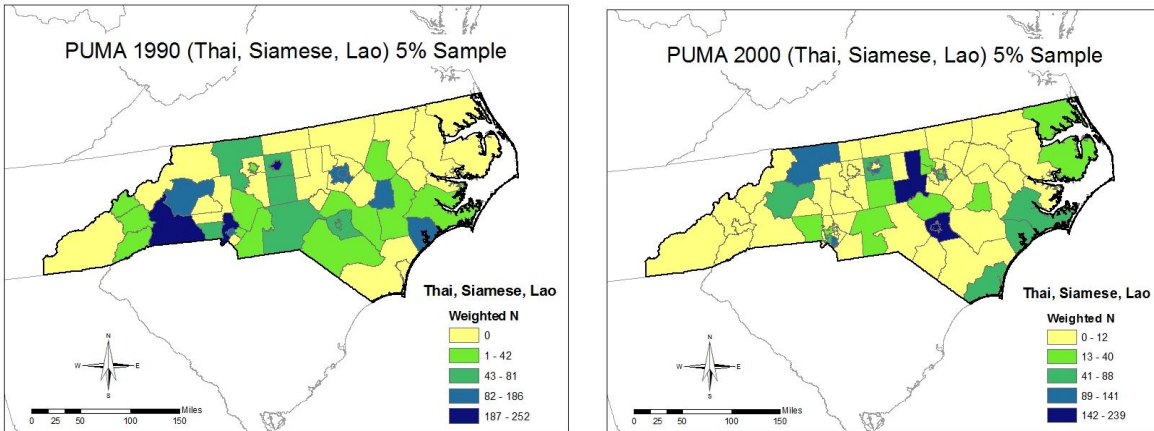
Legal entry requirements for the United States favored family reunification, a factor that largely determined initial refugee settlement locations along with a match with a sponsoring organization. Much secondary shifting subsequently occurred to areas with relatively high public assistance, low unemployment in low skill jobs, mild winters, and a large Asian community, resulting in a pattern of increasing spatial concentration (Desbartes 1985). Clustering was also a sign of community reconnection through contacts with a same- ethnic sponsor in the U.S. who was able to locate relatives initially settled elsewhere.

Figure 1. Hmong Settlement Pattern, 1990-2007: PUMA 1990, ACS 2005-2007



North Carolina's Hmong continue their cluster location in the western Appalachian mountain range in the foothills east of Asheville (Figure 1), which is anchored by the patriarchal leadership of Gen. Vang Pao. The extended clan found congenial jobs in the furniture related industry of the nearby Hickory-Lenoir area, enabling members to easily gather for frequent ceremonies. More far-flung secondary clusters noted in later census maps were an outcome of two considerations. The 1994 welfare reform act motivated Hmong agriculturalists to separate to buy land for poultry farming in the southern tip of the state. Clusters in Guilford County in central North Carolina reflect a higher concentration than in surrounding areas due to the education opportunities and relatively high paying jobs available there. A second clan leader also settled with his network in North Carolina, but both locations attracted skill sets that led to different occupational outcomes than in the upper Midwest or west coast states.

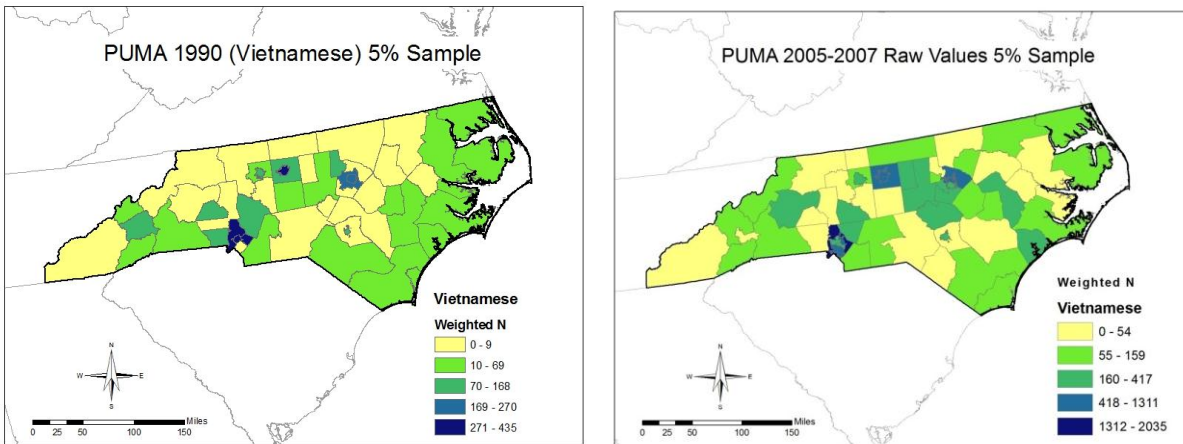
Figure 2. Thai-Lao Settlement Pattern, 1990-2000: PUMA 1990, ACS 2005-2007



