



저작자표시-비영리-변경금지 2.0 대한민국

이용자는 아래의 조건을 따르는 경우에 한하여 자유롭게

- 이 저작물을 복제, 배포, 전송, 전시, 공연 및 방송할 수 있습니다.

다음과 같은 조건을 따라야 합니다:



저작자표시. 귀하는 원저작자를 표시하여야 합니다.



비영리. 귀하는 이 저작물을 영리 목적으로 이용할 수 없습니다.



변경금지. 귀하는 이 저작물을 개작, 변형 또는 가공할 수 없습니다.

- 귀하는, 이 저작물의 재이용이나 배포의 경우, 이 저작물에 적용된 이용허락조건을 명확하게 나타내어야 합니다.
- 저작권자로부터 별도의 허가를 받으면 이러한 조건들은 적용되지 않습니다.

저작권법에 따른 이용자의 권리는 위의 내용에 의하여 영향을 받지 않습니다.

이것은 [이용허락규약\(Legal Code\)](#)을 이해하기 쉽게 요약한 것입니다.

[Disclaimer](#)

**Master's Thesis of Graduate School of International Studies**

**The Effect of Ethnic Minorities  
Policies of Southeast Asia on  
Women's Education and Social  
Advancement:  
A Comparative Study of Hmong  
Women in Laos and Thailand**

**동남아시아 소수민족에 대한 정책이  
여성 교육과 사회진출에 미치는 영향:  
라오스와 태국 흐몽여성 비교연구**

**August 2022**

**Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University  
Area Studies Major**

**Danielle Seungmin Kim**

**The Effect of Ethnic Minorities  
Policies of Southeast Asia on  
Women's Education and Social  
Advancement:  
A Comparative Study of Hmong  
Women in Laos and Thailand**

**Eun Ki SOO**

Submitting a master's thesis of  
International Studies

August 2022

Graduate School of International Studies  
Seoul National University  
Area Studies Major

Danielle Seungmin Kim

Confirming the master's thesis written by  
Danielle Seungmin Kim  
August 2022

Chair Oh, Yoon Ah (Seal)

Vice Chair Park, Jeehwan (Seal)

Examiner Eun, Ki SOO (Seal)

## **Abstract**

The complexity of minorities and their relationship with the Thai or Laotian government serve as a stepping stone in establishing minority policies. Ethnic minorities' policies are usually structured to develop individual ethnic groups and form relationships with the nation-state. Additionally, minorities face parts that need continuous development through minority policies. For the development of ethnic minorities, minorities usually try to meet fundamental factors to raise awareness of their existence by adopting and complying with the state-announced ethnic minority policies. The factors encompass basic education, including primary and secondary education, vocational education and training, economic activity, and social participation.

The Hmong group is the representative ethnic minority group that has tremendously achieved unprecedented development through the ethnic minority policies in Southeast Asia. In particular, the development through education was made based on ethnic minority policies. The Hmong, an independent population, have been spread through large-scale influx into the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia, such as Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar. The mounting population of the Han Chinese expelled them from China out to the Southeast Asian countries in the 18th century. Subsequently, thousands of Hmong were expatriated to Thailand, and other masses escaped to the deep jungle in Laos to live and shift for themselves. Such differences in settlement styles of the Hmong people living in Thailand and Laos have also been a leading factor in forming relationships with the state, overall development, and the beginning of education and social and economic participation. In particular, ethnic minorities' policies in

the country were resolved so the Hmong people in Laos and Thailand could receive divergent education. In the case of Laos, the main focuses of the educational forms were literacy skills, primary education, and an increase in the enrollment rate. On the contrary, in the case of the Thai Hmong people, education focused on preparing for economic activities such as vocational training, living skills, agriculture, labor, and social participation rather than emphasizing basic education as a given prerequisite for speaking Thai.

Nevertheless, there was a common difficulty that persisted. The Hmong in Laos and Thailand faced a constant conflict for their development and autonomy against the national state. Hmong women, part of a society classified by class and gender, face different levels of discrimination and struggles. The long history of illiteracy, sexual harassment, enslavement, poverty, and a hazardous environment has led to the exploitation of Hmong women under the paternal community. They are constrained by social stratification in a communal and family-oriented society.

As a way to narrow the gap between men's and women's educational levels and attainment within the Hmong group, the opportunity for Hmong women to receive an education was given through the ethnic minorities policies established by the national government. The educational opportunities led them to a certain degree of attainment, including eradicating illiteracy, primary and secondary education, and vocational schools. These allowed them to be involved in economic activities and social participation. As a result, the educated Hmong women have become able to express their opinions to male figures within the form of the paternal society of the family. In addition, if the traditional and ritualistic customs of Hmong women of the past were devoted to encouraging housework, child raising, and submitting to their husbands for their own contentment, Hmong

women grew to form their own social communities in rural and urban areas to share and support economic activities. Just as though Hmong women were compensated for the opportunity of education they had not received while they grew up, Thai Hmong women voluntarily moved their residences to ensure that their children received proper education under abundant infrastructure and better school systems. As another example, Hmong women in Laos contributed to alleviating the poverty rate on a national scope by utilizing skills and knowledge acquired through education in economic activities.

Key words: Ethnic Minorities policies, Hmong women, Laos, Thailand, Education Attainment

**Student number: 2019- 20704**

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	iii
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	vii
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	vii
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Historical background.....	3
1.2 Research Methodology .....	4
<b>Chapter 2. Literature Review</b> .....	5
2.1. Mông or H'Mông in Laos .....	6
2.2. Meo “hill tribes” in Thailand.....	7
2.3. Hmong women in Laos.....	9
2.4. Hmong women in Thailand .....	10
2.5. Common roles of Hmong women .....	11
<b>Chapter 3. Policies on Ethnic Minorities/Hill Tribes</b> .....	14
3.1. Policies on Ethnic Minority: Hmong in Laos.....	14
3.2. Policies on Hill Tribes: Meo in Thailand .....	20
<b>Chapter 4. Policy Outcomes</b> .....	28
4.1. Hmong women’s education and poverty reduction– Laos .....	28
4.2. Meo women’s education and economic activity –Thailand .....	40
<b>Chapter 5. Conclusion</b> .....	51
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	54
<b>국문초록</b> .....	59

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Literacy rate for Hmong women and men 1995 .....	31
Figure 2. Literacy rate for Hmong women and men from 1995 to 2005 .....	31
Figure 3. Percentage of Distribution by Active Status (Lao Hmong) .....	36

## List of Tables

Table 1. Tasks for Implementation of Ethnic Minority Policy in Laos.....	16
Table 2. Primary and Secondary education for Lao Sung 1996 1997.....	29
Table 3. School Attendance among Hmong women from 1995 to 2005 .....	33
Table 4. Mean Primary School enrollment rates (in %) for children aged 6 to 12 (2002/3) .....	34
Table 5. Poverty headcount rate by Ethnicity of Household Head (2012/13 - 2018/19).....	39
Table 6. DNFE Primary education for Hill area community curriculum in 1999 <sup>5</sup> .....	42
Table 7. Level of Formal Education in Maesa Mai village (Leepreech, 2001, p. 148) <sup>41</sup> .....	47
Table 8. Student numbers in Khun Krang village school in 2004 <sup>41</sup> .....	47





# Chapter 1. Introduction

The Hmong are categorized as a group that brings destruction and disloyalty, and especially it is believed that they do not have the sense of respecting the borders, including international borders.<sup>1</sup> The Hmong in Thailand is generally regarded as treachery for the fact that some had battled for the Communist Party of Thailand in the late 1960s and early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> The Hmong in Laos is deemed as a "threat" to the state since they had been allied with right-wing anti-Lao government protestors.<sup>1</sup> Despite such reputations, the Hmong rather call themselves "free people", holding onto a strong sense of cultural identity and independence.<sup>7</sup> The major economic activities of the Hmong were in agriculture of integration of cultivating dry rice, maize, and opium poppy with a cash crop. However, towards the late 20th century, shifting cultivation became unfeasible, excluding a few remote areas. They have instead replaced them with the permanent-field cultivation of crops such as corn or the gardening of flowers, fruits, and vegetables.<sup>2</sup> For a living, the Hmong sold the cultivated crops in lowland markets.<sup>2</sup> Not only have such economic activities helped the Hmong to prosper a sustainable economic practice, but also this has boosted their economic interrelations with lowland people. The secondary sources of income are household-based handicraft production and wage employment. While the secondary sources of income have allowed the Hmong women to be part of basic economic activity within their family boundary, they have come to be the main factors that take away opportunities to obtain formal and non-formal education. Eventually, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Baird, I. G. (2020). The Emergence of an Environmentally Conscious and Buddhism-Friendly Marginalized Hmong Religious Sect along the Laos-Thailand Border. *Asian Ethnology*, 79(2), 311–332. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27009598>

<sup>2</sup> Tapp, N. (2010, March 15). Hmong. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hmong>

uneducated Hmong women were left subordinated to hierarchical male dominance.<sup>5</sup> The stance of government assistance stayed more prioritized on the recovery of natural disasters such as forest destruction, narcotics, and national security rather than narrowing the humanitarian gap between the majority and ethnic minority groups. Lao PDR undergoing an intense transformation evolving from numerous years of military rule, centralized control, and internal conflict, remains a low-income country in South-East Asia, along with grave poverty divided into small elite, a relatively small middle class, and many of the very poor. In addition, for the society operates under a ‘male-preference’ culture, it is considered a norm that daughters are not as worth the investment. This has led to the mistreatment of girls and women by selling them to another family or giving birth to another family name. On the contrary, the Hmong women in Thailand had been once treated equitably in a subtle manner in the 1960s when Thailand was under the communist party (CPT). It was during the 1960s when textiles and garments were the core commodity of the industrialization process. High growth rates were driven by exports of agricultural products. During the period, Hmong women and men were permitted to have equal rights in political, economic, cultural, educational, and working opportunities.<sup>3</sup> The policy under CPT stressed on enhancing the role of women in carrying out the revolution and production, and guaranteeing the welfare of women and children for the purpose of Hmong gender liberation.<sup>3</sup> The historical precedence for the Hmong and Hmong women have been regarded as owning Thai nationality even today. With such inclusiveness from the Thai government, the Hmong women in Thailand seem to have more accessibility to formal and non-formal education and social activities as the economy of Thai

---

<sup>3</sup> (1979) Documents from the communist party of Thailand, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 9:1, 100-107, DOI: [10.1080/00472337985390081](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472337985390081)

develops.<sup>4</sup> However, the locational condition of the Hmong's residence, and societal discrimination and expectation towards Hmong women play fatal obstacles for them to be independently present themselves.

The Hmong in the two countries, Thailand and Laos, have existed respectively followed by the historical occurrences, regional characteristics, and relations with the nation-state. Within the Hmong group, Hmong women, a minor within ethnic minorities, have undergone the most underprivileged treatment due to societal repression, gender discrimination, and lack of accessibility to basic necessities, including access to education. In the midst of the discriminatory social status and scarce conditions of Hmong women, the national policies focusing on ethnic minorities have been a “window” for Hmong women to not only attain education in several forms but also expand it to obtain the opportunities to be part of social participation through economic activities in both rural and urban areas.

## **1.1 Historical background**

Hmong, an indigenous people who originated from the southern part of China in the 18th century, are scattered in Southeast Asian countries like Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. The Hmong, called Mio people as a subgroup of China, fled to Laos for geographical proximity; however, there was oppression by the French and Laotian authorities, which generated internal clan conflicts between French and the Royal Lao Government versus the Communist Party. Throughout the course of several wars like World War II, “Secret War”, Special Guerrilla Units (SGU), and the American War, countless Hmong people yielded their lives. Besides being categorized as a subgroup of Miao people, Hmong are referred to by

---

<sup>4</sup> Goudineau, Y. (2003). *Laos and ethnic minority cultures: Promoting heritage*. UNESCO.

some other names according to the countries they locate, so Mông or H'Mông in Lao and Meo in Thailand. In Thailand, they are listed as “hill tribes” or called “Mong” because they are geographically settled in the highlands and hilly areas in Northern Thailand. Not only are the Hmong called by different terminologies, but they have established respectively dissimilar relationships with the country they belong to. The “Meo/ Mong” or “Hill Tribes”, fluctuating between “naturalized, “alien,” and “illegal,” encounter severe poverty more than other ethnic minorities in Thailand.<sup>5</sup> Due to lacking infrastructure, limited access to Thai citizenship, and denounced land settlement, they have become the most disadvantaged group in Thailand.<sup>5</sup> As one of the largest populations in Laos, *Mông or H'Mông* has been stuck by a swirl of a religious period, the Buddhism period, and a governmental period, the socialism. Amid the conflicts and arbitration between central governments and the minority group, the government of the nation formulated and implemented policies toward the ethnic group to enhance the effect upon them to develop human capital and afford a sense of belonging as part of the country beyond the conventional norms they had been maintaining.

