MORALITY AND PERSONHOOD IN THE HMONG DIASPORA: A PERSON-CENTERED ETHNOGRAPHY OF MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT

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For Brenda, Thomas, and Reed, who bore the brunt of this work every bit as much as myself.
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A Note on Hmong Orthography

All Hmong words in this dissertation are written using the Romanized Phonetic Alphabet (RPA). The RPA is the most widely used system for writing Hmong in the West and in many parts of Asia. Hmong is a tonal, monosyllabic language in which all words consist of at least a vowel–tone combination and usually a beginning consonant. ‘W’ is a vowel in the Hmong RPA, and ‘b,’ ‘m,’ ‘j,’ ‘v,’ ‘s,’ ‘g,’ and ‘d’ are indicative of the tone (and are therefore not pronounced as consonants) when found at the end of the word. If a word does not end in any of these tone markers but rather ends directly in a vowel, the tone of the word is neutral. Hmong contains a total of seven distinct tones and one neutral tone. White Hmong consists of fifty-seven consonants (seventeen simple and forty complex), which consist of anywhere from one to four roman letters. Consecutive consonants indicate complex consonants. For example, ‘h’ adds and aspiration, ‘n’ adds a pre-nasalization, and ‘x’ adds a fricative to another consonant sound. A common example is “tx,” where the ‘t’ is pronounced similar to an English ‘t’ with a post-fricative similar to the English ‘s.’ ‘Tx’ is therefore pronounced similar to the ‘ts’ in the English word “cots.” There are thirteen vowels (six simple vowels and seven complex vowels), which are either indicated by a single or double vowel (a, e, i, o, u, w). All words transcribed in this paper are White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb), as most of my research participants self-identify as and speak White Hmong. While some of my participants in Ban Txuam spoke Green Hmong, many would default to the mutually intelligible dialect of White Hmong for the sake of ease of communication with me. Among the Hmong in the United States, the majority speaks White
Hmong, even if Green Hmong is their natal dialect. See Chapter 2 for a further explanation of sub-ethnic and dialect differences.
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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned most fundamentally with understanding the various cultural and psychological adaptations that result from migration to different locations. I employ a person-centered ethnographic approach to investigating these patterns in a transnational group of Hmong families that migrated to both Thailand and the United States. Morality and personhood are particularly fertile domains for investigating these psychocultural variations that emerge in different contexts. The methodological design of this project involves a comparative, transnational, and intergenerational framework that provides a unique basis to addressing these questions. I begin by documenting some of the important changes that are occurring in Hmong refugee communities in the diaspora. These include language shift, changing kinship and ritual networks, and the proliferation of several messianic movements that I encountered in my fieldwork. I argue that these changes can be attributed at least in part to the ways in which social dispersion in the Hmong diaspora have disrupted traditional religious practices and dispersed kin-based ritual networks.

I proceed to describe a Hmong cultural model of ‘ancestral personhood,’ which is a prominent way that Hmong imagine the life course that includes post-mortem existence and regular interactions between living and deceased kin. This model of personhood drives reasoning about the three ethics (autonomy, community, divinity). Through a transnational comparison of parents and children in Hmong refugee families in both Thailand and the United States, I argue that families in both locations manifest similar life-course trajectories
in moral development. This trajectory entails a spike in autonomy-oriented thinking in late adolescence, which is partially displaced by ethics of community (and to a lesser extent divinity) in later life. Given the nature of this carefully selected comparative sample, I argue for an interpretation of these data that emphasizes a Hmong-specific life course trajectory in explaining observed generational differences. These trends challenge the predominant social science models of “acculturation” and “assimilation” in important ways. Coupled with my exegesis of ancestral personhood, I ultimately argue for the importance of considering changes in moral thought over the life course and challenging the linear assumptions of some theories of social change in migration scholarship.
Chapter 1: Introduction

I feel that culture is really passive, and it changes whenever there is a new innovation or idea out there that impact[s] the whole community... and one thing for American culture that definitely sets that tone, is the television- the introduction of television. And when each television comes to everyone's household, the culture changes, their habits change, and their values change because of the message they put out there... For Hmong I feel that we're in a really really extremely fast pace, and I feel it's really hectic, because we are going through a very fast change with the twenty-thirty years that we are here, we're going in an extremely fast pace trying to catch up. When we're going to catch up I feel like the culture is definitely going to be losing a lot.

-A twenty-three-year-old Hmong man in Minnesota

This quote, taken from my interviews with transnational Hmong families, reflects commonly held and frequently expressed sentiments in Hmong communities about an uncertain future. Hmong youth and elders alike express the concerns that their practices, values, customs, and traditional life are going to fade away. Many of them jokingly assert that in the future I will have to teach their children about Hmong culture. The anxieties expressed in these concerns are saturated with issues of identity, morality, generational differences, and tradition. These anxieties inspired this dissertation, which seeks to contribute to our understanding of the effects of resettlement on the cultural and psychological worlds of those who relocate.

"About 40 percent of international migrants move from one less developed country to another," and more than one half of migrants moving from a less developed country to a more developed one settle in either the United States or Canada (Bureau 2007). What are the cultural and psychological consequences of relocating to a “developed” versus “developing” context? Or, to use another equivocal distinction, what are the psychocultural
implications of relocation in an “Eastern” versus “Western” context? I am interested in the comparative dimension of what happens to populations who migrate to disparate places from the same or similar sending communities. This dissertation involves an analysis of the cultural and psychological changes that occur in two such Hmong communities as they adapt to different contexts in the course of migration and resettlement.

I conducted twenty-one months of comparative ethnographic research in two communities of Hmong who fled Laos (beginning in 1975) as political refugees following “America’s Secret War” and eventually settled in either Thailand or the United States. About 145,000\(^1\) Laotian Hmong were resettled in the United States (Pam Lewis, program officer at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the U.S. State Department, *personal communication*, May 14, 2004), while many thousands (at least 42,000) simply walked off the Thai refugee camps and settled in Hmong communities throughout northern Thailand (Tapp 2005a). Many families split as people resettled in different locations. In a short number of years, some Hmong refugees were displaced from their mountainous farming villages in the highlands of Laos and resettled in inner-city U.S. neighborhoods, representing perhaps the most drastic ecological and sociopolitical changes a group could undergo in such a short period of time. Consequently, they went from having little or no contact with Western customs to being immersed in and forced to live through a Western paradigm. On the other hand, Hmong who resettled in Thailand also experience a move

\(^1\)130,000 Hmong refugees were resettled in the initial resettlement period from 1975 until 1996. Subsequently, the United States granted resettlement to 15,000 additional refugees who had been living in Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand, in an effectual but unofficial refugee camp, thus totaling 145,000.
toward urbanization and a higher degree of both Thai and Western influence, but perhaps not rivaling the deep cultural chasm experienced in the American resettlement context, at least superficially. While each group had to adjust to a new cultural and sociopolitical context, resettling as refugees in a comparatively urban American context versus returning to swidden horticulture in the Thai countryside represent potentially vast differences for the cultural and psychological negotiations these refugee communities undertake in each place. This begs the question, what are the real differences that occur as a result of relocation to these different types of places?

Morality and personhood provide particularly fertile grounds for investigating how subjectivities develop in different sites of migration, such as the United States and Thailand. Comparative research in both psychology and anthropology has shown significant variation in conceptions of the self and in moral reasoning across societies and theorized how different ontogenetic contexts lead to different cultivations of self and morality (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Haidt, et al. 1993; Jensen 1996; Jensen 2008; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shweder, et al. 1987; Shweder, et al. 2003). Thus, Hmong who migrate to distinctly different contexts face different normative ideals with which they must interact. How does a Hmong concept of self change from resettling into two distinctly different macro-social contexts, such as one where independence/individualism is predominantly valued versus one where interdependence/relationality reigns? While this project will not stick to the ever-present dichotomies of individualism/collectivism, independent/interdependent, atomism/holism, etc., these distinctions have been very potent in past comparative research on the self, and have successfully demonstrated the
cultural variations inherent in different (predominantly conceived of as East/West) societies. However, anthropological accounts have also critiqued this simple dichotomy to show that hybrid (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001), or altogether new ways of conceptualizing the self must also be considered (e.g., the “divine self,” Shweder, et al. 2003), or that an emphasis on the cultural models as opposed to actual subjective experience will overemphasize these differences and fail to capture cross-cultural similarities (Hollan 1992). Regardless, one’s concept of self is closely related to the ways that one reasons through moral issues, and it is difficult to imagine the self without considering the moral values of the community where the self is cultivated (Shweder, et al. 2003). Thus, this project seeks to understand the various ways that selves are cultivated as Hmong have migrated to Thailand and the United States, including the corresponding moral subjectivities that coincide with those ideas of personhood. As I will demonstrate below, in some cases the “differential effects” of migrating to such distinct locations that would be predicted by many social science approaches to globalization and modernity are not so distinct as one might expect.

I employ a person-centered ethnographic approach (Hollan 2001; Levy and Hollan 1998) to understanding how morality and personhood manifest themselves in individuals in both Thailand and the United States, and supplement that approach with ethnographic observations of those individuals’ interactions within families and the larger communities in each location. The central research questions that this project seeks to answer include: How do Hmong conceive of themselves as persons in Thailand as compared to the United States? Do autonomous, communal, or divine conceptions of the self (Shweder, et al. 2003)
figure significantly into Hmong personhood in these communities? Does this happen in different ways in Thailand and the United States, and differently for different generations in each location? What are the various moral discourses that prevail in these communities, and how do these relate to different self-conceptions? How do these different ideas of morality and the self relate to those that prevail among the host societies in each resettlement context? Finally, in answering these questions I also document how some of the daily experiences and practices that Hmong refugees engage in, such as participation in particular social institutions, shape moral subjectivities in the Hmong diaspora (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1988; Mahmood 2004).

In sum, this project seeks both to document variations and commonalities in Hmong discourses of self and morality in each location as well as to begin to understand what interactions and practices lead to these patterns. Thus, this project contributes to the need within immigration anthropology to “better understand how transnational practices affect migrants’ lives and their involvement in US [and Thai] communities and organizations” (Foner 2003). Previous research has largely dealt with singular resettlement contexts and their effects on multiple immigrant or refugee populations, or even comparisons of sending and receiving communities (Foner 2003). The novel characteristic of the present study is its comparative focus on one group that has relocated to two vastly different cultural contexts, thus enabling me to answer questions regarding those relocation contexts that otherwise could only be considered across studies, and with less comparative validity. The value of understanding how particular relocation contexts affect personhood and morality in different ways contributes to a better overall understanding of how migration affects the
lives of those who relocate.

**Theoretical and Epistemological Approach**

This project is rooted in the interdisciplinary fields of psychological anthropology and cultural psychology. As such, it draws from a theoretical tradition that complicates the distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘culture’ that is often at least tacitly taken for granted in sister disciplines. This interdisciplinary grounding also leads me to cast a broader methodological net than is customary in contemporary psychology or anthropology alone. In what follows, I will provide some context for my theoretical and methodological starting point that informs the analyses in the subsequent chapters.

Among the sources that inform the psychocultural model that drives my investigation, three exemplary influences include Richard Shweder's work on methodological individualism, Douglas Hollan and Robert Levy’s elucidation of person-centered ethnography, and Jean and John Comaroff’s analyses of the dialectics of encounter in South African personhood and religious practice. I will elucidate these three influences as examples of the models of mind and culture and the psychocultural dynamism that I bring to understanding how Hmong adapt to distinct social contexts in the diaspora.

First, Shweder (1995) delineates an approach to understanding individuals within cultural contexts that he compares to economists’ use of preferences/constraints. This is cast in contrast to the prominent psychological model of the person/situation. Favoring the

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2 To many scholars in these sub-disciplines, these two fields are one and the same, or at least are seen to contain more intellectual overlap than not. For an exegesis on one prominent vision of what “cultural psychology” is, see Shweder (1990). Essentially, both fields are fundamentally concerned with the ways in which ‘mind’ and ‘culture’ co-constitute one another.
preferences/constraints conceptualization, he argues that this model presupposes agency instead of the bifurcation of psychic and situational determinism inherent in the person/situation dichotomy. It also implicates a rich understanding of cultural context in order to understand individual action. Further,

“the view that an action is the joint product of ends (preferences) and perceived available means (constraints), mediated by agency (will, rational choice) does not require an opposition between ‘culture’ and ‘mind’ or between ‘social practice’ and ‘individual mental functioning.’ When it comes to the preference/constraint approach to human action the ‘individual’ or ‘person’ exists on both sides of the equation...” (Shweder 1995:118)

Elsewhere, in describing the state of the discipline, Shweder (1990) explains that cultural psychologists seek to understand the negotiation of individual psychology within various cultural contexts, including the development of both the individual and collective representations. In sum, individual mental representations undergo “transformation through participation in an evolving intentional world that is the product of the mental representations that make it up” (Shweder 1990:22). Psychological anthropologists and cultural psychologists argue that, on the one hand, mainstream anthropological frameworks overemphasize the structural and cultural dimensions of social processes, without serious regard to individual psychological factors. On the other hand, they also argue that mainstream psychology has an unsophisticated view of culture that often relegates it to the status of one of many personality variables in an individual’s profile. Among the latter, the individual is given primacy in theoretical explanation. Both cultural psychology and psychological anthropology represent interdisciplinary attempts to overcome the shortfalls of each extreme.
Hollan's work on person-centered ethnography and the self follows a similar pattern, but draws a firmer distinction between cultural model and individual subjective experience than does Shweder's methodological individualism. By advocating the method of person-centered interviewing, Levy and Hollan (Hollan 2001; Levy and Hollan 1998) argue that anthropological research has historically tended to emphasize cultural variation in self-conceptualization largely at the level of cultural models or cultural ideal types. The idea of treating interviewees as “informants,” with the capacity to reveal the local discourses on certain topics to which they have access as an insider, reflects this emphasis. Alternatively, Levy and Hollan advocate that psychocultural research must treat the interviewee not only as an informant, with the capacity to reveal cultural models and schemas, but also as a “respondent, as an object of systematic study unto him- or herself” (Levy and Hollan 1998:335). They go on to delineate a method that is able to move between these modes of informant and respondent. A central point is that this oscillation between modes of interaction and interviewing can reveal the dynamics and potential conflict between cultural models and the subjective experience of individuals who know the models but may have additional or conflicting subjective experience that diverges from them. Hollan (1992) uses these concepts to critique cross-cultural research on the self that, he claims, has emphasized cultural models at the expense of individual subjective experience. He concludes that the sociocentric/egocentric or relational/individual distinctions between East and West may be overdrawn because of a sole emphasis on the cultural models of informants. Hollan further argues that when subjective experience is included in these analyses, the difference becomes more a matter of degree than of kind.
John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (2001) wage a similar critique against this "tired theoretical antinomy," and as an alternative they emphasize a more complex formulation of Tswana personhood (in their example) that emphasizes “becoming.” The Tswana ethnotheory draws from both “traditional” notions of personhood and ideas introduced by colonial missionaries, as well as hybrid forms that emerged out of reactions to colonial encounters. Here and in *Of Revelation and Revolution* (vol. 2, 1997) Comaroff and Comaroff emphasize the dynamics involved in “the dialectics of encounter,” an admittedly complex process through which both colonizers and the colonized change their notions of personhood (as but one example of phenomena treated by Comaroff and Comaroff) in relation to one another. While I do not have space here to summarize the complexities of their arguments, what is important for my current purposes is the description of this process as one of dialectic. This underscores the process through which the Tswana, when presented with the discourses of British colonizers, developed discourses and practices that were reactionary to but also in recognition of what was presented in the colonial encounter. Out of such encounters Tswana often forged hybridity—novel cultural forms and discourses that were not entirely “traditional,” assimilative to those colonial, or a mere conglomeration of the two. Thus, one can see “why crude contrasts between European and African selfhood—or the reduction of either to essentializing, stereotypic adjectives of difference—make little sense” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:277). In this last point their critique aligns nicely with Hollan’s above.

Drawing from these perspectives, my approach is attuned to the ways in which individual mental representations and potentially conflicting cultural models mutually
shape one another, through a process of negotiation and adjustment. These potentially conflicting cultural models constitute those available to Hmong as “traditional” ways of thinking about (in this case) the self and moral behavior, as well as those that are perceived to be more “American” or “Thai” ways of thinking or acting. This dialectic of individual mentalities and collective representational spaces leads me to focus on the dynamics of negotiation that Hmong undertake as they wade through conflicting cultural models in various locations of the diaspora. These conflicting models are measured against individual experience and weighed for their moral authority and sometimes their “authenticity.” Such interactions may result in the reshaping, challenging, or even perpetuation of those models in the broader cultural context.

From Shweder this perspective draws on the methodological individualist denial of psychic and situational determinism, in favor of a more holistic conception of persons in context. People are perceived as actors who negotiate circumstance and constraint, as opposed to malleable objects being passively shaped by situations, the latter of which characterizes a core assumption of much of the immigration literature in psychology. From Hollan and Levy, this perspective draws both a theorization of, and a methodological perspective for investigating, the differences between the cultural models which people partake and are able to articulate as ideals and their more idiosyncratic psychic experiences. This includes the caveat that subjective experience may or may not coincide or may even conflict directly with cultural models. By interviewing people as both informants of cultural ideas and as respondents unto themselves, and by oscillating between these modes to explore tensions between perspectives, I am able to deal with Hmong subjective
experience in a way that otherwise might be overlooked. From Comaroff and Comaroff my approach draws its explicitly dialectic character. Their work in colonial encounters parallels interactions in migratory circumstance, and this type of postcolonial scholarship is useful for thinking about the dynamics in these types of migration encounters as people react to distinct and potentially conflicting discourses.

Shweder's and Hollan's formulations are designed to explain how individuals operate within their cultural milieus. I am applying these approaches to the processes of migration and resettlement in order to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the effects of migration on the psychocultural dynamics of migrants. The context of migration adds another (or at least conceptually distinct) layer of complexity, since the spaces for collective representations often include cultural models and schema that have vastly different histories and often come into tension with one another to vie for ideological space. This added layer must be accounted for. To Comaroff and Comaroff's account, however, Shweder and Hollan add the importance of individual subjective experience, as opposed to emphasizing group-level phenomena.

Describing the processes through which Hmong immigrants negotiate their selfhood and moral beliefs as a dialectic allows one to avoid the assumption that either the individual subjectivities or the collective representational space they occupy are reified, bounded, homogenous, or static. In fact, my use of the term “psychocultural” is designed to

3 The term ‘psychocultural’ is customary in psychological anthropology scholarship, and it reflects the blurring of the boundary between mind and culture, as described above. Both cultural psychologists and psychological anthropologists tend to be reluctant to

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suggest that individuals are not merely shaped by context, nor that context is merely the result of a collective sum of mentalities. Instead, mental and cultural worlds interact with one another, both shaping and being shaped over time, in perpetual theses, antitheses, and syntheses of both individual and collective representations. As I show below, this conception and the person-centered epistemology that founds it are particularly useful for understanding incredibly dynamic situations, such as the interactions of migrant mentalities with the worldviews of majority groups in the context of relocation (including individual variation in these interactions). Hopefully an example will clarify.

The “traditional” Hmong ethnotheory of the self involves at least one transmigrating soul that inhabits a physical body at birth, shedding the placental jacket that it wore in its travels to inhabit the physical body. At death, it is the goal of the soul to return to the place where the placental jacket was buried, to take the jacket back up and return to the ancestral village. Hmong funerary rites are designed specifically to guide the soul in this process, retracing the steps of their life to the birthplace. The soul’s sojourn and welfare before, during, and after taking its occupation of a human body is deeply intertwined with the welfare of both living and deceased kin, gods, and other spirits in the environment. Individual identities are constituted by one’s relationships with living kin, ancestor spirits, and these other spirits or deities. For example, how one fulfills one’s social role(s) as a wife, son, father, sister, clan leader, shaman, lineage elder, or magical healer (kws khawv koob), to mention a few possible roles, have heavy implications for one’s social identity in Hmong
society. Failing to fulfill such roles properly can lead to a loss of face (*poob ntsej muag*), whereas fulfilling one’s role well will lead to increased honor or reputation (*sam xeeb, sua npe*).

I do not want to over-determine the collective nature of the traditional Hmong ethnotheory of self here, because I do think that there are also significant lines of discourse on morality and personhood that also suggest significant individualistic ideas as well. In fact, in Chapter 5 I discuss some of the significant ways that “autonomy”-oriented thinking pervades Hmong moral discourse in both Thailand and the United States. There is also the oft-cited assertion that “Hmong means free” (Chan 1994; Fadiman 1997:14; Hamilton-Merritt 1993:559). This assertion was originally put forth by Yang Dao, a Hmong scholar who felt that framing the etymology of the word “Hmong” as meaning “free” would be beneficial to the Hmong themselves (Lee 1996; Yang 2009). This phrase has gained the status of an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992), but no historical or linguistic evidence have been put forth to support the assertion. Regardless, it is an oft-cited point and is quite meaningful for Hmong in the diaspora. In fact, many of my friends and informants have quoted this translation *as if* it were authoritative, and it therefore has come to take on a life of its own for Hmong in understanding their own identities as a pervasively freedom-seeking people. This point is accompanied by salient liberationist historical narratives that portray the long plight of Hmong seeking political autonomy from a series of historical aggressors or rulers, from Han Chinese, to French Colonialists, to Pathet Lao, to the American government.

The point here is that one could make a significant case for individualistic lines of
moral thought and self-conception beyond the collectivistic traits that are seen to most commonly characterize the Hmong as an upland, tribal, Asian minority. This narrative would reinforce orientalist ways of imagining the Hmong as an exotic other, vis-à-vis Western liberal individualism (Said 1978; van der Veer 1993). However, as Hollan (1992) has argued, these portrayals often depend more on the cultural-level constructions—cultural models and schema—and do not pay enough attention to more idiosyncratic psychocultural dynamics of those who supposedly ascribe to these models. In the following chapters I seek to pay close attention to both the cultural models and the idiosyncratic discourse that varies from these models.

In the present project, then, one potent question presents itself: How do local ethnotheories of the self vary from this explicitly recollected Hmong ethnotheory of the self? What is it about living in the United States or Thailand that has changed normative ideals about what constitutes a self? Following Hollan (1992), anthropological accounts of the self must not only take into account the normative ideals or models, but actual subjective experiences of individuals as well. With regards to diasporic Hmong, then, what are the patterns of variation from the cultural model, and how have these patterns been shaped by resettlement? In sum, it will be important to investigate both the divergent cultural models of the self that have developed in each resettlement location, along with the divergent subjective experiences of individuals who have resettled in each location, which may or may not coincide with the normative “traditional” models. Using the theoretical and

4 Any one of these characteristics could be used (and have been used for various groups) to Orientalize the Hmong as an exotic, collectivistic Other.
methodological framework of person-centered ethnography (Hollan 2001; Levy and Hollan 1998), I parse out these levels of cultural and psychological difference in these two locations of the diaspora.

I will ultimately argue that there are prevalent lines of thought in the data I collected with Hmong families in both the United States and Thailand that could be characterized as ideal types of both individualistic and collectivistic thinking. However, similar to Hollan’s critique, the heavier presence of collectivistic values that is explicated in various “traditional” Hmong cultural models leads many to assume that this mode of thinking dominates Hmong subjectivities. I argue that this sole emphasis on the explicit cultural models ignores some of the important and influential lines of autonomy-oriented thinking for many Hmong. In the chapters that follow, I seek to empirically demonstrate these differences. I will also argue for the importance of considering various value systems as they develop across the life course (particularly in Chapters 4 and 5).

Globalization and Immigration Literature

While each of the chapters that follow make theoretical contributions unique to those chapters, here I outline the more general theoretical thrust of the dissertation, including its unique comparative framework of Hmong that have migrated to two distinct locations.

First, there exists a large potential irony involving the disjuncture between Thai and American policies toward minority groups and the actual experiences of Hmong as one of those minority groups. For example, Thai policies have been largely designed to assimilate “hilltribes” into mainstream Thai society (Tapp 2005b), while official American policy
toward minority and immigrant populations has been comparatively more multicultural. Tapp (2005b) describes both the land tenure policies as well as educational policy that the Thai government has undertaken to attempt to better assimilate the minority groups, including the Hmong, into Thai sociocultural norms, and to foreground a Thai national identity above sub-ethnic identities for its citizens. On the other hand, one could argue that American policies in education and elsewhere have been considerably more multicultural in nature, both historically and presently. The interesting point to note here is that, from my interviews and observations, Hmong in the United States find it considerably more difficult to continue a way of life that they would consider genuinely Hmong. That is, there is a more deeply felt and explicated pressure to “assimilate” and a nostalgic mourning of the perceived rapidity with which younger Hmong so easily adopt American practices and perspectives. In stark contrast, in Thailand it would seem that Lao Hmong refugees are able to a greater extent to live a way of life that they more readily recognize as authentically “Hmong.” Thus, a deep irony exists here, which suggests that the macro-level policies toward minority assimilation may have little to do with the felt assimilation of Hmong in Thailand and the United States. The following chapters seek to document the actualities of cultural and psychological change for Hmong in one community in each country. My findings contribute to the understanding of the more micro-level experiences and practices that lead to the reshaping of personhood and morality more directly. It appears that these micro-practices and personal experiences potentially have a much greater influence on the shaping of notions of personhood and moral beliefs than the macro-level policies (Bourdieu 1977; Foucault 1988; Laidlaw 2002; Mahmood 2004).
One potential inroad here parallels Liisa Malkki’s work on Hutu refugees in Tanzania. Malkki (1995) found that Hutu refugees that resettle in homogenous refugee camps developed a much more dense and unified Hutu ethnic identity, which sparked nationalist sentiments that pervaded the camps. Hutu’s that resettled in heterogeneous towns amongst other ethnic groups, in comparison, developed a much more cosmopolitan outlook in which a Hutu identity was but one aspect of a multifaceted identity, but wasn’t necessarily nationalist in nature (at least in conceiving of nationalism as based in Hutu ethnic identity). The key difference here seems to be the extent to which Hutu settled together in fairly homogenous or apart in heterogeneous communities, which also marks a key difference between Thai and American Hmong communities. In Thailand Hmong communities tend to have almost exclusively Hmong inhabitants.\(^5\) In the United States, however, Hmong live in quite heterogeneous communities where considerable ethnic diversity exists. St. Paul, Minnesota—the largest urban concentration of Hmong in the United States and possibly the world—has been an official resettlement site for refugees from a number of conflicts, the result of which is large populations originating from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Balkans, among other places.

Given Malkki’s findings, one might expect that the nature and composition of these resettlement communities may be much more important than government policy toward them in shaping how Hmong negotiate their personhood. In Chapters 3 and 5 I present

\(^5\) This is not to say that Hmong do not live in close proximity to other ethnic groups. Rather, I am pointing to the fact that “villages,” as they are defined politically, tend to be fairly homogenously Hmong. This can even involve ethnically gerrymandering village boundaries to maintain a constant ethnic constitution. Such is the case with my field site in Thailand. Relative ethnic homogeneity, of course, changes significantly in more urban contexts.
mixed evidence with regards to Malkki’s conclusions. On the one hand, the ethnic constitution of American Hmong communities, coupled with the national and transnational fracturing of kinship networks, is perhaps the most important contributing factor to the emergent transnational ritual networks that I describe in Chapter 3. These networks displace ritual practice to Southeast Asia, since the constitution of American Hmong communities preclude the successful execution of many of these rituals. On the other hand, in Chapter 5 I present evidence that the generational trends in moral thinking are strikingly similar for Hmong families in the United States and Thailand. This suggests that we look beyond just the constitution of the resettlement context for answers, and in that Chapter I discuss some alternatives.

Second, anthropological literature on immigration has largely emphasized the structural aspects of resettlement contexts or processes, without treating the mental experience of those who undergo this process (see, for example, Abe 2006; Fassin 2005; Hollan 1992; Montero-Sieburth 1991; Warriner 2007). Psychological literature on immigrants, on the other hand, has largely focused on individual mental processes, without much regard to the cultural contexts through which they are shaped (e.g., Beiser and Hou 2006; Fang 1997; Her 1997; Kue 1997; Rick and Forward 1992). My dissertation’s emphasis on how different contexts shape cultural-psychological adaptations in morality and personhood requires an approach that is sensitive to both cultural context and individual mentalities, which is why I draw methodologically from psychological anthropology and cultural psychology to develop a person-centered approach to these questions. This methodological approach fruitfully adds to immigration anthropology by
emphasizing its effects on the individual mental realities of migrants in two locations.

Appadurai’s work in *Modernity at Large* (1996) epitomizes an over-emphasis on the collective phenomena. Appadurai theorizes a modernist break that is unique by asserting a postnational political order and its accompanying postnational imaginations that will displace the current nationalist order. This new order is more local than the nation-state and is mediated by increased migration and electronic media that facilitate transnational imagined communities. His emphasis on everyday practice is useful for my project, but the emphasis on collective imagination is typical of other anthropological perspectives that lack individuals in their accounts and instead emphasize macro-social phenomena that shape collective imagination. My person-centered approach and focus on individual agency will reveal the other side of the mind-culture dialectic that leads to the shaping of moral subjectivities and individual subjective experience more generally.

Third, I will build on cultural globalization studies such as Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2009), who theorizes the forms of hybridity that result from cultural globalization. His model offers a unique argument in the cultural globalization debate that escapes the false dichotomy of “McDonaldization” (Ritzer 2000) versus “The Clash of Civilizations” (Huntington 1993). The concepts of cultural hybridity, syncretism, and mélange offer the possibility that novel cultural forms emerge from the interaction of cultural systems and values. This dynamic hybridity offers an agentic position for subaltern actors to react against pressures to assimilate and create novel cultural forms. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff (1997; 2001) emphasize the emergence of hybrid forms in addition to degrees of assimilation and resistance in colonial encounters, as described above. Comaroff and
Comaroff’s analyses of intercultural colonial encounters parallel those that I undertake on Hmong encounters with majority institutions in Thailand and the United States.

More psychologically-based research paints a picture of simple assimilation of the Hmong toward a more “Americanized” set of values or worldview (Fang 1997; Her 1997; Kue 1997; Rick and Forward 1992). My research findings pose a strong argument against these assimilationist frameworks, in favor of one that hypothesizes novel moral discourses and beliefs about the self to emerge as competing discourses are consumed, weighed, and reacted against. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco also argues against the more psychological assimilationist framework, arguing that immigration anthropologists emphasize the cultivation of “hybrid identities and transcultural competencies” (2003:69). My previous findings on the hybridity inherent in Hmong American health beliefs follows the hypothesized outcomes of this framework (Hickman 2007). In this previous work I demonstrated that Hmong health practices and reasoning are most accurately characterized as a novel combination of biomedical and spiritual health ideologies that has led to entirely new diagnostic and treatment practices. Similarly, I argue in the following chapters that a more nuanced understanding of changes in moral thinking are needed, and that in the end the person-centered data that I present directly challenge the predominant models of acculturation and assimilation in migration scholarship (Berry, et al. 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Schwartz, et al. 2010).

Fourth, this dissertation also builds on anthropological research on the Hmong diaspora more generally. Nicholas Tapp (2002) has argued that urbanization among the
Hmong in Thailand⁶ is expanding their ethos from more community-based to a more universalizing one as they are coerced into greater participation in the national Thai economy. Tapp (2005b) has also argued elsewhere that the Hmong of Thailand have taken aspects of Thai society to carve out an ethnic space against those characteristics. Louisa Schein (2004a; 2004b) theorizes how transnational Hmong media affects sexual subjectivities and cultivates a transnational identity for Hmong to pursue. My analyses engage this research by demonstrating both the divergent and concordant ways that morality and personhood develop in Thailand and the United States through a comparative analysis of related discourses that Schein and Tapp analyze. In so doing, I directly challenge a host of findings (Fang 1997; Her 1997; Kue 1997; Lee 2005b) on Hmong communities in the United States that rely on some of the frameworks and epistemologies that I argue are less suited to answering questions about the nature of psychocultural change in the Hmong diaspora (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Finally, previous anthropological research on immigration has largely dealt with singular resettlement contexts (e.g., Beiser and Hou 2006; Fang 1997; Ha 2000; Lee 2005b; Mahalingam 2006) or comparing sending and receiving communities (Watson 1977). The novel characteristic of the present study is its comparative focus on one group that has relocated to two vastly different sociocultural contexts, thus enabling me to answer questions regarding those contexts that otherwise could only be considered across studies with less comparative validity. The comparative nature of this project in looking at Hmong

⁶ Here Tapp is dealing with White Hmong who have inhabited Thailand ever since they left Southwestern China in the mid 19th century. Lao Hmong refugees have largely settled in villages with their co-ethnics in Thailand after varying sojourns in the refugee camps.
refugees who have settled in both the United States and Thailand supersedes the single case studies of Hmong in one locale. This enables a larger understanding of the effects of diaspora on the group in different contexts. This transnational comparative analysis culminates in Chapter 5.

Chapter Outline

The following chapters each deal with a separate host of issues as I address the central topic of understanding psychocultural adaptations in the Hmong diaspora. Chapter 2 begins with an overview of Hmong history and historical narrative that, as I have alluded to here, inform the moral perspectives and self-concepts of many of my Hmong friends and interlocutors. While this historical perspective is necessarily brief, it is designed to give context for understanding how Hmong themselves understand their diaspora and how this plays into Hmong cultural models of self and ‘the good.’ This chapter also introduces both of my field sites that formed the basis for my comparative fieldwork in Thailand and the United States. In addition to describing each community, I also delve into the nature of my transnational sample of Hmong families that maintain members in each community. I describe their migration histories in brief, focusing on the decisions that led to some of them resettling in the United States while others remained permanently in Thailand. Chapter 2 also includes a description of the data collection methods with these families, as well as notes on some of the important trends in the survey data. I close this chapter by noting some of the larger social developments that I believe constitute important adaptive phenomena for understanding how diasporic Hmong cope with resettlement and relocation. This includes a brief synopsis of some of the messianic movements that I
encountered in my fieldwork.