North Carolina served as a relocation site particularly for the less skilled and less literate Laotians (Figure 2) who left the West Coast for factory jobs and services as secondary relocatees. The Piedmont Triad's Laotian cluster, for example, found employment in a variety of small entrepreneurial businesses catering to the ethnic community such as grocery stores and restaurants that functioned as community gathering place with videos and other entertainment in Thai/Lao language. Other businesses also drew upon a market in the larger community with laundromats, sandwich and auto shops. A new predominantly Lao Theravada Buddhist temple in High Point provides a community gathering place as well, branching out from the Thai-Cambodian temple in nearby Greensboro, also in central Guilford County. Thai/Lao Theravada Buddhist temples are located in North Carolina's main three cities. Kings Mountain, on the southwestern border of North Carolina has a large Lao community, as does Spartanburg, SC across the border to its south, but cluster sites are split by affiliation to parties in the civil war of the home country. Southern Lao congregate close to each other, as do the Northern Lao, representing two parts of the traditional Laotian three-headed elephant. Tennessee, to the immediate west of North Carolina, contains another community of Laotians. With more than 60

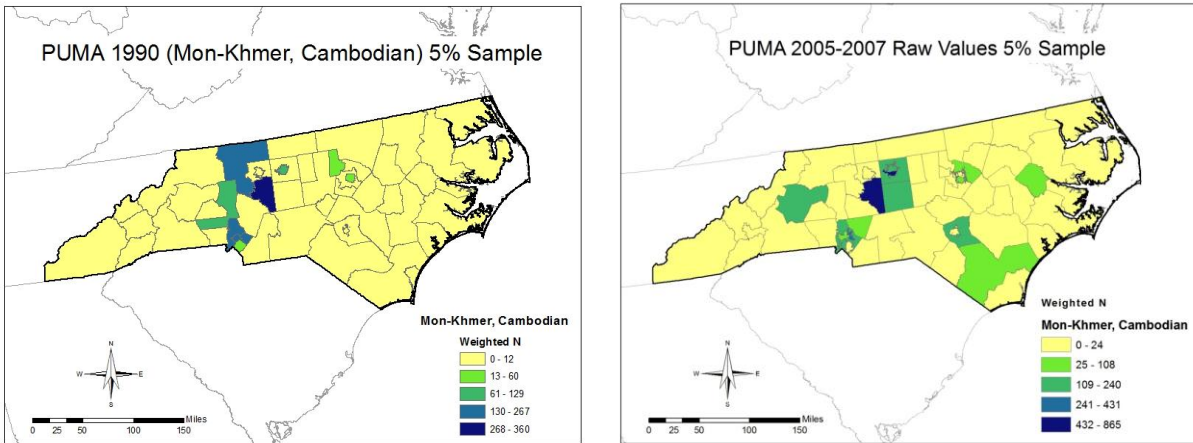
ethnic groups in Laos, it is not unexpected that the immigrant population would be less cohesive and more readily assimilated than other groups such as the Hmong and Montagnard Dega that transferred in as more tightly integrated clan groupings. Thai immigrants overwhelming concentrate in the three largest cities in the state, as do the next group.