## **1.2 Research Methodology**

The study contributes to analyzing the educational development and attainment of Hmong women living in Laos and Thailand in response to the policies on ethnic minorities implemented by the national government of each country and by them also discusses the effects on social participation and economic activities. The national policies on ethnic minorities of Thailand and Laos are the backbone of analyzing its effect on Hmong women's education and its development

---

<sup>5</sup> Fujioka, R.K. (2002). Case Study on Education Opportunities for Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand: Implications for Sustainable Rural Development.

chronologically. Subjected to the emphasis of the policies, educational development and educational attainment of the Hmong women will have resulted in different formations. This research will be conducted mainly in a mixed method of numerical data and analytical texts to reinforce the numerical figures from reliable secondary resources. The numerical data will be used to compare and contrast the educational attainment in several forms, poverty reduction, and economic activities that were promoted for Hmong women. Along with the numerical data, analytical documents and journals will be used to interpret educational outcomes for Hmong women, and to examine gradual social participation, and active economic activities. To comprehend the practical outcome of Hmong women, a case study will be introduced as an evidential and reliable document assessing the effects of women's education and economic activities.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

Women from various ethnic minority groups encounter different experiences, usually determined by government neglect, discrimination, and isolation. Moreover, minority women often find themselves marginalized facing exclusion within their communities and society. This applies to Hmong women in a way that they are recognized as “subordinate,” “invisibleness,” and even the machine of “producing” in the ideology stressing male dominance, and female submission. Due to the social and cultural connotations they represent, sexual enslavement and ruthless abuse prevail toward Hmong women. Conventionally, girls hold a lower status than boys in the Hmong culture. Unmarried daughters are appointed as “other people’s women” since they are subordinated to being part of the husband’s family. While Hmong men are empowered to participate in public

realms, Hmong women hold their power privately. In addition, women are projected to be working diligently, and hospitable to primarily care for the household and raise their children instead of attending schools or holding a job outside the home. The only success acknowledged societally and culturally for Hmong women is usually measured by the nurturing contentment of their husbands and children.

During most of a Hmong woman's life, equipped skills for operating the family's land, retaining the livestock, and caring for the family members are what acknowledge them.<sup>6</sup> Since the primary source of Hmong people is agricultural activities, such as farming, this has made the woman's role more dependent and subordinate to the family's future and survival; instead of seeking to actualize self-sufficiency as one individual entity. Substantially, the identities of "subordinate," "invisibleness," and the machine of "producing" are shown more visibly in marriage and divorce because Hmong society is a communally family-orientated. Therefore, the roles of Hmong women in marriage are remarkably representative.

## **2.1. Mông or H'Mông in Laos**

The Mông or H'Mông, called "exterminated to the last root"<sup>6</sup> in Laos approximately, numbered 460,000, slowly propelled southward by the increasing population of Han Chinese. Mông or H'Mông who escaped from Chinese oppression and persecution in the 1800s mostly took refuge deep in the mountains away from the cities.<sup>7</sup> During the Vietnam war, the Mông or H'Mông in Lao battled against forces from north and south of Vietnam and the communist Pathet Lao forces by recruiting from France and the United States Central Intelligence Agency

---

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Perrin, Welcome to the Jungle, TIME, Apr. 28, 2003

<sup>7</sup> *Hmong*. EthnoMed. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ethnomed.org/culture/hmong/>

(CIA) during the first and second Indochina Wars.<sup>8</sup> Though Mông fought to defend their homeland and cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail with the U.S. promise to relocate, they fell under the hands of communists after the Americans had left.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, they had been under constant persecution and exploitation by the Western forces. Hmong women, the most vulnerable, faced communist persecution, such as mass killing, rape, torture, and incarceration in fear and danger. Those who were left surrendered to the communists after thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand to seek refuge for safety; the Hmong in Lao sought refuge deep in the jungle, fighting the communists.<sup>8</sup> They rebuilt their homes and villages or continued the fight. Approximately 595,000 Hmong remain in Laos as of now.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2. Meo “hill tribes” in Thailand**

In Thailand, the Hmong, called “Meo”, are the second largest hill tribe<sup>41</sup> consisting of approximately 17% of the total hill tribe population. Hmong migration into northern Thailand started around 1995. However, in 1929, there were Hmong already residing in Tak Province in northwestern Thailand. Besides Tak Province, the Hmong settled in Chiang Rai province, Chiang Mai province, Nan province, and Pechaboon province.<sup>41</sup> The two representative Hmong groups are Blue Hmong and White Hmong. Their dialects and costumes distinguish them, and other subgroups of Hmong have migrated into these main groups.<sup>9</sup> Several Hmong villages were established within the borders of Thailand, fleeing from Lao against the aggressive fight, where the Lao soldiers attempted to assassinate Hmong soldiers and families who favored the CIA in the late 19th century. The runaway Hmong from Laos felt much safer in Thailand for feeling liberated to do

---

<sup>8</sup> *Hmong timeline*. Minnesota Historical Society. (n.d.), from <https://www.mnhs.org/hmong/hmong-timeline>

<sup>9</sup> Leepreecha, P. (2001). *Kinship and identity among Hmong in Thailand*. University of Washington.



whatever they could do to remain in Thailand. In 1975, when the communist takeover of Laos seemed forthcoming, the U.S. managed to transfer 1,000 to 3,000 Hmong to Thailand.<sup>10</sup> When the Lao People's Democratic Republic came together towards the end of 1975, approximately 44,000 Hmong had fled to Thailand as refugees.<sup>10</sup> They have mostly resided across northern Thailand, and can be found in Chiang Ria, Mae Hong Son, and in the Sameong district of Chiang Mai. Yet, the Hmong, as the country's most disadvantaged group, rarely feel a sense of belonging as a national identity due to the shortage of infrastructure, limited access to Thai citizenship, and deferred land settlement.<sup>5</sup> Even though the first-generation hill tribes received Thai citizenship, the Ministry of Interior has been cautious about granting Thai identity to newly immigrated ones due to asserted involvement in illegal trafficking.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of it, the national government strikingly recognizes how providing education to children, youth, and adults can enhance sustainable development of rural areas, which has resulted in an increasing number of hill tribe children attending primary schools at the initiative of their communities and the Thai government.<sup>5</sup> Besides primary and secondary education, governmental and non-governmental organizations run vocational knowledge, life skills learning, and training programs.<sup>3</sup> Village schools also run informal education. In recent years, the promotion of quality of life and welfare in highland development has been drawing increasing attention. This is partly due to some factors such as the changing pattern of economic activities, and growing acceptance of Thai language instruction in schools, and exposure to modern knowledge.

---

<sup>10</sup> Yau, J. (2005). *The Foreign-Born Hmong in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute.

### 2.3. Hmong women in Laos

Hmong women in Laos are defined as “persecution” and “marginalized.”<sup>11</sup> Concerning Hmong women who reside in the jungles, their ability to enjoy human rights fully and fundamental freedoms are particularly precarious. There is barely any protection guaranteed for Hmong women in Laos while they are being further subjected to considerably difficult conditions during pregnancy, labor, and lactation periods.<sup>12</sup> Not only are they unable to fulfill basic nutritional needs during these periods, but also they have no access to medical care or medicines.<sup>12</sup> While they are expected to be excelled nurturers for the family, they are, in effect, abandoned and overlooked. In addition, they are suffering abuse during military attacks and trafficking, and sexual enslavement under the situation of living in jungles and deep mountainous regions.<sup>12</sup> The worse situation is that as Lao military forces destroy temporary structures, the Hmong women lack nutrition, which leads to ill-nourishment. Such conditions place the Hmong women in a vulnerable situation to diseases and at the risk of maternity and birth mortality.<sup>13</sup> One Lao Hmong woman had testified, “we [Hmong people] are distressed by credible allegations...indicating that cases of extrajudicial killings, torture, and other serious violations of human rights, including sexual abuse, have been perpetrated by army soldiers.” Hmong women in Laos have been constantly exposed to vulnerabilities not only in the sense of protection but also as societal individuals.

---

<sup>11</sup> *UNPO REPRESENTATION: Congress of World Hmong People*. UNPO. (2017, July)

<sup>12</sup> *Persecution & marginalization of Hmong women in Laos*. UNPO. (2018, October 5). Retrieved from <https://unpo.org/article/21143>

<sup>13</sup> *Country gender Lao PDR - Asian development bank*.

## **2.4. Hmong women in Thailand**

Hmong women are considered the “skeleton of the society” to men and “other people’s daughters” entities in the Hmong patriarchal society. Even women are oppressed by social and nurturing pressures as if it were a given. The traditional idea that “marrying early, bearing early, and having many children are blessings” is prevalent in the Thai Hmong community. In consequence, many girls of school age choose marriage over schooling, and learn embroidery from the age of six to seven.<sup>41</sup> When they reach the age of puberty, a Hmong girl marries someone introduced by her parents. Otherwise, the Hmong girl is stigmatized and misunderstood that there is something disoriented about her.<sup>41</sup> The traditional ideologies are the greatest hindrance for Hmong females in ongoing their formal education.<sup>41</sup> However, as the economy of Thailand started to grow; many Hmong women have dynamically taken part in various economic activities, and meddled in decision-making processes. As a representative form of education for Hmong women to play a role in the economic realm, adult and vocational education have aided as a significant avenue for Hmong women to develop the educational level and acquire new skills for a living.<sup>41</sup> But, without access to Thai citizen rights, hill tribe women become invisible in national communities. This leads to deprivation of their rights to education, health services, occupations, and human dignity. In other words, having no nationality for hill tribe women means a form of imprisonment in their communities. Another problem at this point is that when there are limited economic accessibilities within the local communities. The traditional security measures fail to protect the women, so they end up falling into the pit of the sex industry or perform illegal work to make a living and to have access to the resources that will help them get nationality for their families and themselves,

particularly for those who are widows and have children to take care of at home.<sup>41</sup> In the end, many of them are arrested for illegal conduct leaving the controlled areas. Sometimes, in order to get bail, they are forced to provide sexual services as a bribe for the officials.

### *Summary*

While Hmong women in Thailand are in an unceasing battle to justly practice citizenship rights which could be considered internal complication, Hmong women in Lao are constantly cautious of military forces which are external impediment. Apart from the two dissimilar situations that Hmong women are in, there are communal categories that encompass the roles of Hmong women. Not only were the roles significant obstacles to their attainment and development of education but also the catalyst to receive education and take part in social participation because of its conventional and societal pressures that are obliged to follow and settle their identity in as subordinate beings. The communal categories grant more reasons for Hmong women to receive education in all forms to preserve their identities but also the facilitator to develop their potentials in educational realm, as well as social and economic fields.

## **2.5. Common roles of Hmong women**

### *Marriage and Divorce*

Marriage is a communal structure and ceremony within the Hmong community. Conventionally, the engagement comes through a strict procedure of negotiations between the bride's parents and the groom with the support of his male relatives.<sup>7</sup> In the process, the woman has no personal choice to decide whom she wants to marry; instead, she is expected to submit her parents' wishes about

whom she should marry. Moreover, when a woman marries a man by the wishes of their parents, she may have less responsibility for the relationship and turn into either an abusive one or controlled by the power dynamic between a husband and a wife.

Typically, a younger Hmong woman tends to marry an older Hmong man. This relation grants the man hierarchical power to handle the social and economic responsibilities. In Laos, polyandry is lawfully allowed. A man may marry multiple wives; except for the wealthy being restricted to marrying multiple wives. This husband-wife relationship arrangement in structure shows that women can be regarded as commodities for the satisfaction of men. This act of having as many wives as a husband wants depending on their income seems to be no different from a form of human trafficking. In the Hmong language, the literal meaning of “to marry” is translated as “buying a wife”.<sup>14</sup> The formation of marriage bestows a great benefit and invaluable identity upon Hmong women. Thus, being a wife seemingly gives them the “convincing” reason to settle for their role as wife or mother. Even if they may have the drive to afford for economic activity, their primary title as wife or mom is tied down for dreaming of something more for her future. However, the “convincing” reason is to provide freedom from poverty on behalf of their lineal family members by providing financial needs.