In Chapter 3 I discuss a prominent Hmong cultural model of ‘ancestral personhood.’ This model, I argue, constitutes one of the salient ways in which Hmong extend their imagination of the life course to include continued interaction with one’s kin after death. This model is distinct from ethnographic portrayals of ancestor veneration with other groups. I argue that for Hmong who adopt this model, it becomes an important lens for understanding and imagining oneself in relation to one’s kin, and that this self-imagination has a more profound influence on Hmong subjectivities than some other systems of ancestral veneration provide. This chapter also includes a discussion of how ancestral personhood is socialized, and how different social circumstances in the United States and Thailand are challenging the generational transmission of this model to different extents. The theoretical import of this model is found in providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between concepts of personhood and moral reasoning, which I argue many theorists take for granted rather than analyze explicitly. Chapter 3 concludes with a brief discourse analysis of the ways in which ancestral personhood underpin to varying extents the moral discourse of a father and son in one of the transnational families that I interviewed.

The following chapter moves to a more explicit treatment of moral discourse per se. As background to this analysis, in the beginning of Chapter 4 I describe the theoretical thrust of how I treat moral reasoning and theorize its development across the life course. I rely heavily on Shweder and colleagues’ development of the ‘Three Ethics’ approach to analyzing moral justifications. Adapting their method (Shweder, et al. 1987), I presented a
series of vignettes containing potential moral breaches to Hmong college students and their parents (separately) in a sample of Hmong families in Wisconsin. Each person was asked to make and justify moral judgments about each vignette. The moral discourse elicited in these interviews was compared across generations, genders, and religions (Christian or animist). Results indicated that Hmong youth utilized autonomy-oriented discourse to a much greater extent than their parents, who relied much more on community-based principles in their moral discourse. Further, these trends held not only across generations, but within families. In other words, within each family children tended to utilize autonomy-oriented discourse to a greater extent than their own parents, and vice versa for community-oriented discourse. What’s more, the younger generation manifested a more distinct tension between community and autonomy discourse. In other words, their discourse reflected more than a simple shift towards liberal individualism, but rather manifested the tensions that moral thinking undergoes when such a shift occurs. Two possible theoretical explanations for these patterns are presented—life course theory and acculturation/neoliberal subjectification. In the end, understanding the roots of the intergenerational differences in this prior study requires a broader comparative context, which I address in Chapter 5.

This final data analysis chapter represents the culmination of the other findings in this dissertation, as I apply the comparative moral discourse methods to the transnational sample of Hmong families described in Chapter 2. This broader comparative framework offers a better empirical scope for staking claims on the nature of changes in moral thinking across generations for Hmong refugee families. In short, the results of this
comparison indicate a similar life-course trend among Hmong families in both the United States and Thailand. That is, in each location the younger generation utilized autonomy-oriented thinking in their discourse than the older generation, and to roughly the same extent. Conversely, the older generation utilized community-oriented concepts in their moral justification to a much greater extent, although autonomy discourse was still quite prevalent. Given the nature of this carefully selected comparative sample, I argue for an interpretation of these data that takes account of a Hmong-specific life course trajectory in which autonomy-oriented thinking gradually diminishes over the life course. This is accompanied by an increase in both community and divinity-oriented thinking. This is not to say that resettlement in the United States and Thailand have not shaped moral thinking, however. In addition to the trends described in previous chapters, I show how the personal experiences documented in my person-centered interviews manifest distinct patterns of moral thinking that map onto resettlement experiences. However, these trends challenge the predominant models of “acculturation” and “assimilation” in important ways.
Chapter 2: The Ethnographic Context of Migration and Resettlement

It will be helpful to provide both an ethnographic and a methodological background to the Hmong families and communities where I conducted my ethnographic research, as well as to give the reader a sense of the nature and quality of my interactions with them during my fieldwork. I therefore begin this chapter by providing a brief historical perspective on the Hmong. This ethnographic and historical summary focuses on the subgroup of Hmong with whom I conducted my fieldwork, and will include a summary of my two field sites where I spent a total of about twenty-one months conducting ethnographic fieldwork (thirteen in Thailand and eight in the United States). Following this backdrop, I will describe the particular methodological approaches that constitute the empirical basis for my subsequent analyses. These are elaborated in the subsequent chapters as pertains to each particular analysis, but the present purpose is to describe the general ethnographic foundation for my claims. Finally I will conclude this chapter with some of my more general ethnographic observations that inform the analyses in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. These concern larger patterns of social change in religious practices, language shift, and patterns of life course development. These practices have been shaped in important ways by the new transnational characteristics of Hmong social organization in the diaspora. Beyond providing ethnographic context, these observations will give the reader a sense of some of the broader strokes of social change that are affecting Hmong in the diaspora.
Hmong History and Ethnography

Hmong are one of the more populous upland ethnic minority groups in Southeast Asia and China. Estimating the number of Hmong in the world can be hazardous, particularly given the politics of ethnic classification in China and claims of under-representation in the American census, as but two examples. A generous estimate for the world-wide population would be about 5 million, with the largest number residing in China (for a detailed analysis of these figures, see Lemoine 2005). Other countries with the most significant populations, in descending order, include Vietnam, Laos, the United States, Thailand, France, Burma, and Australia, with various communities numbering under 2,000 people in other locations of the diaspora.

Hmong comprise a variety of ethnolinguistic subgroups. The most common of these found in Laos, Thailand, and the United States are White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb) and Green Hmong (Moob Ntsuab). While there are significant dialect and cultural differences between these subgroups, they broadly recognize each other as co-ethnics. The dialects spoken by these subgroups in my field site are largely intelligible, and many Green Hmong can easily default to White Hmong (and to a lesser extent vice versa) in their speech if necessary. This is a result of White and Green Hmong having lived in proximate communities for many generations. It was quite common for Green Hmong to default to

1 My figures are an extrapolation on Lemoine’s numbers along with more recent census figures in the United States.
2 Green Hmong do not aspire the ethnonym. As a result, some scholars gloss the English translation as “Mong” rather than “Hmong,” but for consistency I use “Hmong” throughout this text. It is also important to note that the sub-ethnic classification terms vary widely form region to region, but I stick to the usage most common in my field site in Thailand.
speaking in White Hmong in my interviews as they recognized my greater proficiency in White Hmong. I had learned White Hmong in the United States, where it is the dominant dialect.

The politics of ethnic classification become much more complicated as one moves further north into the Southeast Asian Massif toward Vietnam and China. Hmong comprise a major portion of the Miao minority nationality in China, and the debate as to whether all Miao are “Hmong” is a highly politicized one. Without delving deeply into these identity politics (for a more complete summary see Lemoine 2005; Schein 2000), it is sufficient for my present purposes to note that it is now common for Miao (Miaotze) in China to recognize each other as co-ethnics in a broader sense. Some see this as the effect of half of a century of ethnic policy by the Chinese government (Lemoine 2005), which has political interests in maintaining a fairly uncomplicated ethnic nomenclature. However, when speaking one of the Hmong dialects, I have found through brief ethnographic encounters in Yunnan province that the ethnonym “Hmong,” which is used primarily when speaking a Hmong dialect, is not necessarily synonymous with the way people use “Miaotze” when speaking Mandarin or a non-Hmong dialect of Chinese. Diasporic politics have complicated this picture, however, as Hmong in the West seek to establish historical narratives that link them to references to Miao kingdoms in classical Chinese texts. This is further complicated

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3 Lemoine’s piece and perspective should also be considered contentious and politicized. In the Hmong Studies Conference at Concordia University in 2006 a shouting match erupted between a Chinese scholar and Lemoine following his address asserting that less than 4 million of the total 8 million Miao as classified by the Chinese government are actually Hmong per se. That being said, I tend to agree with Lemoine on the use of ethnolinguistic data to treat Hmong as a sub-group of Miao.
by tourist ventures in which Hmong in the Western diaspora travel to China to “re-establish” kinship relationships with their co-ethnics in China (Schein 2004a; Tapp 2010).

China is widely considered the epicenter of the now global Hmong diaspora, and is considered by many or most Hmong in the diaspora to be an ancient homeland. Many historical narratives place Miao in the Yellow and Yangtze river valleys as far back as 2700 to 2300 B.C.E. (Geddes 1976). Hmong in the United States commonly believe this to be the locus of an ancient “Hmong kingdom,” led by the mythical leader Chi-you (Geddes 1976; Yang 2009). Despite the historical and empirical vagaries, the power of this historical narrative is quite poignant for Hmong identity. As a ‘stateless people,’ the myth of an ancient Hmong kingdom becomes a basis for political legitimacy. These narratives are elaborated in various ways, including the assertion that Chinese writing was actually pioneered and eventually ‘stolen’ from the Hmong—a claim I have heard in conversation many times.4 This ancient kingdom is commonly understood to form the origin point of a long diasporic trajectory, the legitimation of a time when Hmong were genuinely “free” (see discussion of “Hmong means free” in Chapter 1).

While Hmong commonly interpret this ancient Miao kingdom to be a “Hmong” kingdom, it is not clear that the Miao reference in the Chinese historical texts carries the same meaning as later appearances of the term, which form the basis for the modern ethnic classification (Culas and Michaud 2004). Prior to this time, a host of theories assert Miao historical origins from every distinct direction conceivable (Geddes 1976; Schein 2000). A

4 As with ethnic classification, the historical reality is highly contended and very politicized. Rather than focusing on the historical data, I emphasize the importance and power of the narratives for Hmong and how they understand themselves and construct their identities.
historical linguistic analysis of ecological vocabulary suggests that Hmong and Mien (a closely related ethnolinguistic group) have occupied roughly the same region of southern China for two millennia (Ratliff 2004). Despite pre-nineteenth-century historical vagaries, it is clear that Hmong began to flee Southern China for the Southeast Asian peninsula en masse in the nineteenth century as a result of political upheaval. They were carried even further by the search for arable land (Culas and Michaud 2004). Hmong migration into Vietnam began even earlier, perhaps as long as four centuries ago, as part of the same process of displacement that pushed highland ethnic minorities to Southwestern China (Culas and Michaud 2004). Between these gradual and more sudden migrations south, Hmong eventually populated many of the northern highland areas in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and to a more limited extent Burma.

In these highland areas Hmong largely practiced subsistence swidden horticulture. This has historically entailed staples of dry rice, corn, beans, root crops, leafy vegetables, and the like. This mode of subsistence was further accompanied by opium cultivation, which became an increasingly important cash crop in the nineteenth century. This subsistence swidden-based economy underpinned an exogamous patrilineal clan-village social structure, with villages relocating every five or ten years when current swiddens diminished in productivity.

Resettlement in the Southeast Asian peninsula eventually led to deep involvement for the Hmong in the geopolitics of colonialism, and eventually the Indochinese wars. The effects were distinct to different regions, and this history is beyond the my current purpose (see Lee 2005a). As this dissertation involves primarily Hmong who were living in Laos
prior to 1975, it is critical to note that perhaps the most important recent political period for these Hmong was what has come to be known as “America’s Secret War” in Laos (see Hamilton-Merritt 1993; Robbins 1987). Hmong inhabited the highland areas where much of the fighting between the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Royal Lao military on the one hand, and Vietnamese-backed Pathet Lao on the other. Hmong ended up fighting on both sides of this conflict, although American scholarship and historical memory has placed a much heavier emphasis on Hmong collaboration with the CIA. A Hmong General in the Royal Lao Army by the name of Vang Pao became one of the key players in this conflict and facilitated the involvement of Hmong soldiers with the CIA. Vang Pao also became the most prominent leader in exile after the war, although political divisions among Hmong in the United States often fell upon lines of either support for or contention with Vang Pao and his cohorts.

When the United States pulled out of Laos, top military officials and their families were air-lifted, but the masses of soldiers who were trained, equipped, and occasionally coerced into fighting were left without support, military or otherwise. Shortly after taking power in 1975, the Pathet Lao officially declared a program of future genocide against the Hmong on May 9 (Robbins 1987:xi). Despite Hmong involvement on both sides of the conflict, they were widely labeled as American collaborators. Fearing reprisal, a mass exodus of Hmong began to flee to Thailand in seek of refuge. This included villages distant from zones of heavy conflict, but where violent reprisal was nevertheless widely expected. Earlier waves of Hmong often settled in Hmong villages in Thailand close to the border of Laos, while later waves were ushered to refugee camps. These camps became the screening
sites for resettlement in third-party countries.

Hmong have lived in Thailand since the 19th century, but the population grew sharply post-1975 as hundreds of thousands of Hmong fled Laos. Most of these Hmong from Laos would resettle in third-party countries such as the United States, but about 42,000 (Tapp 2005b) remained in Thailand for permanent resettlement. From my interviews, it appears that this ad-hoc resettlement to Hmong villages in Thailand was largely unofficial, at least at the outset. The vast majority of families that I surveyed in 2009 had worked out citizenship papers.

The Hmong population in Thailand is approximately 150,000, whereas in the United States the population numbers close to 300,000. Among Hmong that fled Laos, the United States was the most common ultimate resettlement location by population numbers, with Thailand being the second most common. Other third-party countries of resettlement included France, Canada, Germany, Australia, Argentina, and French Guyana. These divergent resettlement patterns (particularly between the United States and Thailand) form the basis for my investigation of psychocultural adaptations in distinct locations.

A Prominent Historical Narrative

A now-prominent art form emerged in the refugee camps, commonly referred to as “story cloths.” This medium was encouraged by Western staff in the camps as a mode of small business and teaching literacy, but has also come to constitute a significant mode of artistic expression and decoration for Hmong in the diaspora. Story cloths are used to depict traditional life or folk tales using an embroidery technique that dovetails off of Hmong embroidery techniques used on traditional clothing. I collected one such story cloth.
that portrays one of the most common scenes I observed on story cloths in markets or hanging in Hmong homes in the United States.

![Figure 1: Story cloth depicting the historical narrative of Hmong migrations (photo by author)](image)

Depicted in Figure 1, this story cloth is a variation on perhaps the most common theme for this medium—a long migration narrative stretching from China to Vietnam, on to Laos, then Thailand, and eventually to board airplanes presumably bound for the United States. Note that the prominent themes in this visual narrative entail the conflicts at each
stage of Hmong history. One can see Hmong fighting the Han Chinese on horseback and being chased away by Han wielding machetes in the top-left section of the image. The story continues as the exodus leads the Hmong fleeing China to cross the “River Red,” as it is labeled, presumably into Vietnam. The visual exodus of people then leads to “Longcheng,” the CIA funded military base that was the center of the CIA and Royal Lao military efforts during the war in Laos. Below this, a line of Hmong are depicted fleeing through the jungle toward Thailand (after 1975), and swimming across the Mekong river, all the while being shot at by Pathet Lao soldiers. In the lower-right corner of this image is a depiction of the closely clustered cabins in a refugee camp. Here Hmong are also packing their suitcases, swearing oaths to a refugee screening committee (e.g., UNHCR), and traveling to Bangkok to board airplanes for resettlement.

Equally important are the narratives that accompany this image. Hmong who have described this history to me (in some cases as it hung on their living room walls) narrate a continuous trajectory of Hmong seeking political autonomy and ultimate freedom. While the forces that oppose Hmong autonomy have changed over time—from the Han Chinese, to the French colonial government, to the Pathet Lao communists—the story is the same: ‘We have always sought freedom.’ In some cases the added feature of seeking for a Hmong country is mentioned. In other iterations the culminating point of the story is ultimately realizing this dream through resettling in the United States, ‘a truly free country.’

This historical narrative has become a valued perspective and the basis of a pedagogical narrative for Hmong youth in the United States. Touger Xiong, a Hmong celebrity, comedian and activist, produced a video on one of his popular performances
where he seeks to instill in Hmong youth the importance of this narrative. He stresses that at each point people died in these conflicts, steadily decreasing the population, bit by bit, until we are left with the few that ultimately survived and achieved freedom in the United States. He uses this to instill in Hmong youth the importance of their identities as Hmong people, and to encourage them to value their traditions and history.

This historical narrative fits quite well with James C. Scott’s recent thesis regarding “Zomia” (2009). Scott seeks to challenge the state-centric focus of historians that ignores the hinterlands. He shifts his focus to groups like the Hmong, whom he argues have cultivated a set of cultural practices over the millennia that have allowed them to effectively avoid state encapsulation. He argues that shifting swidden horticulture, an inherently mobile subsistence strategy, acephalic social structure, non-standardized religious practices, and even the lack of literacy (what he terms ‘a-literacy’) can be seen as political strategies to maintain political independence. While I think that Scott’s thesis is a bit overdrawn, the recollected narrative of Hmong in the diaspora fits quite well with his reading of history.

Given this narrative, it is easy to see how a specious linguistic thesis such as “Hmong means free” (as discussed in Chapter 1) has come to be so widely adopted in Hmong American society. In my subsequent analyses of moral discourse in later chapters, I demonstrate trends of autonomy-oriented thinking and parse out the generational differences of these styles of discourse. As a backdrop to those analyses, it is essential to note that this historical narrative encourages modes of autonomy-oriented moral thinking. Mai Na Lee (2005a) has documented the repeated failure of Hmong leaders to consolidate
political power among Hmong over the centuries. She suggests that this is, among other things, also an artifact of an essentially acephalic social structure and valuation of what I would call autonomy-oriented thinking. While there are significant hierarchical dimensions to Hmong social structure and kinship patterns, these hierarchical patterns fail to extend beyond relatively small patrilineages and patriclans. One could argue, then, that beyond the microcosm of one’s immediate kin, Hmong often adhere to a model of egalitarian anti-authoritarianism. So goes the narrative.

While I do not want to paint an essentialistic caricature here, I also do not want to dismiss the salience of this historical narrative. Coupled with Lee’s historical analysis and my own ethnographic observations about Hmong leadership, I think it would be a mistake to dismiss these trends of autonomy-oriented thinking and focus solely on the hierarchical social structure of Hmong kinship practices. In choosing leaders, for example, I have frequently observed a significant emphasis placed on the individual skill, political shrewdness, confidence, cultural knowledge, and oratory skill of potential leaders. When leaders are selected, it is the case that one’s status is always potentially threatened by a more skillful orator, say in a conflict resolution. This has led to a system of home-grown elections in Hmong communities in the United States to periodically select clan leaders in different communities. These autonomy-oriented tendencies in political and moral thought provide an important backdrop for Chapters 4 and 5.

Field Sites

Given the recent history of Hmong migration from Laos and my theoretical goals to understand the effects of relocation on migrant psychocultural dynamics, I originally set
out to find a field site in Thailand where a significant number of Hmong refugees reside. In Chapter 5 I cover this selection process more fully as it relates to the validity of my comparison of Hmong transnational families. Here I want to give a general background regarding the history and composition of the field site. I spent twelve months conducting ethnography at this site in 2008-2009.

Ban Txuam

Ban Txuam\(^5\) is one of the larger Hmong “villages” in Thailand. It is located about 30 kilometers from the Lao border, in a more sparsely populated province in the northeastern portion of the country. Ban Txuam itself is a resettlement village and located at a comparatively low elevation to most Hmong communities, at only 350 meters. When the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was increasing in influence in the surrounding mountains during the 1960s, the Thai government established Ban Txuam as a resettlement alternative to stem the influence of the CPT in the higher elevations. Resettlement began about 44 years prior to my fieldwork. Families that resettled in Ban Txuam had been living in Thailand for 6-7 generations, according to oral histories. Starting in 1975, Hmong refugees fleeing Laos began to settle here as a permanent destination, as well as en route to formal refugee camps or other Hmong communities throughout northern Thailand.

Prior to the conflict that ensued between the CPT and the Thai military and resulted in the establishment of Ban Txuam, the Hmong that eventually settled there lived in the

\(^{5}\) In order to preserve the anonymity of all of my research participants, I use pseudonyms for the names of all research participants referenced here as well as for the name of my actual field site in Thailand. This pseudonym means “mixed village.” See footnote 6.
mountainous regions close to the border. Even though they were living in Thailand, borders and national affiliation were largely not an issue of concern in these itinerant swidden horticulture villages. Such was also the case with the Hmong that eventually settled in Ban Txuam as “Laotian refugees.” An irony exists here, since many of the Hmong refugee families actually lived fairly close to Paklang for generations, and in fact had settled on both sides of the borders in mobile villages over many decades. Those that happened to be located in Laos during 1975 ended up being labeled arbitrarily as Laotian refugees, whereas those Hmong that were resettled to Ban Txuam during the CPT era were assumed by the Thai government to be long-time Thai citizens. In sum, national affiliation is a new phenomenon in Ban Txuam that has really only emerged as a significant factor in daily life over the past couple of decades. The elders whom I interviewed were never concerned with residing in Thailand or Laos in their youth. However, as the Indochinese wars heated up and borders became a more significant concern of the lowland states, Hmong were in turn affected by being forced to affiliate with the nation-states that claimed the territories where they resided. For Hmong residing close to these border regions, this often resulted in kinship groups being divided by these now-enforced borders and consequent national affiliations. In fact, the tenuousness of the border areas—especially for upland minorities—is reflected in the significant border wars that ensued in the 1980s between various Southeast Asian states. I interviewed many Hmong parents about their attachments to Thailand and Thai citizenship, and largely found that Thai citizenship only really matters when one needs to interact with state institutions. That is to say that personal identities are not heavily saturated with considering oneself “Thai” in a political sense. Even today,
identifying oneself as a Thai citizen is largely an economic and political practicality.

Ban Txuam is located close enough to the Thai-Lao border that it was relatively easy for Hmong fleeing Laos to resettle there directly. A United Nations governed refugee camp was eventually established about 20 kilometers away, and Hmong residents from Ban Txuam (who were already considered Thai citizens by the state) served as support staff and translators for the newly arrived Hmong in the refugee camps. As a result of this frequent contact with Hmong refugees and the village’s proximity to the border, Ban Txuam became one of the most significant locations for Hmong from Laos to resettle in that greater region. The refugee camps were relatively porous due to understaffing by the Thai military. This allowed families to come and go relatively easily, and in some cases Hmong from Thailand even covertly moved into the camps to get refugee status and migrate to the United States.

Today, Ban Txuam has been upgraded in the local political hierarchy from village to sub-district, given its sizable population. It now consists of six villages, three of which are largely Hmong, two Lua, and one Mien - a linguistically and culturally related highland ethnic group. The total Hmong population between all three Hmong villages in Ban Txuam is about 5,300 out of a total population of 7,300. Given the proximity of these three villages (they have grown together since their original establishment such that they are not spatially demarcated, at least superficially), I treat them as a single community⁶. Despite

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⁶ I did not spend a significant amount of time with Lua or Mien residents, except for one good personal friendship that I developed with a Mien family. My surveys and interviews were conducted only with Hmong families in Ban Txuam. The mixed ethnic nature of the sub-district is the source of the pseudonym that I chose for Ban Txuam, or “mixed village.”
the political divisions that have largely to do with Thai government, members of these communities interact daily with one another as a single community. There is one historically relevant caveat to this. The mayors of one of the Hmong villages has historically dissuaded or even out-right prohibited Hmong refugee families from settling there. I was told that this policy was not malignant, but rather designed to avoid the possible conundrum of having to decide between two allegiances with regards to reporting undocumented migrants. On the one hand, political superiors would expect the mayor to report undocumented migrants living in one’s village. On the other hand, it would be an affront to a co-ethnic to report them to the government. As a result, there is a higher percentage of Hmong refugees from Laos in the other two villages.

Demographically, my survey of Ban Txuam indicates that about 18% of household heads were born in Laos. If I am to include children of these migrants who have established new households, the total number of first or second-generation Hmong from Laos in Ban Txuam is likely to be about 25% or higher. Among Hmong households, about two thirds of the community identify as Green Hmong, about one third as White Hmong. The local economy is driven largely by subsistence rice farming, supplemented by cash crops. Lychees, corn, and mango are most common. Two thirds of the community engage in subsistence farming, 28% in wage labor, and 12% in small business, largely the manufacture of traditional textiles or jewelry.

There are a couple of Christian churches in Ban Txuam, but only 13% of the sampled population practiced Christianity. Each congregation was fairly small, and the Catholic church in the town was all but abandoned. The remaining households all reported
traditional Hmong religious practice as their predominant ritual system, although from my participant observation it is apparent that Buddhist practices and beliefs are commonly intermixed with traditional animism and ancestor veneration. These modes of practice are typically not seen as incommensurable from a Hmong perspective. The Thai state registers Hmong citizens as Buddhist on their identity cards unless they claim Christianity. This is to say that Hmong shamanism and traditional ritual practice do not even register as a religion in the Thai system. Finally, the average level of education in Ban Txuam was 6 years, a number that has no doubt increased in recent years due to Thai education policies.

The nine transnational families that form the basis for my analyses in Chapter 5 are fairly representative of these village demographics. All of them perform some level of subsistence agriculture, and in most cases this is the primary mode of subsistence. Several fathers of these families do metal-work for local traditional jewelry producers for supplemental income, and many of the women also do needlework for supplemental income. In a few cases, children from these families have gone to other provinces for post-secondary education—an increasing trend in Ban Txuam. However, many of these children returned to Ban Txuam and even to subsistence agriculture with their parents after a few years of college or a post-secondary degree. There is some movement from Ban Txuam to urban centers elsewhere in Thailand (e.g., Bangkok or Chiang Mai) to abandon subsistence agriculture and work in unskilled laborer positions in the cities, although my survey of Ban Txuam is likely to underrepresent this portion of the population, since they were not available for interviews. Nevertheless, my discussion of globalization and modernity as they relate to moral thinking and personhood in the following chapters is firmly rooted in a
sample of families that by and large live what many of them would consider a “traditional” lifestyle and mode of subsistence. This is not to say that globalization is not an issue in Ban Txuam or that life is not in fact changing there. In fact, the increasing importance of cash crops as a supplement to subsistence cultivation is evidence of this. However, I argue below that the continued reliance on extended kinship networks for both subsistence and cash-crop cultivation maintains an important dimension of a historically rooted social structure that is likely to affect moral thinking and community ethics (see Chapters 4 and 5).

_Twin Cities_

The selection of a comparative field site in the United States was the result of preliminary analyses of the survey data I collected in Ban Txuam and the selection criteria that I describe in greater detail in Chapter 5. In essence, the goal was to find a subsample of families that were surveyed in Ban Txuam who were Hmong refugees from Laos and had close relatives who had resettled to the United States. I was eventually successful in finding a subsample of families in Paklang who had relatives in the Twin Cities, Minnesota.7

There are obvious dimensions on which Twin Cities and Ban Txuam differ, but there are also some important dimensions on which they are surprisingly similar. Hmong began coming to the United States in 1975, and official resettlement ceased in 1996. The average year of resettlement to the United States for the families that I interviewed was 1986. Minnesota was one of the original sites for the US State Department to resettle Southeast Asian Refugee families in 1975, and has remained a significant site of refugee resettlement

7 Given the sheer size of the Hmong community in Twin Cities, I found it unnecessary to use a pseudonym as in Ban Txuam.
since. There is a significant population of Somali refugees, and more recently a wave of Karen refugees from Burma being resettled in the Twin Cities from refugee camps in Thailand. Political leaders tout the Twin Cities’ virtues as being a friendly place for resettlement.

When Hmong were originally settled in the Twin Cities, they largely resided in lower-income urban neighborhoods. This was quite a drastic change from the highland villages they had left, but perhaps at least remotely more reminiscent of the crowded refugee camps in Thailand. The US State Department originally had intended to spread Hmong amongst as many resettlement communities as possible in order to facilitate assimilation into American society. However, secondary chain migration became a significant phenomenon and it was not uncommon for entire communities to pick up and relocate closer to clan leaders or other relatives. The Twin Cities became a major hub of secondary resettlement. The Hmong community here eventually grew to be the most concentrated Hmong population in the United States, and perhaps even the world. Hmong community leaders estimate the population at 50,000-60,000, and this is roughly substantiated by population statistics and census figures, although the community estimates tend to be slightly higher. Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, the Hmong population in Minnesota increased approximately 150%. This was the era of really intense secondary chain migration.

The total Hmong population in California far exceeds that of Minnesota, but the unique dimension to Minnesota’s Hmong community is found in its urban concentration. The vast majority of the Hmong population in Minnesota lives in the Twin Cities or its
suburbs. Since the 1980s and 90s, Hmong have progressively moved out from lower-income urban neighborhoods to suburban areas, although the presence of Hmong in these historic neighborhoods is still quite prevalent.

The relative density of Hmong in Twin Cities leads to some interesting comparisons with Hmong in Ban Txuam that make for an interesting comparative baseline between relatives that have resettled in each location. First, this population of Hmong has enabled an ethnic-specific economy that even supersedes that in Thailand. There are two large, sprawling flea markets in St. Paul, where the Hmong population is a bit larger than in Minneapolis. These market centers are run by Hmong and designed largely for Hmong. Each market also houses individual businesses. Walls are filled with advertisements in Hmong for plastic surgeons, insurance agents, doctors, lawyers, barbers, and other businesses—all run by Hmong professionals and entrepreneurs. There are also a number of parks located all over the Twin Cities where Hmong gather daily in the warmer months to play soccer, takraw, volleyball, tops, and otherwise socialize. Several senior centers for daily activities and assisted living have emerged specifically for elderly Hmong.

In St. Paul there are several funeral homes run by Hmong entrepreneurs which are typically booked weeks in advance for the multi-day funerals required by Hmong ritual tradition. These large funeral halls are packed with attendees every weekend, and they also constitute a major site for social interaction. The size of the population in Twin Cities also leads to the ready availability of traditional healing specialists, such as shamans or khawv khoob (often translated as “magical healers”) practitioners. A large supply of families practicing traditional rituals also enables some Hmong entrepreneurs to provide services
such as ritual-friendly slaughtering facilities that make shamanic and ancestral rites more practical and possible. One of the most common explanations that I have documented for converting to Christianity in various Hmong communities entails the relative facility of Christian ritual and the comparative difficulty of carrying out traditional ancestral and shamanic rites and animal sacrifices. However, the culture-specific services available in Twin Cities at least partially ameliorate these types of concerns.

In sum, the Twin Cities contain an ethnic enclave in which it is possible to interact almost exclusively with other Hmong and get a majority of essential services while speaking Hmong. While not all Hmong in the Twin Cities are deeply ensconced in this type of ethnic enclave, it is clear that this lifestyle is available, and that many people avail themselves of it. As such, it provides an interesting comparison to the relative ethnic density of Ban Txuam. Of course there are significant differences between these communities as well, but I want to draw attention to the similarity of ethnic density, as this has an impact on my subsequent analyses, and has been demonstrated to be an important factor in the development of identity and value systems for other refugee communities (Malkki 1995).

The economic picture in Twin Cities is quite distinct in some regards from that in Ban Txuam. Of the members of the nine transnational families living in Twin Cities, only three families practiced some form of cultivation more extensive than a small backyard garden. I worked the fields for a few days with two of these families, and I was surprised about the extent to which agricultural life in Southeast Asia was largely replicated in the extra-urban plots of these Hmong families. The parents would even spend nights at the
fields so as to not waste money commuting to the fields from their homes, and they maintained a rudimentary shelter at their fields not too different from what one might find on a Hmong farm in Thailand. The children of these families preferred to stay at home and commute when working the fields. Several of them commented to me that they saw sleeping at the fields to be somewhat backwards or perhaps “fobbie,” an adjective derived from the semi-derogatory acronym F.O.B. (for “fresh off of the boat”). In other words, they perceived sleeping in the fields to be something that Southeast Asian rural farmers do, but not modern Americans or Hmong American. Nevertheless, their parents seemed quite at home sleeping at the fields to work them day in and day out during the cultivation season.

Cultivation practices differed from their relatives in Thailand, however. For the most part these families grew various types of produce (e.g., bell peppers, cucumbers, cilantro, green onions, lettuce, potatoes, flowers, tomatoes, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, etc.) to sell at the Minneapolis farmers’ markets or other local produce markets. In fact, Hmong have a strong reputation among the farmers’ market attendees for playing a prominent role in these markets, and a high percentage of the vendors at Twin Cities markets are Hmong. In other words, the cultivation that Hmong engage in the Twin Cities is less directed towards direct subsistence than it is for sale as income. Children in these families were quite active in the cultivation process, and many of them also held other jobs and would help their parents on the farm when they were not working elsewhere. Other children were essentially working full-time either on the farm or selling the produce at the markets while their parents worked the fields (given the children’s greater proficiency with English). I went to sell on several occasions with these families. The collective nature of the work, the
exchange of help between extended kin, and the economic exchange between immediate family members (i.e., who takes how much of a cut from the overall sales or the mutual assistance of labor) was quite similar to how Hmong families in Thailand practice cultivation.

Beyond these three families, however, members of the remainder of the nine transnational families work in various sorts of professions or unskilled labor. Occupations ranged from computer programming and medical translation on the professional end, to minimum wage factory labor. Factory production (typically low-wage) was the modal occupation for parents in these families, as many of them had resettled in the United States later in adolescence or early adulthood and often lacked advanced education or English language skills.

**Language Shift in Thailand and the United States**

In trying to understand the psychocultural adaptations of migrants to various relocation contexts, one core consideration includes the importance of language use and language shift (Kulick 1992). This also constitutes one of the frequently cited preoccupations of Hmong elders when they express concerns about the inevitable change and eventual disappearance of Hmong culture in both the United States and Thailand. Given these concerns, I round out this ethnographic description of each field site with some of the systematic data that I collected concerning language shift. These data constituted part of the systematic survey of Ban Txuam and relatives of Ban Txuam families living in the Twin Cities. This survey is described below and appears in Appendix E. An interviewee for each sampled family was asked to rate how well each member of the household speaks
Hmong, reads and writes Hmong, speaks Thai (or English in the case of the United States), and reads or writes Thai (or English). Each person was assigned a score on a scale from one to three. One indicated little or no proficiency, two indicated intermediate proficiency, and three indicated advanced proficiency. Using these data, I created several regression models to test the relative predictive power of age, education, and gender on both the oral proficiency and literacy of family members in both Hmong and the majority language in each country—Thai and English. Some of the dimensions of these regression models are revealing about the nature of language shift in both locations.

Because generational differences is a central concern of this dissertation and migration studies in general, the first set of models that I analyzed for understanding language shift treated each generation in each country as a separate population necessitating a separate model. Using age thirty-five as a generational cutoff (this coincides with my intergenerational comparisons in Chapters 4 and 5) and excluding all individuals under the age of five, I thus ran four sets of regression models (one for each generation in each location) with the structure: Language Proficiency Index = Age + Education + Gender.