Figure 3. Vietnamese Settlement Pattern, 1990-2007: PUMA 1990, ACS 2005-2007



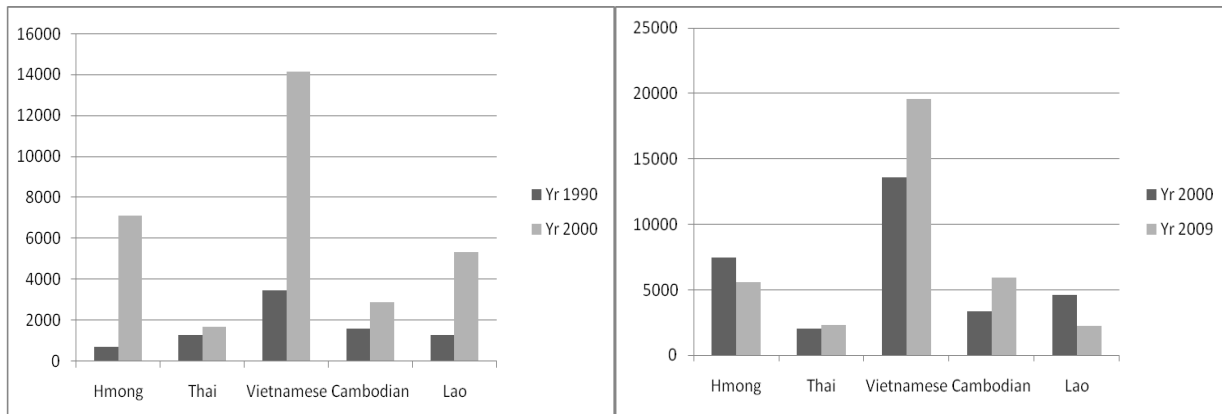
The Vietnamese (Figure 3) reconcentrated in the state’s three major urban areas of Charlotte (in the southwest), the Piedmont Triad (Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem in the center of the state) and the Triangle (Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh, several counties to the east of the Triad). These university-anchored sprawling city regions served as home bases suitable for business and education. The level of human capital brought by the Vietnamese most closely approximated that of the Thai, and also reflected their shared higher proportion of ethnic Chinese population.

Figure 4. Cambodian Settlement Pattern, 1990-2007: PUMA 1990, ACS 2005-2007



Initially settled in a continuous belt of counties, the Cambodian population count (Figure 4) increased slowly throughout the state (see Figure 5) unlike that of other Southeast Asians. Remaining Cambodians shifted as well as spread out to different counties, responding in large part to two developments: the targeted enticement of hardworking, low cost and low skill workers by several individual factories, and construction of Buddhist temples which became sorely needed community sites. Despite efforts to encourage custom maintenance such as a traditional dance group, attendance at culture classes rapidly diminished as the youth preferred to downplay their difference from and instead blend into the majority practices. Population of all Southeast Asian groups except for the Thai-Lao, for whom PUMA data were not available in 2007-2009, increased in North Carolina over the 18 year period measured. This development reflected the availability of appropriate skill-level jobs, affordable land and educational opportunities for those who sought them, though with different adaptive dynamics functioning in various groups as discussed below.

Figure 5. Population shift in North Carolina Southeast Asians, 1990-2009: PUMA by Language and Census, Language by 5+years of age



Socio-economic indicators

By the first census of the 21st century the strongest growth in Hmong population had occurred in the South and Midwest. This occurred largely as a result of the previously noted tendencies for clan re-unification in areas of higher job opportunities. The proportion of the U.S. Hmong population in the South increased from 1.3% in 1990 to 6% of the total population, with particularly strong gains in the Carolinas (544 to 7,093) (K.Yang 2003). Hmong population in the mountainous Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir census area jumped from 433 in 1990 to 4,207 in the year 2000. The abundance of military contacts in North Carolina (important for groups with ties to the U.S. as former anti-Communist fighters) and hospitals in the Hickory area provided jobs in a suitable skill level.

An important emerging trend is the beginning of movement out of ethnic enclaves toward areas of employment opportunities. The Hmong population is young, the only ethnic population with a median age under 20, reflecting the perceived role of females as child-bearers and a paucity of elders who survived the rigors of relocation. In North Carolina, 83% of the Hmong

population came from other states by the year 2000. The average household size was a large 6.28 compared to the US average of 2.59 individuals.