On the other hand, divorce gives a contradicting ending to the Hmong women. From the perspective of the Hmong women, divorce is not a straightforward process. If a Hmong couple battles with problems in marriage and one of them claim a divorce, the couple will have to first approach their clan leaders with the issue.<sup>15</sup> The problem is that the clan leaders are mostly men, which

---

<sup>14</sup> Cha, Y. P. (2010). *An introduction to Hmong culture*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Publishers.

contributes a great privilege towards grooms. A woman cannot take part in initiating a divorce under any circumstances, such as a situation where a woman catching her husband's adultery. Even if the divorce takes place with a mutual agreement from both the husband's side and wife's side, the wife is usually taken for granted by having to recompense her marriage contract fee to her future-to-be husband. When a husband breaks the marriage and files a divorce, he needs to just pay a small fee to "clean" his wife whether neither the "fault" of the wife nor the permission of the wife is necessary to the process.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Political participation & Social involvement*

Women cannot exercise direct expression of their opinions to higher authorities, except through men under any circumstances.<sup>15</sup> If women need, the only channel is through their husbands or male relatives. In short, the interests of women are represented by only male partners or representatives who would not only translate but also interpret their viewpoints for higher authorities.<sup>15</sup> There could be a risk of having their opinions taken for granted or taken lightly due to the indirect communication. This also applies to the matter of ownership to lands because land ownership is patrilineal in the Hmong society. Men are regarded as the "owners and administrators of land," whereas women are deemed "generally not inheriting land from their parents."<sup>16</sup>

Hmong women's daily routines and responsibilities are focused on maintaining their family and creating material goods. According to Donnelly (1994), Hmong women were traditionally in charge of manufacturing textiles and

---

<sup>15</sup> Cha, D., & Small, C. A. (1994). Policy lessons from Lao and Hmong women in Thai refugee camps. *World Development*, 22(7), 1045–1059. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x\(94\)90147-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x(94)90147-3)

<sup>16</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2004. Lao PDR: Gender, poverty and the MDGs. Country Gender Strategy. Manila.

all threads and clothes.<sup>17</sup> This has been a quintessential work. They built their community as learning needlework, and as doing embroidery together. Through the community work, Hmong women adapted a way of expressing social relationships. This was an essential social community that Hmong women cultivated.

## **Chapter 3. Policies on Ethnic Minorities/Hill Tribes**

### **3.1. Policies on Ethnic Minority: Hmong in Laos**

#### *General Policies*

There was no explicit policy or interest in ethnic minorities when Lao PDR was first established in 1949. Basically, formal and traditional education structure did not exist for the Lao Soung<sup>18</sup>, highland dwelling peoples of Hmong, because the government of the constitutionally monarchy had regarded ethnic minorities as the “disadvantaged” that were non-existent before. Even though there were no concrete policies for ethnic minority groups, the government unceasingly endeavored to integrate them into one single Laotian nation imposing assimilation.<sup>19</sup> At that time, illiterate Hmong who could not read or wrote were as equated to 99% in Lao provinces.<sup>19</sup>

In 1981, the Lao government implemented a policy on the Hmong people with the decree on Ethnic Affairs. It aimed to strengthen the political opportunities for Hmong to participate in the governing process,<sup>20</sup> containing a critical statement such as “not enough attention has been paid to the ethnic minority issue.” Of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Donnelly, N. (1994). *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press.

<sup>18</sup> Inui, Miki. "Hmong women and education: challenges for empowerment in the Lao PDR." *Hmong Studies Journal*, vol. 16, annual 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Grégoire Schlemmer. *Ethnic Belonging in Laos: A Politico-Historical Perspective*. CHANGING LIVES. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY, POLITICS, AND CULTURE IN LAOS, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> *Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Country Technical Notes on Indigenous Peoples' Issues. (2012, November).

individuals who had received some education in Laos, 70% were illiterate in Hmong. At that time, Reder (1982) found that 92% of Hmong women had no formal education compared to 46% of men. Beyond the educational aspect, the policy on the Hmong people attempted to enhance their living conditions and increase national security for the entire nation, recognizing the critical role and contribution of minorities in the “liberation, sovereignty and development of the nation.”<sup>21</sup>

The 1992 ethnic minority policy, as the cornerstone of current ethnic minority policy, focuses on gradual improvement in the lives of ethnic minorities as they retain their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. The policy concerning ethnic minorities encompasses building national identity, recognizing equality between ethnic minorities, increasing the solidarity among ethnic minorities as members of the greater Lao family, resolving economic and cultural inequality problems, and improving the living conditions of the ethnic minorities step by step.<sup>24</sup> Besides the general policy of the Party, comprehensive policies on economic affairs, education, culture, health, and social welfare were established precisely for Ethnic minorities in Lao as follows in the chart below. These policies were written in 1992 and activated as the backbone of the first Ethnic minorities policy on Hmong adopted in 1981. Based on these policies, the Laos government advocated and worked towards promoting and strengthening procedures for Hmong women and girls. The general policies needed to be initiated in advance because they laid out the sense of harmony and inclusiveness for the Hmong group by emphasizing building national sentiment and recognizing the equality between all ethnic

---

<sup>21</sup> DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, INVESTMENT AND FINANCE. (2017, December 6). *Ethnic groups engagement framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.maf.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ethnic-Groups-Engagement-Framework.docx-BTC.pdf>



minorities. Implementing the Ethnic Minority Policy in Laos comprises six tasks: Economic Affairs, Education, Culture, Health, Social welfare, and others. Each task greatly narrows the gap between the nation and minorities in terms of development and inclusiveness. Each of them draws attention to maintaining the balance for the minorities to exercise their rights to be part of society as individuals. It is noteworthy that the nation has been involved in constructing policies for ethnic minorities to immerse them into the society and establish the foundation to eliminate the lacking area according to the officially built policies. The following table below proposes the resolutions for developing ethnic minorities, including the Hmong, by tasks.

*Table 1. Tasks for Implementation of Ethnic Minority Policy in Laos*

Task	Contents
Economic Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue programmes to halt shifting cultivation</li> <li>• Allocate land for cultivation and raising livestock</li> <li>• Introduce policies on taxation and credit</li> <li>• LFNC is in charge of the development of mountainous areas to reduce socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the literacy rate</li> <li>• Expand the primary education network</li> <li>• Improve access to education for all children of school age</li> <li>• Improve the system of schools for ethnic minority children</li> <li>• Develop training programmes for teachers of ethnic minority schools in rural mountainous areas</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Hmong and Khammu scripts using Lao alphabet, and introduce these alphabets to schools simultaneously with the Lao language</li> <li>• Promote traditional arts, literature and their heritage to foster the rich cultural diversity of the nation</li> <li>• Educate ethnic minorities to eradicate those traditional customs which are backward and have negative effects on production, life and the state of unity</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote hygiene, prevent diseases, and eliminate serious epidemics for better health and longer life expectancy</li> <li>• Make appropriate investments in the health sector, combining modern and traditional medicines</li> </ul>
Social welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect data on ethnic retirees, handicapped persons and families of those who died for the nation to give them special services</li> </ul>
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up information systems in mountainous ethnic areas, for example, radio broadcasts in minority languages</li> </ul>

Source: Central Administration Committee of the Party: *The Resolution of Central Administration Committee of the Party Regarding Ethnic Minority in a New Phase, 1992.*

Out of all the tasks in the policies, the education measure of the Ethnic Minority Policy underlines the increase of the literacy rate, the expansion of the

primary education network, the improvement of accessibility to education for all children of school age, and the system of schools for ethnic minority children, and lastly, development on training programs for teachers of ethnic minority schools in rural mountainous. The policy of increasing the literacy rate aligns with the government endeavoring to incorporate the Hmong into Lao's economic and societal areas. Following the economic affairs and culture, reducing socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as educating ethnic minorities to eradicate those traditional customs due to being negative and backward, are encouraged instead of trying to preserve and immerse into the Lao society as it is.

In 1996, the Lao government promoted the extension of educational opportunities within ethnic minorities, and endeavored to elevate their cultural legacy.<sup>22</sup> Siu (1996) found that only 8% of Hmong refugees had had school experience and were literate in either Hmong or Lao.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the government has gradually employed policies to create additional educational resources available to ethnic minorities.<sup>22</sup> In 1998, as a long-term objective, the Ministry of Education constituted and promoted vocational training for women and girls, minority groups, and disadvantaged adults (Peters, 1998:5).<sup>23</sup> The National Strategy on the Promotion of Education for Girls and the Advancement of Women in the Education Sector Plan 2006-2010 intended to ameliorate gender equality by promoting opportunities for women and girls through upgrading their education.<sup>24</sup> This strategy particularly paid attention to ethnic girls in poor and disadvantaged areas.<sup>24</sup> The "Education for All National Plan of Action 2003-2015" introduced

---

<sup>22</sup> Inui, M. (n.d.). *Improving education access and quality in the Lao PDR*. Retrieved from [http://www.laostudies.org/system/files/subscription/Inui\\_0.pdf](http://www.laostudies.org/system/files/subscription/Inui_0.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> HSJ. (n.d.). *Hmong Studies Journal*. DOAJ.

bilingual education in the first grade of primary school.<sup>23</sup> The newest educational policy document titled “National Strategy and Plan of Action on Inclusive Education 2011-2015,” aims to ensure that all principles of inclusive education, especially among ethnic groups are mainstreamed into all dimensional levels of education system. The 2016-2020 Education Sector Development Plan, as the most recent educational policy, reiterated the necessity to draw system-wide attention to the needs of out-of-school children, adolescent’s young people including girls and women.<sup>24</sup> The Laos government has built up the national policies consecutively on ethnic minorities, including the Hmong, for the purpose of harmonizing with the nationals while emphasizing education development and attainment for girls and women. What benefited the Hmong women in attaining education was that the Laos government has paid unceasing attention to caring for women and lessening gender disparity.

#### *Gender-focused Policies*

The Laos government was concentrated on easing gender equality and protecting women. Thus, the Lao National Assembly approved the law on the Development and Protection of Women in 2004.<sup>25</sup> In order to narrow the gap of the gender disparity, the education sector has increased the accessibility, quality, and applicability of primary and secondary education for girls, particularly impoverished and ethnic girls, by encouraging them to join schooling and to receive an education to reduce illiteracy. The main targets are educationally disadvantaged females who deal with daily problems, and communicate with their family members living in inaccessible areas that lack primary education.

---

<sup>24</sup> *Inclusion*. Lao People's Democratic Republic | INCLUSION | Education Profiles. (2021, July 28). Retrieved from <https://education-profiles.org/index.php/eastern-and-south-eastern-asia/lao-peoples-democratic-republic/~inclusion>

### *Girls' Basic Education Program*

With a proposal of the Ministry of Education (MOE) funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Education of Women in Asia underlined the shortage of educational opportunities for girls in Laos.<sup>23</sup> Following the outcome of these processes, the government constructed the Basic Education (Girls) Project to bring more women out into the socio-economic mainstream by actively developing their educational standards.<sup>25</sup> The Basic Education (Girls) Project was to increase access to primary education for girls in ethnic areas by offering primary educational facilities in 50 districts and strengthening the capacity at both central and provincial levels to plan, manage, and implement schools,<sup>25</sup> and promote community participation in school management to increase enrollment, and also retention of pupils.<sup>25</sup>

With the sponsorship of UNESCO, the Laos government completed the Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Training Project in 1996 based on the four strategies.<sup>35</sup> The four strategies prioritized improvements in basic and primary education, and the educational development needs of rural areas, including non-formal education, emphasized the priority on educationally marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and girls and women, and lastly, made efficient use of available resources.<sup>35</sup>

The development of the policies for ethnic minorities, including girls and women, has progressed from scratch to a consecutive policy. It began with recognition of the "disadvantaged" on a national scope, and as one of the disadvantaged, improvement of the life of Hmong people was endorsed. Also, as the protection for girls and women, gender inequality has been eased through

---

<sup>25</sup> *Basic education (girls) project - Asian Development Bank*. Asian Development Bank. (2008, July).

educational progressions, such as eradicating illiteracy, raising school enrollment, and recognizing the challenges of allowing formal and non-formal education for ethnic women in Laos.<sup>35</sup> Through the policies on ethnic minorities, Hmong women have taken a step closer to finding a way around living beyond surviving.