Looking at gender as a predictor of language proficiency, the younger-generation models revealed no gender differences on language proficiency, either written or spoken, for either language in both locations. This is perhaps not surprising, since gender-based educational disparities have all but disappeared with more recent educational policies in both countries. However, the older-generation regression models in Thailand yielded some interesting gender differences. For example, men reported a higher capacity for reading and writing Hmong (male mean = 1.74, female mean = 1.32). Gender was a significant
predictor in a regression model even when controlling for both age and education. The regression coefficient for gender in this model was $\beta = -0.262$ ($p=.024$, male coded as 1, female coded as 2). A similar trend held true for reading and writing Thai, but with a much more pronounced effect. The male average index was 2.25, while the female mean was 1.48. In the regression model, the gender $\beta = -0.364$ ($p < .001$). In sum, for the older generation there seems to be a marked difference in literacy in Thai, where older men reported a much higher capability in this regard. When it came to speaking Thai, a similar trend emerged. The regression coefficient was $\beta = -0.449$ ($p < .001$), and the male average on this scale was 2.79, compared to a female average of 2.26. In summary, older women seemed to manifest a general ability to communicate in Thai, while men reported a higher proficiency in the spoken and written dimensions of the language. This is consonant with my ethnographic observations. Men in Ban Txum were much more likely to be involved in politics and otherwise dealing with Thai political officials, thus necessitating a higher proficiency in Thai.

In the United States, on the other hand, no interesting gender trends emerged for the older generation. Older men and women in the sample manifested roughly similar speaking and reading and writing abilities in both languages, although the sample of Hmong in the United States is significantly smaller (71 total individuals were surveyed in both generations, as compared to 930 individuals in Thailand) and therefore maintains significantly less statistical power.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\text{ This is a result of the fact that I conducted a randomized survey of Ban Txum, while I only surveyed members of the nine transnational families in Twin Cities.}\]
Linguistic Proficiency in Thailand

In order to look at language shift intergenerationally, I ran a model for each language index in each location, but which included all participants (i.e., as opposed to the separate models for each generation explored above) over the age of eighteen, thus precluding students who would be in the midst of schooling (as this may affect literacy or possibly even reported speaking abilities). In Thailand, when controlling for both gender and education, I observed a marginally significant effect of age on reading and writing Hmong. The positive coefficient in this model (β = .005, p = .091) suggests that the capacity to read and write increases for older Hmong, even beyond the school-aged years. This makes sense, since literacy in Hmong tends to be more of a status icon than a necessity. In other words, learning to read and write Hmong carries significant cultural capital, but does not necessarily help one economically. By contrast, in each country literacy in either English or Thai tends to provide much more direct economic implications and is thus seen as more of a necessity. Learning to read and write Hmong later in life is something I have seen many Hmong adults pursue for its own sake. This seems to accompany a heightened cultural awareness or traditionalism. It is also important to note that this effect, although statistically significant, is weak. From this regression model, it also seems to be the case that more highly educated Hmong are more likely to learn to read and write Hmong, even when controlling for age and gender (β = .023, p = .003).

When it comes to literacy in Thai, however, the opposite seems to be the case. Younger Hmong are more capable of reading and writing Thai (by age, β = -.014, p < .001), but this is positively associate with education (β = .097, p < .001), as one might predict.
Holding these two variables constant, and lumping both generations together, I observed a significant gender effect on literacy as well. Men reported a higher capacity for reading and writing Thai ($\beta = -0.184$, $p < 0.001$), similar to the older generation model above.

Age did not significantly predict one’s ability to speak Hmong in the Thailand sample. While this might seem to provide superficial evidence against generational language shift, comparing relative speaking abilities provides stronger evidence in support of the language shift hypothesis, which I address below.

Perhaps one interesting note here is that education is negatively correlated with speaking Hmong in Thailand. This probably has to do with the fact that some of the younger generation is in fact experiencing a degree of language shift as a result of involvement in the Thai education system. This is certainly reported anecdotally by many parents that I interviewed, but the trend seems a bit weak. From this regression model, it appears that each additional year of education is likely to decrease one’s placement on the 1-3 scale of Hmong speaking ability by -.004 units ($p=.029$), a very slight, yet statically meaningful shift. The ability to speak Thai proficiently manifested the most drastic outcomes. Age ($\beta = -.011$, $p < .001$), gender ($\beta = -.213$, $p < .001$), and education ($\beta = .029$, $p < .001$) all manifested significant independent effects on one’s reported ability to speak Thai. Younger Hmong tended to speak Thai better than older Hmong, along with men speaking better than women. Education also had a positive effect on speaking Thai. These outcomes suggest that the younger generation is certainly becoming more proficient in spoken Thai, but that this is not attributable to education alone. It is possible that peer groups, media, and other Thai-language resources in the community also have some effect. The gender
difference is likely attributable to the older generation’s gender gap discussed above.

**Linguistic Proficiency in the United States**

In the United States I also observed a significant positive effect of age on literacy in Hmong ($\beta = .030$, $p = .023$). This suggests an extension of the same trend found in Thailand, namely that even beyond the schooling years, older Hmong tend more to read and write Hmong than younger Hmong. This holds true when controlling for gender and education level, and the effect is much stronger than that found in Thailand. I would argue from my ethnographic fieldwork that Hmong literacy is something that increases over the life course. My basis for this lies again in the cultural import and social status on what can essentially be seen as a cultural luxury. Reading and writing Hmong tends to be something that older people seek or push on their children as a symbol of Hmong cultural preservation. It is not taught in schools, but rather from “masters” (xwb fwb) in the community that know the orthography well enough to teach it. I have encountered a few after-school programs for Hmong children to learn Hmong culture and language, and a few Hmong charter schools have emerged in the past several years in the Twin Cities where Hmong language courses are offered. This may help increase Hmong literacy for the younger generation, but these programs are quite limited in comparison to the Hmong population in the United States. Despite the lack of an economic necessity to read and write Hmong in the United States, there is a concerted effort to teach the orthography. Establishing this age trend as a systematic life-course phenomenon rather than concluding from these survey data that the younger generation is simply becoming less proficient in written Hmong would require longitudinal data and a more sustained ethnographic
emphasis on these practices.

Treating all adult Hmong in the United States in a single model, I observed no significant predictors for proficiency in spoken Hmong. Age, gender, and education all seemed to have no bearing, although the sample size is admittedly limited for such a model (44 adults in the United States sample). Education did predict both spoken ($\beta = .066, p < .001$) and written English ($\beta = .104, p < .001$), as one might expect. There were no significant gender differences with regards to English proficiency. Although younger Hmong tended to be more proficient in English (oral $\beta = -.009, p = .064$, written $\beta = -.010, p = .031$), the effects were relatively small.

**Language Shift**

Perhaps the most interesting and revealing evidence with regards to language shift per se concerns the calculation of an index in which the score for proficiency in the majority language is subtracted from that reported for Hmong language ability. This comparative result would indicate how well one speaks (or, alternatively, reads and writes) the predominant language in the context of relocation in comparison to Hmong. This index has the ability to most comprehensively gage whether or not the younger generation is shifting from a greater proficiency in Hmong in favor of an increased proficiency in Thai or English. A positive index on this scale indicates better ability in Hmong, while a negative index indicates a higher reported ability in Thai or English. The following Table 1 displays the average index figures for the sample of Hmong families in Thailand, separated by generation (again using age thirty-five as a cutoff point).
Table 1: Language shift index by generation in Thailand

On both the oral and literacy indices, the younger generation ranked lower, indicating a stronger shift toward proficiency in Thai (all differences in Table 1 and Table 2 were statistically significant at the p < .001 level). One can see from this table that for both generations, on average a higher ability was reported for speaking Hmong. However, for the younger generation this difference barely exceeded zero. A negative figure would have manifested a higher speaking ability in Thai. This generation gap is further instantiated by the literacy figures in the lower half of the table. When it comes to reading and writing, both generations reported higher abilities in Thai. This difference was quite stark for the younger generation, which reported an average difference of 1.4 points on three-point scale favoring literacy in Thai over Hmong. This is not surprising, given that schooling is mandatory in Thailand, and Ban Txuam has a number of primary schools. As mentioned above, Hmong literacy is not taught in schools, but rather one has to seek out a knowledgeable person and take the time to independently learn to read and write Hmong. In fact, Thai education policies have actually worked against both spoken and written proficiency in minority languages, such as precluding co-ethnic schoolteachers in minority-predominant classrooms (Tapp 2005b).

These figures make it appear that there is a significant momentum for generational
language shift in Ban Txuam, although the tendency for both generations is still to speak Hmong better than Thai. The reported level of proficiency in spoken Hmong was barely higher than Thai, and within a few years, this index may well invert as Hmong youth become more proficient in Thai and less proficient in Hmong.

### Table 2: Language shift index by generation in the United States

The language shift index in the United States presents a somewhat more drastic picture for the younger generation. Table 2 divides these figures out by generation. These figures reveal that for the smaller sample of 44 individuals in the Twin Cities, the younger generation already reports a higher average proficiency in both written and spoken English than in Hmong (-.36 for oral proficiency and -1.32 for literacy on a scale of one to three). The generation gap in language shift also seems to be wider (all generational differences exceeded p < .001). As opposed to the older generation in Thailand, in the United States older Hmong were more proficient in both written and spoken Hmong than in English (with a higher reported proficiency of .68 for spoken Hmong and .58 in favor of written Hmong). This finding is quite interesting and suggests that the American resettlement context is such that the older generation is maintaining native linguistic capabilities to a greater extent than their counterparts in Thailand, while for some reason the younger generation seems to be shifting to the majority language at a faster rate. One caution here
concerns the disparity in sample sizes. Nevertheless, this interesting finding at least calls for further research to validate and explain such a trend. In summary, these data provide a sort of empirical substantiation of the frequently uttered concerns of Hmong parents that fret over their children not learning to speak, read, and write Hmong properly. This context of language shift also provides an important backdrop for my subsequent analyses of Hmong moral thinking and conceptions of personhood.

This rounds out what it is, for present, a brief ethnographic overview of the communities where I conducted fieldwork for this dissertation. In Chapter 4 I discuss research findings with an additional sample of Hmong families scattered throughout Wisconsin, but I describe that sample in detail in that chapter. For present it is sufficient to note that Wisconsin as a state has a sizable Hmong population, but it is spread amongst a number of smaller towns. Many of these towns have small Hmong communities that would approximate a large village in Thailand in size (between 1,000 and 5,000).

Fieldwork

To provide context for my ethnographic claims, a few words regarding my general mode of data collection are in order. As mentioned above, my initial goal in this project was to develop a sample of transnational families with members in both Ban Txuam and the United States (eventually deciding on Twin Cities). This comparative structure is essential to address questions of psychocultural adaptations to different resettlement contexts.

I began my fieldwork in Ban Txuam in September 2008. Using a base of contacts that I had developed during a survey trip in 2007, I began to establish a network of families and plan an anthropological survey of Ban Txuam. This survey would provide both a
demographic overview of the community, as well as reveal trends in transnational kinship networks. The complete survey is given in Appendix E. I decided it was best to obtain a random sample of Hmong households in Ban Txuam, and from this narrow down the Lao Hmong refugee families who, along with their relatives in Twin Cities, met my criteria for the transnational comparison. I eventually found nine such transnational families out of a survey of 121 households in Ban Txuam. Households were sampled by randomly selecting latitude and longitude coordinates and mapping these onto a geocoded satellite image. Any randomly generated point that fell within eleven meters of a habitable structure was used and the corresponding household was surveyed. This excluded households where no member ethnically identified themselves as Hmong.

In Chapter 5 I describe the protocols for further selecting the transnational families. Here I will note that this survey resulted in a fairly positive response rate (about 90%), and was administered by myself or one of my six research assistants hired to conduct the survey. In each household the leader’s consent was sought for participation and interviewed if available. As noted in Appendix E, questions covered topics such as household composition and demographics, religious practices, transnational networks and communication patterns with international relatives, agricultural practice, household economics, migration and family history, and some brief questions on moral beliefs.

*Reasons for Resettlement*

The most significant dimension of these data for the present purpose regards the

9 The geocoded imagery was dated December 2010, just before I began the administration of my survey. Thus, all existing households at the time were represented in the imagery.
brief migration history elicited in the survey. This portion of the interview was recorded and later coded. I took great care to document the reasons for which some members of the family stayed in Thailand while others opted for and obtained resettlement in third-party countries such as the United States. For the families from Laos, the migration history involved asking the leader of the household to recall the circumstances surrounding the decision to walk off the refugee camps or otherwise resettle in Thailand (or for the families in the United States the circumstances surrounding the decision to go to the United States). This included questions about the desire to resettle as well as the conditions that either enabled or precluded the possibility. These data are critical for my comparative ethnography, since the initial reasons for migration could provide a selection bias in which people with different moral outlooks are more predisposed to migrate to the United States as compared to their relatives in Thailand, for example. For these reasons, I was careful to document these circumstances for each family.

The lists of reasons given for both the desire or not to migrate to the United States, as well as the reasons that this was or was not possible, are given in Table 3. These are cross-tabulated with the interviewed family’s location, Thailand or the United States. It should be noted that only one of these instances has the obvious potential to affect moral outlooks. One person in Thailand responded that they did not like American values, and for this reason did not want to migrate to the United States. It is therefore possible that in this one case, where the family did indeed remain permanently in Thailand, the reasons surrounding this decision may be related to their moral outlook that I would later analyze through their discourse.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Country = United States</th>
<th>Country = Thailand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 : Migration Desire</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : Afraid because weren't literate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 : Afraid children would be disobedient in US</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 : Believed there were Evil Spirits in America</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 : Better Life</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 : Better opportunity to Work in US</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 : Currency Rates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 : Dependent on Sons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 : Didn't know they could</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 : Didn't like American Values</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 : Didn't want to change lifestyle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 : Didn't want to go back to Laos</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 : Didn't want to leave family behind</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 : Escape the War</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 : Familiar with French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 : Finish School in Laos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 : Heard good things about America</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 : Just followed everyone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 : Pact to stay in Thailand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 : Stay as a Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 : Transportation in America</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 : US didn't help them out in the war</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 : Wanted Citizenship</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 : Wanted to be Thai citizens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 : Wanted to return to Laos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 : Migration Opportunity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 : Already Thai citizens</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 : Didn't live in refugee camps</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 : Didn't need father’s approval</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 : Didn't want to leave his child in Thailand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 : Family didn't let them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 : Had opportunity, didn't want to go</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 : Too Late</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 : UN wasn't there yet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 : Underage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Reasons cited for the desire and ability (or lack thereof) to migrate to the United States from Thailand**¹⁰

¹⁰ The numbers in the table indicate the number of interviewees (maximum of one per family) citing each reason. The table is divided into two sections, the reasons for the desire to further migrate and the reasons surrounding the actual decision to leave or stay in Thailand.
Outside of this case, however, the rest of the reasons cited seem to either have no obvious bearing on moral thinking, or seem to not have affected the actual decision to resettle. For example, the second and third reasons listed in the table under “Migration Desire” in the table could possibly have reflected a particular moral perspective that could hypothetically drive the migration decision. However, given that the respondents giving these reasons ended up migrating to the United States, it is unlikely that this bias reflects a selection bias in the sample.

With regards to the circumstances that enabled or disabled the ability to migrate to the United States, note that the reasons cited in these interviews are largely independent of psychological factors that could significantly affect a priori moral perspectives. In other words, the practice conditions of fleeing Laos at different times than other family members, residing in the right refugee camp at the right time, or never residing in a refugee camp in the first place all represent factors independent of one’s moral outlook that factored significantly into whether or not someone was able to gain refugee status and migrate to the United States.

As one example, a man that I interviewed in Ban Txuam explained to me that he had arrived to the refugee camps earlier and did not want to migrate to the United States without his sister even through UNHCR was then conducting interviews to certify refugees. He ended up waiting so long for her to make it to the refugee camp that the window of opportunity had closed. As a last resort, they decided to leave the camps for a nearby Hmong community. Respondents on the survey more often than not recalled wanting to migrate but cited some external conditions that precluded the possibility. In sum, I have a
strong case that there are no reasons to suspect that my transnational sample of Hmong families were sorted by different styles of moral thought at the point of relocation into different ultimate destinations.

Data Collection

Once I selected the nine\textsuperscript{11} families in Ban Txuam that would become the focal point of my analysis of moral discourse, I recruited them and set appointments to interview a parent and a child (either late adolescent or emerging adult) in each family. This resulted in a total of 36 participants for these extended interviews between both countries. These interviews were divided into a moral vignette semi-structured interview, and an unstructured interview on each person’s life history and family life. The content of these interviews is described in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. I spent on average just under three hours with each person. The ultimate goal of these interviews was to take a person-centered approach to understanding the nature of their moral thinking, as well as their resettlement experiences in their communities that could influence these. Following the person-centered model (Hollan 2001; Levy and Hollan 1998), I focused my analyses and questions on understanding the cultural models that each person ascribes to, as well as the important ways in which their personal perspectives and beliefs deviate from such collectively held models. For example, it was common for respondents to answer questions with the phrase “we Hmong believe that...” or “Hmong custom dictates that...”. I would

\textsuperscript{11} As described in Chapter 5, I initially found thirteen families that met the necessarily selection criteria, but I was only able to successfully track down nine of the corresponding families in Twin Cities. Thus, I treat the nine complete transnational families as my core sample.
explore their recitation of these important cultural schema, but also take these
opportunities to solicit meta-commentary and personal reflections on these models. This
interview style became the basis for my analyses in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Beyond the survey and more formal interviews with these nine transnational
families, I spent the rest of my time in fieldwork conducting participant observation and
otherwise participating in the daily activities of my friends and acquaintances in Ban
Txuam. I would go to the fields for all of the different tasks involved in both subsistence and
cash-crop cultivation, play volleyball and soccer in the afternoons, and otherwise seek
opportunities to spend time with Hmong friends and families. While I lived in a rented
home separately with my wife and son for the first nine months of fieldwork, I spent the
final three months living with a young family whose patrilineage I had come to know quite
well.

Some of my most productive ethnographic observations and experiences involved
the frequent ritual activities that I attended. These involved countless shaman ceremonies,
funerals, soul-calling ceremonies, and to a more limited extent Christian services. I
recorded these ceremonies whenever the opportunity afforded, and spent much of my time
in rituals documenting the symbolic and practical elements. These data and the interviews I
conducted during these performances became the basis for my analysis of ancestral
personhood in the next chapter.

A Reflexive Ethnographic Note

As is often the case in ethnographic work, I was drawn in a very deep and personal
way into the lives of my “informants,” whom I hesitate to classify under such a rubric. My
Hmong friends with whom I spent so much time during my fieldwork came to be quite close, and my personal attachments to their lives no doubt color my analyses. It was difficult at times, as I had developed close relationships with two patriclans that I came to find were significant political rivals. There was no shortage of gossip and political back-biting between these groups, and each recognized my mutual affinity for both sides. This political rivalry culminated in the election of the Puyai Ban (the political equivalent of a town mayor) toward the end of my fieldwork, as a member of each clan was running for the position. Other minor rivalries included other members of each patriclan running against one another for lesser political positions. In the end, I think they were understanding as to my position and my desire to be closely allied with both families.

One particular point bears disclosure. In anticipation of my analysis in Chapter 3, I think it is important to note that I believe that my personal background enables this analysis in an interesting way. Having grown up as a Mormon in both Utah and New York, I have personally been socialized in a form of Christianity with a rich set of beliefs about the importance of ancestors in one’s own life. This religious and ritual emphasis on ancestors in contemporary Mormonism has been documented by various anthropologists (Bennion 1998; Cannell 2005). To be brief, Mormons place great interest in “getting to know” one’s ancestors. For this reason the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the proper name of the mainstream Mormon church) maintains some of the most extensive genealogical resources in the United States and spends immense resources in developing

\[ \text{____________________________} \]

\[ ^{12} \text{I want to thank Rick Shweder for really encouraging me to think reflexively through this particular dimension of my analysis.} \]
and maintaining a massive genealogical library in Salt Lake City, Utah and satellite libraries throughout the world. These practices are rooted in the belief that one’s individual salvation is intimately tied to the welfare of one’s ancestors.

In the Mormon scriptural canon of *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith wrote of the ancestors and performing baptisms for the dead, “For we without them cannot be made perfect; neither can they without us be made perfect.” (Smith 1988: Section 128:18). Mormon temples are seen as sanctuaries where vicarious rituals such as baptisms for the dead can be carried out and therefore open the door for individual salvation for one’s ancestors. Mormon theology further draws a picture of “sealing” families, forming a long line of divinely sanctioned kinship stretching from Adam and Eve to the last souls to be born in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Beyond the ritual dimensions of this emphasis on ancestors, the practice of family history also entails historical reconstructions of ancestors’ lives through historical documents and family journals inasmuch as is possible. These beliefs include the understood obligation that one has to document one’s own life for future posterity.

This crudely brief synopsis of Mormon ancestral theology is necessarily too short. Regardless, suffice it to say that one could argue that Mormon beliefs about ancestors provide some striking ontological similarities to Hmong ancestral ritual and belief. In fact, I would argue that Mormon conceptions of ancestors and the emphasis in interacting with them through ritual and research closely approaches what might be called “ancestor veneration” in a way that might make their Christian sensitivities uneasy. While Mormons reserve the term “worship” for deity, I do not think the term applies any less to these host
of practices than to Hmong ancestral ritual, which I describe elsewhere (Hickman 2007) and in Chapter 3. Considering the reflexive turn in ethnographic representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986), I must consider the extent to which my socialization into this ontological perspective gives shape to my analysis of Hmong ancestral personhood.

To be clear, there are many significant differences between these two ontological positions (i.e., Hmong ancestral personhood and Mormon ancestral beliefs about the self and others). I think that the concept of ancestral personhood sets apart Hmong views of the life course from many other ancestrally oriented ritual systems documented by other anthropologists, particularly in the way it fosters an imagination of the self in an eternal life course. In asserting this unique characteristic, however, I feel the reflexive ethnographic responsibility to consider the possibility that my own background and upbringing both enable this analysis in certain ways but limit it in others. This is a much more realistic and tenable stance than attempting to adopt a perspective from “nowhere in particular” (cf. Shweder 2003; Slife 2004). It is not obvious that this perspective is simply productive or simply counter-productive. Given the similarities between the two positions, it seems most likely that my analysis was benefited by my potentially more attuned focus on certain elements of ancestral identity, while my background also likely precludes some potentially alternative analyses.

Having provided some background to Hmong history and the actual communities on which I base my analyses, I now turn to a brief discussion of some of the changes occurring in the Hmong diaspora. Beyond the important trends of language shift described earlier, these further developments provide useful initial insights into how Hmong are adapting to
the various social conditions with which they are presented. The succeeding chapters will build on these ethnographic observations.

**Of Traditionalism and Transnationalism: Constructing “Hmong-ness” in the Diaspora**

Throughout this dissertation, I investigate the impact of macrosocial characteristics of each resettlement community on religious practices. Scattered resettlement patterns in the diaspora have fractured traditional, kinship-based ritual networks through which ancestral rites are carried out. Historically, lineage-based ritual knowledge was widely distributed throughout patrilines, with various sub-specialists maintaining patrilineal ritual knowledge for different rites. The divergent relocation patterns of families in different countries and communities has directly challenged the ability of kin groups to carry out the entire ritual repertoire, given sparse access to all of the necessary ritual specialists. This has led to two coinciding trends.

First, a trend of “outsourcing” ancestral rites to “more knowledgeable” kin in Thailand and Laos has emerged. These increasingly common transnational kinship-ritual networks provide one means of overcoming the limits of ritual expertise in one's diaspora community. Under this trend, kin from an extended lineage group are drawn upon to vicariously conduct essential ancestral rites and send videos of the rites to the direct descendants of the target ancestors in the United States.

One of the difficulties that the diaspora has presented to traditional Hmong ritual networks is the movement from itinerant village life that is organized by kinship relations, to dispersal in variegated resettlement communities. These range from inner-city settings in places like Sacramento or the Twin Cities to rural farming communities in Alaska. Given
the conditions of employment and participation in a new type of macro-economy, in many instances it is simply not feasible to live in a single location with all of one’s closest patrilineal kin easily accessible. Kinship based chain-migration is certainly a prevalent characteristic of Hmong resettlement patterns in the United States, but I am arguing that there are also severe practical constraints on the extent to which this phenomenon might really parallel the traditional village migration practices that were so prevalent a few decades ago in the Southeast Asian highlands. What’s more, at the point of resettlement many lineage groups were significantly divided by the conditions under which Hmong were able to gain refugee status and resettle in places like the United States. In some instances a sibling or two were forced to remain in Thailand permanently, either to stay with parents who did not want to resettle in the United States, or because they fled Laos too late to gain a refugee screening interview in a particular camp, or for other similar reasons. The central point to be made here is that these practical circumstances have divided kin groups, and disabled the previous ritual system that necessitated a variety of ritual resources that were historically widely distributed within a lineage group. For example, one relative may know the particular lineage-specific utterances for the “nyuj dab” ceremony, while another may be particularly adept in the “npua rooj” ceremony - another lineage-specific rite. Someone else may know the burial rites for one’s kin-group, and another may specialize in some other generalized ritual practice, like soul calling or magical healing (khawv koob). The more general practices can be carried out by any practitioner in the larger Hmong community, but some of these rights require the expertise of immediate kin. When one’s relatives are geographically dispersed, then it becomes
impossible to effectively carry out the ‘traditional’ ritual repertoire. This trend and its psychocultural implications are the subject of Chapter 3.

A second trend is the emergence of multiple messianic religious movements in the Hmong diaspora. Beyond the development of transnational ritual outsourcing discussed above, I argue that these practical limitations of social dispersal in the Hmong diaspora is also playing a significant role in the emergence of these messianic movements. I encountered two relatively developed independent movements during my comparative fieldwork, and other anthropologists have documented some others (Culas 2005; Ogden 2009; Smalley, et al. 1990; Tapp 2005b). Beyond these, in my random sample of nine transnational families, four of the fathers I interviewed manifested significant messianic proclivities. In each case I was told that they could only reveal part of the story and were restricted until the time is eventually ripe for a more complete revelation.

While these messianic movements were not even within the intended scope of my research at the outset, I have come to realize how significant these movements are in understanding how Hmong cope with diasporic social realities. In essence, my research to date suggests that these messianic movements fill the void left by the diasporic dispersal of traditional ritual networks. The movements that I have documented thus far commonly paint “traditional” Hmong religion as constituting a limited, “fallen” state, from which the messianic visions depart in order to restore a former greatness. In the remainder of this chapter I document these trends and explain how they help Hmong in the diaspora deal with the social and religious disruption that resettlement has presented.

One group, which self-identifies as “Kev Cai Is Npis Mis Nus,” (Culas 2005 presents
the most developed ethnographic perspective on Hmong messianism, and deals with this group in particular as well) began a couple of decades ago, as their leader narrates, when the founding prophet was visited by God. Through divine revelation, the prophet developed a new, divine orthography for Hmong language, and he wrote extensive scriptural codices of the revelations pertaining to Hmong and their place in the world. They have developed an elaborate narrative of ancient loss and prophesy concerning future global economic and political prosperity for Hmong. This includes the prediction that their religious movement will become the fifth pillar of the major world religions.\textsuperscript{13} It is essential to note here that in my many interviews with the current leader (the original prophet passed away several years ago), he does not disparage traditional Hmong ritual practice. In fact, he participates regularly in funerals and other rituals, since he is a master of many of these rites. However, he characterizes this complex ritual system as inferior to the newly revealed truth, and he says the old practices are unnecessarily taxing, given their complexity, economic burden, and limited efficacy. As the leader of this messianic movement, he perceives his purpose to be the gradual restoration of Hmong to their former greatness and ritual purity, which would come with time.

A second movement with which I became acquainted in the Midwestern United States is called by its practitioners “Poj Koob Yawm Ntxwv.” This is a play on the Hmong term for ancestors, “poj koob yawm txwv.” This movement has chapters in several states in the U.S., and organizes itself much like a Christian church. The point of their movement, as

\textsuperscript{13} The leader’s conception of the other important worlds religions were Christianity, Islam, Buddhism / Hinduism lumped together, and Judaism.
explained by one of its governing members, is to simplify Hmong ritual practice, cut the unnecessary rituals, and to standardize rituals to be universal to all Hmong. They explain that residence in the United States and the fracturing of lineage groups does not lend itself to effectively carrying out the older, complex set of rituals.

In answer to this problem, the group is in the process of actively reformulating and standardizing what they argue will constitute the future canon of Hmong ritual. They have added some novel rituals and religious iconography, and cut some of the more burdensome practices, such as bride-price, cow sacrifice at funerals, and the “ua nyuj dab” ritual described in Chapter 3. They also hold regular meetings on Sunday mornings, and actively proselyte at major Hmong events. I observed one of their leaders proselyting to Hmong who practice “shamanism” (read: traditional Hmong ritual practice, _dab qhuas_) at the fourth of July soccer tournament in the Twin Cities. He presented the following types of questions to Hmong who practice shamanism: “What is better, to spend $50,000 at a funeral, or to invest in your children’s education? Why do our ritual practices have to be so complex, and require so many specialists? We offer an alternative where you can pay your respects to God and your ancestors, but without the unnecessary ritual and financial burdens.” It seems that this movement is growing at a significant rate, as their members describe the increasing establishment of chapters all over the United States and internationally. I have also been told by some members that they have a messianic leader, but others were less forthcoming about this. By one account, this leader is a reincarnation of Soob Lwm Yaj, a famous Hmong prophet that developed the popular Pahawh orthography by divine revelation (see Smalley, et al. 1990 for a description of Soob Lwm
Yaj and his movement and orthography).

I should also note that many families quote economic and social burdens of traditional ritual practice as a major reason for converting to Christianity. So, the processes I am describing here are not limited to messianic movements and transnational ritual outsourcing. It seems that the relative simplicity of ritual involvement in Christianity and its messianic message also provide a fulfilling response to the practical concerns for many Hmong in the United States, and to a more limited extent in Thailand.

I have also met other Hmong who adhere to messianic principles, but who were less forthcoming as to the particulars of what they believe will happen and how their messianic visions will unfold. I was asked multiple times to help people find contact information for the diplomatic departments of Western governments such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, with an eye toward approaching these governments to establish diplomatic ties between the Hmong polity that will inevitably emerge from these messianic movements and the current world powers.

I was told by the leader of Kev Cai Is Npis Mis Nus and another independent messianic practitioner that my ability to speak Hmong and my interest in Hmong ritual and history is not coincidental. Both of them separately prophesied that I would personally play a significant role in the realization of their messianic prophecies, and that I would serve as a sort of cultural diplomat of their movements to Western governments. The leader of Kev Cai Is Npis Mis Nus also told me that he had foreseen that I would come to my field site in Thailand before I arrived, and assured me that my research agenda was divinely inspired in order to lead me to him.
Diaspora and the Universalization of Morality and Ritual

What do these trends mean? What social and historical circumstances might lead to the independent emergence of these philosophies and structurally similar movements that seem so pervasive? It seems to me that these movements are all playing an important role in helping Hmong deal with the narratives and historical realities of constant displacement, and the lack of a consolidated “homeland.” What many of these movements seem to be offering most principally is an alternative vision and narrative of Hmong “authenticity,” and Hmong “tradition.” For Kev Cai Is Npis Mis Nus, this tradition is located in an ancient state of being in God’s good grace, before written language and an organized political society to govern all Hmong was lost. These messianic visions offer the assurance of this state being restored in the near future. What Poj Koob Yawm Ntxwv offers, on the other hand, is a consolidation of Hmong ritual practice that has supposedly faltered and fractured into its current idiosyncratic state where particular lineages have their own rites that require local ritual experts. In other words, they offer a universalized version of “traditional” Hmong religion, but one that can withstand the realities of geographically fractured kinship groups. Conversions to Christianity similarly offer a resolution to the complexity and financial burden of former ritual practices and social structures. Finally, the emergence of ritual outsourcing displaces traditionalism to Thailand, where one’s relatives are still “living the old ways” and maintaining the “true” traditions. In sum, while all of these trends offer competing versions of “authentic Hmong tradition” and alternative historical narratives, they all seem to serve similar purposes of making religious meaning out of the social upheaval of diasporic social realities.
Another important implication for many of these visions of Hmong tradition and prescriptive narratives for how the Hmong trans-nation will take form, is that they seem to want to universalize the very nature of obligation. This has significant implications for “traditional Hmong morality,” to the extent that this exists. As previously mentioned, some of these newer narratives from Poj Koob Yawm Ntxawv and Kev Cai Is Npis Mis Nus suggest that the current state of Hmong ritual practice is actually the result of a sort of “fallen state” of Hmong religion. Their respective movements offer the restoration that is to eventually replace it. However, what this also suggests is that moral perspectives driven by ideas like filial piety, and particularly piety toward one’s ancestors, is being ideologically undermined. Nicholas Tapp (2002) argues that changing economic relations are affecting the universalizing nature of moral obligation or moral taboo. I think that these new messianic narratives and their visions of Hmong traditionalism are performing a similar task. For Marcel Mauss (1985), Christianity provided the ontological cement to the notion of universal, individual persons - all equally accountable to God’s judgment. In a similar way, these messianic trends are universalizing Hmong notions of interconnectedness and undermining the imagination of the lineage group as a ritual necessity or the primary socially and geographically cohesive unit.

My interviews with Hmong families that span the United States and Thailand indicate that younger in the United States experience comparatively more moral ambivalence in their discourse and narratives (Chapter 4). They have engaged American cultural models of the self and morality that compete with the Hmong models into which many parents are seeking to socialize them. Competing models view the self as a liberal
individual and ground the ontology of self in a more biomedical understanding. This competes directly with a Hmong emphasis on the importance of spiritual balance and maintaining one’s relationships with ancestors and local spirits. This leads to an interesting mode of cognitive dissonance for many youth. I think that such moral-cognitive dissonance is rendered likely by the schisms in the Hmong diaspora, the geographic fracturing of kinship groups, the outsourcing of ritual back to Thailand and Laos (eliminating an important socializing mechanism), and the universalizing messianic narratives that are seeking to fill this void. I now turn to more serious consideration of various Hmong concepts of the person and the accompanying moral discourses that emanate from them.
Chapter 3: Ancestral Personhood and Moral Socialization through Ritual Practice

Shortly after Siv Yim\(^1\) returned from his first extended visit to his relatives in the United States, he began preparations for the “ua nyuj dab”\(^2\) ceremony. This ceremony is a ritualistic offering to two of the patrilineage’s ancestors. It is an extremely important ritual that is designed to help meet ancestors’ material needs in the afterlife. Just as they are in life, deceased ancestors are in need of food and money in order to maintain themselves in the ancestral village. "Ua nyuj dab" is typically performed a good time after the ancestor’s passing, colloquially “ib puas nees nkaum xyoo,” or 120 years. In this particular case, the grandparents had passed away thirty-four years prior to this ritual offering.