Regional attitudes in U.S. host states and their resident Southeast Asian communities differ. Southeast Asians wield more political clout in the Midwest since the population size is large enough for a block vote and they coordinate a cluster response. The Southeast Asian population is spread out, so they are less able to exercise a block vote on behalf of lifting discrimination barriers or increasing access to education opportunities such as for adult learners. The Hmong community's attitude in regard to female education changed markedly over time, demonstrating the impact of leadership arising from within the community in response to new opportunities in the larger society. Hmong feminist leaders promoted education to elders on the basis that their skill acquisition could benefit the larger group. Several graduates found prestigious jobs in Washington, DC that proved helpful as path-breaking models. A Hmong leader advocates education by lecturing to students that having a high school degree brings honor to one's family, a BA elevates the clan, a Master's degree brings distinction to the ethnic group, and a PhD provides the opportunity for making a global contribution.

Figure 6. Education Levels 1990 – 2000: Census SF 3 files

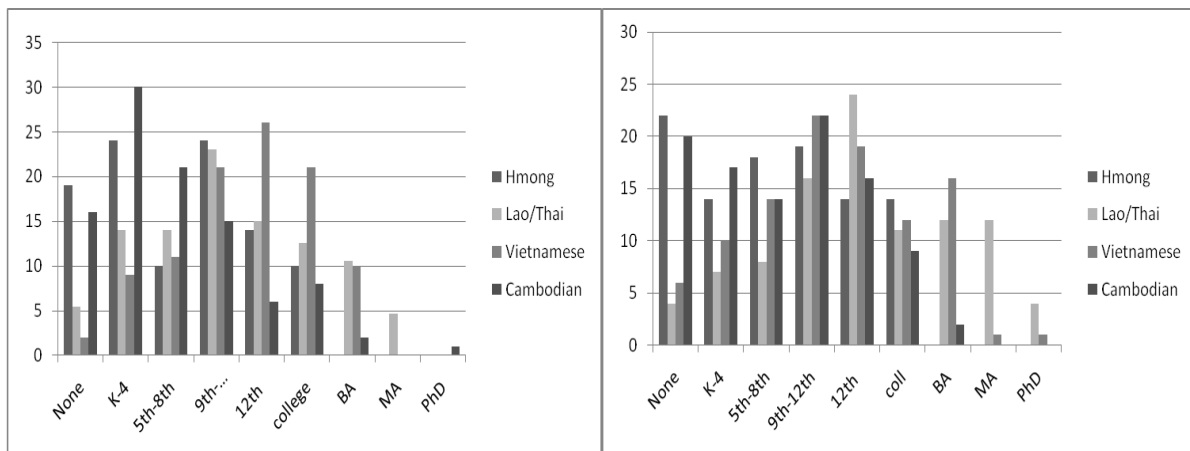


Figure 6 compares the four groups for which census figures were available across education levels in North Carolina in the 1990 and 2000 census years. The relatively young Hmong and Cambodian population is reflected in the “none” education category, but their priority on education as a path to improvement appears in the year 2000 MA and PhD categories. The much larger Vietnamese population is featured in the high school completion and college through the BA level. All figures are shown as percentages of the affiliated population, since absolute numbers vary greatly reflecting the size of the group’s population in the state.

A comparison of the upland Hmong with the lowland Lao refugees from the same country yields some interesting shades of difference (see Table 1). American FactFinder data proves useful in separating the Lao from the less similar Thai with whom they are associated in U.S. Census data. Although the Lao population is smaller by one-fourth than the Hmong, they are slightly older with a higher percentage of foreign born and lower percentage of college graduates, but have a slightly higher median income and lower percent of individuals living below the poverty line.

Table 1. Comparison of Hmong and Laotians in North Carolina: Census 2000

	Population	% age 65+	College graduate	Foreign born	Median HH income	Individuals in poverty
Hmong	7,093	2%	3.5%	50%	\$42,544	14%
Laotian	5,313	3%	2.3%	62%	\$44,354	10%

This pattern would seem to contradict national trends, but reference to the longitudinally extended Table 2, which compares progress of groups over a decade, conforms more to national trends and particularly demonstrates how much the Hmong improved. Table 1 also demonstrates