### **3.2. Policies on Hill Tribes: Meo in Thailand**

The policies on ethnic minorities, so-called “hill tribes” in Thailand, are initiated as an assortment of educational and economic, and social development policies. The indisputable idea of the Thai government on hill tribes did not consider them as refugees or aliens, but more as Thai nationals. Despite such an inclusive perception of the hill tribes, Meo, the Hmong, needed to be somewhat under control and checked to ensure that they would not commit any crimes or stir up incitation within the community of hill tribes. As a way to control the hill tribes, the government executed rules on the naturalization of the hill tribes. However, the one absolute condition was that hill tribes must be born in the land of Thailand, and inhabited the same place for several years without any security violations.<sup>26</sup> Besides that, the Thai government laid out several policies for ethnic minorities from the national perspective. These policies wove the integral relationship with the Thai government. They led Hmong women to be part of the societal ground through economic activities based on comprehensive education, including primary education, secondary education, and vocational education they received.

#### **Nationality Act (1913)**

This Act banned the rights of all aliens to procure property for any purpose unless they were Thai by nationality, which means only by the birth of or by

---

<sup>26</sup> Burusapatana, K., & Atipas, P. (1988). Thai Government Policies on Minorities. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 16(2), 47–60.

naturalization.<sup>26</sup> This policy permitted all persons born in Thailand to hold Thai citizenship regardless of their parents' nationalities.<sup>26</sup> As this policy was revised, all aliens applying for naturalization were required to be literate in the Thai language.<sup>27</sup> This policy was heavily vital to ethnic minorities for having squarely linked to achieving the qualification for living in Thailand. Five years later, the earliest educational policy called Private School Act (1918) was set with a purpose of regulating private schools and promoting public schools.

### **Private School Act (1918)**

As the earliest educational policy in Thailand, Private School Act (1918) aimed to regulate the development of all private schools in Thailand to restrict teaching no other subject besides the Thai language.<sup>26</sup> Migrants were no exception in being required to pass a primary graduate examination in Thai to be certified to teach in schools. All schools had to conform to the regulation of the Ministry of Education regarding syllabi, schedules, and choices of textbooks.<sup>26</sup> Ethnic Chinese born in Thailand were regarded Thai nationals; therefore, it was a must for them to master the Thai language.<sup>28</sup>

### **National Committee for the Hill tribes (1959)<sup>5</sup>**

The Thai government, the first national-level organization, established the National Committee for the Hill tribes in 1959 to formulate policies focusing on the development of hill tribes.<sup>5</sup> This governmental policy towards the hill tribes intended to integrate hill tribes into the Thai state, and to maintain their cultures as a “priority.”<sup>5</sup> The detailed objectives are to allow the hill tribes to become a part of Thai society, for socio-economic upgrade to improve the socio-economic well-

---

<sup>27</sup> Coughlin, R. J. 1960. *Double identity: The Chinese in modern Thailand*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Thomson, C. N. (1993). Political Identity among Chinese in Thailand. *Geographical Review*, 83(4), 397–409. <https://doi.org/10.2307/215822>

being of hill through programs in education and vocational training, and execute rapid registration of all hill tribe-persons, and also to limit population growth by accelerating birth control programs.<sup>26</sup> During this period, hill tribes were associated with communist insurgency, taken place from 1942 to the 1990s. While the Thai authorities attempted to better relations with hill tribes, they tried to promote permanent settlements where the Hill tribes could be regulated at the same time.<sup>29</sup>

### **General Education Department (1965)**

In 1965, General Education Department generated a curriculum for hill tribe schools.<sup>30</sup> Later on, the department launched a project called “Adult Education Project for the Hill Tribes” in 1977, aiming at preparing textbooks for students and teachers’ handbooks for teachers. By operating through top-down analysis regarding the problems of education, the Thai government tackled the educational issues from the position of educators and pointed out lacking materials. The Department of Non-formal education was obligated to prepare and distribute the handbooks for teachers and textbooks for students. In 1978, the Thai government finally confronted the higher education problem for Hill Tribes through the Hill Areas Education Project (HAE).

### **Committee for Hill tribes on national security and relocations (1968)**

National Economic Development Board enacted for highlanders to stabilize their residence and livelihood by supplying development and welfare services. This discouraged the highlanders from cultivating opium poppy, which causes deforestation, and instead prompted them to substitute it with other crops to contribute to the nation in a manner expected of citizens.<sup>30</sup> The ultimate purpose of

---

<sup>29</sup> CULAS, C., & MICRAUD, J. (1997). A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 153(2), 211–243. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27864832>

<sup>30</sup> Mckinnon, John & Vienne, Bernard. (1989). Hill tribes today: problems in change.

this policy was to terminate all the illegal acts from growing opium poppy, and to exchange them with legally profitable and potent crops that would not only allocate jobs for Hmong people but also make a bridge to contact lowland residents. It was an initiative policy of economic production for the Hmong to embark on economic activity in a legal and lucrative way so that they could build up trust with the nationals and lay a sustainable economic path.

### **Integration Policy (1982)**

This policy upholds the welfare of the hill tribes and resolves problems related to the destruction of floodplain and forests, opium poppy cultivation, and security problems.<sup>30</sup> In detail, the policy's objectives are divided into three categories, which are administration, eradication of opium production and consumption, and socio-economic development.<sup>30</sup> As the foremost aim, the administration allows the hill tribes to harmonize within Thai society and to have a sense of belonging, which encompasses being good citizens and loyal to the nation.<sup>30</sup> The second category, eradication of opium production and consumption, encourages the Hmong to relocate the lifestyle of hill tribes and Thai lowland residents to the highlands to guard a livelihood consistent with the law and local regulations.<sup>30</sup> Also, the second category prompts hill tribes to engage in alternative activities that provide them sufficient and consistent income by reducing and eliminating opium production and consumption among the hill tribes.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, socio-economic development focuses on developing the productive capabilities of highlanders to maintain their way of life and improving their standard of living.<sup>30</sup> In addition, it is also to decrease the hill tribe population growth rate to 1.5% by the end of the year. Reducing the population of hill tribes was enacted by the 5<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development policy, focusing on the national level.



The policy also included “hill tribes” to reduce tribal population growth while producing quality Thai citizens of tribal origin and facilitating opium production, reforestation, and rehabilitation of the forests. Particularly, the reduction of opium was encouraged due to the US government’s exploitation of it. The policy was taken action through two master plans, which are the First Master Plan (1992-1996), devised to function as a framework for preparing their operational plans, and the Second Master Plan (1997-2001) being drawn up to solve the problems in highland areas, particularly emphasizing integrating hill tribe people into the national administration system.<sup>5</sup> Along with these master plans, registration of hill tribes as Thai citizens, promotion of permanent settlement, preparation of tribal communities to merge into the current administrative system, law enforcement in tribal areas, and prevention of in-country and border area migration were stipulated.<sup>5</sup> Also, socio-economic development through employment creation, improvement of the quality of life through the provision of basic infrastructure, particularly in health and education, and control of narcotic crop cultivation by reducing areas and output quantity were emphasized.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the 1999 National Education Act, the Department of Non-Formal Education (the DNFE hill area policy) aimed at “Education for all.” This policy emphasized providing various non-formal and informal education programs to fulfill the needs of individuals, communities, and particular areas.<sup>5</sup> It considered the disadvantaged group to be provided with basic education and vocational training for job opportunities, and decentralized the non-formal education administration system to the local management level to plan and operate.<sup>5</sup> In particular, DNFE, in 1998-1999, set a policy to develop highland non-formal education based on the community learning center (CLC) model.<sup>5</sup> Through this

center, the hill tribe was promoted literacy along with DNFE programs for informal education such as culture and community based-knowledge.<sup>5</sup> For promoting education and learning opportunities for the Hmong, communication with hill tribe people was one of the essential factors. However, the hill tribe people faced some limitations because of the distance to villages and the lack of support from the Thai government. Thus, farmers and local agricultural communities have barely participated in the decision-making and plan formulation processes.<sup>5</sup> One of the main obstacles to communication was the language differences. Radio programs partially overcome these obstacles. The programs offered broadcasts hill people about agriculture, community relations, and life skills in tribal languages.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Hill Area Education project*

This project strived to offer educational services to put the needs and problems of hill tribes' communities into effect through a flexible, low-cost, community-based learning model.<sup>5</sup> The Hill Area Education project integrated a combination of support from governmental and non-governmental organizations with community participation.<sup>4</sup> Its philosophy is to bolster village knowledge and resources to implement participatory education for community development.<sup>5</sup> At the highland community learning center, classes composed of both children and adults learned the basic skills such as the Thai language, math, and life and social experience.

#### **The 8<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997- 2001)**

This policy laid out the pathway for the development of hill tribes to cultivate self-reliance and to be able to improve their quality of life. The plan concentrated on tackling the challenges of social change and the unbalanced pattern of development, which particularly instigated by unequal distribution of

wealth, urban-rural discrepancy, social problems, and environmental deprivation among the ethnic minorities.<sup>5</sup>

### **The 9<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006)**

As the following development plan, the 9<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan<sup>31</sup> were constructed based on the "self-sufficiency economy" philosophy as the guiding principle of national development and management.<sup>5</sup> The policy considered Thailand's previous development performance, the management of rapid changes under globalization, and the needs to strengthen "desirable" values.<sup>5</sup> While the 8th plan was focused on a holistic people-centered development approach, the 9th plan accentuated the steady development of human, social, economic, and environmental resources, with the priority goal of pursuing good governance to achieve sustainable people-centered development.<sup>5</sup> In that sense, the 9<sup>th</sup> plan are consistent with the 8<sup>th</sup> plan because it was fundamentally about human resource development and people's participation in national development.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the policy is mainly aimed at poverty alleviation, recovery with sustainability and stability, good governance, and strengthening development foundations, as well as emphasizing the growing significance of the role of civil society in decision-making.<sup>5</sup> The combination of the governmental aim of boosting the national sustainability and stability while emphasizing the participation in decision-making was a considerable step to including the hill tribe in planning the national development. Participatory planning methods were widely applied during the formulation of the plan.<sup>5</sup> Hill area development was a primary part of human resource development and social protection strategies, particularly for the poor and

---

<sup>31</sup> Marcotullio, P. J. (2002). Arrested growth and urban sustainability in the Asia Pacific. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 43(2), 223–236. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00166>

the underprivileged.<sup>5</sup> The plan was enacted in the fiscal year 2002 (October 2001-September 2002), aiming to promote lifelong learning processes through education reform and skill development.<sup>5</sup>

As Thailand was transitioning from a rural society to an urban society with the economy recovery in the early 2000, it was vital for the Thai government to classify the development of urban and rural areas to deal with the imbalance in the development.<sup>32</sup> Ever since “self-sufficiency economy” was promoted in the 9th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006), the three consecutive 5-year national economic and social development plans to the latest 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development plan have leaned toward economic stability and human capital on a national scale. The main emphases were commercializing Thai’s competitiveness and actively engaging in global developing financial markets.<sup>33</sup> The main goal of upholding such policies is to prepare people and systems to adapt to future changes and acquire a benefit by keeping up with globalization and building resilience in all sectors. This is the distinctive difference from the previous policies of national economic and social development in Thailand. Hill area development or growth of ethnic minorities was pushed down the priorities in the national economic and social development plan after the 9<sup>th</sup> plan due to the exigent economic development to be part of global markets and to upgrade towards a value-based, innovation driven economy away from the production of commodities and low value added manufacturing.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> *Preamble the sufficiency economy philosophy and the context of...* - NESDC. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.nesdc.go.th/nestdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=3785](https://www.nesdc.go.th/nestdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=3785)

<sup>33</sup> *THE TWELFTH NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2017-2021)*. Nesdc.go.th. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.nesdc.go.th/nestdb\\_en/](https://www.nesdc.go.th/nestdb_en/)

<sup>34</sup> *Thailand’s development trajectory: Past and future strategies*. OECD Investment Policy Reviews: Thailand | OECD iLibrary. (2022).