Siv Yim was well positioned to head up the organization and performance of this ceremony. He is considered one of those men who maintain the ritual-specific knowledge of “Hmong culture” in general and the rites of their immediate kin’s ancestors in particular. The “ua nyuj dab” ceremony is one that varies from clan to clan and lineage group to lineage group. As such, one may well know the general ritual performance structure of “ua nyuj dab,” but if one doesn’t know the particular language and ritualistic idiosyncrasies passed down from one’s own ancestors, then the ritual may carry no effect at all. Siv Yim, though, knew the oral history and was fairly well versed in the particular ritual practices of his patrilineage.

\(^1\) All personal names here are pseudonyms, as is the name of the village.
\(^2\) The Hmong word “ua” means “to do or to make,” “nyuj” translates as “ox,” and “dab” translates as “spirit” or “ghost.” Including its inferred connotation, the phrase would translated as the “ancestral spirit rites using an ox.”
Being in his late fifties, Siv Yim invited two uncles with even greater ritual knowledge to direct the actual rites. The ritual was to be held at Siv Yim's house. I was doing fieldwork in Thailand at the time, and I was invited to attend as well. I had a close relationship with many families in this patrilineage, and I lived with them for a portion of my fieldwork. They invited me to record the ceremony as much as I wished. As it turned out, Siv Yim had brought back a video recorder from his visit to the United States, and he also recorded a good part of the proceedings himself. I wondered why, and when I asked, he told me that the ceremony was not actually for Siv Yim's own grandparents, but for the grandparents of his relatives in the United States. These relatives sent $700 and a video recorder back to Thailand with Siv Yim and asked him to perform this ceremony for their direct ancestors on their behalf. They had told him that none of their lineage members in the United States had sufficient lineage-specific knowledge to perform the ceremony. So, they asked their more knowledgeable relatives in Thailand to carry it out, record the ceremony's proceedings, and send the tape to them. In this way they could vicariously perform the rites to sustain their ancestors and still have the lineage-specific aspects of the ceremony performed.

I found this transnational and vicarious outsourcing of essential rituals to be a compelling example of the transnational nature not just of culture, but of *kinship* in the Hmong diaspora. It is also an instance that speaks to generally held perceptions about differences in Hmong resettlement communities in the United States, Thailand, and elsewhere in the diaspora. Fears of “Americanization” are wide-spread in the Hmong community in the U.S., and this instance—where Hmong people living in the United States
do not know how to perform a critical ceremony—certainly substantiates those fears. This also raises the question: What is the future of ritual practice among Hmong in the United States? This is a concern of many Hmong men and women I have spoken with, but it is also a concern of mine, because threats to the ritual tradition also have important implications for the development of subjectivities and moral discourses that my interlocutors often describe as “traditional.” As some descendants lack sufficient ritual knowledge and the particular discourse to perform these rites, what are the implications for Hmong subjectivities, both across generations as well as sites of relocation?

Questions about subjectivity are important both from the phenomenological standpoint of the Hmong experience of resettlement, as well as from the analytical standpoint of understanding the effects of resettlement on Hmong psychocultural dynamics. These are the issues I take up in this chapter. I begin my analysis of Hmong subjectivities in the diaspora by outlining what I want to call “ancestral personhood.” Ancestral personhood is a type of subjectivity that is constantly reinforced through rituals that mark the passing of time and unique occurrences in family life. It constitutes an essential dimension for how Hmong conceive of themselves as persons and think about their eternal life course. It also has significant implications for how Hmong men and women conceive of and enact social relationships.

In order to frame this analysis, I will begin by reviewing some of the ethnographic work that most closely approaches the explicit theoretical emphasis that I am advocating, including highlighting where these theorists fall short in explicitly theorizing how models of personhood underpin moral thinking. My use of ancestral personhood is designed to
point to the particular importance of theorizing personhood in our understanding of moral discourse. This represents a central goal of this chapter. I will then develop some comparative ethnographic examples (i.e., the “ua nyuj dab” ritual and a look at moral discourse within one family in Thailand) from my research with Hmong in Thailand and the United States in order to explicate the Hmong cultural model that I term “ancestral personhood.” I believe this model to be a particularly lucid case in point of the emphasis that I want to place on how a cultural ontology of self drives the more conscious moral justifications that Hmong engage in their moral discourse. This analysis will demonstrate the different levels of rationalization that represent the domains of personhood and moral justification, despite the deep implications these constructs have for each other. From this I will draw a wider framework for how anthropologists concerned with “moraleites” and “ethics” (cf., Heintz 2009; Laidlaw 2002; Zigon 2008) in their own right should consider notions of personhood in order to more thoroughly theorize culturally specific notions of the moral and analyze patterns of moral discourse in particular cultural milieu. I will conclude by briefly describing how ancestral personhood varies among social groups both within and between Hmong communities, in the diaspora in Southeast Asia and beyond. This variation is important for understanding resettlement and cultural change in general, including how ritual practice plays into these psychocultural processes.

**Ancestral Personhood**

The concepts of personhood and morality are often evoked together as somewhat coterminal or at least involving significant overlap. Occasionally these assumptions are made bare in the use of terms such as “moral personhood” (Parish 1994) or “moral
identity” (Hardy and Carlo In Press-a; Hardy and Carlo In Press-b). In this chapter I want to tease apart these concepts in order to analyze their interrelatedness. In doing so, I hope to shed new light on the particular ways in which cultural models of personhood give rise to moral models for people who ascribe to them. In other words, I want to separate “morality” from “personhood” theoretically in order to show how the relationship between these concepts reveals something new about the formation, development, and expression of moral ideals, and in turn, moral justification and rationalization.

This is not to say that it is improper to talk about “moral personhood” or assert a deep integration of cultural models of personhood and moral ideals in the ways people think about them. In fact, in the end, I expect my analysis to make this very claim - that these two psychocultural constructs are necessarily interconnected. However, I also want to argue that the unexamined collapsing of morality and personhood overlooks the processes by which cultural ontologies of self or person undergird particular moral systems of thought. I argue that a more thorough theoretical focus on this relationship is essential to the development of a more formalized anthropology of morality and ethics, which has been called for with increasing regularity of late (Fassin 2008; Fassin and Stoczkowski 2008; Heintz 2009; Laidlaw 2002; Zigon 2008).

The “ua nyuj dab” ritual, among others in the Hmong ceremonial repertoire, is key in the instantiation of a particular type of subjectivity that I term “ancestral personhood.” Perhaps it is useful to begin with a working definition of ancestral personhood that will become more clear as I describe how it is encoded in ritual practice and revealed in moralizing discourse. As a concept of personhood, I mean to imply that this notion deals
with specific ideas about the fundamental nature of persons, their origins, destinies, obligations, and characteristics. In his 1938 Huxley lecture, Marcel Mauss (1985) outlined variations in the imaginations of different societies as to how persons are thought about. Mauss pointed particularly to the fact that individual subjective experience is deeply affected by the prominent ways that persons are imagined in different societies (I describe this in greater detail below). He also described how particular ontologies, Christianity in his theoretical case, enshrine particular imaginations of the person in metaphysical reality. For Mauss, the Christian notion of individually culpable spirits was fore-grounded in the development of a strong sense of individual “self” in the West, for example.

By comparison, I want to describe a particular imagining of the person that I found to be important among my Hmong interlocutors in my field site in Thailand. By “ancestral” personhood I mean to denote that this particular imagining of persons not only emphasizes the importance of one’s relationship to one’s ancestors, but anticipates one’s own future as an ancestor as well. In other words, ancestral personhood denotes a particular view of the life course as eternally embedded in kinship-based relationships and hierarchies, which are enacted through ritual and discourse. These relationships continue in very much the same fashion after one’s passing. The important implication for ancestral personhood is how it shapes Hmong subjectivities and imagining about themselves as persons. One’s relationship to one’s ancestors clearly drives ritual behavior, but as I argue, one’s potential as an ancestor is equally important in this type of subjectivity. This is largely because ancestral personhood has profound moral implications and behavioral injunctions that influence the ways people live and the choices they make, as I demonstrate below.
Morality and Personhood

One work that approaches the analysis that I am advocating is Steven Parish’s (1994) *Moral Knowing in a Hindu Sacred City*. Parish seeks to demonstrate the cultural embeddedness and origination of seemingly psychological processes such as ‘moral knowing,’ moral consciousness, and self-concepts. “The Newar sense of self grows out of the cultural and psychological experience of merging with and emerging from the ‘web of relatedness.’” (p.130) Arguing against simplistic ideals of Oriental collectivism and Western individualism, Parish paints a picture of Newars suspended in social relationships into which they merge, later to emerge and subsequently remerge again into this web. In this cultural dialectic he argues that Newars experience a strong personal identity, but one that is strongly oriented toward sociocentric holism. Parish argues that as Newars engage with the web of relatedness, their self-concepts are shaped, and these self-concepts produce “the subtle, powerful, cross-currents of moral consciousness.” (p.187).

While this model explains how Newar ideas of personhood might emerge from their sociality, it is not clear how these precise identities lead to certain types of moral thinking. That is, how do particular types of moral reasoning emanate from particular models of personhood? The strength of Parish’s analysis lies in his analysis of how certain types of selves can be created for Newars. It is apparent that these are moral selves, but collapsing morality with personhood assumes away the very process that I want to interrogate. What is it about certain models of personhood that lead to certain types of moral thinking? Rather than treating them as the same thing, what might we learn about these constructs by analyzing how they shape each other?
Parish approaches this, but not to the extent that I want to take it. In fact, he quotes an ethnotheory of how personhood gives rise to moral thinking (in very general terms), as he describes a key informant’s view on these issues:

In this cultural construction of moral reality, what people do (or should do) is determined by what they are - as material bodies, as persons composed of substances, processes and entities that are both moral and physical in nature. What people are also determines their place in society, since their "nature" fits them for certain social roles and enjoins certain patterns of behavior that fit them into the social order in defined ways; society expresses the ordered relations of different "natural kinds" of persons. (Parish 1994:77)

In my own analysis I want to build on what Parish is citing here as a particular ethnotheory of moral consciousness by actually disentangling these ideas of personhood and morality. In doing so, I want to engage in a more nuanced analysis of how these "moral beings" depend on culturally specific ideas about the nature of persons, as well as how it is that these models of personhood give rise to particular lines of moral thinking.

Before proceeding further, perhaps a few words are in order as to what precisely I mean by “personhood.” In his 1938 Huxley lecture, Marcel Mauss (1985) outlined variations in the imaginations of different societies as to how persons are thought about. While I disagree (along with others, e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2001) with the fundamentally evolutionary bent of Mauss’s outlook, he did point to the fact that individual subjective experience is deeply affected by the prominent ways that persons are imagined in different societies - a point that has been reiterated forcefully more recently (Shweder and Bourne 1984).

Mauss traces the evolution of the concept of the ‘person’ from what he asserts to be its most primitive form as it was used among North American native groups. In this
primitive sense the concept was used more to denote the passage of ancestral essences (among other spiritual entities) through the bodies and beings of mortal incarnations. Importantly, the passing essence was emphasized as coherent, rather than the mortal form it took, and for this Mauss argues that the trajectory of the ‘person’ concept in society took its “original sense,” meaning a ‘mask’ that one wears. He then goes on to describe how in China and India, this idea takes a turn toward the modern sense, in which Buddhists, Hindus, Taoists begin to think about persons as marking individual selves. Ultimately, the Chinese succumb to collectivism, as Mauss argues, and it remains to the Romans to develop the concept further toward its modern sense.

In Roman civilization, the idea of self came to mark proper citizens and endow them (but not all individuals in the realm - certainly not slaves) with legal rights. It is in this point in world history where the "mask" becomes the "wearer," thus fusing the person-as-mask with the self, and therefore concretizing the nature of the individual. However, this meaning yet lacked a metaphysical grounding, which Mauss argues then came from Christianity's contribution to this evolutionary (and teleological) trajectory. In short, individual culpability before God and individual salvation provided the metaphysical cement for the individualized notion of the person, of the self. Western philosophy drove the final nail in the coffin of sociocentrism (as an antithesis to individualism) by emphasizing various issues of self-consciousness. In this most latter sense, the idea of the individual person becomes so fundamental that it is assumed away with ontological force.

Almost two decades after Mauss’s lecture on this topic, Kenneth Read (1955) takes a nearly identical theoretical approach. He also uses this foundation of a Christian universal
concept of persons that is rooted in the West, and he compares it to the “tribal morality” of the Gahuku-Gama. Taking off from Mauss, Read compares the different models of personhood in the West and among the Gahuku-Gama in order to argue that Western universal personhood provides a foundation for universal morality, which the Gahuku-Gama lack. Christian morality starts from the assumption of the morally universal nature of human beings. Everyone is on the same footing with the same ultimate obligations—we will all face God's judgment. Thus, the moral demands on any given person would be the same. For Gahuku-Gama, on the other hand, “men ... are not conceived to be equals in a moral sense” (Read 1955:260). Instead, one’s position within social relationships determines the moral obligations and status of a person. “Stated as sharply as possible, [for the Gahuku-Gama] moral obligations are primarily contingent on the social positioning of individuals” (p.260), and not founded on intrinsically held moral value. In sum, the lack of a universalizing model of persons precludes universalization in Gahuku-Gama moral thinking.

Read theorizes an important way in which specific ideas of personhood (or their lack) lead to specific lines of moral thinking, and he does so in an interesting comparative fashion. However, I would critique his assertion that the Gahuku-Gama apparently non-universalizing sense of personhood leads to a comparative lack of universal moral thinking. In fact, the data he presented do not necessarily support his conclusion.

Read uses as a central example the variability in norms and prohibitions of homicide: it is wrong to kill your brother, but fine to kill a non-clan, non-kin member of a competing tribe. It does not follow from this observation that morality is therefore context-
dependent. One could assert a universal morality to be operating for the Gahuku-Gama, but instead propose an ontology of personhood that only imbues sacred, protected status on certain types of persons (despite the full personhood of those lying outside of this protected status). It may also be the case that Gahuku-Gama hold universal ethics that prescribe certain actions toward particular kin. Gahuku-Gama might also expect morally upstanding members of competing tribes to uphold these principles as well, despite the conflicting goals of each tribe to fulfill such obligations. In other words, it does not follow from “it is okay to kill X, a member of a competing clan” that “X is not a person and no ethic applies to my interaction with them.” It may also be that the particular type of personhood imbued on one’s enemy predisposes one to engage in particular moral acts involving him (i.e., violence that might glorify one’s in-group). Of course, these are empirical questions. Read’s presentation of his data poses an interesting case for understanding the connection between morality and personhood, but it is not apparent from his data that this connection does not exist in important ways for the Gahuku-Gama as he proposes it does for Western Europe.

Ethnographic scholarship on the concept of personhood has perhaps been centered on no other region more than it has on Africa. Meyer Fortes’s (1971) treatment of personhood among the Tallensi is representative of subsequent uses (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2001 as but one example). It is clear that Fortes and subsequent theorists place the notion of personhood as central to other domains of behavior and thought. “To sum up, I would maintain that the notion of the person in the Maussian sense is intrinsic to the very nature and structure of human society and human social behavior everywhere”
(1971:288). However, the Fortesian conception of personhood, which has dominated the scholarship in Africa, focuses on one aspect of personhood - becoming.

Fortes paints a picture of Tallensi personhood as one that starts from scratch and grows in quantity, perhaps to be realized in its full potential, or perhaps not. In fact, full personhood is not attained until it is demonstrated at one's funeral that one was in fact killed by the ancestors, thus marking ones worthiness to become one of the ancestors. An important nuance here, is that what Fortes says these beliefs imply is that "full personhood" is actually realized in the "potential" that one reaches in mortality to eventually become an ancestor. Personhood here is something to be achieved, something that is accumulated or acquired over the course of life. However, one's personhood status can never be directly confirmed until it is divined at the person's funeral that he or she was indeed killed by the ancestors, and therefore has become one of them. Importantly, this is a quantitative conception of personhood. It is a status to be achieved by accruing.

This sense certainly seems to fit well with the ethnographic data Fortes presents on the Tallensi, but I want to widen the concept to be more inclusive of other cultural models of being a person, which may place less emphasis on the central goal of accruing personhood in hopes of eventually attaining it. Rather, in the Hmong ideal of “ancestral personhood” that I describe below, I think it is appropriate to consider the extent to which concepts of personhood represent salient models for identities that may vary qualitatively from group to group or person to person, rather than solely a status that is assumed or accrued. In other words, I want to broaden the concept of personhood to the level of cultural model (see Shore 1996, Chapter 2), rather than limit our understanding of it to
one, culturally specific process (see below).

In all of the sources cited above, it is important to note that the concept of personhood is much further developed than the concepts of ‘morality’ or ‘ethics.’ In fact, more often than not ‘morality’ and ‘personhood’ are compounded on top of one another, which provides less theoretical clarity as to what is meant by either. More recent scholarship that has focused on the moral reasoning side of this equation is quite helpful in parsing out these phenomena and examining their relationship. Richard Shweder and colleagues (Shweder, et al. 1987; Shweder, et al. 2003) have developed a theory of moral reasoning, positing minimalistic ethics that undergird much of moral thinking to varying degrees in different moral frameworks. However, built into their model are related self-concepts that relate to each ethic.

“Presupposed by the ethics of autonomy is a conceptualization of the self as an individual preference structure, where the point of moral regulation is to increase choice and personal liberty. Presupposed by the ethic of community is a conceptualization of the self as an office holder. The basic idea is that one’s role or station in life is intrinsic to one’s identity and is part of a larger interdependent collective enterprise with a history and standing of its own. Presupposed by the ethics of divinity is a conceptualization of the self as a spiritual entity connected to some sacred or natural order of things, and as a responsible bearer of a legacy that is elevated and divine” (Shweder, et al. 2003:99).

As noted here, these assertions are more theoretical presuppositions that are built into Shweder et al.’s conceptualization of moral reasoning. Their emphasis is on the implications of their model for critiquing universalistic notions of moral development in psychology (Shweder, et al. 1987), as well as the implications for this model and the various causal ontologies of suffering (Shweder, et al. 2003). Again, I want to call more attention to both a theoretical as well as empirical treatment of precisely how different
models of the self or person lead to particular types of moral thinking. In order to do so, I will describe the Hmong cultural model of ‘ancestral personhood,’ and show how this cultural model drives the moral discourse of people in different ways.

**What is Ancestral Personhood?**

Ancestral personhood is a type of subjectivity that is constantly reinforced through rituals that mark the passing of time and unique occurrences in family life. It constitutes an essential dimension for how Hmong conceive of themselves as persons and think about their eternal life course. It also has significant implications for how Hmong men and women conceive of and enact social relationships. I will begin by briefly sketching out what I mean by ancestral personhood. I will then describe how this model is marked, expressed, and instantiated through ritual practice, with particular attention to the assumptions of ancestral personhood built into ritual performance. I will then analyze some moral discourse from Hmong in Thailand and the United States and demonstrate how ancestral personhood leads to particular lines of moral discourse.

I disagree with Mauss’s (1985) assertion that the whole of human history has been working toward a more individualistic conception of the self. Shweder and Bourne (1984) critiqued this “evolutionism” with regards to analyzing cultural variation in the concept of the person. Rather, they argue that these variations are contemporary and equally rational, albeit distinct conceptualizations. Mauss’s framework falls squarely within Shweder and Bourne’s critique. It appears that Read’s analysis of Gahuku-Gama moral being (or the lack thereof) does to some degree as well. I distinguish the concept of ancestral personhood from any attempt to place person concepts in a conceptual or evolutionary hierarchy, and
instead focus on qualitative differences in the models of personhood for different groups of people.

This seems to be what Fortes was doing with the Tallensi. However, I would also distinguish ancestral personhood from Fortes’s (1971) emphasis on “accumulation” for the Tallensi or Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2001) emphasis on “becoming” for the Tswana. What I mean is that Fortes (and Comaroff and Comaroff) presents personhood as a status that is gradually sought after in one’s life. Personhood is the status of having become an ancestor, and this status (or at least its expectation) is accrued throughout one’s life as one does the proper things to mark their own achievement of personhood.

By comparison, I want to describe a particular imagining of the person that I found to be important among my Hmong interlocutors in my field site in Thailand. By “ancestral” personhood I mean to denote that this particular imagining of persons not only emphasizes the importance of one’s relationship to one’s ancestors, but anticipates one’s own future as an ancestor as well (although in different terms than the Tallensi). In other words, ancestral personhood denotes a particular view of the life course as eternally embedded in kinship-based relationships and hierarchies, which are enacted through ritual and discourse. These relationships continue in very much the same fashion after one’s passing. The important implication for ancestral personhood is how it shapes Hmong subjectivities and imagining about themselves as persons. One’s relationship to one’s ancestors clearly drives ritual behavior, but as I argue, one’s future as an ancestor is equally important in this type of subjectivity. That is, as Hmong imagine themselves as future ancestors and as they construe kinship relationships and interactions to continue after the death of some
members, their conceptions of themselves are extended beyond that proposed by these other models. Ancestral personhood has profound moral implications and behavioral injunctions that influence the ways people live and the choices they make both as descendants and future ancestors.

This notion of ancestral personhood that I am describing for the Hmong is quite distinct from Fortes’s ideas about personhood. Ancestral personhood is more of a cultural model of the self and its eternal life course than an end to be achieved in one’s life. One might call the process described by Fortes, “achieving ancestorhood.” Instead, I am referring to the extent to which Hmong in fact come to see themselves as ancestors incarnate (or, more appropriately, in spiritu), or at least as inevitable future ancestors in the incipient stages of becoming. The key difference here is that a Fortesian concept of personhood may or may not be achieved, whereas Hmong ancestral personhood is more of a mode of thinking that Hmong come to adopt about themselves. It is an identity and a lens through which one comes to view social relationships. Hmong do not “strive” to become ancestors, they come to adopt the view that, inevitably in the life course, they will become ancestors. I argue that this changes the way that they see themselves, and in turn changes their moral thinking as well. Thus, my base concept of “personhood” is broader than Fortes’s, which I argue is but one culturally specific model of personhood (a Tallensi one) within a wider scope of possible conceptualizations of personhood. ‘Ancestral personhood’ is the Hmong-specific incarnation of this concept that I wish to employ in my analysis.

That being said, there are also some striking similarities that I draw from Fortes in his description of ancestral religious systems. These similarities come particularly in the
ways he describes filial piety to be a defining element of ancestral veneration (Fortes 1961). Filial piety is also a fundamental and defining characteristic of the Hmong model of ancestral personhood. Fortes defines the concept thus, “Filial piety is a parent’s unquestioned and inalienable right because he begot you—or, in the mother’s case, she bore you” (1961:174). This description is quite apposite in light of Hmong responses to the first vignette presented to participants in the portion of this project summarized in Chapter 5 (and summarized in the subsequent moral discourse in this chapter, see below and in the examples of Community discourse listed in Appendix F). The most frequent cluster of responses to this vignette involved a host of concepts that I would summarize as reinforcing the natural order of parenthood and childhood. The first and most fundamental sacrifice of parents giving birth, let alone raising a child, was commonly asserted to be the most fundamental reason that merits a child’s undying loyalty toward their parents. As with Fortes’s description, filial piety for my Hmong interlocutors tended most often to supersede any moral transgression of the parent. In this way it was commonly conceived as a most fundamental and natural obligation.

Although Fortes’s description of Tallensi ancestorhood seems much more tenuous for any given Tallensi person, a similarity between Hmong and Tallensi exists in the fact that filial piety undergirds one’s orientation to both living kin and ancestors. In both cases, it is clear that the filial obligations extend beyond death and are quite similar in quality, despite the apparent barrier of death. Fortes argues that, for Tallensi who do achieve personhood, they remain “part and parcel of the everyday life of their descendants” (1961:184). In a similar fashion, I found interactions with ancestors to be a regular
consideration in the lives of Hmong in both Thailand and the United States. Several close friends described to me at various points their intense personal encounters with ancestors. Importantly, these extend beyond the regular ritual interactions described below. In one case, for example, a paternal uncle visited a middle-aged woman in her sleep. She described the intense and frightful experience as she was paralyzed from moving and not able to breathe for a period of time. She explained that the spirit of her uncle was sitting on her chest as she slept, perhaps in order to get her attention. She eventually woke from the frightful experience, and later described to me that this particular uncle died in the jungle as their family was fleeing from Laos to Thailand. Given the perilous circumstances of refugee flight, they were not able to provide a proper funeral for him. The result is that he was never properly guided to the ancestral village, and was not provided for (i.e., with food, clothes, and money) as ancestors typically are. This nocturnal visit was apparently designed to remind her of his needs, and to suggest some offerings. Interestingly, she did not seem to resent in any way the nature of the encounter, despite the fact that she described it as a near-death experience. Rather, she focused on the poor plight of her errant uncle, his sad situation in the afterlife, and the filial obligation to provide for him.

Beyond this example, the relative health of family members is one of the most common indices for Hmong to gage the welfare of their close ancestors and to problem-solve any issues that might exist with them. Some illnesses and patterns of illness are commonly understood to communicate particular needs of ancestors. These patterns have shifted in the United States and Thailand to some degree, but the importance of understanding health and illness in the light of ancestral interactions remains, as I have
documented elsewhere (Hickman 2007). The important point is that one’s relationship with one’s ancestors matters in a very real sense. Filial obligation towards ancestors affects one’s health and general prosperity, and Hmong that I interviewed about these concepts tended to care deeply and emotionally about the real welfare of their ancestors.

The reality of the ancestors and mortal interactions with them is also reinforced by existence of a number of rituals where these interactions become public. This public dimension, however, does not in my estimation diminish the personal interpretations and realism contained therein. An example might be the tso plig ceremony, where the soul of an ancestor is released months after their funeral. This differs from the ua nyuj dab ceremony described below in that it is performed comparatively soon after the person’s passing. I observed the tso plig ceremony for General Vang Pao, which was carried out in St. Paul, Minnesota four months after his funeral rites. While a full explanation of his funeral rites, tso plig ceremony, and the cultural and historical significance of these events must be explicated elsewhere, it is sufficient to note that the interactions at this three-day ceremony were very personal and very real for the participants. Rather than constituting a symbolic manifestation of their appreciation or grief at the passing of General Vang Pao, the entire performance denoted the realism of his spiritual return, his descendants obligations to him, and his ability to provide particular blessing for his descendants. The unique character of this particular tso plig ceremony is that Vang Pao was frequently referred to as an ancestor for all Hmong, given his political standing.

When his spirit was first invited back to the presence of the ritual attendees, a large parade and procession were organized to greet him, similar to those performed during his
life. Military personnel and former Special Guerrila Unit (SGU) soldiers lined up and saluted him as his spirit passed (residing in a small effigy and spirit-house for the duration of the ceremony). A military color guard and a large group of Hmong youth (perhaps forty or fifty), dressed in traditional Hmong clothes and playing a traditional reed instrument, the qeej, led the procession. All attendees were ushered into line to show their respect for the general as his spirit was to the hall where the rituals would take place for three days. A military band and honor guard also constituted important elements as he was welcomed back for the ceremony.

Beyond the importance of this procession, the ways in which family members, friends, and fellow soldiers directed their speech to him indicated a very real understanding of his presence. In fact, it was interesting for me to note the differences between many of the Americans that delivered speeches during the event (e.g., former CIA and military personnel, as well as local political officials), who spoke as if he were present, while Hmong relatives and close friends actually spoke to him, assuming his actual presence. Accompanied with the intense expression of emotion at times, and the personalized communication, it was clear to me that Vang Pao was not being spoken to in any symbolic sense, but rather in a very direct sense. The discursive reality of these interactions provides strong evidence to the realism of ancestral personhood.

It is important to note that the Hmong repertoire of ancestral rituals is quite similar in many regards to those practiced by Chinese. Baker (1979) and Hsu (1971) lay out kinship practices and ancestral rites that in many cases directly resemble those that I and others have documented among Hmong in Southeast Asia. In Hsu’s classic ethnography, he
describes the extent to which Chinese in West Town rely on geomantic principles in burial ritual to maximize the prosperity that will emanate from an ancestor. Hmong in Thailand and the United States still care deeply about this practice, although they often lament its decreasing prevalence as older and more knowledgeable geomantic practitioners pass away without successors to carry on the knowledge. Hsu further describes the ancestral temples and family burial grounds that provide important spaces for ancestral veneration in West Town, documenting how these provide important sites for ancestral rites similar to those carried out by Hmong in the calendar of ritual ancestral veneration. In both cases, “feeding the ancestors” is core to these ritual interactions. Baker also notes that the interdependence of ancestors and living kin cuts both directions. That is, kin who fail to care for their ancestors are likely to suffer bad fortune and even sickness and death. Likewise, ancestors who fail to receive proper rites are expected to become errant ghosts, the beggars of the afterlife. This portrayal closely resembles the example of the uncle described above, as well as a common Hmong understanding of ancestors.

Despite these commonalities in actual ritual practice, it is unclear from these accounts how important one’s orientation towards one ancestors is in light of day-to-day psychocultural function. In other words, it is clear that there are ritualistic similarities between Hmong, Chinese, and even Tallensi when it comes to ancestral veneration, but I want to call particular attention to the psychocultural effects of these practices for Hmong. It may or may not be the case that these rituals are merely symbolic for other groups. In many cases this psychocultural connection is not addressed directly. In seeking to establish and analyze the connection between personhood and moral ideation, however, I want to
call direct attention to the implications for this type of ancestral practice on the actual subjectivities of the practitioners. We might surmise from a Foucauldian (Foucault 1988) or practice theory (Bourdieu 1977) perspective that these practices have implications for the developing habitus of Hmong who engage in them, but I want to actually analyze this relationship in a way that is scarcely addressed in the literature on ancestral veneration. In so doing, I want to call attention to the way that Hmong come to imagine themselves as particular types of persons (i.e., future ancestors and children of future ancestors) through the ritual enactment, and how this, in turn, predisposes them to particular types of moral thinking.

**Ancestral Personhood as a Cultural Model**

It is essential to note that I conceptualize ancestral personhood as a cultural model, in the general terms that many contemporary psychological anthropologists theorize (D'Andrade 1993; D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Shore 1996). While the debates surrounding cultural models within culture theory are beyond the scope of this essay, suffice it to note that I am using the term in a similar vein to Roy D'Andrade:

“A cultural model is a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group. Because cultural models are intersubjectively shared, interpretations made about the world on the basis of a cultural model are experienced as obvious facts of the world... A further consequence of the intersubjectivity of cultural models is that much of the information relevant to a cultural model need not be made explicit, because what is obvious need not be stated” (D’Andrade 1993:809).

As Bradd Shore (1996) points out, the concept of cultural models does not necessitate a one-to-one correspondence between the idiosyncratically held cognitive schema and the model in its modal manifestation within a group. It also does not
necessitate the oft-critiqued assumptions that cultural models are homogenous, bounded, or static cultural goods of a past era of anthropological theory. It is quite important to document variations in the idiosyncratic manifestations of important cultural models. I argue that ancestral personhood is one of these important cultural models in a Hmong cultural context, and that one must consider the variety of individual interpretations of this model. I take up this variation and the various subjectivation processes that lead to significant variations in the instantiation of this model in later chapters. For the current purposes, however, I focus on the importance of ancestral personhood as a cultural model for understanding the moral discourses of people that ascribe to it (notwithstanding idiosyncrasies in their conceptions of the model). Even despite this variation, it is clear that the ways in which individuals hold these models and operate from them assume a greater intersubjective unity than can be warranted from an empirical analysis of their many idiosyncratic manifestations. In other words, people tend to essentialize their own worldviews and operate from that essentializing mode of thinking. This point is one that merits further argument in contemporary culture theory and debates, but is beyond the scope of my current objective. Suffice it to say that I seek to pay significant attention to both the collectively held cultural models that people experience as an intersubjective reality—in this case ancestral personhood as a way of thinking about the life course—while also paying attention to important idiosyncratic challenges to these models. In fact, this tension is at the heart of my person-centered approach to these problems (Levy and Hollan 1998), which becomes more clear in my analyses of moral discourse in Chapters 4 and 5. For now I turn to some of the ways in which ancestral personhood is instantiated through
ritual practice.

**Ancestral Personhood in Ritual Practice**

The pace of the year in Ban Txaum is largely dictated by the agricultural cycle and the demands of rice and cash-crop farming. The ritual life of families in part coincides with this schedule, and this ritual dimension of life consumes a great deal of time and resources by those who participate. Hmong ritual practices are key in the instantiation of this type of subjectivity that I am calling ‘ancestral personhood.’

**Ua Nyuj Dab: Conceptualizing Ancestors**

The “ua nyuj dab” ceremony is a particularly poignant practice that really emphasizes central assumptions of this model. The name of this ritual can be translated as “to perform the spirit rite of a cow.” This ceremony is designed to provide material care for one’s deceased parents and grandparents a number of years (colloquially ‘120 years,’ or “ib puas nees nkaum xyoo”) after their passing. I observed it happening three or four decades after the passing of the couple to whom the rite was directed. Sometimes the appropriate time is simply divined by the descendants, and in other instances a person got sick or otherwise received a cue from the deceased that it was now the time to perform the rite.

When the appropriate day was chosen, Siv Yim and his relatives purchased a large ox, a large pig, and all of the other necessary materials. The “nyuj dab” rite was composed of several phases, lasting about a day and a half. The night preceding the sacrificial offerings, Siv Yim’s uncle, a shaman named Tsav Foom, came to his home to begin the

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3 Many people have told me, for example, that one major reason for conversion to Christianity was the relief from the burdens of animistic ritual.
process by inviting the great uncle and aunt to come spend the night in Siv Yim’s home. Tsav Foom’s shamanic portion of the ceremony lasted about 3 hours, beginning shortly after dark. He described to me precisely what his role was and how he accomplished it. Upon entering his shamanic trance, Tsav Foom followed the direction of his tutelary spirit to track down the deceased relatives’ home. The bench on which he sometimes jumped and sometimes sat bouncing serves as a horse to guide him on his journey.