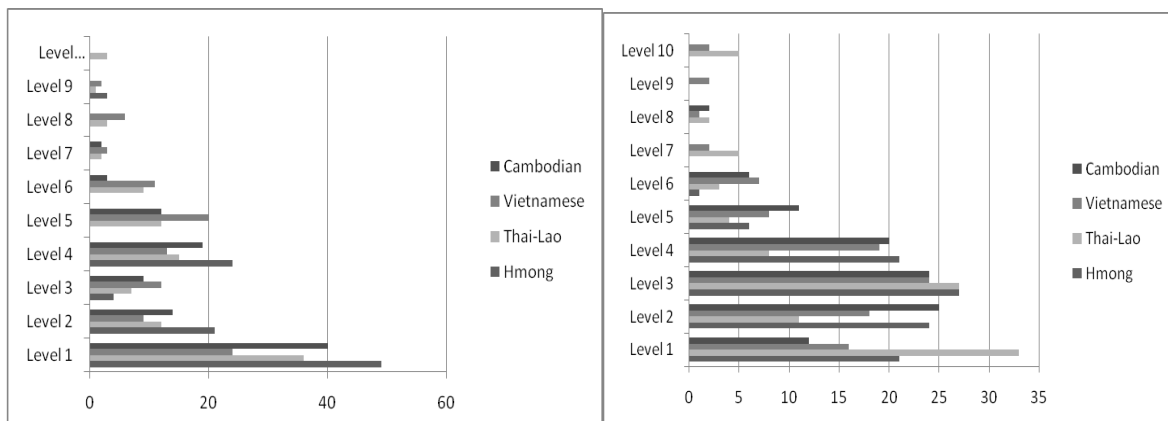
the choice of the Lao to go for income attainment while the Hmong are more represented in higher education levels.

Table 2. Southeast Asians in North Carolina Socio-Economic Measures: Census 1990, 2000

	% College Change	% in 1990	% in 2000	Poverty change	Clustering change	% Population change
Hmong	^5	74%	43%	-31%	Reconcentrate	910%
Thai/Lao	^7	51%	44%	-7%	More	436%
Vietnamese	-2	37%	34%	-3%	Similar, shift	308%
Cambodian	^1	55%	33%	-22%	Less	82%

While increasing their state population by an astounding 910%, the Hmong brought 31% of their population out of poverty, compared to the Cambodians at 22% and the Thai/Lao by 7%. Vietnamese in the South are seen as more business minded, less focused on education than those on the West Coast, and began at a higher income level overall leading to only a 3% change in poverty level. The strong upward movement in all groups testified to their overall economic success.

Figure 7. Income levels 1990 - 2000: Census SF 3 files



Conclusion and Discussion

The children of the 1975 First Wave joined the post-1987 Second Wave immigrants in a largely second stop migration to North Carolina. They were drawn to the Tarheel State by employment and education opportunities and followed community leaders to less urban settings than those that characterize the larger refugee concentrations in the West Coast or Upper Midwest. Three generations are now involved in cultural change, simplifying and stream lining traditional practices in an adjustment transition to the U.S., through a process that displays a great deal of flexibility, adaptive ingenuity and drive to succeed.

A variety of factors affect the demonstrated differences in spatial, educational, and economic outcomes of Southeast Asian ethnic groups in North Carolina over the 18 years studied. The most important considerations appear to be whether the original settlement was in an urban or rural area (which the final settlement location tends to replicate), the educational or economic attainments and aspirations of the group that initially came to the state, and the tightness or looseness of the community network. The direction of adaptive adjustment taken by a particular group often depends on local leadership within the Southeast Asian community, with the most successful leaders utilizing basic traditional values to transition to successful positions within the new host society. As an area peripheral to the main body of early refugee settlement, the southeast has less elite population representation than does the West Coast community which garnered more of the literate and higher skilled refugees.

Policies that recognize and appreciate these differences and work with local leadership can improve the accommodation outcomes of both the host and the immigrant society, creating contributing citizens who are assets to all. Education remains a prime route to economic achievement, but good schools are often tied to the economic standing of the immediate location

so tend to perpetuate the local geographically concentrated culture. The beginning socio-economic position does not determine the success of subsequent generations, as demonstrated by the Hmong. It just means that more ground needs to be covered. so community networks are even more important, as shown in the cluster maps. While data are indispensable for tracing the numerical movement of these groups, interview evidence is also indispensable for making sense of the complex interactions involved in cultural adaptation. Many of the insights used in this research reflect the input of numerous community members and leaders who contributed their time, experience, and stories to construct the preceding picture of their adjustment to a new society so different in many ways to their society of origin. Their success benefits sending and receiving areas, as well as extending frameworks for theory and policy application.

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