## Chapter 4. Policy Outcomes

### 4.1. Hmong women's education and poverty reduction– Laos

Before discussing how the national policies on ethnic minorities were taken action to Hmong women in Laos, it is crucial to briefly re-examine the obstacles that the women undergo. The accessibility to formal and non-formal education, in particular, is lacking due to these conventional and social representations. Hmong girls being expected to be responsible for carrying out domestic chores and watching over younger siblings and rural villages lack primary school facilities.<sup>35</sup> Parents are generally worried about the safety of their daughters in the middle of a commute. Also, there is no guaranteed promise of improved job opportunities resulting from attaining education. Lastly, the patrilineal groups have a cultural bias against girls acquiring education. Thus, girls marry and have children very young, making education difficult.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these ongoing difficulties derived from the traditional ways of perspective on Hmong women in Laos, the Ethnic Minorities Policies of Laos have contributed remarkable progress for the education of Hmong women in the areas of literacy rate, school enrollment, primary and secondary education, and social participation.

#### *Primary education and secondary education*

With the completion of the Women's Literacy and Basic Skills Training Project in 1996, a priority on basic improvements such as primary education was highly encouraged to be implemented for ethnic minority girls and boys. Subsequently, MOE (Ministry of Education) compiled the accumulated data of

---

<sup>35</sup> Peters, H. A. (1998). *Girls' and women's education: policies and implementation mechanisms; case study: Laos*. Unesdoc.unesco.org.

primary school, lower secondary school, and upper secondary school of three ethnic minorities by gender from the year of 1996 to 1997.

According to the New Entrance to Forma Education by Ethnic Group and Gender (1996-1997) table, it is assessed that males from the Lao Sung (“Meo”) - Hmong reaches 63% of the population attending primary school while females reach 37% of the population. For lower secondary school, males received more education, increasing to 76%, while females dropped to 24%. Regarding attending upper secondary school, the number of males escalated to 84%, while the number of females dropped to 16%.

*Table 2. Primary and Secondary education for Lao Sung 1996 1997*

Category		Primary School	Lower Secondary School	Upper Secondary School
Lao Loum	Total	117,407	48,349	18,219
	Male	60,742 (52%)	27,417 (57%)	11,017 (60%)
	Female	56,665 (48%)	20,932 (43%)	7,202 (40%)
Lao Sung	Total	17,171	2,958	635
	Male	10,807 (63%)	2,260 (76%)	532 (84%)
	Female	6,364 (37%)	698 (24%)	103 (16%)
Lao Theung	Total	40,873	3,607	531
	Male	23,126 (57%)	2,637 (73%)	410 (77%)
	Female	17,747 (43%)	970 (27%)	121 (23%)
Others (total)		647	370	95

Source: Ministry of Education: *Annual Bulletin, 1996-1997*.

Note: Classification of ethnic groups used is cited from the original data sources.

This data elucidates the interpretation of the policy on the Hmong people derived from the decree on Ethnic Affairs written in 1981. The policy aimed to strengthen the political opportunities for Hmong to participate in the governing process from the position of the men.<sup>20</sup> However, due to the emphasis on the conventional roles of Hmong women in the patrilineal society, Hmong women still hardly found value in continuing to attain an education. Instead, the women found more value in maintaining a family, raising children, and taking responsibility for house chores. However, it was an unprecedented compared to 1981, when 92% of

the Hmong women did not receive any education. Within a decade, 8% of attaining education for Hmong women in 1981 grew to 77% in 1997.

### *Literacy Education*

Hmong women express an interest in becoming literate in the Hmong language even though being literate in the Lao language is inclined to be more guaranteed a chance of getting a job than being only literate in the Hmong.<sup>15</sup> Here are the two reasons for highly concentrating on learning Hmong literacy, not Lao language. First, there is no immediate opportunity to use Laotian in the camps. Second, there are the locational distance and situational uncertainties in using the Lao language in real life. However, if they learn Laotian, the life of Hmong women can become way more convenient and useful in private and public ways. First, it would help them write letters to their families and relatives without having to beg their husbands or male relatives to write letters on behalf of them. In addition, learning literacy would allow them to retain the social and life skills on both micro and macro scale. So, literacy skills can become a reasonable excuse to attain further education to be take part in economic activities and social participation.

In sum, to Hmong women, the meaning of becoming literate not only offers them opportunities to communicate with their family members but to make their ways further to retain their skills and claim their rights in a patriarchal society. In more detail, being capable of reading and writing the Laotian will have them able to fulfill basic nutritional needs during periods and also given accesses to medical aid and medication when needed. With the capability, Hmong women will be able to develop autonomy. So, even when they are exploited by men and the man-controlled society, the Hmong women as a functional society can cooperate

with each other to raise the awareness of the maltreatment and acquired oppression in the conventional society.

Figure 1. Literacy rate for Hmong women and men 1995

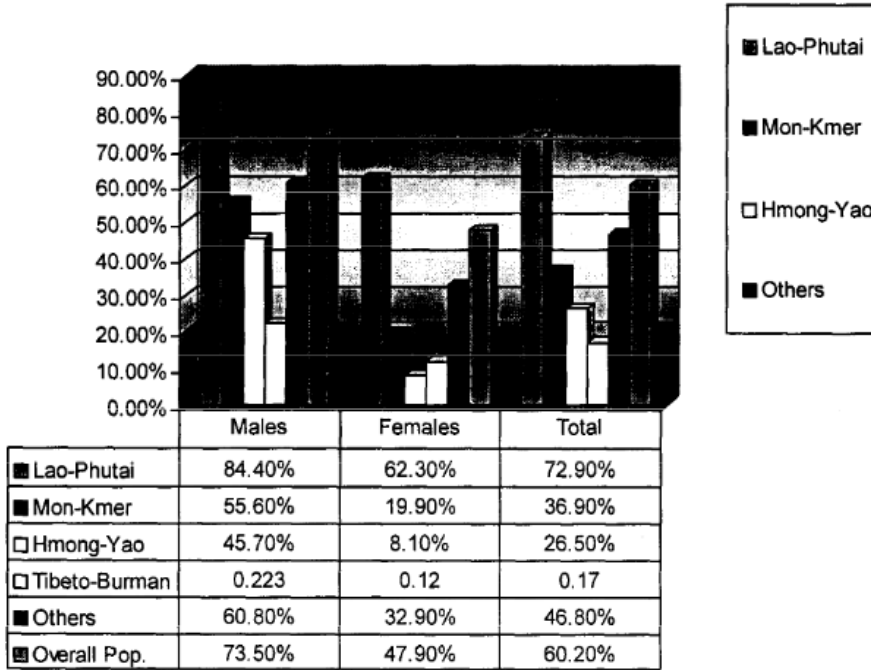
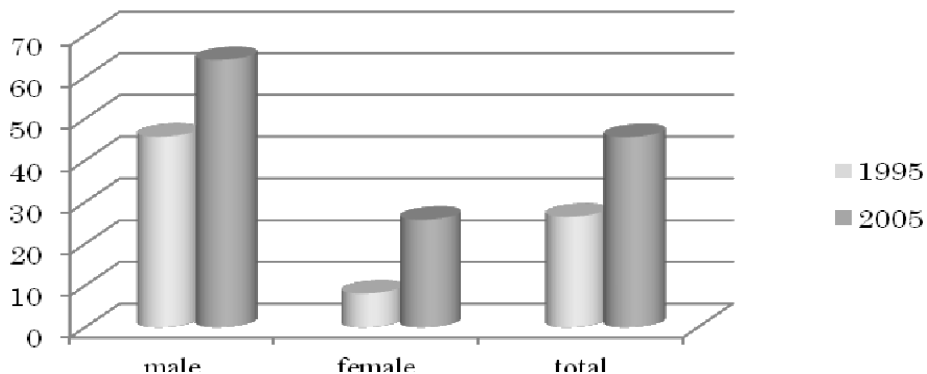


Figure 2. Literacy rate for Hmong women and men from 1995 to 2005

Year	Men	Women	Total
1995	45.7	8.1	26.5
2005	64.1	25.8	45.6
Growth rate	40.3	218.5	71%



Source: Created by the author, based on the 1995 [p.41] and 2005 [p.72] censuses<sup>18</sup>



These two figures above indicate that out of all the women from major ethnic groups, Hmong in Lao Soung experienced the most drastic growth from 1995 to 2005 in literacy rate. It verifies that the policy for eradicating illiteracy rate was actively taken action. Through the increase in literacy rate, Hmong women have shown more interest in receiving further education and taken more initiatives in attending schools. In the past, they had not considered breaking the conventional ways of life as wives becoming submissive to their partners and mothers raising children as the primary responsibilities.

Since the Lao government took the initiative to increase in literacy rate in 1992, the progress had escalated unprecedentedly. According to the compared literacy rate among women from major ethnic groups from 1995 to 2015, the percentage of Hmong women increased from 8.1% to 25.8 to 70%.<sup>36</sup> This indication tells that Hmong women are emerging out into society to participate in economic activities through literacy ability. By improving their literacy capability, Hmong women have taken a significant segment in expanding the opportunities to be part of the society beyond their conventional roles as housekeepers or family supporters. In addition, the Gender Development Association (GDA), a Lao non-profit organization, has implemented a project to promote gender equality through the rule of law and good governance. This resulted in increased women's access to information, improvement in their decision-making ability, and social security through livelihood strategies, as well as access to resources and employment

---

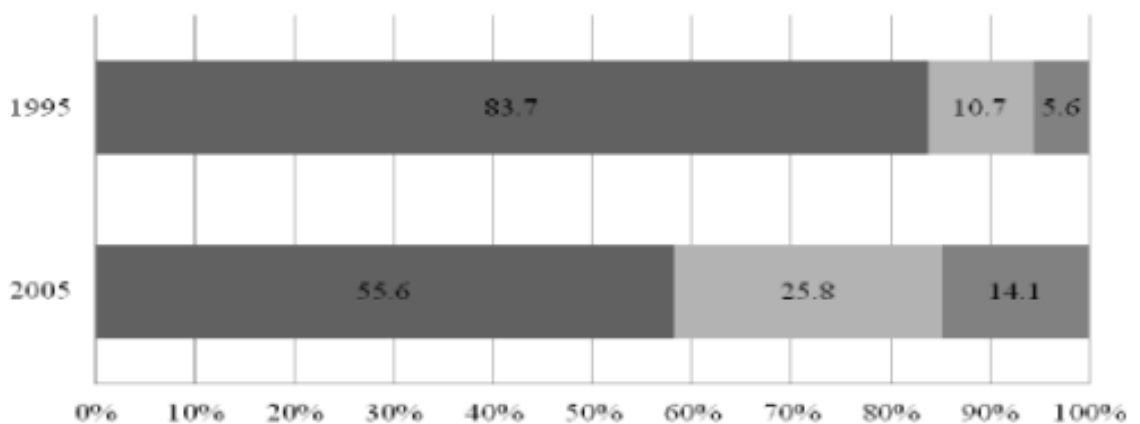
<sup>36</sup> Khuu, B. P., Lee, H. Y., & Zhou, A. Q. (2017). *Health literacy and associated factors among Hmong American Immigrants*. CrossMark.

among Hmong women. This has all been feasible due to the growth in literacy capability.

*School enrollment*

School enrollments are largely affected by the capability of a student’s literacy. Along with the increasing literacy rates of Hmong women, there has been an unprecedented growth in school enrollment. The quality and relevance of primary and secondary education for girls, especially impoverished and ethnic girls; the “never been to school” rate decreased from 83.7% to 55.6% over the last decade, according to the 2005 census below. In the meantime, the rate of “at school” increased from 10.7 % to 25.8%.<sup>21</sup> This illustrates the increase in enrollment rate during the same period. While both the rate of “never been” and the “at school” increased, the rate of “left school” raised simultaneously. The primary factor for the increased rate of “left school” is explained by the phenomena of economic activity taken action.

*Table 3. School Attendance among Hmong women from 1995 to 2005*



	2005	1995
■ never been	55.6	83.7
■ at school	25.8	10.7
■ left school	14.1	5.6

Source: created by the author, based on the 1995 census [p.34] and [p.62]<sup>18</sup>

The Basic Education (Girls) project aimed to expand access to primary education for girls with enrollment increment and retention of pupils. As a result, the number of Hmong women who had “never been” to school decreased within a decade. In order to maintain and continue to increase the numbers of retention of Hmong women, the infrastructure also needed to be prioritized. As indicated in Table 4 below, the mean primary school enrollment rates for children aged 6 to 12 in 2002 show that out of all the major ethnic groups, Hmong-lu Mien residing both in urban and rural areas appears to have the most numbers of male and female enrollment. They rank the second top next to Lao Tai. This corroborates that there has been a proactive growth in school attendance from 1995 to 2005.