Figure 2: Set of clothing to house the ancestors during Ua Nyuj Dab ritual (photo by author)

Tsav Foom explained that this process is not an easy one, since it is difficult to find a place you have never been before. He described how you must go in a direction, ask local spirits for relevant information, describe the person you are looking for, and thereby find directions to their village and home. “There are many roads [in the spiritual domain,]” he said, “not just one. You have to try this one and this one and this one. There are many roads.” Once he found the relatives in question, Tsav Foom explained to them that they wanted to offer an offering and hold a feast in their honor. He then proceeded to guide their spirits back to Siv Yim’s home as a personal escort. Tsav Foom guided their spirits to two
sets of clothing - one male and one female (see Figure 2), where their spirits would reside for the rest of the ceremony. They were formally invited to spend the night with Siv Yim and his family, and to rest for the ceremonies to be performed the next day.

The following day, nearly all members of Siv Yim’s patrilineage took a day off from their fields to come to his home to help carry out the work necessary for the ritual. While the deceased were not their direct ancestry, the fact that the feast was in the honor of their great uncle made the ceremony nearly equally important in weight to their own sublineage. The two central offerings of the day would be one pig and one ox, but these were interspersed with smaller offerings of a boiled egg, water, rice, and alcohol. Siv Yim’s cousin reinforced the fundamental parallels here to offerings to other living humans. When I asked why they offer alcohol during the ceremony, he responded:

"cawv no- ib yam li yus ua tus dab tuaj, ua tus dab- hu tus dab tuaj, mas yuav tsum muaj cawv rau tus dab haus. Ib yam- ib yam li yus ua neeg nyob, lawv kom yus tuaj haus cawv. Yus tuaj ces lawv muaj cawv yus haus, xwb. lawv muaj cawv yus haus, muaj mov yus noj."  

"this alcohol... it’s the same as, if you make the spirit come, then one must give alcohol to the spirit to drink. It’s the same as... It’s the same as for living people, they invite one over to drink. If you visit them, they have to give you alcohol to drink... they give you alcohol to drink and rice [food] to eat."

The pig was offered earlier in the day, as an early meal or preliminary feast for the two celebrated ancestors. Following the slaughter of the animal, the spirit was directed to the ancestors to remain in their keep for sustenance in the ancestral village. The animal’s physical body was then butchered and cooked, and the preliminary feast was held for the ancestors of honor and several other deceased ancestors that also attended.
During this performance of ritualized food offerings to the ancestors, the orientations of space, the oratory engaged by the actors, and the general form of the meal mirrored those engaged in honorary banquets for living kin at other times during my fieldwork. Several of the younger clansmen demonstrated a particular interest in the performance and form of the ritual, including its specific orations. I interviewed two of the younger men (in their thirties) regarding the rituals, and they explained that it was important to them to study the oration and motions of the ritual. They both knew that eventually they will be responsible for knowing and reproducing these lineage-specific rites, and they considered themselves understudies of sorts for the performance. The fact that the lineage-specific ritual knowledge would disappear with their fathers if they did not take the time to learn was a very concerning threat, and for this reason they spent a good portion of the rituals hunched over their fathers’ shoulders, listening closely to the orations and the motions involved in directing the offerings to the ancestors present at the meal.

The preliminary offering and early feast of the pig was followed by an escort to a small model house, located outside of Siv Yim’s home, close to where the ox would soon be offered to the ancestors. A string was tied from the ox to the clothes where the ancestral spirits reside, and the ox was sacrificed and cooked, followed by a parallel feast for the ancestral spirits, in the same fashion as the one for the pig. After the feast, the ancestors were put into a small model home and offered burnt money and a final drink of alcohol. After this final rite, Siv Yim’s living relatives sat down to eat an extensive meal of the sacrificed meat. After the meal, the performers of the different parts of the ceremony thanked one another and the family officially accepted the performance. Later that evening,
Tsav Foom performed the shamanic duty of guiding the ancestors back to their ancestral village. This time his trance lasted less than an hour, since he was no longer searching for the ancestors but accompanied by them. He obviously already knew the route back, having travelled it the night prior.

As participants see their elders interact with their deceased ancestors, their continuing personhood is marked and played out, and the fact that they continue to interact with living descendants is reinforced. One could also point to the myriad of ways that ancestors can affect the health of their descendants and the other ritual practices that mark this interaction and seek to restore health through ancestral offerings (Hickman 2007). These are powerful ideas for many who participate in these rites, and I argue that their personal conceptions of themselves are duly shaped by these ritual interactions. In other words, one’s own future as an ancestor is anticipated and embodied in the performance.

Ancestral personhood is further instantiated in the common practice of daughters-in-law crafting a more-or-less ritualized set of clothing for their husbands’ fathers when he advances in age. Importantly, this ritually bestowed set of clothes is never to be worn in life, but is given as a token of deep respect and admiration, as a gift for the father’s use in his post-mortal journey. The clothes are to be buried with him, but they are presented to him personally in the later stages of his life as a token. This preparation presupposes the extending relationships through which wants and needs of ancestors are to be fulfilled by living descendants. These needs will eventually be communicated to living descendants through dreams, spiritual manifestations, and even bouts of illness, which are sometimes
taken as meaningful communication that deceased ancestors are in want of food or resources in the spiritual realm. Again, the continuity of interaction with dead ancestors is anticipated while all parties are still alive.

The relationality represented in this “nyuj dab” ritual firmly parallels the relationality between living kin. The hierarchical aspect is certainly present, but in a very same fashion as the hierarchical relationships among living kin. For example, the ancestors eat first, as do the older males in a typical post-ritual feast. The host directed the meal to them in a similar oratory fashion as he might have for a living guest of honor. The use of a split bamboo stick to divine communication from the ancestors to the orator mimics the symbiotic communication with living relatives, as questions are posed and answers given by how the sticks fall. In this way, the orator divines how the ancestor feels about the offering, the meal, their willingness to afford blessings to the present descendants, etc.

What I want to draw attention to here is that the qualitative similarities here presume that one’s relationality to these ancestors, whom the older living kin knew personally, continues beyond death. Their interactions with these deceased ancestors are carried out more as if they had moved to a far away village, and had come back after a long time away to enjoy the company of relatives, receive gifts, have a few drinks, stay a night, and then return. The personhood of these ancestors extends beyond their physical life as they continue to interact with their descendants and kin after death - even participating in conversation through the ritual enactment. This fact reinforces the reality that living kin will eventually receive similar rituals and offerings from their descendants, thus further instantiating the conception of the self as an ancestor-in-embryo.
Ritual Orientations

This is a powerful idea for many who participate in this ritual, and I argue that their subjectivities are duly shaped by these ritual interactions. However, I must limit my argument in one respect, and that is to say that the subjectivation process I describe here is likely much stronger for those engaging more directly in the ritual process, as well as those younger men who feel the burden to learn the lineage-specific rites to carry this ritual forward to future generations. To illustrate, I compare the following comments on a Hmong online forum, in which the originator of the thread wants to start a discussion about the specificities of the “nyuj dab” ritual. The poster, screen name “missbeautiful” says:

Nyuj Dab...

Have your parents done this for your grandparents? Do you know how it all begins? What needs to be done in order to send the nyuj to our loved ones? My dad was talking to my uncle’s son the other day. The fact that my uncle has been getting weaker by the day, my uncle’s son want’s to ua neeb for my uncle. However, my dad mentioned that my uncle had always put off the Nyuj Dab and never did it. My uncle had always said, “thaum twg, lawv tuaj noog tsov mam li ua, yog tis tuaj ces tsum (i’ll wait for them to come and ask for it, otherwise I don’t care for it yet).” My dad told my uncle’s son, for him to mention to his father (my uncle) that he needs to do that, because I think that grandma&grandpa is probably wanting it by now, and even if we ua neeb, he probably wont gain his strength. So the theory goes..... you need to ua nyuj dab :). (sic) (see Figure 3)
In response, “SweetSmile” indicates that she knows about the ritual, but her place in it seems to leave little effect on her subjectivity, at least with regards to ancestral personhood:

i can’t answer your question..
but all i know is that..
i wake up extra early just to get everything ready.. (sic) (see Figure 4)

Similarly, “Dollface” responds to the original post:

My family have done it to my great uncle and my grandma. Yups. Its just like any other Hmong parties to me, cause I just help clean do those girl stuff. I don’t know what’s really going on.. Except, I watch the interesting parts, where they do those... come to the door, dada, yups. Its really interesting and nice. (sic) (see Figure 5)
In sum, one’s engagement with this ritual process seems powerful for those directly involved, but it is easy to see how various degrees of involvement or distinct orientations toward the ritual itself have varying implications for the instantiation of ancestral personhood. These comments represent at least a part of the spectrum of varying orientations toward ancestral personhood among the younger generation.

Gender

One obvious caveat in this analysis is the category of gender. Upon reading these comments to an online forum regarding the ua nyuj dab ceremony, one might respond that the gender-based division of labor in ritual performance leads to a particular gendering of the outcomes of that performance—in the present analysis the outcome of ancestral personification. However, I would caution against an essentialism of gender in this respect. In fact, it is quite important to note that the original poster on this forum is presumably female (i.e., screen name, “missbeautiful”). While she is posing a question about the ceremony and some of the more minute details, she does so while actually performing her knowledge of that ritual. She initiates a discussion on the topic, and then endorses it as a necessary ritual performance for one’s ancestors: “so the theory goes... you need to ua nyuj dab.” It almost appears as if she created this post for the purpose of performing her knowledge of the ritual, rather than seeking information about it.

I think that there are certainly trends of gender and sexualized divisions of labor that will lead to practically distinct orientations toward ritual performance in Hmong communities throughout the diaspora. However, I would also caution against over-simplifying these gendered trends or placing too much weight on them. In fact, shifting
gender relations in Western resettlement locations such as the United States has opened up a space for women to become cultural experts of sorts (“xwb fwb”). While it is not necessarily common to see women training others formally in Hmong ritual performance, in my fieldwork among Hmong in the United States I have known a number of particularly younger women who take the initiative to learn about “traditional” Hmong cultural practice in order to pass down those teachings to either posterity or pupils. Some of these women have been teachers or university professors.

Let me be clear that I am not arguing that gender differences with regards to ritual practice and subjectivity do not exist or are not meaningful in Hmong society or with particular regards to the socialization of ancestral personhood. I am rather arguing that these differences do not seem to fall along the lines of a strict division between men becoming more socialized into this phenomenon and women less so. In fact, I have collected many observations during my fieldwork to support a more idiosyncratic understanding wherein wives can become significantly more knowledgeable about Hmong tradition than their husbands. In many of these cases, what seems to matter is the diligence of parents in spending significant amounts of time explaining their ritual practice to their children. For example, the wife of one young family in Ban T xuam (both parents were in their early thirties and they had two young daughters, aged three and seven) whom I came to know quite well often had to correct her husband when I would ask him questions about some rituals. She also knew the Hmong orthography quite well, while her husband did not. She seemed to take a distinct interested in learning about Hmong rituals while she was younger, and her father was known for his mastery of several domains of Hmong ritual
Similarly, one of the young, recently married couples that I interviewed in Twin Cities had a similar dynamic. The young husband was more or less ambivalent about traditional Hmong culture. He would participate in the rituals when directed by his father or other relatives, but explained that he would not seek them out for his own family. His wife joined in the interview to explain that they would indeed be doing the traditional rituals for their family, and he ultimately conceded. As the wife was pregnant with their first child when I interviewed them, I asked whether they planned to do a soul-calling ceremony (see Symonds 2004 for an example of this "hu plig" ceremony) when the child was born. I also asked him if he knew why this and other rituals would need to be performed, and what their effect would be. He ultimately turned to his wife, who explained the ontological basis of the rituals and why she cared so deeply about carrying them out in her family. She had learned about ancestral and animistic ritual practices from her father in her youth. In sum, the wife was much more knowledgeable and adamant about performing these traditional rituals as they establish their family. I could add to these many other cases of young Hmong women in the United States and elsewhere who actively sought knowledge of Hmong history and ritual practice that has not traditionally been sought to large degrees by Hmong women.

It is possible that an enhanced degree of traditionalism is combining with an ethos of gender equality in both the United States and Thailand to encourage young women to aspire to domains of cultural practice that have traditionally been much more male dominated. Another point to be made here, however, fights against some strains of feminist
thought that might argue that any form of patriarchal social structure is inherently counterproductive to women’s interests (Ortner 1974). Rather, I would argue that in some real senses, many Hmong women that I have worked with value the patriarchal and hierarchal dimensions of their “traditional culture” (as they frame it), and they seek to defend this against deterioration or intergenerational decay. I think that the many young women actively seeking training in Hmong traditional ritual is an artifact of this.

Others have written about the extent to which women actively defend what might seem from the outside to be an oppressive, patriarchal cultural system (Mahmood 2004; Menon and Shweder 1998). I do not want to downplay the real oppression that women can experience in this patriarchal system, such as the effects of a gendered double-standard for chastity in marriage. Ultimately, a more nuanced look at the gendered dimensions of psychocultural life in the diaspora would be a worthy endeavor in itself. For present I want to draw attention to the oft-overlooked point that in many cases these women do engage in cultural work to maintain an admittedly patriarchal system, but one that they deeply value. Many of the women I interviewed are deeply concerned with the welfare of their ancestors, and actively support the patriarchal ritual structures through which ancestors are supported. They also tend to emphasize the essential place and role that women play in these systems. For the young women mentioned above, many of them express desires to understand the philosophy behind the ritual practice without asserting a desire to carry out the rituals. Rather, the emphasis is on preserving traditional knowledge for its own sake and in order to propagate it for the next generation. In many families it appears that if these women were not so proactive in doing so, then this knowledge might be lost in a
generation if left to rely purely on their husbands’ shoulders. I will address some other
gender differences and similarities in my analyses of moral discourse in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Moral Discourse and Ancestral Personhood**

In order to shed more light on this process and its outcomes, I now turn to the moral
discourse that I elicited through semi-structured interviews in my field site. Ancestral
personhood naturally lends itself to particular types of moral thinking. This point has been
made more generally by Marcel Mauss (1985), Kenneth Read (1955), and Richard Shweder
and colleagues (1987; 2003). That is to say that the ontological assumptions about the
nature of persons factor heavily into the moral obligations, duties, and reasoning of people
where these assumptions are made.

In this vein, then, I want to share some discursive evidence of how ancestral
personhood leads to particular moral ideation, and discuss how this varied across
generations with the families that I interviewed. I will focus here on data gathered using a
moral discourse elicitation method, adapted from Shweder and colleagues. This method
involves the presentation of hypothetical vignettes, followed by a series of probes designed
to get interlocutors to evaluate the vignette and defend their moral stance. The larger
comparative framework of my dissertation looks at responses to six such vignettes in 18
families in my field site - all of whom resettled to Thailand from Laos following the war.
This larger project also includes the relatives of each family that resettled in the United

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4 In this chapter I emphasize a more discourse-oriented analysis of this interview data in
order to draw out some of the lines of thinking relevant to ancestral personhood and moral
reasoning. For a more systematic treatment of the larger trends of these types of discourses
and how they vary between groups, see Chapters 4 and 5.
States, resulting in a controlled comparison of the two sites of relocation. I interviewed a parent and child in each family, but here I only have time to comment on the discourse of one father and one child on a single vignette in order to make my point.

Txawj Pheej, aged 48, and his son, Pov, 21, live together in a typical patrilocal residence pattern. Both are married with children, and practice subsistence rice agriculture supplemented by petty labor. Importantly, Txawj Pheej is a shaman, and both him and Pov identify strongly as practicing traditional Hmong shamanism, although Txawj Pheej has expressed sympathies for some incipient millenarian ethnonationalist religious movements in the community and beyond. The first vignette that I presented to them, in separate interviews, goes as follows:

Muaj ib tug tub thiab nws li txiv, nkawv nyob ib lub zog. Lwm hnub tus txiv ua kev txhaum loj heev, thiaj li poob suav npe heev, ua kom tus tub txaj muag tshaj. Tux tub xaiy mus nyob ib lus zos tshiab, thiab nws xaiy pauv npe thiab pauv lub xeem, ua kom tsis muaj leej twg pauv nws yog leej twg li tub. Tus tub tsis leej nws niam txiv li ntawv, puas txhaum? A father and son lived together in their village. One day, the father committed a serious moral transgression that made him lose face, and the son became very embarrassed. The son decided to move to another village, and he changed both his given name and his clan name, so no one would know whose son he is. Is a son that does this wrong?

It is important to note in presenting this vignette that Hmong commonly change given names. This can occur for a number of reasons, but changing one’s surname is all but
unheard of. Clan identification—marked by one’s surname—is a primary marker of identity, and one of the first points of introduction for previously unacquainted people. I only documented one case of changing clan affiliation in my field site. In this case, a mother and son were abandoned by the son’s biological father and patrilineal kin. The mother married another man and her son adopted his new father’s surname. In sum, surname change is rare and generally only seen as acceptable when one has no kin of the birth clan with whom to affiliate. Orphans fall into this category and are seen as acceptable in changing their clan affiliation, as long as they are not survived by any significant patrilineal kin.

_Father on Vignette 1_

This fact becomes more apparent from Txawj Pheej’s reaction to this vignette, and it demonstrates an important point about the model of ancestral personhood. In response to this vignette, Txawj Pheej initially asserted that the son is not wrong in fleeing to another village, but upon clarification, he says it is indeed wrong not to own up to one’s true parents and clan, but the mere act of fleeing is not necessarily wrong. He clarifies by emphasizing that one must “lees” (admit or confess) one’s true parentage, stressing that this knowledge is essential for one to “accept the knowledge that it is your mother and father that gave birth to you” (yus yuav tsum uas txais paub hairs tias yog yus niam yus txiv yug yus na). Txawj Pheej’s assertion about the natural order of parenthood indexes how this must play into one’s identity. The word “lees” connotes to admit or confess, in this case

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5 There are eighteen most commonly found clan names among Hmong in Thailand, Laos, and the United States, but this number would increase substantially if one were to include clan names in China and Vietnam.
to confess one’s parents and patrilineal kin in relation to oneself. I asked if there is any sense in which Hmong practice surname- or clan-changing. He replied that there was, but that this extreme case requires all of the patrilineal kin to be gone - either dead or completely severed from the person, such that the person who changes clans “is the only one left” (tshuav nws ib leeg xwb). In this explanation, he reinforces the notion that one is bound to the clan or kin group as a primary identity-affiliation. Importantly, he concludes by saying that taking up an ad-hoc affiliation with another clan is the common response to situations such as that of an orphan, which actually reaffirms the natural order. This adaptation merely constitutes the closest approximation to the natural order, given the circumstances.

Txawj Pheej goes on to further explain that the obligation to identify with one’s parents is so strong that it outweighs any personal concerns or feelings of shame that may have resulted from the parents’ actions. When asked what advice he might have for a relative who is in the situation of the young man in the vignette, he responded:

P: Kuv yuav hais rau nws hais tias cov covy nias kov niaw kov txiv yuav kov nav mas kov yuav tsum lav lees paub lawv yuav tsum qhia nws na mas nws chim me me xwb yom nws chim me me xwb mas yog hais rau nws nws kuj yuav tsum yuav niaw txiv lawm thibav nws txaj muag me me xwb ne yom.

P: I would say to him that those people over there are his mother and father that gave birth to him! (emphatic intonation) You have to just admit/confess knowing them [even though you don’t want to]. [I would] have to tell him that, maybe he is just a little mad, just a little mad, then say to him that he has to accept his mother and father also, he is only a little ashamed.
The implication here is that, even though the son is presented as very ashamed in the vignette, Txawj Pheej positions this level of shame as less weighty as compared to the supposedly heavier obligation to one’s parents. Filial piety dominates personal shame or suffering. The relationships of these values as demonstrated here obviously places importance on the psychological suffering of the son, but the sheer consequence of filial piety outweighs this burden. What’s more, Txawj Pheej further delineates the reasons for this importance:

P: Kev txaj muag keb poob suab npe no mas tsis npaum li qhov uas yus niam yus txiv yug yus txoj moov mas zoo tshaj nav.

P: Shame or losing face is not as heavy as the fortune of one’s mother and father that gave birth to you, which is more important.

I asked a series of clarification questions, to see what Txawj Pheej meant by the fate or fortune of one’s parents. He went on to describe how when one accepts one’s parents, one’s parents will mediate the fortune or luck to be sent from the heavens, as well as send this form of fortune or fate themselves. He succinctly states that:

P: Yus hwm niam txiv lawv mas yuav tsum muaj txoj hmoov hov ntawm lub ntuj los muaj txoj hmoov ntawm niam txiv poj koob yawm txiv hais tias nws yog ib tug neeg zoo... Yog ib tug neeg zoo mas yus ua dab tsi thiaj zoo.

P: If one respects one’s mother and father, then one must have good fortune from heaven, or one will have good fortune from parents and ancestors because he or she is a good person... If you are a good person then you can do anything.

Txawj Pheej’s reaction to this vignette is integral to what I mean by the notion of ‘ancestral personhood.’ As described earlier, this idea includes a conception of the life
course that extends beyond one’s physical death, and in which ancestors are integral to the daily lives of living descendants. For living descendants, ancestors are pivotal in the shaping of one’s identity, nature, fate, and fortune. Living parents are equivalent to not-yet-deceased ancestors, and these relationships essentially endure death. In other words, the qualitative similarities between one’s relationship with different categories of elder kin—both living and deceased—run deep. Indeed, ritual practice at the later stages of life even anticipate this continuing relationship, such as the act of presenting one’s father-in-law with clothes for his post-mortal sojourn as described above.

My analysis of the “nyuj dab” ceremony demonstrates the ways in which ancestor spirits are invited back to the home and wined and dined as if living relatives visiting from a distant place. Ancestral personhood, then, denotes both one’s potential as an ancestor, as well as the essential nature of relationships with ancestors for living persons. Funerals in my field site were increasingly intense in ritual and participation in proportion to the number of descendants and relative status of the deceased. The implication here is that the more descendants one has and properly looks after, the more positive characteristics and greater importance can be imbued on their personhood. With regards to one’s relationships with ancestors—both living and deceased—it is obvious from Txawj Pheej’s view that for him, one’s temporal fate is directly related to one’s care and respect for ancestors and elder kin. The same could be said for one’s post-mortem fate. Indeed, this view asserts that it is in one’s proper nature to care for elders and the spirits of deceased patrilineal kin, and failure to do so has dire consequences for the self and for future generations.
For these reasons, my Hmong interlocutors care deeply about having male children that will care for them when they pass away. Male heirs carry the ritual burden and thus the maintenance of these relationships forward. Ancestral personhood, then, leads to both specific and general moral injunctions that emerged in the moral discourse of my Hmong interlocutors. These include normative ideas of how one should relate to one’s parents, such as claiming their inherited clan and passing that identity to future generations. It also includes injunctions about caring for one’s ancestors once they have passed away and returned to ancestral villages, such as the devotion manifested by Siv Yim and his relatives.

The salience and even specific characteristics of this model of personhood are certain to vary between individuals in the community where I conducted this research, and certainly between ritual sub-communities. I have mentioned generational effects briefly above, but it is also important to consider religion, such as the roughly ten percent of Hmong in my field site who converted to Christianity. Interestingly, I found that many Christian Hmong do not actually deny the metaphysical assumptions of this model of personhood, but simply opt out for what they perceive to be a coexisting, alternative ideal of personhood with different relationships. This view substitutes relationships with ancestors for one with God and a heavenly future. It is still common to understand that non-Christian relatives do actually return to the ancestral villages, but this is seen as a less desirable eternal alternative to a heavenly abode. In other words, the metaphysics of the traditional system are not denied, but rather added upon with a Christian dimension. After conversion, many Hmong talk about the dual possibilities of either returning to the ancestral village if they return to shamanic practices or going to live with God if they
continue with Christian practices. In either sense the outcome is generally seen as positive and merely a matter of personal preference.

However, with regard to those that identify with “traditional” Hmong ritual practice, I argue that it is yet possible to build a cultural model of ancestral personhood that asserts normative ideals of how one should relate to one’s ancestors that would be widely recognized among my interlocutors as a “traditional Hmong” ideal. In fact, idiosyncratic variations from this model, despite its wide recognition, constitute an essential aspect of my later analyses of variations in Hmong ideals of morality and personhood (see Chapter 5).

Son on Vignette 1

Perhaps one of the most important dimensions of variation in both the prevalence of ancestral personhood and its moral manifestations, is that of generation. Now I want to consider Pov’s responses to the same vignette as his father. It seems clear that Pov endorses the model of ancestral personhood intellectually, but the moral implications for him are distinct from those of Txawj Pheej. For example, he responded to the vignette by saying:

P: Vim hais tias ถ้าสมมุติถ้า(yog piv xam hais tias) yog hais nws zoo li no muaj tus tub khiav mus pauv xeem li no yog hais tias txhaum me me xwb lwm zaus tus tub no nws rov qab muaj ib tug li no khiav mus li no thiab khiav li no thiab ces thaum kawg tsis paub hais tias tus no yog xeem ab tsi

P: Because, for example, if you have something like this, a son who runs away, changes his clan name, maybe this is a small transgression only. Then, the next time, this son will have a son like this who runs away in the same way, runs away like this and in the end, no one knows what
This comment indexes the fundamental nature of clan affiliation to one’s identity and personhood. The underlying assumption is the fundamental importance of knowing one’s *true* clan affiliation, which is manifested here as a natural order that social circumstances and actions cannot undo. I later queried this assumption and asked what would happen if the son truly changed his clan, and somehow became just as much a member of that clan as any other member. Pov rejected this hypothetical out of hand, continually referring to the *true* clan that he was born in to, and responding that my hypothetical simply could not happen. Pov later mentioned that he had heard from his father about a particularly arduous ritual that can change one’s clan name and affiliation. However, he follows this with the observation that one is likely to get quite ill from one’s ancestors even following the arduous ritual, thus reinforcing the natural order of things.

Pov also reinforces ancestral personhood in other areas, which I do not have time to go into here. However, following the person-centered ethnographic model, I argue that Pov buys into ancestral personhood and accepts it as a Hmong cultural model of personhood, but that, as a respondent, his idiosyncratic moral beliefs vary somewhat from this. For example, when it comes to his moral assessment of the situation, Pov stresses the transgression of self that accompanies not owning up to one’s true identity or place in the natural order.

While the basis of this form of identity he indexes here is indeed a group-based marker of identity—the patrilineal clan—he emphasizes the fact that it is an enduring identity for the individual that one cannot escape. Again, a similar premise to his father, but the underlying
assumptions manifest in his speech here is slightly different, namely that one must admit to oneself one’s true identity.

A further variation from his father’s assertion lies in the emphasis Pov places on karmic influences. A primary reason for asserting that the son has transgressed in the vignette, lies in the karmic result down the road. Namely, if one transgresses one’s elders by denying their clan, then this transgression will result in future consequences for one’s posterity. The difference here is that it seems to be less rooted in the ancestors as the source of fortune or fate, but more in the idea that actions lead to future consequences of the same order. This seems to draw more from the Buddhist karmic concept of consequential action. He goes on later to describe how changing one’s clan name will lead to future generations of one's posterity potentially marrying other members of one’s true clan. This violates a very strongly held marriage taboo, and is cited as a future, karmic-style consequence of this action. In sum, while Pov seems to endorse the cultural model of ancestral personhood to some extent, and recognizes it as a model, he also explains that some of these models are actually the domain of elders and that he, as young person, has not yet reached the moment in the life course at which one should be more fluent in these models.

P: Qhov no yog տասնտարած (kev ntsæeg) ne peb cov hluas no տասնտարած (kev ntsæeg) peb kuj tsiis tau paub thiab ov.

P: This is superstition (glossing “superstition” in Thai), and we young people, we have not yet understood much of superstition.

Importantly, on top of this recognition, Pov’s idiosyncratic evaluations of this
vignette have stronger ideas of transgressing the self and karmic consequences, arguably Buddhist-influenced ideas that can be seen as an idiosyncratic extension or perhaps even a critique of the cultural model of ancestral personhood.

One important distinction must be made between the cultural model of ancestral personhood and the moral ideas that I am arguing that arise from it. This regards the relative consciousness of each domain. As I interview Hmong and analyze their rituals, it became apparent that models of personhood remain unarticulated (by them) and that they operate at a relatively unconscious level. In other words, the cultural model of ancestral personhood constitutes a cluster of assumptions about persons that affect one’s thinking, but they are just that—unarticulated assumptions. The ethics that people cite in their moral discourse, on the other hand, concern relatively explicit sets of ideas and prescriptions that people talk about, imbue in ritual, teach to their children, and recite to ethnographers. My Hmong interlocutors are able to fairly articulately recite reasons why someone should or should not do something, or what types of behaviors constitute proper kinship interactions, for example.

I am arguing that the more implicit model of ancestral personhood undergirds this explicit moral discourse, and that understanding ancestral personhood in its own terms levies an additional understanding of this discourse. This distinction between the relative consciousness of each domain follows Laidlaw’s (2002) argument against a Durkheimian view of morality that collapses it with social structure. I agree with Laidlaw when he advocates for an anthropology of freedom that can inform an anthropology of ethics. Boiling Hmong morality down to social structure (and nothing more) ignores the uniquely
moral agency inherent in their discourse and reasoning. In taking this stance, I must also disagree with Robbins (2007) when he argues that in domains of banal social reproduction (i.e., in the absence of significant shifts in moral thinking such as the influence of Evangelical Christianity that he describes) moral thinking operates at a more tacit level of which people are less conscious. This rules out the possibility that I want to argue from my data—that Hmong can be quite morally conscious and aggressive in asserting ethics that line up best with what one might term “traditionalism.” In other words, I think it is clear that many Hmong are actively seeking social reproduction with regards to moral thinking and socializing their youth, and I think an anthropology of ethics and freedom must account for the agency inherent in social reproduction itself. Txawj Pheej’s response to the vignette above actively asserts articulated reasons for which the son should act in a way that maintains the cultural status quo (as he perceives it).

One potential problem here, as I have described these Hmong models of personhood and moral thinking, is that it may be that there is less freedom inherent in the socialization of ancestral personhood, in which case there may necessarily be less freedom in moral thinking, since I argue that the one leads to the other. I grant this to be a possibility. However, participation in the essential socializing mechanisms for ancestral personhood (rituals such as “ua nyuj dab”) are engaged by different people for different reasons. While Hmong who choose to emphasize traditional ritual practice in their lives (versus those that actively avoid or de-emphasize it) recognize themselves as engaging in a sort of traditionalism that I would argue leads to a greater instantiation of ancestral personhood. While they may not consciously articulate the model itself, they do talk about the
significance of taking such rituals seriously, making them a significant part of their daily life, and socializing their children into them. In this way, Hmong with various orientations to traditional ritual practice engage in the self-making described by Foucault (1988) and Laidlaw (2002), even though they may not articulate the particular type of self being fashioned (which the Jains described by Laidlaw do articulate).

**Conclusion**

Through the course of this chapter I have sought to outline a potent form of personhood that figures significantly into the subjectivities of Hmong in the United States and Thailand. That is, Hmong come through participation in certain rituals to imagine themselves as future ancestors and even to imagine their elders as on the cusp of ancestorhood. I have demonstrated how certain rituals are key in shaping ancestral personhood, and how this form of subjectivity underpins certain types of moral discourse, particularly with regards to responsibilities and obligations to one’s clan and ancestors. In sum, as Hmong come to see themselves through a model of ancestral personhood, this particular conception of the self and its future as an ancestor necessitates the moral prescriptions and directives that place ancestral well-being at a premium, both for oneself and for one’s ancestors, since these modes of wellbeing are deeply intertwined.

At least for Hmong, it is theoretically useful to separate for a moment the model of personhood and the moral prescriptions that extend from them. This is not to say that one can conceive of ancestral personhood without necessitating logically subsequent moral implications. Indeed, I think this is the case with ancestral personhood. However, by focusing on the ontological assumptions of ancestral personhood, and by analyzing the
moral prescriptions revealed in the moral justification discourse that are underpinned by these assumptions, I come to a better understanding of variable conceptions of persons and the actual relationship between personhood and morality than I might by considering them part and parcel of the same psychological construct (as in “moral personhood”). In the end, varying conceptions of persons do indeed lead to different moral conclusions. But analyzing, understanding, and emphasizing the ‘how’ of this connection will provide important insights into the anthropology of morality as this field of inquiry develops.

I want to conclude by briefly situating these findings in larger comparative framework of this dissertation, which deals with the comparative dimensions of morality and personhood across generations in both the United States and Thailand. This larger comparative ethnography includes moral discourse elicitation similar to that previously discussed, but adds to this analysis a dimension of life narratives of parents and children in each family as well as extensive participant observation with these families and in these communities. One analytical approach I have taken to these data includes a structured coded comparison of moral discourse in response to the vignettes, and some of these findings are particularly relevant to this chapter in the light of Siv Yim’s American Hmong relatives requesting his ritual performance on their behalf. In the next chapter I describe how younger Hmong use a much richer autonomy-oriented style of discourse in their justifications of moral stances as compared to their parents, whose discourse was denser with ideas of communal hierarchy. One of the striking trends, however, was that the children in these families used autonomy and community oriented justifications to roughly the same extent. These ethics more commonly appeared in conflict with one another as
Hmong youth struggled with competing moral possibilities in their discourse. This *value pluralism* (I use the term as described by Isaiah Berlin, see Gray 1996) mirrors the moral divergence of Pov from his father, Txawj Pheej. The next step in my analysis (Chapter 5) will look at the systematic variations among groups in different sites of relocation, and this future research will seek to reveal more systematically what is happening with ancestral personhood in Hmong families in the United States versus Thailand, as well as how value pluralism plays into it. It is to this task that I now turn.
Chapter 4: The Moral Landscape of Hmong Family Life in America

America’s secret war in Laos (see Robbins 1987) during the late 1960s and early 1970s displaced hundreds of thousands of Hmong refugees who would, after years in Thai refugee camps, eventually resettle in various Western and Latin-American countries after the communist take-over of Indochina in 1975. The result is that in a short number of years, Hmong refugees have moved from their mountainous farming communities in the highlands of Laos and have resettled in inner-city American neighborhoods, representing perhaps the most drastic ecological and sociopolitical changes a group could undergo in such a short period of time. Adding to the practical and psychological difficulties of displacement and resettlement, the cultural differences between Hmong and the communities where they have resettled compound the difficulties of establishing new lives in a new social context. The drastic transition from rural, clan-based villages centered on subsistence swidden horticulture to an urban context in which the Hmong are forced to interact daily with comparatively liberal institutions such as public schools, social services, and medical establishments leads many Hmong to find their traditional values, practices, and survival strategies less pragmatic for day-to-day living than they were in the Laotian

1 Even as recently as the summer of 2004, the United States granted resettlement to up to 15,000 Hmong who had been living in Wat Tham Krabok, a refugee camp in Thailand, since the end of the war in Laos. By the end of this most recent program, a total of approximately 145,000 Hmong will have been officially resettled in the United States alone (Pam Lewis; Program Officer at Population, Refugees, and Migration Programs; Personal Communication; May 14, 2004).
The Hmong have gone from little or no contact with Western customs to being immersed in and forced to live in a Western political economy, and this inversion has undercut traditional power structures in Hmong culture. Similar to observations of other immigrant groups to the United States, some parents become dependent on children, who tend to learn English much faster, perform interpretation, and even become ad-hoc cultural brokers as they help parents manage Western institutions. Elderly Hmong, who maintained the most power and veneration in traditional village life, occasionally find themselves the most powerless in these urban, Western contexts, given their futile prospects for learning English or gaining skills that are valuable in the West. Fathers and clan leaders learn that their traditional power to arbitrate family decisions and discipline individuals in their families and clans are undercut by the policing power of the state (Keown-Bomar 2004; Lee 2005b). Further, Hmong adolescents find great difficulties managing their identities and forming beliefs about competing views of the world that they learn from parents at home (i.e., animism) and from socialization in school (e.g., scientific rationalism).

This power inversion, the American education received by the younger generation and the different contexts of development (rural Laos versus urban America), leads to many potential sources of intergenerational differences for the Hmong in several cultural-

\[2\] This is not to say that this is happening objectively, but merely referring to the fact that many of my Hmong interlocutors in the United States expressed this type of conflict or friction. I would not argue that “traditional” Hmong practices are obsolete or useless in an American context, but in fact do provide important coping mechanisms and community solidarity that help in resettlement. However, some people have expressed this emic perception of the obsoleteness of Hmong tradition. Sometimes this view provides a justification for conversion to Christianity.
psychological domains, such as morality, emotion, conceptions of the self, and religious belief. While little research deals specifically with the intergenerational differences among Hmong, it is certain that these differences are at least widely perceived within Hmong communities, as nearly all Hmong with whom I have spoken on the subject will attest. Hmong themselves are also very interested in these types of differences. For example, “traditional” parents are constantly concerned about having knowledgeable descendants who can perform a proper Hmong funeral for them. Many Hmong (both old and young) also worry about their traditions and language fading away in subsequent generations.

Issues of morality across generations are at the heart of these concerns. Perhaps three examples can elucidate why. First, in my interviews with Hmong adolescents and young adults, one late adolescent male, Sam, told me, “I am just waiting for my parents to die so I can just be an American.” He explained that he just wanted to be a lawyer, have a lot of money and a nice house, and be able to just live an independent lifestyle that he thought typified the American way, as opposed to the more structured, family- and clan-oriented Hmong lifestyle that he described as burdensome. On the other hand, Nom Npis, a young adult male whose family very actively practices shamanism and proudly proclaims their animist beliefs, described how one of his life goals is to conserve and, in a way, preach traditional Hmong beliefs to his peers in order to preserve his parents’ and ancestors’ way of life. He wanted to learn khawv koob (a series of traditional healing techniques using “magical methods;” see Hickman 2007) and the specificities of shamanism. He lamented

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I have substituted pseudonyms for all individuals quoted herein. Where the person prefers to use their American name, I have substituted an American pseudonym, but where the person prefers their Hmong name, I have substituted a Hmong pseudonym.
that so many people in his generation do not know about these things. A third example
demonstrates the middle road between Sam and Nom Npis. Hawj, a senior in high school,
described to me the deep-seated ontological ambivalence that he experiences everyday as
he learns to reason through scientific rationalism at school, and yet gets socialized into a
seemingly contradictory animist paradigm at home. Further complicating his effort to find
a coherent belief system, most of his family (including himself) had converted to
Christianity, and he described to me how those beliefs do not align well with either the
animist or the scientific-rationalist ways of thinking about the universe, spirits, bodies,
families, etc. Hawj felt a desire to believe in all three paradigms, yet found it quite difficult
to manage the discrepancies that occur when they come into direct conflict with one
another in his mind.

These brief examples help to elucidate the moral space inhabited by second-
generation Hmong. They are simultaneously navigating the worldviews of their parents
and the larger American society as they are socialized in schools and peer groups while
they also participate in the many clan-oriented ceremonies and activities directed by their
parents. These experiences of the three Hmong youths can be contrasted as well as
compared to the ethnographic descriptions of the older generation, who also struggle to
manage a “traditional”\(^5\) lifestyle in a Western and often urban context (cf. Culhane-Pera, et

\(^5\) Hmong themselves commonly juxtapose “traditional culture” against “American” or
“Christian” lifeways, depending on the context of the comparison. My use of the word
“traditional” in this paper, while not always used in quotes, is used from an emic
perspective—the perspective from which Hmong themselves would use it. I do not intend
to adopt any essentialist assumptions about “traditional” Hmong culture but rather use the
Such a comparison begs the question of what types of differences one might find between these two generations. Both generations struggle to deal with multiple cultural frameworks, but the older generation spent their childhood and adolescent years in Laos or in refugee camps in Thailand, while the younger generation was largely born in the United States or immediately prior to their parents’ immigration. Moral reasoning constitutes a particularly fertile domain for this comparison, especially considering the ontological prescriptivism of the traditional, scientific-rationalistic, and Christian paradigms that provide the tensions that Hmong youth and adults face at the levels of the individual, families, clans, and communities.

Beyond the emic importance of moral reasoning in this intergenerational comparison, moral reasoning is of vital importance theoretically as well. Even Lawrence Kohlberg’s title given to his foundational (1969) book chapter, “Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive Development Approach to Socialization”—which emphasizes moral development and yet omits the word moral from the title—assumes that moral socialization is pivotal to socialization in general. A current debate in moral and cultural psychology is being waged concerning the universality or specificity of particular types of moral reasoning, particularly as related to Kohlberg’s developmental framework. Several recent treatments have called for the need to consider the ways that moral reasoning plays out in variegated cultural contexts in order to infuse this debate with ethnographically based data (cf. Haidt, et al. 1993; Rozin, et al. 1999).
The present chapter constitutes a comparison of the moral discourse of first and second generation Hmong in the United States in an attempt to lend valuable insight into the changing nature of moral reasoning in this location of the Hmong diaspora, which will be juxtaposed in the next chapter against the findings on the Hmong in Thailand. In order to do so, I adopted a model of morality that was developed by Rick Shweder and his colleagues (Jensen 1996; Shweder 1990; Shweder, et al. 1987; Shweder, et al. 2003), which was developed under the framework of cultural psychology as a reaction to ethnocentric models of moral development put forward by Lawrence Kohlberg and others (cf. Kohlberg 1969; Kohlberg 1981; Kohlberg, et al. 1983; Turiel 1983). Shweder et al.’s “Three Ethics” approach provides a pluralistic framework for analyzing differing moral discourses across cultures and proposes a means by which culturally specific lines of moral reasoning can be considered unique without reverting to a developmentalist (in the unilineal evolutionary sense) conclusion that alternate forms of morality are inferior to normative Western forms.

I will ultimately argue that the younger generation is adopting a more autonomy-oriented moral discourse that aligns more with American data in the comparative literature on moral reasoning. A within-family analysis demonstrates that this is not only a group-level phenomenon, but that within families, children consistently use discourse that is more autonomy-oriented and less community-oriented than their individual parents. Additionally, it is apparent from these data that younger Hmong in the United States experience significantly more moral ambivalence than their parents do. Using the moral philosophical perspective of Isaiah Berlin, I will offer an understanding of this type of ambivalence and why it is developing among the younger generation. Other comparisons of
the data resulted in weak or non-significant differences between religious groups (Christian and Traditional Animist) and genders (excepting a near significant effect of women tending toward more autonomy-oriented discourse as compared to men). Finally, the significant intergenerational variation can be explained by two plausible theoretical frameworks: life course development and acculturation. I will delineate these two possible explanations and suggest additional comparative research that will help to tease apart these explanations, a comparative approach that will be addressed in the following chapter.

In order to develop this argument, I will first briefly review the development of the Three Ethics approach as a response to Kohlbergian morality, as well as discuss a few approaches to Hmong morality in the anthropological and psychological literature. Subsequently, I will describe the method that I adopted to analyze moral discourse among my sample of first and second generation Hmong and describe the results, after which I will discuss the life-course developmental and acculturation explanations that can explain the patterns of moral discourse that I found among the Hmong. Given the centrality of moral reasoning to the many concerns that Hmong have about transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to another, this project could be potentially enlightening both to Hmong scholars and the Hmong themselves. It also taps into an important contemporary debate in moral psychology that deals with the universality of particular types of moral reasoning across cultural groups.

**The Cultural Psychology of Morality**

A major debate has emerged in developmental and cultural psychology over the past 40 years, beginning with Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, concerning the
universality or cultural particularity of different notions of morality, and whether a
developmentalist, universalist, or pluralist stance is best for understanding morality across
societies. I adopt Richard Shweder’s “Big Three” or “Three Ethics” approach to morality in
this research, as it provides a sophisticated pluralistic model of morality that lends well to
comparative analysis, such as the intergenerational differences in which I am interested.
Lene Jensen has extended Shweder’s work, and I also integrate her cultural-developmental
approach to analyzing these data. It is important, first, however, to situate the emergence of
this particular approach to morality in the larger scope of moral psychology, which was
largely put on the academic map by Lawrence Kohlberg (Jensen 2008).

Shweder’s formulation began as a critique of Kohlberg’s (Kohlberg 1969; Kohlberg
division of moral stages into pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional
reasoning, Kohlberg proposes that all human beings, regardless of cultural context,
naturally progress from the most immature stage (pre-conventional reasoning) to the most
rationally developed (post-conventional reasoning)—but that not all or even most humans
reach the upper stages. Kohlberg proposes that this is a unilineal stage-like progression
that is based in rationality. Once an individual realizes that conventional reasoning is
innately more rational than pre-conventional reasoning, he has no choice but to proceed to
the more rational form. An essential characteristic of this formulation, as argued by
Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller (1987), is that Kohlberg limits this line of moral
development to particular, culture-specific notions of individual liberty, rights, and justice.
This aspect of Kohlberg’s theory has also been further critiqued by feminist theorists as
androcentric (Gilligan 1982). While Shweder et al.’s critique is more expansive, this point is perhaps the most important in the development of the Three Ethics theory. For Kohlberg, the culminating post-conventional reasoning is characterized by an individual’s capacity to reason through universal, rationally accessible principles of individual rights and autonomy.

Shweder et al. proceed to critique a response to Kohlberg’s theory put forward by Turiel, Nucci, and Smetana (their work as summarized in Shweder, et al. 1987), the “social interactional theory.” Turiel et al.’s formulation takes the conventional and individualistic values that are ontogenetically hierarchized in Kohlberg’s moral development and “turns it on its side” to propose that these are actually co-present domains that children understand at an early age. Turiel et al. assert that certain types of social interactions universally lead children to recognize these different domains and to operate through them. For example, a child witnessing the innocent suffering of another individual engenders feelings (e.g., empathy) that help her or him to formulate a sense of morality about the suffering of the innocent. Other social interactions lead children to value social conventions, but these can develop simultaneously and are not ontogenetically linked as Kohlberg proposed. The domain distinction that Turiel et al. emphasize most is between convention and morality, but there is also an individual domain, which coincides with Kohlberg’s pre-operational reasoning, but again is not an ontogenetic stage but a distinct domain.

Shweder et al.’s critique of Turiel can be summarized by the assertion that there are no universal developmental processes, nor is there empirical evidence for the presence of “stages,” and that “there exists more than one rationally defensible moral code” (Shweder,
et al. 1987:18). This notion of “divergent rationalities” seems to begin to emerge in Turiel et al.’s thinking, but is not taken far enough. The latter half of Shweder et al.’s critique turns to an empirical examination of morality in Bhubaneswar, India and Chicago, Illinois. Without describing their study in detail, it is sufficient to note that their research leads to the conclusion that multiple notions of morality—beyond the singular notion of individual rights or principled liberty that Kohlberg proposed—can be reasoned at the post-conventional, or principled level (Shweder and Much 1991). Additionally, social practices do not always equate to social conventions, an assumption inherent in both Turiel et al. and Kohlberg’s work. In other words, people tend to moralize their social behaviors and norms beyond the realm of a mere social contract and imbue meaning upon them in a way that portrays them as forms of natural or divine law. Shweder et al. (1987:35) assert that “Orthodox Hindu informants make little use of the idea of convention. They view their practices as direct expressions of natural law.” This is, perhaps, more common in non-Western contexts, which is why Shweder et al.’s comparative research is so revealing in this critique.

These critiques cleared the ground for the possibility of a pluralistic conception of morality. Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (2003) subsequently undertook the task of defining a possible organization of universal principles of morality from which cultures differentially draw principles for moral reasoning. Using a list of hypothetical moral violations (derived from ethnographic fieldwork), Shweder et al. interview a sample of adult Brahmins about these moral violations and elicit responses about the nature of the violations. Using hierarchical cluster analysis and discriminant analysis, they separate the
responses into three main ethical realms. The qualitative commonalities of these three clusters allow them to assign the labels, autonomy, community, and divinity.

The ethic of autonomy most closely relates to Kohlberg’s idea of post-conventional reasoning, namely that it involves principles about harm, individual rights, and justice. Under this ethic, the self is conceptualized as “an individual preference structure” (2003:99). The ethic of community is concerned more with notions of hierarchy, duty, interdependency, and conceptualizes the self as “an office holder” (2003:99). The ethic of divinity encompasses ideas of purity, sanctity, tradition, and a strong concept of the natural order. Under this ethic, the individual is “a spiritual entity connected to some sacred or natural order of things and as a responsible bearer of a legacy that is elevated and divine” (2003:99). An important theoretical caveat of these three ethics is that they are not mutually exclusive in their presence in any moral system. Indeed, some cultures may manifest multiple and even competing ethics for the same behavioral contexts. Oftentimes people will adhere to one ethic and sometimes to another (i.e., alternating between two competing values) if both are strong in the person’s moral reasoning. This is an extension of Shweder et al.’s (1987) idea of divergent rationalities, but this later research identifies specific domains for these divergent rationalities. While they are conceptualized as universal ethics, under this theory autonomy, community, and divinity are construed in minimalist terms. Indeed, local interpretations of these ethics add maximalist meanings that may not be present in understandings of the same moral principle in another context. Shweder’s Three Ethics nicely fill the cultural void left by his critique of Kohlberg and Turiel et al.’s theories of moral development.
After this original formulation, additional cultural psychologists have undertaken the refinement and validation of these three universal ethics. Lene Jensen (1996) mobilized the Three Ethics as a means of understanding the American “culture war” between the ideological dispositions of orthodox and progressivist individuals. Speaking of cultural differences between these groups, Jensen argued that “the crux of the division pertains to the sources of moral authority and the extent of individual autonomy” (1996:22). Jensen concluded that the Three Ethics theory of morality is quite useful in describing ideological differences between these groups.

Jonathan Haidt, Silvia Koller, and Maria Dias (1993) considered an additional empirical investigation of the Three Ethics in light of Turiel et al.’s reaction to Shweder et al.’s cultural psychological critique. In order to account for Turiel et al.’s reaction, Haidt et al. focused on harmless, but offensive moral breaches in urban and rural United States and Brazil, thus testing a primary assumption of many approaches to morality (i.e., that moralizing is primarily and universally a harm-based assessment of actions). Their detection of moralizing even in the absence of a harm-based reasoning supports Shweder et al.’s critique, and ultimately Haidt et al.’s side with Shweder in the debate. Later, Paul Rozin, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada, and Jonathan Haidt (1999) developed an additional empirical test of the Three Ethics and attempted to map particular moral emotions onto the Three Ethics. They concluded that “The evidence, from students in the United States and Japan, supports the predictions of the hypothesis; that is, it suggests that one aspect of the organization–appraisal–meaning of the other-critical moral emotions has to do with something like the Shweder moral codes” (1999:583).
Lene Jensen (2008) recently developed an integration of the Three Ethics approach with the developmental approach of Kohlberg and others. She advocates a cultural-developmental model that can guide future research and take account of not only the variation between culturally specific notions of what is moral, but also variation across the life course within any given cultural context. Using the Three Ethics approach, Jensen proposes that research on moral development move towards adapting the three ethics to understanding variation in the manifestation of each ethic across the life course within cultural groups. This comparative agenda parallels Shweder et al.’s work on which the Three Ethics was founded, but it adds another dimension—comparative analysis across developmental cohorts both within and between cultures. This is where my current research fits best into the Three Ethics research agenda, and I shall return to this point in the discussion below.

**Hmong Studies Literature**

Three relevant graduate theses have looked at the intergenerational or developmental aspects of morality among the Hmong in the United States. First, Mailee Kue’s (1997) thesis uses an operationalization of Kohlberg’s model to compare Hmong and American youth, but the study is dependent on Kohlberg’s assumptions about the cross-cultural universality of moral development—assumptions that have received important critiques that I have discussed. Using responses to Rest’s Defining Issues Test, Kue concludes that, although their scores are slightly lower than those of American peers (indicating lower levels of moral development), Hmong youth are essentially the same as American youth in most areas of moral reasoning. Second, Chao Fang’s (1997) central
purpose is to provide empirical support that traditional Hmong family values are changing across generations in the domains of leadership, education, marriage, and family, given that only anecdotal evidence currently exists. Fang concludes from his results that there are significant generational differences on these dimensions, but that “the relationship is not as global as presumed by other authors” (Fang 1997). Finally, Mymee Her’s (1997) dissertation constitutes a comparative analysis of Hmong and American values as reported on the Values Questionnaire. Her relies heavily on the collectivism–individualism dichotomy in her analysis, which becomes a weakness as she attempts to explain her unexpected outcomes. This problem arises most likely because the Hmong and Americans in her sample espouse values that encompass notions of both collectivism and individualism. However, setting these two values up as a dichotomy assumes that participants must be placed on a continuum with collectivism at one extreme and individualism at the other (i.e., conceptualizing individualism and collectivism as mutually exclusive). Alternatively, a pluralistic conception such as the Three Ethics could potentially offer a more complete explanation of Her’s results.

A collective weakness of these three theses (Kue, Fang, and Her) is found in the common reliance on narrowly designed and defined psychometric instruments. Kue and Her use Hmong adaptations of pre-existing psychometric tests, while Fang designs his own. However, none of these approaches allow for the emergence of emic views of moral issues, but force respondents to choose among predefined responses that were developed in a different cultural context. This is particularly problematic when, as in Kue’s case, the theory upon which the instrument was based on has been shown to reflect a particular Western
liberal bias (Shweder, et al. 1987). Eliciting more open-ended responses would allow interviewees to better define the moral issues in which they are interested, as well as better delineate the way they think about them, an approach that I adopt in the present research.

On the other hand, a very important empirical and theoretical exposition of Hmong morality is offered by Nicholas Tapp (2002), who discusses important processes that are instrumental in changing Hmong moral reasoning in Thailand. Tapp mobilizes Marshall Sahlins’ conceptualization of concentric spheres of influence and obligation to describe the substance of this morality, spanning from the most personal domain of one’s lineage group and extending to increasingly more distant spheres of affines, non-Hmong peoples, jungle and wilderness, and heaven and earth. Different moralities apply to people or things in different spheres. Actions that are strictly forbidden to be enacted towards one’s relatives are seemingly less offensive when enacted on individuals or objects that are more socially distant from oneself (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Tapp’s (2002:98) diagram of spheres of influence and obligation in traditional Hmong morality as adapted from Marshall Sahlins
Using this traditional morality as a baseline, Tapp contends that as the Hmong have become ensconced in urban lifeways (both from urban migration and from urbanizing lifeways permeating traditional village life), the traditional basis for distinguishing moral behavior has dissolved. More particularly, the hierarchy of family, lineage, village, co-ethnics, et cetera has become irrelevant in the new urban economy and interpersonal relations. He argues in somewhat of a functionalist-Marxist sense that the changing socioeconomic base to which urban Hmong have had to adapt has led to new behaviors (e.g., competition with close kin through market activity) that previously would have only been acceptable towards socially distant others. Previously, the subsistence-based economy encouraged a type of morality in which close kin and affines clung together. This new context has led Hmong to universalize moral behaviors for socially distant others to close kin as well, and indeed, to all human beings:

Returning to the original model of a relative tribal morality, it would seem reasonable to conclude that what will have occurred under the impact of urbanisation, is a kind of gigantic stretching of the traditional boundaries of the Hmong moral universe, in which the boundaries between the self, community, and the world have been ex-ploded, and the relative basis of traditional Hmong morality therefore having largely collapsed. ...Behaviour which was traditionally seen as only appropriate to those beyond the pale of the social system has now been universalized, and it is this kind of behaviour we would consider as immoral. (Tapp 2002: 100, 107, original emphasis)

Tapp provides an understanding of a particular type of change in morality that one might expect as a contextual, “traditional” morality displaced by a more universalizing, urban ethos. My interview data will allow me to analyze the extent to which research participants, both first and second generation Hmong, universalize their moral thinking to other people (see question 7 in Appendix A). Further, the present intergenerational
comparison will allow me to consider the extent to which moral discourse is either changing over generations or perhaps reflecting a particular pattern of moral development over the life course. I will now turn to the methods of this research and describe how the resulting data can speak to these issues.

Method

The Intergenerational Sample

First, in order to gain a comparative look at moral reasoning across generations of Hmong families, I constructed a sample of twenty participants, ten coming from each generation. Seventeen interviewees were first recruited from a Midwestern University, where a significant number of Hmong students attended. I was able to contact and set up interviews with ten of the parents of these college students, and I went to their homes throughout the Midwestern communities to do so. Some of the other parents were either not interested (two of them), or I was unable to schedule an interview with them. In this study I will consider the data gathered from the ten parents and their ten children because they represent within-family dyads that will allow me to gain a generational perspective within families that can control for potential lurking variables across families (i.e., year of migration to the US, socioeconomic status, etc.).

Hmong began coming to the United States in 1975 up until 1996, with a shorter second wave lasting from 2004 until 2006. The mean migration year in the present sample was 1987, with the earliest family migrating in 1979 and the latest family migrating in

6 Data from an additional 18 Mid-western families is being compiled and coded and will be included in this analysis in the final draft of this chapter.
1992. The average age among the college students was twenty, and among their parents it was fifty-two. Thus, on average the college students were born either shortly before or shortly after their parents migrated to the US, and the parents’ age at time of migration averaged at thirty-two. This profile fits the many families and the many late adolescent or young adult Hmong that I have interviewed in my previous ethnographic work. Further, 1987 was the peak of the resettlement period, which got off to a slow start in 1975 and was slowly tailing off by 1996. Thus, as far as time in the United States is concerned, my sample can be considered representative of Hmong in the United States.

Self-proclaimed religious preference was fairly evenly distributed between Christian and “Traditional” (the word that most Hmong use to gloss those who believe in animism and practice shamanism). Four people in each generation were Christian (children all following their parents’ religion), and six of the older participants were Traditional, along with five of their children. One of the younger Hmong described herself as agnostic (her parents were Traditional). I wanted a good split of Christian and Traditional participants because the issue of religion divides many Hmong families on a number of moral issues, such as the practice of polygyny. For this reason, I also included a vignette that speaks to this divide.

The sample included participants from eight distinct Hmong clans. Four of the participants were Green Hmong (Moob Lees) and sixteen were White Hmong (Hmoob Dawb). There were nine women and eleven men in the sample. All but one of the younger Hmong were single. Among the older generation, there was one widow and the rest were married. I know that at least two of these families were polygynous (both were
“Traditional,” in the aforementioned sense of the term), but I am uncertain as to whether any of the other seven parents were married polygynously or monogamously. Due to the recruitment technique, all of the younger participants were college students (one had recently graduated at the time of interview). Among their parents, however, two had no formal education, one had partially attended high school, three had obtained a GED or high-school equivalency certificate, and four had received at least one year of technical school for specific occupational training. Having conducted all of my interviews with the parents in their homes, I would describe the average socioeconomic status as lower- to lower-middle class. Finally, all of my participants were bilingual to varying degrees. The younger generation preferred to have me conduct the interview in English, while the older generation preferred to be interviewed in Hmong, as children tended to be more proficient in English while their parents were much more proficient in Hmong.

The Interview

While Tapp took a more purely ethnographic look at the ways in which Hmong are negotiating morality in a changing Thai context, my research question required a structured interviewing technique that would allow intergenerational, religious, and gendered comparisons through a standardized data set on each individual. Thus, I adopted an interview technique similar to Shweder and colleagues, which has been employed in various comparative research studies to look at group differences in moral reasoning. This method’s major advantage is found in the balance it offers between the ability to present fairly standard situations for research participants to respond to, while simultaneously allowing for in-depth qualitative analysis of each individual’s responses.
The interview technique is designed to analyze moral discourse in response to hypothetical vignettes. Shweder et al. (1987) used this method with a series of thirty-nine vignettes in order to derive the original Three Ethics structure, and subsequent authors (Haidt, et al. 1993; Jensen 1996; Jensen 2008; Rozin, et al. 1999) have used this to carry out further comparative work that has sought to understand the differences in moral reasoning in different groups as well as assess the utility of the Three Ethics framework. Although much of the previous research has indeed validated the Three Ethics approach as more appropriate than a Kohlbergian or Turielian approach in cross-cultural comparison, this was not a main emphasis of the present study. Instead, I am more interested in the utility of the framework for looking at intergenerational differences in moral reasoning among immigrant groups such as the Hmong. I adopted this interview structure and presented six moral vignettes to all respondents, each of which was followed by a standard series of questions that were designed to elicit the person’s moral stance, their justification or defense of their moral stance, the extent to which they feel that their stance should be a universal one, whether the offender should be punished, and whether other’s witnessing the event should affect the moral evaluation. Given previous comparative research, these are domains of moral discourse where differences have emerged between Americans and Brazilians (Haidt, et al. 1993) or between Indians and Americans (Jensen 1996), for example.

The vignettes were designed to elicit salient moral issues in both Hmong and American cultural contexts. I limited my interviews to six vignettes due to time constraints, as I wanted to gain in-depth information on each vignette, as opposed to a superficial
coverage of more vignettes (see Appendix A for a complete list of vignettes and follow-up questions). Some of the vignettes were adopted from Shweder et al.’s (1987) study of Indians and Americans, from which they developed the original Three Ethics framework. These represented moral issues that I considered more universally applicable (although perhaps for different reasons in different cultural contexts) and particularly valuable in tapping notions of harm, rights, and justice (important values of autonomy-oriented discourse) in an American context, an important consideration given the nature of my intergenerational comparison. For example, many Hmong observe that their children tend to think in more American ways about things like physical discipline to children and spouses, emphasizing the person’s right not to be hit. On the other hand, many “traditional” Hmong men feel like the American legal system (predicated on these autonomous notions) restricts them from fulfilling their obligations to direct the affairs and behaviors of the members of their family (a community based idea). Shweder et al.’s vignettes were chosen to test these tensions.

Other vignettes were developed from my previous ethnographic fieldwork with the Hmong in Alaska and the Midwestern United States. They represent salient moral issues that Hmong immigrant families regularly observe or hear about, and about which a multiplicity of ethics are commonly used to assess the actions of those involved. Interviewees often confirmed that these represent important issues that Hmong living in the United States face. One limitation of this study regards the sampling domain of these vignettes. They were not designed to be comprehensive of the moral domain, but to elicit discourse on a few salient moral issues for both Hmong and Americans and to tap potential
generational and cultural differences in doing so.

The follow-up questions (all vignettes and follow-up questions are described in detail in Appendix A) attempt to elicit the respondent’s moral stance as well as the gravity of their position, in addition to the specific ways in which they defend their moral position on the vignette. Several questions are also designed to assess the extent to which the interviewees think their moral position is universal or culturally specific, by both looking at the flexibility of their in-group norms, the norms of another group (i.e., Burmese society), and the norms of global society at large. Shweder et al. (1987) noted that these questions are necessary in order to assess the extent to which interviewees consider the issue at hand in the moral domain or simply a cultural construction of a particular group, in response to Turiel et al.’s hypothesis of domain specificity.

Data Analysis

While this data could be analyzed in several ways, such as a grounded coding scheme or through comparative discourse analysis, in the present chapter I begin with a comparative analysis of the distribution of the Three Ethics (Autonomy, Community, Divinity) across the two generations. I made this move particularly because the present vignettes and sample were constructed in order to consider the intergenerational differences in moral reasoning among Hmong, and several other studies have already demonstrated the greater utility of a Three Ethics approach in culturally comparative research on morality (Haidt, et al. 1993; Jensen 1996; Rozin, et al. 1999; Shweder, et al.)
In order to get at the comparative moral stances under a Three Ethics framework, I focused the analyses on moral justifications. In other words, it did not matter what moral stance any individual took on any given vignette, but the reasons they gave in their defense of their moral position were coded and analyzed. This emphasis on justification comes from Kohlberg’s (1969) original method using the Heinz dilemma. I compiled excerpts from the interview transcripts in which the participants offered justifications to their moral stance, with a total of 120 justification excerpts (6 vignettes multiplied by 20 participants).

Through her work on the Three Ethics model, Lene Jensen developed a comprehensive coding scheme (see Appendices B and F for actual examples of coded discourse in this dissertation) for classifying justifications as examples of reasoning through autonomy, community, or divinity. I adopted her coding scheme and applied it to my data. All justifications were kept in the language in which they were spoken, and two research assistants (an American fluent in English and a Hmong person fluent in both Hmong and English) independently coded the justifications with Jensen’s coding scheme.

While one potential use of this data would address the question of whether a Turielian or a Shwederian framework is better for understanding the moral domain across cultural contexts, that is not the object of the analysis in this chapter. For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that the vast majority of participants’ responses indicated that their moral stances were universalized in that the whole world was seen as potentially benefiting from their moral stance, that the Burmese would be better off if they followed the moral prescription of the interviewee, and that Hmong could not reasonably change their moral viewpoint by consensus.
along with myself\textsuperscript{8}. In this way, reliability coefficients could be obtained on the coding procedures by myself and a research assistant in each language. In order to minimize bias in the coding procedure, the justifications were separated from the rest of the transcript and from any personally identifying information of the respondent, assigned a random order, and sorted numerically by vignette. This created a random assortment of justifications for each vignette, which were subsequently coded by myself and the two research assistants, and allowed for us to more independently consider the justifications on their own terms and not in the context of other justifications offered by the respondent or by the respondents’ demographics. Codes were then applied to as many justifications as were offered in the transcript under each vignette. If a participant offered multiple discreet justifications for their moral stance, then they were coded as such. Potentially, an informant would offer as many justifications as they please, but the maximum number of justifications for any given participant was twelve for all six vignettes.

The subcodes (as in Appendices B and F) for each ethic was originally assigned, and the proportion of justifications that were coded under each overarching ethic were computed, which resulted in a moral profile of each individual (e.g., 25% autonomy, 60% community, and 15% divinity). As previously mentioned, under the Three Ethics theoretical framework, all people can potentially be using all three ethics, and these ethics can even compete within the same moral space. However, in different cultural contexts some ethics tend to be stronger and win out over other ethics. This was operationalized by

\textsuperscript{8} The American RA coded the English interviews with the younger generation and the Hmong RA coded the Hmong interviews with the older generation. Both RA’s were undergraduate students in social science disciplines.
computing the moral profiles of all individuals and comparing these across generations, religions, genders, etc. By comparing the moral profiles of individuals, one can observe the extent to which individuals utilize discourse that appeals to autonomy, community, and divinity as they defend their moral positions on the vignettes. Further, this also allows a comparison of the tendencies of different groups to use certain moral discourses to greater or lesser extents, and thus to answer the research question regarding intergenerational differences in moral reasoning. The validity of this coding system can be checked by referring to Appendix F, where a fairly random sample of examples of discourse codes from each sub-ethnic are given.

Reliability

In order to gain a reliability measure on the justification codings, two research assistants independently rated all justifications, one in each spoken language of the interviewees. I also coded all justifications in both English and Hmong, and thus, I was able to obtain a reliability coefficient between myself and a Hmong-speaking rater on the older generation interviews and between myself and an English-speaking rater on the younger generation interviews. I adjusted Cohen’s Kappa9 to allow for the fact that multiple codes

9 Cohen’s Kappa considers the level of agreement adjusted for the expected amount of agreement by chance. Therefore, it is a more conservative metric of agreement than reporting a simple percentage of concordance. The adjustment that I made involved refiguring the calculation technique to consider the presence of secondary and tertiary codes a judgment in and of itself which can factor into the reliability coefficient. In other words, the correspondence of the primary code indicates agreement, but if one of the raters added an additional code that the other did not, then this is considered one disagreement. In such a case, within one vignette I would count one agreement and one disagreement in order to calculate Kappa. This was done on the overarching codes of autonomy, community, and divinity, but not to the subcodes. Minute shades of meaning differentiated
could be applied if multiple justifications were present in the responses to the vignettes.

Using this adjusted coefficient, ratings between myself and the English research assistant was .36, and between myself and the Hmong research assistant was .34. While these coefficients are low, I returned to discuss the coding procedure and rationale with the Hmong research assistant, and we concluded that she coded much more parsimoniously than I did, and her threshold of discursive evidence for including a second code was much higher than mine. She only added secondary codes to eleven justifications and did not include any tertiary codes. On the other hand, I added thirty-two secondary and tertiary codes. If these are removed to adjust for our methodological differences, then the Kappa coefficient rises to .53, a more acceptable yet still merely ‘satisfactory’ level. Similarly, the adjusted coefficient of correspondence with the English research assistant was originally .36. However, the English research assistant added eighteen additional secondary or tertiary codes, and I added twenty-eight for the younger interviews. If these additional codes are eliminated and the coefficient is recalculated on the extent to which common codes were applied to by both raters to any given justification, then the coefficient rises to .75, a quite acceptable level. Having discussed the coding procedure and the Three Ethics theory more in depth, I am convinced that an independent reconsideration of the previous coding would yield a higher level of correspondence.\footnote{Further, I conducted my following many of the subcodes, which made the ratings much more variable at the more specific level.} For example, the Hmong research assistant was using a much narrower conception of “community” than the Three Ethics theory calls for. She did not classify family relationships under the community concept as often as I did, because she was considering communal obligations on a larger scale and tended toward autonomy codes when only familial
analysis on both the coded results from my ratings as well as those from the research assistants. Both data sets yielded the same trends, but my ratings were statistically significant while the research assistant data tended toward the same directional trends without statistical significance. In sum, inter-rater reliability on the moral justifications can be considered moderate, and would likely increase with more extensive training and collaboration on individual coding strategies, and even given the differences between raters, the same group trends remained constant.