*Table 4. Mean Primary School enrollment rates (in %) for children aged 6 to 12 (2002/3)<sup>37</sup>*

Ethnic groups	Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Lao-Tai	90.4	91.9	82.1	80.7
Mon-Khmer	80.1	75.0	61.4	57.4
Hmong-lu Mien	87.8	84.5	66.0	48.3
Chine-Tibetan	86.5	100.0	38.7	32.7

*Source: King and van de Walle 2005 based on LECS3*

According to the Basic Skills Training Project, to prioritize the needs of educationally marginalized groups and efficiently use available resources, accessibility needs to be taken account for. Therefore, to increase the school attendance rate and decrease the school absence rate, infrastructure development played a key role in development. According to the Lao PDR’s Five Year Plan

---

<sup>37</sup> King, E., & Walle, D. (2005, September). *Schooling and Poverty in Lao PDR*.

from 2001 to 2005, one of the objectives of central relevance to ethnic groups is infrastructure development. The project ensured that Lao Theung and Lao Sung (Hmong) ethnic groups could participate fully in decision-making regarding the operation and use of the village infrastructure fund.<sup>18</sup> Also, the women's participation in such decision-making is critical, as their labor is mainly allocated to labor-intensive livestock rearing activities as domestic labor.<sup>18</sup> Through the women's involvement in the decision-making, the reduction of their work shifted to returns to household chores. It freed up ethnic women's time for training, and other uses, such as more accessibility to attending vocational school and participating in social activities.

#### *Participation in Labor Force*

While the numbers of literacy rate and school enrollment of Hmong women cultivated, there has been an increase in the participation rate in the economic realm through social participation. The dire financial situation of the country has imposed a taxing demand on time and energy of Hmong women.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the Hmong women work both on farms and within the household.<sup>38</sup> They are involved in the informal small-scale earning activities that supplement the family income.<sup>38</sup> At a family level, Hmong women provide security through their income-generating activities, handicrafts production, and agricultural production.<sup>17</sup> This passes down generation after generation. A Hmong daughter learns from her mother, grandmother, and aunts how to be a mother, wife, and family helper. She is also expected to master skills such as needlework, and midwifery.<sup>38</sup> A married woman has limited rights and little voices in her parents' household, and she must

---

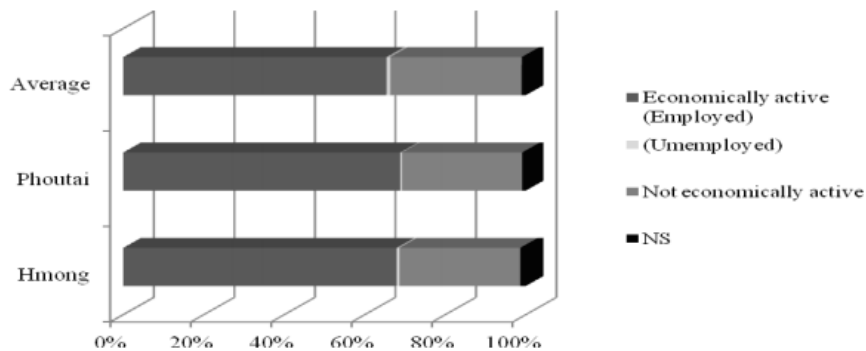
<sup>38</sup> Mendonca, Kimberly C., "Appropriating the unspoken text: development discourse and Hmong women in Lao People's Democratic Republic" (2009). Doctoral Dissertations. 236.

work hard to earn her place in her husband’s household.<sup>17</sup> Although being “economically active” cannot compensate with the idea of women being economically empowered, through literacy education and attending school, Hmong women grow to become autonomous beings who cultivate social skills and economic profession rather than being passive and subjugated to the men-only all in all. The details of the economic activity are followed in the figure below.

According to the figure of distribution by activity status (women) below,<sup>18</sup> the national average of “economically active” adults in the Lao PDR resulted in 65.4% and Hmong women marked 67.9%.<sup>18</sup> Concurrently, the rate of “not economically active” of Hmong women (30%) is also close to the national average (32.7%).<sup>18</sup> This comparison elucidating the activity status of Hmong women being leveled similar to the ethnic majority and reaching beyond the national average in Laos implies that Hmong women placed a figure in economic activity within Hmong communities.

*Figure 3. Percentage of Distribution by Active Status (Lao Hmong)*

	Hmong	Phoutai	Average
Economically active (Employed)	67.9	69.1	65.4
(Unemployed)	0.7	0.4	0.9
Not economically active	30	30	32.7
NS	1.4	0.9	1



Source: Created by the author, based on the 2005 census (women) [p.88-90]<sup>18</sup>

Loes Schenk-Sandbergen (2012: 67, 78), an anthropologist and a socialist, states that minority women, such as the Hmong and the Khmu, challenge to empower themselves by adopting particular majority group cultural norms that value women's lives and surge gender equality while reducing burdens to eradicate poverty. Even some women have decided to relocate their residence from remote villages to permanent locations where provide enhanced infrastructures and commutable bazaars. Subsequently, they have become more resourceful in performing numerous tasks through obtaining literacy skills, which, in turn, enhances economic mobility and accessibility.

#### *Benefits of education for Hmong women*

Attendance in primary education affords imperative learning strategies for Hmong children to succeed in education. Attaining primary school education helps Hmong girls and women reduce the rate of illiteracy. That literacy capability leads them to obtaining valuable skills and knowledge to apply in practice, with household chores, and in communications with family members. Also, primary school graduates are given more possibilities to enter another higher level of education like the lower secondary school level.<sup>39</sup> In a word, the primary school offers students, especially girls, the pathways to gain not only theoretical but also practical knowledge, and this leads to being in a position for continuing onto higher levels of education.<sup>39</sup> Rihani (2006) states that educated women can contribute to educating next generation children once they are married and have their own children since Hmong women take a high value on parenting and raising their children.<sup>39</sup> This perspective also links to what Manohar (2012) states “schooling is

---

<sup>39</sup> Saythongmany, S. (2016). The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parent's/guardians viewpoints and perspectives.

vital because everyone who is trained can get more information and knowledge that are applicable for economic and social activities.” This corroborates the Figure 3 where the percentage of distribution of economic activity of Hmong women is high enough to outnumber the national average of Lao women’ economic activity. Education helps Hmong girls with their development in gaining the possibility for participating in higher education and active economic participation. Also, Hmong girls attending primary school contribute to actualizing the national development framework, which is poverty reduction. For poverty reduction, the government of Laos states that the accessibility of education to Hmong girls and women significantly improves their families’ productivity. (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

According to UNESCO, if students in low-income countries have basic reading and writing skills, an estimated 171 million people could escape extreme poverty. If adults of the countries complete secondary education, the global poverty rate could be cut by more than half. The society of Hmong substantiates the statement followed by the poverty headcount rate by Ethnicity of Household Head (2013-2019) model below that when the literacy rate surges and accessibility to school increases, the poverty rate within Hmong drops.

Table 5. Poverty headcount rate by Ethnicity of Household Head (2012/13 - 2018/19)

	Poverty Headcount Rate			Distribution of the Poor			Distribution of Population		
	2013	2019	Change	2013	2019	Change	2013	2019	Change
Lao PDR	24.6	18.3	-6.3	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0
Lao-Tai	14.5	10.6	-4.0	39.4	37.7	-1.7	66.7	65.2	-1.5
Mon-Khmer	48.1	32.7	-15.4	43.1	38.7	-4.4	22.1	21.7	-0.4
Chine-Tibet	25.7	18.1	-7.5	3.5	3.0	-0.5	3.4	3.1	-0.3
<b>Hmong-lumien</b>	<b>45.2</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>-6.8</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>2.2</b>
Other	33.5	26.6	-6.9	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.7	0.7	-0.1

Source: Poverty Report for Lao Consumption and Expenditure Survey 2018–2019<sup>40</sup>

In sum, higher literacy rates result from higher primary education, and higher primary education results in a lower poverty rate. In response to the chart of Poverty Headcount Rate by Ethnicity of Household Head (2012/13 – 2018/19), the poverty rate was 45.2 % in the Hmong-lumien community. It dropped to 38.4% in 2019 despite both distributions of the poor, and population distribution increased in 2019 compared to 2013.

### *Conclusion*

Despite conventionally taxing house chores, parents' intervention, locational distance, and the cultural stigma in a patriarchal society, Hmong girls and women have made tremendous educational attainment. With the establishment of policies for the Hmong, the government of Lao policies on ethnic minorities particularly emphasized primary and secondary education, literacy education, and school enrollment. Having accomplished primary education, Hmong girls and women ventured out to advance to higher education amidst being hesitant about conforming to the tradition of bearing the subsistence in the household through raising children and marrying early to start a family. Once they augmented their

<sup>40</sup> World Bank and Lao Statistics Bureau. 2020. "Poverty Profile in Lao PDR: Poverty Report for Lao Consumption and Expenditure Survey 2018–2019" The World Bank. Washington DC.



literacy rate, they experienced the privilege of communicating with their extended family members. Also, through learning literacy, Hmong women have been allowed to hold social and life skills more widely. Along with attaining primary and secondary education, and literacy education, Hmong women have entered the labor force. Due to the nature of the Hmong's major economic activities, which are cultivating crops and selling in markets to lowlanders and national people through communication, Hmong girls and women have come to realize more needs in fulfilling the primary education and attaining the further education. This has resulted in a drastic improvement in school enrollment, as well. In a decade, the school enrollment rate soared from 17.3% in 1995 to 48.3% in 2002. With a 30 % difference, more than 50% of Hmong women participated in economic activities in 2005. It is an exceptional development compared to back in the 1980s when 92% of Hmong women were without formal education. Moreover, as one of the substantial plans of the national development framework, poverty reduction has been a priority to the Lao government. Hmong girls attending primary school certainly contributed to lessen the poverty in the Hmong community, and the numbers dropped from 45.2% to 38.4% by the standard from 2013 to 2015. Not only have the educational development and attainment of Hmong women indeed played shifting keys to advancing their social status in economic activities and that of their family but also the Hmong community has taken a substantial part in leading society into less poverty on a national scope.<sup>41</sup>

## **4.2. Meo women's education and economic activity –Thailand**

A majority of Hmong villagers discontinued education for more than compulsory education. Hmong women's educational level was relatively inferior to

that of men because the Hmong society had a biased stance on Hmong females regarding education. From the age of 5 to 14, educational attainment remained low with only 8.2% of the females and 25.5% of males attending school.<sup>41</sup> From the age of 15 to 34, only 4.2% of Hmong females and 27.7% of Hmong males had any education (Kamnuansilpa et al., 1987, pp.26-27).<sup>41</sup>

*“Good woman”*

In the past, ‘Meo’ women barely had access to formal education either in schools or outside school, including other forms of informal education such as vocational training. The contributing factors are mainly due to the location of the schools being significant distances from the communities and other challenges, namely the stigma and limitations of what it means to be a “good woman”, and the lack of having a Thai nationality. As the economy of Thailand arose, the development of highland infrastructure, particularly on roads, electricity, and telecommunications in almost every village in the rural areas, allowed the girls and women to have a primary school located within the communities. However, secondary education was still limited. The limitation on access to a higher level of education did not affect boys but limited the girls to the school boundary. This discrimination derived from the values and customs about a “good woman” is unequivocally linked to the belief in virginity. It is a contributing factor that makes Hmong women cautious about letting the girls go outside the communities by themselves. Therefore, the parents preferred to keep the girls under community surveillance. Keeping the girls at home was also linked to the attitude and belief that a fulfilling future for a girl is marriage and happy family life. In times of necessity, economic activity, and social participation, the village communities offered girls and women primary education. Primary education consists of two

academic curricula, the Thai language and mathematics. The rest are for practical survival and living essences such as local handicrafts, tribal identity, and Thai citizenship.

*Table 6. DNFE Primary education for Hill area community curriculum in 1999<sup>5</sup>*

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Credit hours</i>	<i>Objectives *</i>
<b>BASIC SKILLS</b> ( 2 100 credit hours: 391 objectives)	700	36
Thai language (1 400 hours: 191 objectives)		
Thai I (includes preparatory Thai)		
Thai II	400	79
Thai III	300	76
Mathematics (700 hours: 200 objectives)	268	74
Mathematics I		
Mathematics II	212	60
Mathematics III	220	66
<b>LIFE AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE</b> (3 900 hours: 505 objectives)	189	41
1. The home		
2. The community	127	16
3. Food	125	16
4. Illness	340	46
5. Mother and child	88	7
6. Crops	238	20
7. Land	142	22
8. Forest	80	21
9. Opium	64	12
10. Domestic animals	69	15
11. Merchants	286	53
12. Non-agricultural occupations	137	22
13. Local handicrafts	318	70
14. Local technology	122	19
15. Natural phenomena	252	47
16 Tribal identity	175	17
17 Thai citizenship	272	43
18 Information and communication	54	12
19 Contacting agencies	42	6
20 "Local curriculum"	780	-

While the Thai government overlooked the gender issue due to the impressive statistical data on education enrollment, once girls are in the field of formal education, they tend to remain while boys tend to drop out. For that reason, the rate of women's participation in non-formal education escalated. This resulted in the rate of female adult literacy growing from 86.2% to 91.2% in 1995. It is tricky to be merely called

primary education because the ultimate purpose of the provision of education is, after all, the immersion of the village community into Thailand and survival kits for Hmong girls and women. With that being said, the curriculum for primary education written in 1999 that Hmong girls and women received within village communities followed as above.

### *Early 2000s*

Along with the national level of educational development, the access to education for Hmong women has enhanced, particularly as compulsory Thai education was enacted to the sixth grade. Has not only educational development on a national level strengthened its accessibility to education for Hmong women, but also socio-economic development and transference in the economic system have influenced the educational outlooks of the Hmong. Even within households, parents have become more supportive of having their both sons and daughters further their education because they perceive that higher education will bring out higher income, which will lead to better occupations. Out of eagerness and desperation, some Hmong parents send their children to primary and middle schools in Chiang Mai city and other commercialized provinces.<sup>41</sup> For more detailed reasons:

1) Lacking quality in village schools for Hmong women

2) Adapting to mainstream society early for Hmong women to obtain a better chance to pursue greater level of education<sup>41</sup>

Yet, an ongoing limitation was that a hindrance to the bright future of education for Hmong women in a hesitance with conventional social ideology and a fragile of job opportunities.

### *Limitation on education for Hmong females*

Over the last decades, educational levels for Hmong women in Thailand have indicated unprecedented progress. However, inevitable components limiting and deferring further growth exist. Peng (2007) lists several factors limiting education for Hmong females.<sup>41</sup>

#### (1) Household economic condition

The advancement of agriculture in households measures the capability of sending children for further education. Although most parents are willing to keep up their daughters to continue their further education, only the girls from affluent households are given more opportunities to continue their education.<sup>41</sup> If the households cannot afford it, Hmong women complete their education only up to secondary school.

#### (2) Necessity for girl's labor for the family economy

If the eldest child is female in the family, she is immediately burdened with a heavy workload and taxing responsibility with the household economy. She is obliged to follow the conventional role of women in Hmong society. As mentioned above, the slogan, “marrying early, bearing early, and having many children are blessings”,<sup>41</sup> is a respectful saying within the Hmong community in Thailand. It encourages many Hmong girls to only complete primary school or lower middle school for marriage.<sup>41</sup> Once Hmong women are married, their opportunity for education goes to waste or becomes a secondary extravagance. In a word, the Hmong women's level of education correlates with the age they marry. The girls with a higher education level may marry later than the girls who attain only up to primary education.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Peng, X. (2007). Education for Hmong Women in Thailand. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36(S1), 88-97. doi:10.1017/S1326011100004750.

### (3) Achievement and interest in education

Brought up with uneducated parents, it is not natural for Hmong girls to find a motive to receive an education. Those Hmong girls usually have no role models to learn from and shadow similar educational paths. As a result, the uneducated parents do not have a pretext for attaching importance to education for daughters. Even if the daughter attains an education, she ends up following the lifestyle of what her mother lived.

### (4) Scarcity of employment opportunities

Due to the fear of low returns from the educational investment made by low academic achievement from peers and shortage of jobs in job pools post higher education, Hmong girls and women would somewhat not risk their time and energy into furthering education. If they do not succeed on cultivating career profits out of receiving education, there is more likely shame awaits them from the conventional ideology.

#### *Comparative analysis between two study villages: Case Study sample*

The firsthand data through direct field research in the Maesa Ma village in Mae Rim District, and Khun Krang village in Chomthong District done by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology department of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences explains the present situation of the Hmong in Northern Thailand as well as corroborates the educational levels of Hmong women in Thailand<sup>41</sup>

#### *Target groups: Maesa Mai village, and Khun Krang village*

Maesa Mai Blue Hmong village, located in mountainous areas that are neither too primitive nor too modern, still maintains various traditional cultural features.<sup>41</sup> In comparing the population growth, the village had a population of 1,591 in 2004, whereas the population grew to 1,681 in 2004.<sup>41</sup> Most villagers in

Maesa Mai are engaged in farming. About 30 to 40 women in the village are involved in wage labor, and about 50 women are occupied as traders in the Chiang Mai local markets to improve economic income.<sup>41</sup> Khun Krang White Hmong village locates in Chiang Mai province. As the nature of the regional characteristics, Khun Krang village has become a tourist destination, and this allowed the Hmong women earn income from tourism by offering food and accommodation to tourists.<sup>41</sup> As the economy of the national state grew, the attraction from tourists fill up the Khun Krang villagers' income by buying locally made products and souvenirs, which resulted in a higher income rate than the villagers in Maesa Mai.

*Educational levels of the two villages*

The primary school was formally opened in 1970 in Maesa Mai village. That was five years later after the Thai government developed a curriculum for hill tribe schools in 1965. The schools in the village taught only low primary education until 1978. Upper primary education was implemented after the government promulgated the Hill Areas Education Project (HWE) to tackle the problem of higher education. In the case of the educational levels of Khun Krang village school, the numbers of students who attended primary school were drastically high. It was because some parents sent their children to primary schools in other provinces, including Chiang Mai, where their economic activities mainly took place. The numerical details of the educational levels of the two villages are indicated in the tables on the next page.

Table 7. Level of Formal Education in Maesa Mai village (Leepreech, 2001, p. 148)<sup>41</sup>

<b>Education</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Never enrolled in school	300	434	734
Preschool	35	30	65
Primary school	351	261	612
Secondary school	98	51	149
Vocational college	16	6	22
University	9	0	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>809</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>1,591</b>

Source: Education for Hmong Women in Thailand. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*

Table 8. Student numbers in Khun Krang village school in 2004<sup>41</sup>

<b>Education</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Preschool</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Primary school</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>237</b>
First grade	26	15	41
Second grade	23	22	45
Third grade	21	19	40
Fourth grade	19	16	35
Fifth grade	23	14	37
Sixth grade	22	15	37
<b>Middle school</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>111</b>
First grade	29	23	52
Second grade	19	18	37
Third grade	11	11	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>452</b>

Source: Education for Hmong Women in Thailand. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*



### *Adult education and vocational training for Hmong women*

Adult education, including educating cultural knowledge and vocational skills outside the school cooperatively with formal schooling, is a pertinent way for Hmong women to live outside the traditional community.<sup>41</sup> Such education gives Hmong women a chance to study, and it is an apropos time for Hmong women because they can attend school in their spare time without worrying about the stigma of neglecting the fieldwork.<sup>41</sup> Through adult education, some single Hmong women get to complete high school with support from their peers. As one example of adult class in Maesa Mai village that was initiated back in 2003, those who enrolled in the class learned basic skills in writing and reading in Thai. In adult school, Hmong women acquire some prior knowledge about hygiene and health, environmental protection, and parenting method.<sup>41</sup> By not only being exposed to education but also practicing it within a community, Hmong women grow in knowledge and come to realize the importance of attaining education.

Additionally, vocational training is an essence in life because they acquire practical skills applicable to fields for making a living. Its primary objective was to promote women's skills, increasing opportunities for higher income.<sup>41</sup> A merit about vocational training and adult education is that the government provides teachers, types of machinery, and clothes. With the highly active support from the government and unwavering participation of Hmong women, vocational training implanted a sense of self-worth in Hmong women. This motivated them to enhance their applicable ability to adjust to social growth and economic transformation.<sup>41</sup>

### *Hmong women in business*

As a market economy incorporated the Hmong into promoting non-agricultural occupations with capitalism, Hmong villagers came to know that their

traditional culture was an economic resource.<sup>41</sup> Before the development of tourism, foreign traders went directly to Hmong villages to purchase traditional Hmong clothing and handicrafts.<sup>41</sup> Since the early 1970s, when the Chiang Mai Night Market was assembled, a handful of Hmong women went out to the market for trading. Along with the tourism development in northern Thailand, Hmong women get to participate in business with exotic Hmong clothing and handicrafts. With the government's focus on developing economic infrastructure, such as roads, dams, and diversifying agriculture, Hmong women could be privileged with more access to long-distance business trips. Here are the three locational areas where Hmong women mainly took part in business: local villages, Chiang Mai city, and other cities.

#### (1) Local villages

Women residing in Khun Krang, a tourist village, sell their goods, all types of handicrafts, and local products such as vegetables, fruit, and flowers, in the market on the side of the road.<sup>41</sup> Usually, foreign tourists buy the products rather than nearby villagers do. Therefore, the Hmong women could raise double or sometimes triple the price due to the foreign currency, which aided their living tremendously.

#### (2) Chiang Mai city

Hmong women who have business in Chiang Mai usually go out to Night Bazaar to sell all types of souvenirs in the market. They travel from Maesa Mi and Doi Pui villages every day. Their main job is as a daytime farmer and a nighttime trader. Some Hmong women have begun to move out to the city from their village to reduce the energy and time for commuting.

### (3) Other cities

Being involved in business in other cities requires trading as a permanent occupation. While Hmong women were socially and culturally restrained in a patrilineal society, their business opportunities granted them the choice of relocating to new areas to involve in trade on a full-time basis.<sup>41</sup> They usually started a new life in the lowlands to save time for traveling to Bangkok or other more developed cities for more efficient businesses. Also, this intent of moving benefited their children in the field of education because primary and secondary schools in the cities and towns provide much higher qualities of the curriculum than the ones in rural areas.

#### *Conclusion*

Following the first policy for Ethnic minorities on holding Thai citizenship and integrating into the Thai state, Hmong women were encouraged to be “good women,” conforming to the traditional belief of “marrying early, bearing early, having many children are blessings.” In addition, inferiority to men had functioned as a stumbling block for Hmong women to even contemplate on continuing education beyond the compulsory level along with an unsubstantiated bias against education for Hmong women. As the Thai economy boomed in the 1960s, the Thai government ushered in a policy focusing on hill tribe development through National Committee for the Hill tribes in 1959. The policy was carried out to embody hill tribes in the Thai state. Especially, textiles and garments were a major asset of the industrialization process; therefore, Hmong women involved in manufacturing textiles and clothes were indeed brought to attention with unprecedented hope. An extended period of policy making only, in theory, was finally taken into action officially in 1999 with the National Education Act

encompassing all areas of education, such as non-formal and formal education, and vocational training and education for economic opportunities.<sup>5</sup> Through adult education and vocational training, Hmong women became involved in business and raised their social status.

Subsequently, some Hmong women have taken part in deciding significant affairs of the community. Not only have educated Hmong women gained greater confidence in earning a living, but also they have become active participants in the judgments in social participation and a 'power group' in economic development.

## **Chapter 5. Conclusion**

The Hmong have maintained their tradition and lifestyles while having undergone external forces through several forms of wars and internal conflicts. Throughout it all, absolute victims and victors have been Hmong women amid a discriminatory society and limited access to education for so long. As a silver lining, each national government started to pay attention to ethnic minorities. Though it mainly started with the purpose of national security and national level of economic growth, the national policies on ethnic minorities of Thailand and Laos have brought Hmong women out to the public scope along with educational attainment.