Results

In this chapter I am centrally concerned with three group comparisons on moral discourse—generations, religion, and gender. The sample size is not big enough to consider education, which would be deeply confounded with generation even in a nationwide sample of Hmong refugee families, nor is it large enough to consider variations in the time of migration to the United States. While these are also important considerations in a treatment of changing cultural morality, my previous ethnographic work suggests that the intergenerational comparison and conversion to Christianity constitute two central dimensions on which Hmong perceive themselves to differ on fundamental moral issues.

Generational Differences

Using the coded data from the moral justifications, I constructed moral profiles, which can be represented graphically as the relative distribution of justifications that fell obligation was mentioned. However, the Three Ethics approach clearly considers family relationships and familial hierarchies as central to the ethic of community. Given that the highest category of discordance resulted when the Hmong research assistant classified a justification as autonomy when I coded it as community, this correction will likely resolve much of this discordance in the future.
under the rubrics of autonomy, community and divinity. Figure 7 below displays these profiles, grouped by generation. Each line represents one individual’s moral profile. Two particular characteristics are of note—the striking visual difference between these two generations and the surprising homogeneity of each group. The younger generation utilized much more autonomy-oriented discourse (the modal ethic) in their moral justifications, while the older generation’s modal ethic was community. This is represented in the obvious differences in the slopes of the lines. Further, it was surprising to find how tightly grouped these moral profiles were, particularly in the older generation. The younger generation has one extreme individual that exhibited particularly high autonomy and low community-oriented discourse, and one other individual demonstrated a pattern more like the older generation, but the rest follow a fairly cohesive pattern.

Nonparametric statistical tests indicate that these group differences on autonomy- and community-oriented discourse are significant. First, considering the relatively greater usage of autonomous discourse among the younger generation, a Mann-Whitney U test for rank ordering indicated that this difference was significant at the $p < .001^{11}$ level (mean rank for older generation $= 6.05$, mean rank for younger generation $= 14.95$; Mann-Whitney U $= 5.5$, $Z = -3.38$).

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$^{11}$ All p-values reported here are two-tailed unless otherwise noted.
Conversely, the older Hmong utilized community-oriented discourse to a significantly greater extent, and this difference is also significant at the $p < .001$ level (mean rank for older generation = 14.7, mean rank for younger generation = 6.3; Mann-Whitney $U = 8$, $Z = -3.189$). Divinity centered justifications did not discriminate between the two generations (mean ranks for older and younger generations were 11.0 and 10.0, respectively), and it was somewhat surprising to find that this was the least commonly used ethic in moral discourse for both generations.
These group differences are compelling, and they represent the expected trends, given that the younger generation grew up and was socialized in the United States, while the older generation was born and grew up in rural Laos. However, an even more compelling analysis of these intergenerational group differences can be found by comparing each parent with his or her own child. It is possible that significant group differences exist without strong within-family effects. But if one is interested in understanding either the life course or acculturation implications for changing moral discourse, then a within-family comparison can elucidate what happens to particular families over generations. In order to make this comparison, I grouped each parent and child’s data and created a graphical representation of the trend within each family. This can be seen below in Figure 8 for autonomy and Figure 9 for community. Each line represents one child-parent dyad’s use of each type of discourse in relation to each other. The right point on each line represents the child, and the left point represents the parent. Thus, a negatively sloped line indicates that the parent used the given ethic to a greater extent than the child, while a positively sloped line indicates the child’s greater use of that ethic.

In Figure 8 one can see that the line for each family is positively sloped, thus indicating that not only did the younger generation as a whole utilize the ethic of autonomy more in their discourse, but that within each family, every child used autonomy to a greater extent than their parent. This is an important consideration because it leads one to conclude that no matter how autonomy-oriented one’s parent is within this sample, the child has become even more so at this stage of their life. Figure 9 represents the opposite trend for the community ethic. The negatively sloped lines indicate that in all but two
families, parents used community discourse to a greater extent than their children.

Figure 8: Intrafamilial use of autonomy discourse

Figure 9: Intrafamilial use of community discourse

In order to test these intrafamilial effects statistically, I treated each family as a
single unit with the parent representing one observation on the family and the child representing another. In this way, I constructed a paired-samples comparison across families, using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test (the nonparametric analog to a paired samples t-test). The results confirmed the statistical significance of these within family effects. Children’s mean rank in the autonomy comparison was 5.5 as compared to 0.0 for the parents ($Z = -2.803$, $p = .005$). Parents’ mean rank on community was 6.5 as compared to the children’s mean rank of 1.5 ($Z = -2.499$, $p = .012$). There was no significant difference on mean ranks of divinity for parents and children (5.5 and 3.5, respectively). In sum, a within family analysis lends stronger evidence to the claim that the younger generation is becoming more autonomy oriented and less community oriented than the older generation by adding the observation that these effects are occurring within families. Children whose parents utilize community and autonomy to greater or lesser extents (respectively) develop an even greater use of autonomy and utilize community to a lesser extent than their individual parents. I will return to this observation in my discussion of life course and acculturation theoretical perspectives on these data.

In order to give a better sense of how these differences play out in the moral discourse, consider two interview excerpts from a mother and her son, who were interviewed independently. The following quotes came from the last vignette on the husband who beat his wife for not obeying his command. From the son’s interview (P indicates the participant, J is the interviewer):

P: Yes, the beating part was wrong, because she does have a right to do whatever she wants. And if she doesn’t respect his wishes, mostly...
J: if she does or does not?

P: Or if she doesn’t respect his wishes...

J: But you said that the wife does have a right to do whatever she wants?

P: Do what she wants—not whatever but to do—to watch, I guess, not something that’s disrespecting the marriage, I guess. If she wants to go out and watch a movie then have like a, that’s her time of pleasure, I guess. You know what I mean?

J: Yeah.

P: But then she wasn’t doing anything wrong whatever when the husband beat her. That was the wrong part for the husband.

His mother, on the other hand, responded:

P: [The husband is not wrong in beating her].

J: Not wrong?

P: Maybe only a little bit, because he hit his wife.

J: Why is that wrong?

P: Because, well, it’s wrong and it’s not wrong because the wife didn’t tell him that she was going [to the movie] and made him very mad, so he was forced to beat her. So, it’s only a little wrong, not a lot.

J: Who is more wrong, the wife or the husband?

P: The wife’s transgression is worse than the husband’s, because she didn’t want to tell him [where she was going]...

J: So, because she didn’t do what he said...

P: Uh-huh-

J: it’s worse than the husband... beat...

P: beating her...

J: beating her very badly?
P: Uh-huh, uh-huh. But in America if the husband does something very bad [like beat his wife] that is worse, but we Hmong believe the wife’s transgression was the worse one, because she didn’t do what her husband told her.

A central difference between these two perspectives regards the emphasis the son put on the wife’s right to do whatever she wants (within limits), whereas the mother emphasized the wife’s need to obey and respect her husband. Notice that she ameliorated her assessment of the husband beating her because he was “forced” to do it, presumably by some obligation dictated to him by his station as a husband who needs to discipline a disobedient wife. Further, she asserts that the wife’s transgression is much worse, as her need to uphold the family hierarchy is more important than her desire to see a movie without her husband’s permission.

*Religious Comparisons*

Hmong talk about the tension that arises frequently within families and communities regarding conversion to Christianity from “traditional” shamanism. They speak of the ways that the new belief system undercuts familial cohesion (e.g., many Christians are forbidden to attend shaman ceremonies or *hu plig* rituals) and develop new moral beliefs that are incompatible with the old ways, such as an acceptance of polygyny. For these reasons, I suspected that I might find significant differences between those in my sample that proclaimed themselves to be “Christian” and those who called themselves “Traditional.” I had expected to find a greater use of autonomy discourse among the Christians, given the theological emphasis on individual salvation (Weber 1930). I had also suspected that notions of spiritual purity and God’s authority might seep in more to some vignettes.
One surprising aspect of the final data regards the relatively infrequent use of divinity-oriented discourse. Only 12.5% of the total justifications in the sample were classified under divinity, as compared to 30.7% under autonomy and 56.8% under community. This was certainly unexpected, given that both Traditional and Christian discourses have rich beliefs regarding the welfare of the soul that were expected to emerge in at least three of the vignettes (the father’s funeral, the adulterous woman, and couple converting to Christianity). A visual comparison of individual moral profiles similar to the generational comparison above indicated that the distribution across both religious preferences is erratic, with no obvious pattern. Further, statistical tests of differences in the utilization of autonomy and community show that the relative ranks of Christians and Traditionalists are relatively equal and not statistically different (mean ranks for Christians on autonomy and community were respectively 10.95 and 10.18; while mean ranks for Traditionalists on these ethics were respectively 8.69 and 9.75). Group differences on the use of the divinity ethic approached significance (Christian mean rank = 12.38, Traditionalist mean rank = 8.27; Mann-Whitney U = 25, Z = 1.613; 2-tailed p = .107).

In sum, the effects of religious preference on the moral discourse of this sample are weak, if extant. Even where differences in divinity discourse were marginally significant, the fact that such a small percentage of total justifications were offered under a divinity framework on vignettes designed to elicit such discourse suggests that other factors are more influential for moral discourse than religious preference. One alternative explanation is that it is possible that self-proclaimed Christians in my sample do not demonstrate an orthodox conviction to Christian theology. In my previous ethnographic work I observed
many families who participate actively in both Christian and animist communities and rituals without a strong conviction that either is better or ontologically more correct than the other. In such cases, one might expect community-oriented discourse to prevail, given that people in these situations seem to commit themselves to the religious communities, but not necessarily the spiritual ideologies.

*Gender Comparisons*

I did not have any pre-existing hypotheses regarding the effects of gender on moral discourse, and the analysis of men and women in my sample is largely exploratory. However, Carol Gilligan’s (1982) prominent feminist critique of Kohlberg’s framework would likely predict that women would score higher on an ethics of community, given her assertion of a feminine-specific ethics of care. However, I observed no discernable difference between men and women regarding community discourse. However, marginal significance was observed on gender differences of autonomy and divinity, with women manifesting more autonomy discourse (female mean rank = 13.22, male mean rank = 8.27; Mann-Whitney U = 25, Z = -1.871; p = .061) and men utilizing more divinity discourse (male mean rank = 12.32, female mean rank = 8.28; Mann-Whitney U = 29.5, Z = -1.574; p = .116). A visual representation of moral profiles by gender shows these differences as well (see Appendix D), in order to give a better sense of the raw distribution.

I shared these findings with several Hmong colleagues, and they independently concluded that this was unsurprising because Hmong men carry the burden of preserving and passing down cultural heritage from one generation to the next, including a Christian heritage for those who convert. Hmong women, on the other hand, are seen as becoming
more progressive in the United States than their male counterparts. They oftentimes speak English better than their husbands, provide a significant part if not the majority of household income, and are seen to have much more to benefit (e.g., women’s rights) from American norms than Hmong men do, who often see their traditional authority as being threatened by perceived American egalitarianism. These are but few possibilities that will require further study. Regardless, the lack of a significant difference on community dimension, paired with an increased use of autonomy ethics, works against Gilligan’s thesis of a feminine ethics of care. In fact, Shweder and others have consistently found that cultural differences in moral thinking trump the style of gender differences proposed by Gilligan.

The fact that Hmong women in this study (with an admittedly limited sample) is quite interesting in light of the brief vignettes I discussed in the previous chapter. While some Hmong predict this to be an artifact of Hmong feminism, I would argue that there is likely an extent to which this increased autonomy can be matched with a heightened sense of traditionalism in which women are seeking traditional cultural knowledge in ways that they did not in prior generations. This is obviously not a universal phenomenon, but the few examples that I cite in the prior chapter suggest that it is neither a negligible one. In many of these cases, women are proactively seeking to preserve the traditional framework, ironically in ways that go against the traditional male-centric distribution of ritual and religious knowledge. This phenomenon is not so different from the Islamic piety movement documented by Saba Mahmood (2004), in which women proactively established fundamentalist Islamic study groups that seemed to reinforce patriarchal principles of
Islam in interesting ways, despite the proactive feminine organization of these groups. There exists somewhat of a dearth of feminist scholarship on the Hmong diaspora\(^{12}\), particularly on women and their changing roles in traditional kinship structures. This area deserves much more attention in order to understand how gendered subjectivities are shifting in various sites of resettlement and relocation.

**Discussion: Life Course and Acculturation Frameworks**

Perhaps one most obvious explanatory framework for understanding the intergenerational patterns discussed above might be that of acculturation. Nicholas Tapp's framework approaches this to describe how the Hmong of Thailand are developing a more universalizing—and perhaps globalizing—morality as their socioeconomic circumstances shift to require such an ethos. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the present data, I will herein describe an additional framework that can be useful for understanding these trends, namely life course theory. I will briefly explain each perspective and its utility for understanding my results, including the different conclusions that one might draw from each. Finally, I will conclude by briefly describing the type of further comparative research that would be necessary to discern which of these or alternative theoretical frameworks would offer the most for understanding the differences in moral reasoning in the Hmong diaspora.

**Acculturation**

Tapp describes the processes of cultural change as centered on urbanization and the

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\(^{12}\) Two prominent exceptions to this would include Louisa Schein’s (2000 & 2004b) work on gender and sexuality among Hmong/Miao in China and the United States, and Patricia Symonds’s (2004) ethnography of Hmong in Thailand.
changing market-based activities of the Hmong in rural Thailand. As families become more involved in a larger socio-economy, they change their ways of dealing with moral issues to adjust for the new contexts in which they need to make judgments. For example, Tapp points to the petty mercantilism that requires Hmong to adopt a universalizing ethos of equity that allows merchants to buy at a low price and sell at a higher price without divulging one's sources to even relatives who might be prospective customers. One might say that this embodies many of the characteristics that Shweder et al. frame under an ethic of autonomy, particularly at the cost of a community ethic. Extending such an analysis to Hmong immigrants in the United States, one could imagine that a similar process is happening. A Hmong person who opens up a new store that particularly caters to other Hmong (i.e., an oriental market that carries items from Laos that other oriental markets do not carry is common in many of the communities where Hmong reside) is put in a very similar situation as the petty merchant described by Tapp. This logic is strained a bit when applied to Hmong who work low wage labor positions, but in such cases, other aspects of an acculturation framework could be applied. Interaction with state institutions even before coming to the United States, for instance, can have similar effects in imbuing ideologies of universal equity. As Hmong learn to deal with such institutions, they learn that one's strategy cannot revolve around in-group Confucian morality of the kind that Tapp says is being displaced, but that the state deals with individuals on a more individualistic level. Thus, a pressure may be felt to adopt the same ideology.

The vision of America as a meritocracy further enforces this ideal and teaches that anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Faith Nibbs (2006) asserts that this
type of ideology is becoming explicitly apparent among the Hmong in Texas, and that their
daily interactions with Texans and the Texas economy enforce these ideals. While I do not
have space to deal with the extensive mechanism by which acculturation of morality can
take place, the basic notion from Tapp and others is that the socioeconomic shift leads to
particular strategies of interpersonal relationships, which leads to different ways of
thinking about relationships in general. Along these lines, Margaret Mead (1970) argued
that as one’s orientation shifts between a communal, family life and other types of
networks (e.g., peers), that the relative stasis of these groups leads to subsequent stasis in
the case of the former and change in the case of the latter. As far as the Hmong in the United
States are concerned, the children are involved in schooling systems and socialization
networks that were not present for their parents at this stage in life. These needs were met
by family and clan structures in Laos. The basic thrust of the acculturation paradigm
suggest that the displacement of older cultural institutions and structures has lead to the
types of changes in moral reasoning observed in the present study, especially given that the
patterns observed in the younger generation match similar patterns observed in other
comparative research on Americans and non-Western societies (Haidt, et al. 1993; Jensen

-Life Course Theory-

Life course theory offers another valuable way of looking at the trends observed in
the present research. Glen Elder, a central proponent of life course theory, asserted that
humans’ experiences at different points in their lives can have different effects on their
development if they occur in different points in the life course (Elder 1998). Thus, if
different cohorts of men are drafted into military service at different times of life (even with a cohort difference of a couple of years), the effects of war-time experience and the disruption of the succession of life events can play out quite differently for these different cohorts (Elder, et al. 1994). The first obvious implication of this research for the Hmong regards the idea that the displacement as refugees has different implications for different generations’ life course trajectories. In other words, the effects of resettlement for one age of a Hmong refugee would be quite different from the effects on a Hmong person of a different age. This could even be combined with acculturation theory to assert that different cohorts of Hmong immigrants will experience different types of acculturation, as the drastic changes in ecology and political economy will have different ramifications for differently aged cohort. For example, a Hmong youth who resettles in the United States at the age of 14 is likely to receive little schooling and follow a traditional marriage pattern (possibly choosing to marry instead of finish high school), which will have further ramifications for later life events and the development of psychological processes. On the other hand, a Hmong child whose family migrates when he or she is eight years old is much more likely to be able to make up for missed schooling and be prepared to finish school and even possibly pursue a college education or career oriented pathway that might not have been an option for the 14-year-old refugee.

These different trajectories for different cohorts of refugees are quite parallel to Elder et al.’s (1994) study of military draftees. However, another competing life course explanation that is much less compatible with acculturation theory could also possibly explain the increased autonomy found in my younger sample. The different points of life in
which I interviewed these participants has different implications for the ways their life course trajectories play into the interview itself, particularly the personal demands of these different points within any given trajectory. For example, the younger interviewees were all college students who were trying to decide on fields of study or attempting to learn more about their newfound career pathways. Many are also dating frequently and participating in loose peer-based social circles as they look for mates and potential spouses. All of them live independently from their families, with roommates or possibly another sibling who is attending the same university. The point here is that the daily experiences and major decisions at this point in life are centered on setting up one’s personal future. One would not be hard pressed to assert that these types of decisions and this social context could easily foster a more autonomy-oriented morality that would actually serve the individual quite well at this point in life.

Conversely, the older generation’s daily experiences and decisions revolve around providing for children and aging parents, managing community affairs (both with extended families and clans as well as church groups for Christians), and building social networks that play essential roles in ritual practices (funerals, weddings, hu plig ceremonies, etc.). It may well be that the social context at this advanced point in the life course is better managed through a lens of community, which can explain why all of the parents in my sample tended more toward community concepts in their moral justifications. Lene Jensen (2008), in taking Three Ethics theory back to a more explicit developmental context, proposed the concept of a cultural-developmental template. This framework is useful in the present application of life course theory to my data. If the changing decisions and demands
at these two points in the life course (late adolescence and middle adulthood) do indeed lead to different ethics trumping others (or at least predispose individuals to favor them), then one might expect the cultural-developmental template for a Hmong immigrant to look like Figure 10, below. It is also essential to note that these trajectories may even play out differently for different genders and people of different socioeconomic status (e.g., a 14-year-old immigrant of greater financial means may be better able to pursue further schooling than one of lesser means).

![Figure 10: One hypothetical cultural-developmental template for a Hmong life course](image)

While there exists a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem here (what comes first, the context or the salience of an ethic?), it is obvious that the context experienced by the Hmong youth in the United States today was not an option for the older generation even when they were at this age in Laos, such as attending a university and living independently in a distant city. This represents another potential inroad for acculturation theory to combine with life course theory in this analysis. In sum, depending on how the problem is framed, life course theory and acculturation theory could provide mutually constitutive explanations for my data or perhaps propose competing hypotheses that could be tested in
further comparative research. In the next chapter, I deal with these competing hypotheses and present comparative data from Thailand and the United States to try and tease out the differential effects of resettlement in order to address this issue of life course effects versus acculturation effects in changes in moral reasoning.

Moral Conflict

One additional significant finding deserves mention in these data. This regards the extent to which interviewees experienced moral conflict with regards to their moral stances on various issues. As described above, responses were coded for multiple justifications that emerged in responses, including potentially conflicting justifications. An intergenerational comparison of the extent to which interviewees’ responses manifested moral conflict between multiple ethics is compelling. First, an additional way to parse the data outlined in the non-parametric comparisons of coded justifications above is to simply compare the total coded justifications by ethic and generation and conduct a chi-squared test on the distribution. This distribution is given below in Tables 4 and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation by Three Ethics Crosstabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL JUSTIFICATIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUTONOMY  COMMUNITY  DIVINITY  Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERATION OLD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count 17  62  12  91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Generation 18.7%  68.1%  13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YOUNG</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count 37  38  10  85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Generation 43.5%  44.7%  11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count 54  100  22  176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within Generation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages and totals are based on responses.

Table 4: Crosstabulation of each of the Three Ethics by generation across the sample
Table 5: Chi-square statistics

It is clear from this parsing of the data that the same trends emerge as described above—the younger generation use the ethic of autonomy in their justifications roughly to the same extent as the ethic of community, but the older generation appealed to the ethic of community to a much greater extent in their moral discourse. The chi-square statistics on this relationship indicate significance (Pearson $\chi^2=13.16$, $p = .001$). However, when the extent to which multiple ethics were used in the same vignette is taken into account, a more interesting picture emerges. To this end, the data was parsed into instances where multiple ethics were coded under the same vignette for the same participant. A tabulation of these instances is found in Table 6 below. The combinations of various ethics (i.e., autonomy and community together, community and divinity together, and autonomy and divinity together) are considered, and the results are tabulated by generation. The obvious trend here is that when multiple ethics were appealed to in the moral discourse responding to a single vignette, the younger generation tended to use autonomy and community together more often, and the older generation tended to use community and divinity together more often.
Table 6: Tabulation of multiple ethical justifications in the same vignette by generation

These instances of multiple justifications were analyzed for content in order to understand the trends underlying the appeal to multiple ethics in each moral stance. Content analyses indicated that the use of autonomy and community in the same vignette almost exclusively represented a conflict of moral stances that the interviewee struggled with. On the other hand, the use of community and divinity in the same vignette largely represented the use of multiple moral justifications toward the same ultimate behavioral prescription or moral valuation. A more complete summary of these discursive trends by vignette is given in full in Appendix C, but two examples are also given below. Thus, these data lead to the conclusion that younger Hmong in this sample experienced a significantly greater degree of moral ambivalence about how to react to different moral situations represented in the vignettes. This moral ambivalence is related to the types of experiences outlined in the beginning of this chapter—tensions that interviewees often described as
“traditional Hmong” perspectives competing with “modern American” ones. In order to better understand the nature of this moral conflict, consider this response by a younger Hmong person (an eighteen-year-old male) to the fourth vignette:

P: because it’s, well, his father should have permission to like I know it’s a privacy thing, but if it’s important to his parents, his father should be able to check his personal things. He is the household leader anyway.

... 

P: well, if it’s personal letter, I think he could uh- uh- he’ll probably, I don’t, I don’t really think it’s, I think it’s okay, because it’s, the father probably will understand if it’s a personal letter and go back and give it to him.

J: and what if the father reads it before the son reads it, is that wrong?

P: I think it’s, as far if he’d read like a personal letter, because he should understand we have our personal rights, besides just a family thing, you know? So, also that’s like the other side of that.

J: So if the father’s reading a letter to the son, and it’s a personal letter, then it is wrong?

P: yeah, it is wrong. That’s a privacy thing. We all have, you know, an outside life of the house. It’s okay if we get [them at] this point, but I mean sometimes you don’t want to get families involved in [some of these things].

The conflict is obvious here. This person feels the need for the son to retain a personal right or “privacy” to his property—a letter addressed to him. At the same time, he feels that the father does have the responsibility as the “household leader” to look after his son, even to the point of invading his personal things. This type of tension between an autonomy-based ethical evaluation and a community-based one was common.

On the other hand, consider the compounding use of community and divinity toward the same moral end in the following response of a sixty-four-year-old man to the
first vignette:

P: But in my own opinion, the right thing to do is that they [the doctors] must help him as much as they can, because it is their profession. It’s their job. And they want to know when someone is sick how they can go about fixing that person. They must help him. ...if they didn’t provide him with the medical attention they needed merely because he couldn’t pay them, that would be like throwing him in the garbage, because they are the one’s that are supposed to save people...

...[Also] because this is a poor person. And now compare heaven's law/way, one can be forgiven, let’s say this poor person didn’t do anything wrong to you, but just comes to you sick but doesn’t have money to pay you, and doesn’t have relatives [to help him pay], and you don’t heal him. If you do this then you did not show grace to him [the poor person], and perhaps heaven will not show grace to you either.

While this person invoked both a community-based responsibility (i.e., the essential role of doctors in society) as well as a divinity-based response, these multiple ethics are appealed toward the same moral end—the doctors must treat the man regardless of his ability to pay. This is contrasted to the previous example, where the younger person struggled with whether it was appropriate for the father to open his son’s mail or not, given the different ethics underpinning different possible responses. These trends are representative of the other cases where multiple ethics were appealed to, as demonstrated in Appendix C. Thus, it is apparent that younger Hmong experience significantly more moral conflict than their parents do with regard to the competition of different ethics that vie for space in one’s judgment.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the problematic different lines of moral reasoning that exist within a Hmong immigrant community in the United States, and I have proposed
potential ways to explain this variation. It is clear that further research—both ethnographic and psychological in nature—is needed to learn more about the sources of this variation. The central finding presented herein is that Hmong youth, who were born shortly before or shortly after their parents’ resettlement in the United States, use much more autonomy-oriented discourse in their justifications of their moral positions on a varied sample of hypothetical vignettes. They appealed much more to concepts of individual rights, justice, and the welfare of the individual as compared to their parents. Conversely, their parents utilized much more community-oriented discourse in their justifications, suggesting that parents reason more through notions of hierarchy, roles, and group welfare when making moral assessments. A further analysis revealed that these trends hold up within families and not just across the community. Divinity-oriented discourse was less prevalent than expected but did distinguish to a limited degree between Christians (who exhibited it more) and Traditionalists. Finally, women seemed to exhibit more autonomy-oriented discourse than men, and men seemed to utilize more divinity discourse than women.

One should not jump to the conclusion that these differences represent a mere lineal move toward Americanization or assimilation into an individualistic way of thinking, as might be asserted by a simplistic conception of “acculturation.” This would be a mistake on several levels. First, the degrees of community and autonomy discourse were roughly the same for Hmong youth, thus leading one to believe that, even having grown up in the United States, Hmong youth utilize communal ethics to a large extent, at least to a similar degree with which they invoke autonomous ideals. Further, I have also demonstrated that multiple, seemingly competitive ethics are often invoked in the same moral discussions, at
times in the ambivalent weighing of opposing moral judgments, and sometimes as a further bolstering of one’s initial moral inclination. The uses of multiple lines of moral discourse to different extents represent diverse ways of managing a complex moral landscape and could be seen as a means of successfully navigating the multiplicity of moral discourses available in the American resettlement context.

Shweder’s Three Ethics framework was influenced by the structure of Isaiah Berlin’s moral philosophy in its theorization of multiple ethics that are ultimately incommensurable. Isaiah Berlin (see Gray 1996 for a comprehensive summary of Berlin’s moral philosophy) argued for what he termed value pluralism—a cognitivist conception of moral goods that emphasizes the incompatibility of different moral principles. For Berlin, these differences in moral goods run deep. His moral ontology does assert enduring moral principles, but Berlin also argues that these principles are many and do not fit into a unifying framework, but in fact are ultimately incommensurable. While I do not intend to dwell significantly on his philosophy here, the structure of Berlin’s conception is interesting in analyzing Hmong moral discourses. The ways that certain incommensurable ethics are valued or devalued in the face of others represent examples of how unique cultural spaces are carved out and where incommensurability is discursively back-grounded in order to make sense of one’s moral domain. In other situations, ethics may be rationally mobilized to support one another, despite their incommensurability and mutual irreducibility. While for Berlin the ontology of community, autonomy, and divinity might include a deep rational incommensurability, cultural actors can form spaces where some principles are favored over others. Alternatively, they may deal explicitly with the
ambivalence about two competing ethics through simple ambivalence or perhaps novel iterations on old cultural models. The important thing is to recognize that Hmong of different generations react to the competition of moral goods that they encounter in daily moral discourse in different ways, but to characterize these generational differences as a mere acculturation toward a presumably more American way of moralizing would negate the strides of accommodation, commensuration, and negotiation that take place among a range of ethical perspectives that play into moral assessments and justifications. Further, it is likely that the point in the life course at which Hmong youth came to the United States is significant in understanding why they experience more moral conflict than their parents. Both life course theory and acculturation theory (in a non-linear conceptualization) can offer valuable insights into understanding why these observations have come about. In order to settle which of these is most likely the case or to what extent both are at play will depend on further comparative research, which I address in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: A Transnational Perspective on Moral Discourse

In Chapter 3, I discussed a salient Hmong cultural model of personhood and the accompanying conception of the life course that includes one’s post-mortal interactions and status as an important figure in daily kinship relations. I further argued that ancestral personhood, as I have called it, factors fundamentally into how my Hmong interlocutors construct their moral ideas. While the notions of personhood that I describe may in some cases tend to operate as a more implicit cultural model, the moral discourse to which it gives rise, I have argued, tends to be much more explicit and at the forefront of consciousness.

Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I took a more in-depth look into the patterns of moral reasoning and moral justification with a sample of Hmong families in Wisconsin. While I found interesting intergenerational differences in the patterns of moral justification with this sample, this chapter resulted in further questions about the nature and sources of these generational differences. I proposed a couple of frameworks for understanding these differences—most notably that the younger generation tended much more toward autonomy-oriented modes of moral justification in the discourse that I collected. The life course (Jensen 2008) and acculturation (Tapp 2002) frameworks outlined here provide possible explanations for the sources of these observed differences, but ultimately a more valid and reliable theorizing of these differences must rely on a broader comparative framework. One possible comparative framework for allowing a more robust understanding of the effects of social change on moral thinking for Hmong refugee families
might include a transnational comparison of Hmong that have resettled elsewhere, where the macrosocial dynamics are likely to vary significantly from those experienced by Hmong families in Wisconsin.

In this chapter, I undertake such a transnational comparative analysis of Hmong moral discourse. In so doing, I will demonstrate that some of the conclusions commonly drawn from data such as that presented in the previous chapter often lead to conclusions about the nature of psychocultural change that are overdrawn at best, or complete mischaracterizations of the psychocultural worlds of migrants at worst. While the two theoretical perspectives on which I focused my analysis in the previous chapter were tied more directly to either Three Ethics theory (in the case of Jensen) or the Hmong per se (in the case of Tapp), in this chapter I want to expand my theoretical scope to engage “acculturation theory” more broadly. While the concept of “acculturation” is not much discussed in recent anthropological scholarship, it is heavily theorized in sociology and psychology. Scholars in these sister disciplines have had much more to say on the topics that I am addressing here—viz., the effects of resettlement on psychosocial dynamics for immigrant families (see, for example, Berry, et al. 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2005; Rumbaut 1994; Rumbaut 1997; Schwartz, et al. 2010; Weinreich 2009). While this theoretical emphasis itself would merit my engagement of these theoretical perspectives from these alternative disciplinary perspectives, I also argue that currently prominent anthropological discourses of “neoliberal subjectivities” (and their variants) have significant inroads to these debates on “acculturation” and a “assimilation” that have been underexplored.
Through the course of this chapter, I will present data that provides a more robust transnational and comparative perspective to the effects of relocation to distinct sites on the development of moral discourse for Hmong families. These data have important contributions to make on the nature of social change for groups that relocate, such as Hmong refugees. I will call into question the predominant model of social change in migration sociology, “segmented assimilation,” as well as a related model that predominates psychologists’ treatments of acculturation as a psychosocial phenomenon. While both of these models were developed to question older, unilineal constructions of acculturation and assimilation, I will argue that they simply provide multilinear models to replace them. My data will call into question the very linearity that these models continue to presume. In part, the strength of my approach is found in its person-centered ethnographic approach and cultural discourse analysis. This mixed-methods approach is less susceptible to the type of linear or multilinear thinking entailed in the more strictly quantitative psychological and sociological models. I will conclude this argument by showing some of the ways that the moral perspectives of individuals in my sample have been fundamentally shaped by their experiences in displacement and resettlement, but in ways alternative to predictions that the aforementioned models offer.

Constructing a reliable and valid comparison to answer the questions I am seeking to undertake requires a rather robust comparative framework. I will thus begin by describing the comparative ethnographic methodology that went into gathering the data that are the basis of these claims. I will then describe the findings of these analyses, and proceed to describe how they challenge the theoretical models that I engage in this chapter.
Comparative Methodology

This dissertation project is fundamentally concerned with understanding the effects of displacement, resettlement, and relocation on the psychocultural experiences of those who migrate. In order to stake any claim as to why we might observe the distinct intergenerational patterns of moral thinking presented in Chapter 4, it is necessary to include a broader comparative framework than one group of families in one location. The research design and resulting finding presented in this chapter represent a culmination of this project. Consequently, I devoted extensive time and resources into developing a reliable sample of families to participate in this transnational comparison. In the introductory chapters, I described the broader methodological scope of the dissertation, but here I will outline the specific methodology of selecting, interviewing, and analyzing data from the core group of participants in my transnational comparison of moral discourse in Hmong families.

Establishing a Comparative Sample

After completing the earlier analysis described in Chapter 3, my goal was to broaden my sample to include transnational families that resettled in multiple locations. One could also compare families that remained in Laos with their relatives that relocated to the United States, but this would entail a slightly distinct research question from that which I engage here. Rather, I chose to establish a sample of Hmong families that span relocation and resettlement in Thailand and the United States.

This transnational comparison has several benefits. First, all Hmong families passed through Thailand at some point. Some families continued to resettle in third-party
countries such as the United States, while others remained in Thailand permanently. As a result, Thailand became the essential point of divergent relocation—a key factor in my design of transnational comparison. It is essential to note that many larger kin groups split up to relocate partially in Thailand and partially in the United States, and it was my goal to find a subset of families that were close relatives, had originated from the same areas in Laos, and had members that relocated to each place. This would allow me to use kinship as a basis for comparison and thus to isolate the relocation context in my analysis.

A second benefit to the Thailand-United States comparison is that Thailand is the second-most frequent site of permanent relocation for Hmong refugees from Laos, second only to the United States (Lemoine 2005; Tapp 2005a). Thus, from the standpoint of relocation frequency, Thailand would provide the most relevant comparison to Hmong who have resettled in the United States.