Before receiving any forms of education, particularly literacy and primary education, Hmong women were restrained from the public sphere and relatively compliant with what had been given to them as mothers and wives. However, through access to education and improvement of the school system endorsed by the government policies, Hmong women emerged enlightened with education. As one of the most profound instances, the literacy rate grew from 8.10% in 1995 to 70% in 2015 in Laos, one instance, and adult education and vocational training for

Hmong women in Thailand were highly encouraged in a way to equip themselves for economic activities and social participation. As a result, the poverty rate dropped to 38.4% in 2019. The poverty rate may be dropping; but, there is still a discriminatory perception of Hmong women existing. Especially, the Hmong women who failed in marriage are frowned upon. Nevertheless, there is hopeful attention to facilitating gender equality aiming for the equitable economic stage for women through involvement in decision-making (GRID, 2005).<sup>38</sup> There are hands-on policies like the 9<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development plan in Thailand, and the Gender Development Association<sup>42</sup> in Laos that tackle the problem of gender equality. Although it may be infeasible to enable gender equality and equitable economic activities for Hmong women in the near future, through continued economic activities and the government's endorsement of improvement in women's decision-making, Hmong women may be able to fight for the equal power expressing their needs and empowerment. In Thailand, Hmong women have already become involved in economic activities in local villages and urban settings selling agricultural products to industrial assets. The more Hmong women put themselves out in the economic and social realms, the more the children of the Hmong will likely have more opportunities to attend better schools with more modernized Thai education in urban areas. The national policies on ethnic minorities came proposed in different forms that resulted in the outcomes of educational attainment of Hmong women. This also led to various forms of social participation and economic activities for Hmong women according to the growth at

---

<sup>42</sup> OECD Investment policy reviews: Thailand 2020. (2021). *OECD Investment Policy Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/c4eeee1c-en>

the national level. Most definitely, the national policies on ethnic minorities and their development have been paid attention through focusing on the educational sector. However, additional studies on human rights and gender protection need to be discussed together to secure the educational benefits for the Hmong women and to continue to integrate into mainstream society.

## Bibliography

- Andrew Perrin, Welcome to the Jungle, TIME, Apr. 28, 2003
- Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2004. Lao PDR: Gender, poverty and the MDGs. Country Gender Strategy. Manila.
- Baird, I. G. (2020). The Emergence of an Environmentally Conscious and Buddhism-Friendly Marginalized Hmong Religious Sect along the Laos-Thailand Border. *Asian Ethnology*, 79(2), 311–332.
- Basic education (girls) project - Asian Development Bank*. Asian Development Bank. (2008, July).
- Bhruksasri, W. (n.d.). *Government policy: Highland Ethnic Minorities*.
- Burusapatana, K., & Atipas, P. (1988). Thai Government Policies on Minorities. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 16(2), 47–60.
- Cha, D., & Small, C. A. (1994). Policy lessons from Lao and Hmong women in Thai refugee camps. *World Development*, 22(7), 1045–1059. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x\(94\)90147-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750x(94)90147-3).
- Cha, Y. P. (2010). An introduction to Hmong culture. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Publishers.
- Coughlin, R. J. 1960. Double identity: The Chinese in modern Thailand. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Country gender Lao PDR - Asian development bank*.
- CULAS, C., & MICRAUD, J. (1997). A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History. *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 153(2), 211–243.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, INVESTMENT AND FINANCE. (2017, December 6). *Ethnic groups engagement framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.maf.gov.la/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ethnic-Groups-Engagement-Framework.docx-BTC.pdf>

(1979) Documents from the communist party of Thailand, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 9:1, 100-107, DOI: [10.1080/00472337985390081](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472337985390081)

Donnelly, N. (1994). *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press.

Fujioka, R.K. (2002). *Case Study on Education Opportunities for Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand: Implications for Sustainable Rural Development*.

CENTRE. (2006). (rep.). *LAO PDR: COUNTRY GENDER PROFILE* (pp. 1–42).

Goudineau, Y. (2003). *Laos and ethnic minority cultures: Promoting heritage*. UNESCO.

Grégoire Schlemmer. *Ethnic Belonging in Laos: A Politico-Historical Perspective*. CHANGING LIVES. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY, POLITICS, AND CULTURE IN LAOS, 2017.

*Hmong timeline*. Minnesota Historical Society. (n.d.), from

*Hmong*. EthnoMed. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ethnomed.org/culture/hmong/>

HSJ. (n.d.). *Hmong Studies Journal*. DOAJ.

*Inclusion*. Lao People's Democratic Republic | INCLUSION | Education Profiles. (2021, July 28). Retrieved from <https://education->



profiles.org/index.php/eastern-and-south-eastern-asia/lao-peoples-democratic-republic/~inclusion

Inui, Miki. "Hmong women and education: challenges for empowerment in the Lao PDR." *Hmong Studies Journal*, vol. 16, annual 2015.

Inui, M. (n.d.). *Improving education access and quality in the Lao PDR*. Retrieved from [http://www.laostudies.org/system/files/subscription/Inui\\_0.pdf](http://www.laostudies.org/system/files/subscription/Inui_0.pdf)

Jordana , A. D. (n.d.). *Situational analysis on child, early and forced marriage in Vietnam ...* World Visio

King, E., & Walle, D. (2005, September). *Schooling and Poverty in Lao PDR*.

Khuu, B. P., Lee, H. Y., & Zhou, A. Q. (2017). *Health literacy and associated factors among Hmong American Immigrants*. CrossMark.

Kymlicka, W., & He, B. (2011). *Multiculturalism in Asia*. Oxford University Press.

*Lao People's Democratic Republic*. Country Technical Notes on Indigenous Peoples' Issues. (2012, November).

Leepreecha, P. (2001). *Kinship and identity among Hmong in Thailand*. University of Washington.

Lo, Kaying. "Across the Ocean: The Impact of Immigration on Hmong Women." *University of Wisconsin-Stout*, 2002.

Marcotullio, P. J. (2002). Arrested growth and urban sustainability in the Asia Pacific. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 43(2), 223–236.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00166>

McKinnon, J., & Vienne, B. (1990). *Hill tribes today: Problems in change*. White Lotus-Orstom.

- Mendonca, Kimberly C., "Appropriating the unspoken text: development discourse and Hmong women in Lao People's Democratic Republic" (2009).  
 Doctoral Dissertations. 236.
- OECD (2021), *OECD Investment Policy Reviews: Thailand*, OECD Investment Policy Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c4eeee1c-en>.
- Peng, X. (2007). Education for Hmong Women in Thailand. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36(S1), 88-97.  
 doi:10.1017/S1326011100004750.
- Preamble the sufficiency economy philosophy and the context of ... - NESDC.  
 (n.d.). Retrieved from  
[https://www.nesdc.go.th/nesdb\\_en/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=3785](https://www.nesdc.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=3785)
- Psacharopoulos, G. (2014). The returns to investment in Higher Education. *Using Data to Improve Higher Education*, 121–148.
- Reder, S. (1982). A Hmong community's acquisition of English. The Hmong in the West. Minneapolis, MN: Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota.
- Saythongmany, S. (2016). The benefits of keeping Hmong girls enrolled in primary education in Luang Prabang province of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR): Teachers and parents'/guardians viewpoints and perspectives. An unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Practice, United Institute of Technology, New Zealand.
- Tapp, N. (2010, March 15). Hmong. Encyclopedia Britannica.

THE TWELFTH NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
PLAN (2017-2021). Nesdc.go.th. (n.d.). Retrieved from  
[https://www.nesdc.go.th/nesdb\\_en/](https://www.nesdc.go.th/nesdb_en/)

Thomson, C. N. (1993). Political Identity among Chinese in Thailand.  
*Geographical Review*, 83(4), 397–409.

*UNPO REPRESENTATION: Congress of World Hmong People*. UNPO. (2017,  
July)

World Bank and Lao Statistics Bureau. 2020. “Poverty Profile in Lao PDR:  
Poverty Report for Lao Consumption and Expenditure Survey 2018–2019”  
The World Bank. Washington DC.

Yau, J. (2005). The Foreign-Born Hmong in the United States. *Migration Policy  
Institute*.

## 국문초록

김승민

국제대학원 국제지역학 전공

서울대학교

소수민족의 복잡성과 태국 또는 라오스 정부와의 관계는 소수민족 정책을 수립하는 발판의 역할을 한다. 소수민족 정책은 대개 개별 민족 집단을 발전시키고, 국가와의 관계를 형성하는 방편이 된다. 한편, 소수민족은 소수민족 정책을 통해 지속적인 발전에 필요한 영역을 맞닥뜨리게 된다. 소수민족의 발전을 위해, 소수민족은 주로 정부가 발표한 소수민족 정책을 채택하고 준수함으로써, 자신의 존재에 대한 인식을 높이기 위해 근본적인 요소들을 충족시키려고 노력한다. 이 요소들은 초등 및 중등 교육, 직업 교육과 훈련, 그로 인한 경제 활동 및 사회 참여 학습을 포함한 교육 전반을 포함한다.

흐몽족은 동남아시아의 소수민족정책을 통해 전례에 없던 반절을 이룬 대표적인 소수민족 집단이다. 특히 소수민족정책을 기반으로 교육발전이 이루어졌다. 독립 집단이자 소수민족인 흐몽족은 라오스, 태국, 베트남, 미얀마 등 동남아시아 산악지대로의 대규모 유입을 통해 확산됐다. 증가하는 한족 인구로 인해 18 세기에 중국에서 동남아시아 국가들로 그들은 추방되었다. 그 후, 대규모의 흐몽족들이 태국으로 추방되었고, 또 다른 흐몽족 집단들은 깊은 밀림으로 탈출하여 자급자족을 하였다. 이러한 태국과 라오스에서 거주하고 있는 흐몽족의 정착 방식의 차이는 각 국가와의 관계형성, 또한 전반적인 발전, 교육 및 사회, 경제참여에 주도적인 요소가 되었다. 그리하여 실질적으로, 라오스와 태국의 흐몽족이 다양한 교육을 받을 수 있도록 국가 내 소수민족정책이 결정되었다. 라오스의 경우는 문해력, 초등교육, 취학을 증가 등에 기초교육 형태에 주안점을 두고 있다. 반대로, 태국 흐몽족 같은 경우 태국어를 구사하기 위한 전제조건으로 기초교육 보다는 직업 훈련, 생활기술, 농업, 노동 사회 참여 등 경제활동을 준비하는데 중점을 둔 교육이 집중되었다.

그럼에도 불구하고, 태국과 라오스 이 두 국가는 지속적인 공통의 어려움이 있었다. 라오스와 태국의 흐몽족은 각 국가 안에서 자신들의 발전과 자치를 위해 끊임없이 투쟁을 했다. 계급과 성별에 따라 분류된 사회의

일부인 흐몽족 여성들은 다른 차원의 차별과 투쟁에 직면하고 있다. 문맹, 성희롱, 노예화, 빈곤, 위험한 환경의 긴 역사는 부계사회 아래 흐몽족 여성들의 착취를 초래했다. 그들은 공동체적이고 가족 지향적인 사회에서 계층화에 의해 제약을 받아왔다.

흐몽족 내에서 남녀 학력과 교육성과의 격차를 줄이기 위한 방안으로, 흐몽 여성들이 교육을 받을 수 있는 기회가 정부가 세운 소수민족정책을 통해 주어졌다. 교육의 기회는 그들이 어느 정도의 성과를 낼 수 있도록 이끌어 주었고, 교육을 통해 경제활동과 사회참여에 전보다 적극적으로 임할 수 있게 되었다. 특히나, 소수민족 정책은 흐몽족 여성들이 문맹 퇴치, 초·중·고등교육, 직업학교 등 다양한 형태의 교육을 받을 수 있도록 주도했다. 교육을 받은 흐몽족 여성들은 집안 부계사회의 가족형태 안에서 자신의 의견을 표출할 수 있게 되었다. 또한, 과거 흐몽 여성들의 의례적이고 전통적인 풍습인 가사 장려와 육아, 또는 배필을 조력하는 것에 모든 것을 전념하였다면, 교육의 기회와 달성으로 인해 흐몽족 여성들은 농촌과 도시지역에서 그들만의 사회공동체를 형성하여, 경제활동을 공유하고 지지해주는 관례를 쌓기도 한다. 태국 흐몽족 여성들은 자라면서 자신이 받지 못한 교육의 기회를 보상받듯이, 그들의 자녀들이 풍부한 인프라와 더 나은 학교 제도하에 제대로 교육을 받을 수 있도록 자발적으로 거주지를 옮기기도 한다. 또 다른 예로, 라오스의 흐몽족 여성들은 교육을 통해 습득한 기술과 지식을 경제활동에 활용함으로써 국가적 차원에서의 빈곤율을 완하는데 기여하였다.

**주요 핵심 용어** Ethnic Minorities policies, Hmong women, Laos, Thailand, Education Attainment

**학번: 2019-20704**