Third, Hmong have lived in Thailand since the mid-nineteenth century, when the mass exodus to the Southeast Asian peninsula really occurred en masse. When Hmong from Laos fled to Thailand after the United States withdrew in 1975, many of them went directly to established Hmong communities in Thailand. Even among those that went to the refugee camps, the vast majority that would resettle permanently in Thailand went to live in villages where Hmong had been living in Thailand for six or seven generations. These

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1 See Chapters 1 and 2 for a further description of resettlement patterns throughout the diaspora. In these references, Lemoine estimates that 15,000 Hmong resettled in France, while Tapp estimates at least 42,000 Hmong from Laos to have permanently resettled in Thailand.
2 From the oral histories I gathered, I found that a middle-aged Hmong man born in Thailand who is knowledgeable about his paternal ancestry was most likely to recall that
villages were quite similar in elevation and ecology to those that Hmong left in Laos when they fled. As a result of these circumstances, Thailand represents a relocation context for Hmong from Laos that is genuinely new and distinct sociopolitical context from Laos, but maximally distinct from the social contexts where Hmong resettled in the United States.

Given the nature of my research question, Hmong refugees in Thailand therefore represent an ideal comparison for Hmong refugees in the United States. They remained in relatively rural subsistence agricultural communities, yet had to cope with the difficulties of resettlement. The robust character of this comparison is found in the expectation, for example, that Hmong in relatively urban contexts in the United States might be expected to adopt the cultural models of peer groups in schools, engage in economic practices that breed individualism (see discussion of neoliberalism later in this chapter), or otherwise gradually assimilate into comparatively urban American society. This would provide one explanation for the generational differences found (i.e., a relatively higher usage of autonomy in the younger generation among Hmong families in Wisconsin). If this conclusion were correct, then one would expect there to be lower levels of autonomy oriented reasoning among Hmong youth in a traditional village context in Thailand, holding everything else constant. In sum, comparing related Hmong refugees in Thailand and the United States establishes a sort of quasi-experimental research design upon which one could stake claims about the influences of the resettlement context on factors such as moral discourse and their related self-concepts.

he belonged to the sixth or seventh generation after his paternal great-grandfather left China. This also coincides with placement of resettlement to Thailand in the mid-nineteenth century.
In order to establish such a comparative sample, I decided to start by establishing a sample of Hmong refugee families in Thailand who have close relatives in the United States. I conducted a survey trip of Hmong communities in Thailand in October 2007. I visited over thirty rural Hmong villages and conducted a quick survey of the ethnic constitution of each village, including the estimated percentage of Hmong refugees from Laos and some other village-level demographics. This survey trip included visiting communities in every major province where Hmong reside in Thailand. Using these data and in consultation with local social scientists, I found a field site relatively close to the Thai-Lao border—Ban Txuam—where we estimated at the time that anywhere from one-third to one-half of the residents were refugee families that fled Laos after 1975. It also seemed probable that many of the Lao Hmong refugees in Ban Txuam had relatives in the United States.

Having established a field site, I began a year of ethnographic fieldwork in September 2008. During this time, I conducted the survey described in Chapter 2. The central purpose of this survey was both to help me understand the demographics of the community where I was doing fieldwork, but also to find families who met my criteria for comparison, and whom I could use to find comparison families in the United States.

**Sampling**

In order to obtain a robust sample of households in Ban Txuam—a fairly large

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3 I spoke to the village headman when possible, and I was also aided by my research assistant, Tooj Lis, who knew many of the villages we visited during this survey trip.

4 Most notably I would like to thank Prasit Leepreecha for his mentorship from my first survey trip, throughout the course of my fieldwork, and throughout the analysis phase as well. His guidance was invaluable in helping me find and establish the most appropriate field site for this project.
Hmong community—I obtained a geocoded satellite image of the entire community. This image was taken during my fieldwork, and therefore accurately depicted the households in the community at the time. Using this image, I randomly generated latitude and longitude coordinates and overlaid them on the map. I selected any habitable structure located within eleven meters of any of these randomly generated points, and sampled the household pertaining to that physical structure. I did not include households where none of the members were Hmong. This sampling procedure yielded approximately 150 Hmong households, of which my research assistants and I were able to successfully survey 121 households.\(^5\)

The survey (See Appendix E) was conducted orally by myself and research assistants. It included a host of questions on transnational kinship networks, contact information for relatives in other countries, their specific locations, relatedness to these relatives, and frequency of contact. The other relevant information on the survey included an oral history (which was digitally recorded in addition to the questions on the survey) as to why the family did or did not desire to migrate to the United States, and the circumstances behind whether the opportunity was available or not (see a summary of these data in Chapter 2). Using these data, I was able to establish a sub-sample of surveyed families with close relatives in a single location in the United States.

In order to establish a robust sample of families that could provide comparative data to answer the questions raised in Chapter 4, I used the following criteria to select

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\(^5\) See Chapter 2 for a further description of the Ban Txuam and the survey and sampling protocols.
families from the 121 surveyed households: 1) The household leader or spouse fled Laos as a refugee after 1975 or was born in Thailand shortly after their parent fled (see other criteria); 2) the family had close relatives (e.g., siblings, first cousins, etc.) that originated in the same part of Laos, but who resettled permanently in the United States; 3) the relevant person had either a child who is in late adolescence or early adulthood (in the case of an older household head) or a parent (in the case of a younger household head) available for interviewing; 4) the family had contact information for their relatives in the United States; and 5) the relatives in the United States resided in a single community or general vicinity. In sum, I needed refugee families with a parent and child available for interviewing and relatives that I could track down for interviews in the United States, and who also met these criteria to constitute a valid comparison of the relative effects of differential relocation.

While sixty-three of the 121 households had contact information for relatives in the United States, in many cases this included Hmong originally from Thailand with relatives that moved to the United States for reasons other than resettlement as certified refugees (e.g., marriage or work). For Hmong refugees from Laos, there were two central areas where their relatives were located in the United States: the Central Valley (California) and Minnesota. In the end, there were twenty families out of the 121 that met the above criteria and whose relatives were located in a single location in the Midwestern United States. These became the core families for my subsequent interviews during my fieldwork in Thailand. Of these twenty families, I was able to successfully recruit thirteen families for the series of interviews described below. Of these thirteen, I was able to successfully track
down nine of the corresponding relative families in the United States that also met these criteria and were willing to be interviewed. This resulted in a final sample of nine paired-comparison families (one in each country/community) with a parent and a child in each family. The final sampling matrix for my extended interviews and data analysis of transnational families, along with the age ranges for each subgroup, is summarized in Table 7. All of the following analyses are conducted on data from members of the nine families for whom I have data in both locations.6

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Table 7: Summary of Transnational Comparative Sample and age ranges8

While I started with a random sample of 121 households in Ban Txuam, the total

6 There are three vignette interviews missing from this subset that I have thus far been unsuccessful in scheduling (one parent in Thailand and two children in the United States). However, given my other interviews with these individuals, I expect that their moral perspectives conform with the trends I describe below. The numbers in Table 7 reflect the actual sample sizes, including these omissions.

7 All younger participants in the United States were aged 18-23, except for one, whose age was not firmly established. He seemed to be in his mid-30s, had been married within the past couple years (to a wife in her early twenties) and they had recently had their first child. Qualitatively, one might consider him an “early adult.”

8 The higher sample sizes in parentheses in the Thailand column indicate that I did successfully recruit fourteen parents of the eligible subsample in Ban Txuam, as well as all but one of their children for the set of interviews in this study. However, for various reasons, I was only able to track down ten of the related families in the United States, one of whom I was not able to successfully interview.
sample size of thirty-three individuals in these nine larger kinship groups may seem limited, but the stringent nature of my selection criteria really form the basis for this robust comparison. Further, I was able to spend just short of three hours on average in recorded interviews with each person, resulting in a wealth of data to make comparisons through discourse and narrative analyses. While this mixed-methods approach may not be able to boast the larger sample sizes of other research on the effects of immigration, the wealth of data collected here on each person and the robust nature of the comparison of these nine families that meet strict criteria allow for a more ethnographically grounded and robust comparative perspective on the effects of migration on the lives of migrants to different locations.

One particular sampling issue needs further explanation. One might argue, for example, that the very reasons that certain families chose to migrate to the United States may have created an a priori selection bias that threatens the validity of my research design. Anticipating this possibility, at the point of the survey data collection, data was collected on the reasons for migration (or not) and the circumstances that allowed or prohibited resettlement to the United States. These reasons are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. Here it is significant to note that the vast majority of families in the sub-sample recall a desire to resettle to the United States, but cited an array of circumstances that prohibited the possibility. For example, some of them happened to come upon Ban T xuam prior to living in any official refugee camp where the opportunities eventually arose to resettle. Others may have lived in refugee camps at times when the interview process for gaining official refugee status (and therefore the possibility of third-party country
resettlement) was not undertaken. Others expressed a desire to resettle in a third country, but were delegated the responsibility to stay with relatives that could not or would not resettle. In short, from the oral histories I gathered with these families, there were no systematic differences in the desire to migrate to a third country like the United States (the main destination for most refugees). Further, with regards to the circumstances that prevented or enabled the refugee certification process and eventual resettlement appeared more or less random, i.e., not systematically distributed. These reasons seem to have no obvious bearing on moral thinking and self-concepts, and I therefore conclude that there is no significant selection bias to distinguish the families in Ban Txuam versus those in the Midwestern United States.

Data Collection

The elicitation of moral discourse followed a similar methodological framework to that laid out in Chapter 4. In the present analysis, I will focus initially on the vignette-driven interviews with each person. As with the Wisconsin study, I presented six moral vignettes to each participant, followed by a series of follow-up questions designed to encourage interviewees to express and justify their moral assessment of the actors' actions in each vignette and the moral principles involved. While I did ask each of the follow up questions for the vignettes, I yet maintained a largely semi-structured character to the interviews, exploring issues that interviewees cared to discuss in greater detail. I sought to exhaust their moral stances and accompanying justifications on each issue. The particular vignettes did vary from the Wisconsin study, except for two of them.

For the transnational comparison, I designed two vignettes from my ethnographic
fieldwork in studying Hmong moral perspectives, one of which was designed specifically with Tapp’s (2002) work in mind (vignette #2). I used two of Shweder et al.’s (2003) vignettes that were relevant to a Hmong cultural context (these were also used in the Wisconsin study), and I further added two real situations that were reported to me by my research assistants. The essential moral issues at stake in each vignette were, respectively: 1) a son leaving his parents and changing his given and clan names; 2) a person buying goods at a low price, selling them at a higher price, and refusing to tell relatives where to buy the cheaper goods; 3) a husband beating a wife for defying his will; 4) a father opening his son’s mail without prior permission; 5) a son having to decide to follow his wife and move out of his parent’s home or alternatively follow his mother’s wishes and remain living with them; and 6) a family changing back and forth between Christian and traditional Hmong religious practices to satisfy the spiritual demands of their deceased father. The vignettes can be found in their entirety as presented to participants, along with follow-up questions, in Appendix A.

In addition to the Wisconsin study’s protocols, this larger comparative study of transnational Hmong families also included several other dimensions of data collection. Most notably, I conducted a dedicated interview with each person (usually during a second or third visit) to collect a personal history and have a more open and loose discussion about the person’s life that was driven by what they wanted to discuss, rather than my presenting of vignettes or particular questions to elicit responses. This personal narrative interview typically began with a question to the effect of “tell me about your life growing up.” I did use a host of additional questions to elicit personal narratives and understand
each person’s personal-familial dynamics if this type of information was not forthcoming, but this was less of an interview schedule than a means of eliciting personal narratives. These questions and general topics are given in Appendix G.

Beyond these two interviews, I also spent a more significant amount of time with some of these families outside of my interview interactions with them. These families became the focal point of my year of ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand and the corresponding nine months of fieldwork in the United States. I used these families as the central nodes of the social networks that I developed. I attended rituals in their homes, attended funerals for their relatives, went to their farms and sold with them in the markets (including in the Midwest), and otherwise engaged in extended participant observation with them. It is essential to note that I did not have these extended experiences with all of the families in the sample, but I did, to a great extent, with three families in each field site. This extended participant observation, the rapport I gained with them, the extended personal narrative interviews, and the extensive survey data and migration history collected with each family allowed me a much deeper insight into the experiences of resettlement for each family than I was offered for families in the Wisconsin study in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

I will draw here primarily from the data in the vignette-driven interviews as the primary evidence for moral thinking, but these additional sources of data provide context for my discourse analyses of these data in what follows. I was particularly keen to correlate personal experiences in resettlement and personal kinship-based practices with the moral
discourse collected, in order to capitalize on the value of the person-centered approach that inspired my interview methodology (as outlined in Chapter 1, see also Hollan 2001; Levy and Hollan 1998).

I utilized two styles of analysis in my approach to finding patterns in moral justification. First, the cultural discourse analysis method outlined by Quinn (2005) involves a more grounded, inductive approach to figuring out the underlying cultural models or schemas that give structure to cultural discourse. This method was central to my theorizing of the concept of ancestral personhood in Chapter 3, but it also played a central role in understanding some of the less explicitly developed moral models in the moral justification data. Second, I utilized the same Three Ethics deductive coding method as in Chapter 4. This utilized Jensen’s coding framework (Jensen 2004) in order to categorize the types of moral justifications that might be classifiable under one of the Three Ethics, autonomy, community, or divinity. The deductive method allowed for a more systematic analysis of the trends across groups (i.e., generation, location), while the cultural discourse analysis allowed for a more meaning-centered understanding of these quantitative trends.

Operationalization and Reliability

The deductive method required a strict protocol in order to establish the reliability of the coding. To this end, two research assistants were trained in the Three Ethics theoretical perspective and corresponding coding protocols. One of these research assistants was a native Hmong speaker, and the second only spoke English. Thus, the Hmong research assistant coded all of the Hmong-language interviews, while the English-language research assistant coded English language interviews (largely the younger
generation in the United States). I personally coded every interview according to the Three Ethics framework, along with developing a grounded coding scheme and otherwise conducting a cultural discourse analysis of responses. Examples of the discourse coded to each item in the Jensen coding scheme are given in Appendix F. An inter-rater reliability index was further calculated between each independent coder and myself, as well as between the two coders themselves, who coded a small subset of each other’s data. The inter-rater reliability coefficient (Cohen’s Kappa) between the Hmong coder and myself was 0.665 (79.79% agreement out of 292 observations, 95% confidence interval of kappa = 0.589 to 0.742), between the English coder and myself was 0.686 (81.62% agreement out of 136 observations, 95% confidence interval for kappa = 0.571 to 0.801), and between the Hmong and English coders was 1.0 (100% agreement out of 17 observations). This represents a relatively high degree of agreement on how to classify different types of moral justifications according to the Three Ethics framework. Having established reliability, I used my coding of the data for the analysis that follows, in order to maximize consistency across the data.

In order to test the patterns of moral justifications across members of social groups in this transnational sample, I operationalized a set of rules for counting coded justifications. First, each instance of amoral justification that was coded to a particular

9 One caveat to these figures is that there was some disagreement as to the extent of moral justifications coded. In the end, I coded more liberally than either independent coder, meaning that I included more instances of moral speech as “justification,” while the independent coders coded more parsimoniously. Nevertheless, the extent of agreement on the common justifications suggest that all coders were operationalizing the concepts in the same manner.
subcode in Jensen’s scheme would only be counted once per vignette. In other words, mentioning the same concept twice in discussing a moral position did not increase the number of justifications for the encompassing ethic. Second, the total number of justifications under each of the three ethics would be counted from the number of subcategories of each ethic that were used to justify a person's moral stance within a vignette, summed across the vignettes. The guiding principle here is that as one defends one's moral position, a greater variety of sub-concepts for a given ethic provides evidence for a more developed level of thinking under that ethic. In order to control for loquaciousness or verbosity, I used the final counts for autonomy, community, and divinity justifications to calculate the relative percentage of each ethic that accounted for a proportion of the person’s total coded moral discourse. These percentages form the central basis for the present analysis. Interviewee’s responded with an average of 19.64 moral justifications that were coded across the six vignettes.

Results

As in the analysis in Chapter 3, the percentages of each participants’ moral justifications coded to the ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity can be used to create a moral profile for each individual. Conceptualizing an individual’s moral thinking in this way may not necessarily represent a global moral profile for the person, since moral justifications were constructed in reaction to specific moral situations. However, the standardization of vignettes presented to each person provides at least a standard against which the distribution of concepts wielded in moral justification vary across generations and resettlement locations—the central purpose of this analysis. Further, the variation in
particular dimensions of any given moral situation can vary quite broadly, and I consider it safe to presume that a person’s moral outlook significantly colors what precise dimensions of the vignette are emphasized and elicit comment. This expectation is not too different from what psychologists consider the ambiguous stimulus hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that the interpretive and perceptual force of an individual’s psyche comes to bear on interpretable stimuli in personality assessment, for example (Blatt 1992).

The vignettes used in my interviews might be considered a parallel assessment of moral reasoning. For example, it was initially surprising to me that in response to the third vignette (regarding the husband beating his wife after being warned not to go see a movie), a large proportion of responses focused more on the actions of the wife as a disobedient spouse than the action of the husband beating her. From the standpoint of liberal individualism, this is by no means an obvious moral issue, while from an ethics of filial piety it is easily foregrounded. To reiterate, while I do not claim that the moral profiles presented here represent a complete global assessment of each individuals’ moral worldview, I would also argue that the moral perspectives brought to bear on these vignettes are not simply limited to the nature of the vignettes either.

In that spirit, Appendix H includes the entire distribution of individual moral profiles, divided into subgroups (the older generation in Thailand = TH-O, older generation in the United States = US-O, younger generation in Thailand = TH-Y, and the younger generation in the United States = US-Y). Figure 11 summarizes these findings by displaying the average percent of total coded discourse coded to each ethic (autonomy, community, and divinity) for each subgroup.
Figure 11: Average moral profile of each transnational subgroup

Figure 12: Three Ethics distribution across generation and location sub-groups

The most striking impression from this graph consists in the inverted hierarchy of autonomy and community ethics that occupy the most substantial proportion of coded moral discourse. This hierarchy indicates that the younger generation utilized higher
proportion of autonomy discourse than their parents’ generation, while they utilized a lower proportion of community discourse. Within each generation, Hmong in the United States utilized a greater proportion of autonomy discourse than their counterparts in Thailand, and vice versa for community discourse. There were not substantial differences in the utilization of divinity discourse across generations or locations, which on average only accounted for slightly less than 20% of the total coded discourse.

Another way to fruitfully represent these data is to graph the averages by subgroup, with each ethic constituting a separate line, presented in Figure 12. This representation of the same data highlights the generational differences within each ethic, rather than emphasizing differences in the global moral profile. Figure 12 represents the average for each subgroup across the nine transnational families. This visual representation highlights one of the most important features of these results—the trends of moral discourse across the life course in each location. This visual also provides a good conceptual comparison to Jensen’s (2008) argument, which emphasizes the differential development of different styles of moral discourse over the course of development, from childhood to adolescence, and into adulthood. One of Jensen’s key points is to argue for a more extensive consideration of the importance of potential variation in the moral perspectives that dominate a person’s thinking at different points in the life course.

Assuming a continuity of developmental patterns across generations in the present data (I address this assumption in detail below), it is apparent that autonomy and community manifest inverse trends across the life course. These trends also appear from these data to be constant for Hmong families in both Thailand and the United States. In
sum, autonomy-oriented moral thinking seems to decrease as one matures into mid- and late-adulthood, and community-oriented moral thinking seems to increase over the same period of development. While divinity-oriented justifications constituted a lower total proportion of moral thinking in this sample, it manifests a similar trend as community ethics, slightly increasing in later adulthood in both the United States and Thailand.

This finding is key to addressing the questions raised in the previous chapter. For example, one conclusion that could be drawn from the generational differences observed in Chapter 4 would assert that the younger generation, having been raised in the United States for all or most of their lives, are simply migrating toward a more liberal individualist, ‘American,’ style of moral reasoning. The trends manifested in Figures 11 and 12 provide striking evidence against these claims, and point to a more constant form of generational differences across these disparate resettlement contexts. Rather than pointing to a unilateral move of Hmong youth in the United States toward a more individualistic mode of moral reasoning, these data suggest that a Hmong-specific cultural-developmental template may be at play. That is, despite the distinct resettlement locations and experiences of these sub-samples, Hmong youth seem to utilize autonomy-oriented reasoning to a greater extent than their parents, for whom community-oriented thinking occupies a more substantial proportion of their moral reasoning.

Divinity was relatively less important for both generations, but nevertheless a significant concept. Divinity justifications accounted for between 10% and 20% of the total coded discourse for each subgroup. The graph suggests a slight increase in divinity-oriented thinking over the life course as well, although this difference did not bear out
statistically (see below). Another important note here is that the distinction between
divinity and community can be a rather nebulous one in a Hmong cultural context. Given
the Hmong ontology of spirits and ancestors and the conception of ancestral personhood
described in Chapter 3, it is difficult to draw a line between filial piety toward living elders
and ancestors. For this reason, I suspect that the divinity figures reported here are under-
representative of the extent to which the welfare of the soul plays into one’s moral
thinking. This is because these concerns may just as well be expressed in communal terms
of duty to elders, whereas the divinity sub-codes were only applied when the post-mortal
sojourn or well-being of the individual was explicitly glossed.

Models

Several statistical models are necessary to backup the more descriptive trends laid
out above. While these sub-groups represent essentially four members of nine
independently sampled case studies, it is useful to initially compare them in a multivariate
analysis of variance model to establish that the differences in Figures 11 and 12 are beyond
what one might expect by chance. After describing two multivariate models, I will then
describe a related-samples measure that treats these cases as related.

As Figures 11 and 12 use the total percentages of each discourse (which sum to
100% for each person) to control for the verbosity of individual interviewees, the first
model utilizes these percentages. Using SPSS’s General Linear Model (GLM) function, I
constructed a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with autonomy percentage,
community percentage, and divinity percentages as dependent variables, while using
country, generation, and an interaction term as independent predictors (no covariates on
this model). In essence, this model tests whether sub-group membership effectively predicts one's level of reasoning on each of the three ethics, expressed as percentages of one's total moral discourse. The relevant statistics are given in Tables 8 and 9.

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<td>3.526</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.028^c</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.797</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>3.613</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.613</td>
<td>257.426</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>8.445</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.445</td>
<td>773.455</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.823</td>
<td>70.690</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>15.703</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>8.832</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>2.170</td>
<td>.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>3.396</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>2.426</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation x Country</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.014</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.338</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>4.223</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.223</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>9.044</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>1.215</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.215</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>AUT_PCT</td>
<td>.658</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.658</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COM_PCT</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DIV_PCT</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. R Squared = .382 (Adjusted R Squared = .318)
b. R Squared = .267 (Adjusted R Squared = .191)
c. R Squared = .076 (Adjusted R Squared = .019)

Table 8: MANOVA Statistics for Three Ethics x Generation and Country

The MANOVA statistic indicated a statistically significant multivariate effect for generation (F = 8.061, p=.002), but not for country (F = 1.858, p=.175) or the interaction term, generation x country (F = .058, p=.944). Further inspection of the generational effects reveals significant univariate effects of generation on autonomy percentage (F = 15.703, p <
and community percentage (F = 8.832, p=.006), but not on divinity (F = 2.170, p=.152). Effectively, this model provides confirmatory evidence for a life-course trend in which autonomy decreases in the older generation, while community increases. The lack of multivariate and univariate significance of country or an interaction of country x generation on three ethics levels suggests that a very similar trend is happening within Hmong families in both the United States and Thailand.  

| Table 9: Univariate statistics and mean generational differences on three ethics |

Table 9 displays the mean differences between generations (including confidence intervals for the differences) to give an idea of the relative effect size of this trend. We would expect the average child in this sample to devote 16.4% more of their moral

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11 I should note here that in the univariate tests, the generational difference in autonomy percentage did approach significance (F = 3.396, p = .076), with the American sample being on average 7.6% higher in autonomy justifications (the 95% confidence interval for the group difference is -0.08% to 16.1%). In the subsequent MANCOVA this trend is even weaker (p = .124). It is also unorthodox statistical practice to consider the univariate figures in the absences of multivariate significance. Thus, the evidence for American-specific acculturation toward autonomy is weak to non-existent in these data.
discourse to autonomy-driven concepts, as compared to the average parent devoting 10.9% more of their discourse to community-driven concepts.

Using the relative percentage of each ethic as the independent variable has the strength of controlling for participants who were simply more forthcoming with moral discourse than others. It also allows one to visually represent standardized moral profiles of research participants, as I have done in Appendices H and I. This practice makes sense from the perspective of Three Ethics theory, since autonomy, community, and divinity (in a minimalistic sense) are theorized to be comprehensive of the moral domain, or at least to constitute some of the strongest known candidates for universally available moral goods. This is especially true of Jensen’s deductive Three Ethics coding protocol (2004). However, one significant limitation is that treating these three different types of moral justifications this way necessitates dependency (and colinearity) among the three outcomes, since they always add up to 100%. This limitation has the possibility of distorting ethic-specific differences between groups because of this colinearity issue.12

For these reasons, I ran a second model on the raw number of coded justifications for each person. This MANCOVA model is structured the same as the previous model, except that it models raw justifications while using the total number of moral justifications for each individual as a covariate. This covariate provides a statistical means of controlling for individuals who simply offered more moral discourse, similar to the way I use

12 This could have the effect of either over- or under-exaggerating the trend of a particular ethic because of its dependence on the levels of the other two ethics. However, this concern took a back seat to the importance of creating a standard for individual and sub-group comparisons for this chapter. The MANOVA model of raw justifications guards against the limitations of using the standardized percentages.
percentages to standardize loquaciousness in the above graphs and model. The multivariate statistics are given in Table 10.

### Table 10: MANCOVA model of raw justifications with total justifications as covariate

Similar to the previous model, using the total number of justifications as a covariate in a MANCOVA revealed a significant multivariate effect for generation \((F = 7.901, p = .002)\) but not for country or the interaction term. The univariate statistics are perhaps more revealing as to the nature of the data on this trend. Recall that the average interviewee utilized 19.6 distinct moral justifications that were coded to the three ethics. As can be seen in Table 11, when controlling for the total number of coded justifications, one could expect the younger generation to utilize roughly 3.4 more autonomy-oriented concepts in their
moral reasoning than their parents (p < .001) and 1.9 fewer community justifications than their parents (p=.012). What’s more, this model reveals a significant effect for divinity, wherein the older generation is expected to employ 1.4 more divinity-oriented concepts (p=.048) than their children in an interview. Given the relatively lower use of divinity across the sample, it is possible that this effect was bled out by the higher percentages of autonomy and community in the previous model.

Table 11: Univariate generational differences with total justifications as covariate

This model provides a significant confirmation to the first model, namely that a significant generational trend exists where parents utilized autonomy to a much lesser extent than their children, while utilizing community to a greater extent. The generational effect of autonomy reasoning is nearly not quite double that of community, but more than double the generational effect of divinity.

Before expounding on the theoretical implications of these findings, it is necessary to consider the paired-comparison effects, since these transnational families essentially represent a set of related samples. As in Chapter 4, one way to do this would be to use a
non-parametric paired-comparison test, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. This procedure treats each parent-child dyad as a single case, and tests whether the generational differences (in both size and direction) significantly deviate from what one might expect if there were no generational pattern. I ran this model on the percentage data, since I would have no way to control for loquaciousness on the raw number of justifications for this procedure. Results of these non-parametric tests are given in Tables 12 and 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Sum of Ranks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YOUNG_AUT_PCT - OLD_AUT_PCT</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>107.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUNG_COM_PCT - OLD_COM_PCT</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>104.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>32.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUNG_DIV_PCT - OLD_DIV_PCT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>32.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. YOUNG_AUT_PCT < OLD_AUT_PCT
b. YOUNG_AUT_PCT > OLD_AUT_PCT
c. YOUNG_AUT_PCT = OLD_AUT_PCT
d. YOUNG_COM_PCT < OLD_COM_PCT
e. YOUNG_COM_PCT > OLD_COM_PCT
f. YOUNG_COM_PCT = OLD_COM_PCT
g. YOUNG_DIV_PCT < OLD_DIV_PCT
h. YOUNG_DIV_PCT > OLD_DIV_PCT
i. YOUNG_DIV_PCT = OLD_DIV_PCT

Table 12: Wilcoxon Signed Ranks for generational patterns of three ethics percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Statistics&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>YOUNG_AUT_PCT - OLD_AUT_PCT</th>
<th>YOUNG_COM_PCT - OLD_COM_PCT</th>
<th>YOUNG_DIV_PCT - OLD_DIV_PCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>-2.669&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-2.499&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-1.590&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Based on negative ranks.
b. Based on positive ranks.
c. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

Table 13: Wilcoxon Signed Rank test statistics for generational trends on Three Ethics

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These non-parametric test statistics indicate a significant generational difference within families on the relative use of autonomy ($Z = -2.669, p = .008$) and community ($Z = -2.499, p = .012$). There is a marginally non-significant trend on divinity ($Z = -1.590, p = .112$), which might have been significant if not for the colinearity issues. In other words, not only are the aforementioned trends true across the sample, but within families as well.\footnote{The signed ranks in Table 12 give counts of the number of cases where the expectation was true and the number in which it was false. This forms the basis for the within-family comparison test statistic.} This provides further evidence for the potential significance of a life-course trend concerning the increasing use of community and diminishing use of autonomy (and to a more limited extent, the increasing use of divinity) over the course of one’s life. I now turn to the theoretical ramifications of these data.

**Acculturation, Assimilation, and Life-Course Trajectories**

In the last chapter I discussed two theoretical frameworks that might be brought to bear in understanding the generational patterns in moral thinking for Hmong families in Wisconsin. Each of these perspectives was directly related to either the Three Ethics theory (Jensen 2008), or represented a theory developed largely to explain patterns in Hmong communities (Tapp 2002). Here I want to broaden this discussion to include the most prominent theoretical models of psychosocial change in the social sciences. One of these models dominates research on migration in psychology, while the other dominates sociological approaches to migrations research and social change. However, the problems with each model are fundamentally the same, and I will argue that, when brought to bear on the data in this chapter, these models will result in misleading conclusions and
predictions about social change for Hmong in the diaspora.

Ultimately, what these models lack is an epistemological approach that is firmly grounded in ethnography, yet still open to the quantitative trends on which they largely base their conclusions. This is precisely the approach I bring to the table in my person-centered ethnographic analyses of psychocultural change in the Hmong diaspora. My alternative ethnographic focus on the interstitial space between individuals and their cultural models enables alternative conclusions to these two models of psychosocial change in migration. Ultimately, I will argue that an ethnographic grounding to these models will help to broaden the conclusions that can possibly be drawn from them, and to pay greater attention to the interplay between individual psychocultural dynamics and the more cultural-level models and social process that impinge on them. But first, I will address the models themselves.

_A Psychological Model of Acculturation / Assimilation_

Both of the models I address in this section were developed in reaction to an older, unidimensional conception of acculturation and assimilation as a process in which migrants or minorities move unilaterally from their original cultural practices, beliefs, and values to adopt those of the majority in the host society where they live or resettle (Gordon 1964; Teske and Nelson 1974). Earlier critiques of theorizing this type of social change argue that acculturation and assimilation are not the same process, and neither acculturation nor assimilation is necessarily unidirectional (Teske and Nelson 1974). However, these earlier accounts nevertheless conceived of this process as ultimately constituting a unilineal continuum from one set of cultural practices and beliefs to another.
Both psychologists and sociologists have responded to this simplistic model by adding further dimensions.

**Figure 3.** Acculturation types (Felix-Ortiz et al., 1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation toward American culture</th>
<th>Cultural Maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly Bicultural</strong></td>
<td><strong>Integration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High to Average on cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty to culture of origin</td>
<td>Interest in maintaining one's original culture while also participating in daily and social activities of the dominant group and with other ethnic and cultural groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High to average on orientation toward host culture</td>
<td><strong>Assimilation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low orientation toward host culture</td>
<td>Individual does not wish to maintain his/her cultural identity and seeks daily interactions with other cultures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Ethnically-identified** | **Low-level Bicultural** |
| High cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty toward culture of origin | Potentially high on cultural awareness but low or average on ethnic loyalty |
| Low orientation toward host culture | Low or average on orientation toward host culture |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation toward traditional culture</th>
<th>Contact and Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td><strong>Separation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little to no cultural awareness or ethnic loyalty to culture of origin</td>
<td>Individuals place a high value on holding onto their original culture and avoid interaction with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High orientation toward host culture</td>
<td><strong>Marginalization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low or average on orientation toward host culture</td>
<td>Little possibility or interest in having relationships with others and little interest in or possibility of cultural maintenance (due primarily to experiences with discrimination or institutionalized, forced separation from others)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Low</strong></th>
<th><strong>Marginalization</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low or average on orientation toward host culture</td>
<td>Little possibility or interest in having relationships with others and little interest in or possibility of cultural maintenance (due primarily to experiences with discrimination or institutionalized, forced separation from others)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.** Acculturation strategies (Nguyen & von Eye, 2002 modified from Berry, 1970)

**Figure 13: Summary of the predominant psychological paradigm (Nguyen 2009, see also Felix-Ortiz, et al. 1994; Nguyen and von Eye 2002)**

John Berry (1970; 1980) formulated the foundation of what is now the predominant psychological model of acculturation. His central critique of the traditional model is that it assumes the single dimension discussed above. Berry argues that one must consider the orientation toward one's natal culture, as well as the orientation toward the host or majority culture. Importantly, these are two distinct orientations, and being high or low on one is not mutually exclusive with being either high or low on the other. This resulted in a bi-dimensional framework, summarized in Figure 13 (Nguyen 2009).
This model has received a significant amount of attention and critique, and has also formed the basis for how psychologists approach the concept of acculturation from both a psychometric standpoint and in other areas of psychological practice (as a few examples: Barry 2001; Berry, et al. 2006; Lee and Green 2010; Nguyen and von Eye 2002; Nguyen 2009; Schwartz, et al. 2010; Weinreich 2009).

Despite theoretical and methodological modifications to Berry’s essential model, the central characteristic that remains is the linear assumptions of movement. While Berry complicates the older model by proposing two dimensions on which one might move, this simply compounds one linear dimension on top of another in order to result in a bi-dimensional model. This bi-dimensional model is reflected in Nguyen’s summary of different acculturation types and strategies in Figure 13. It is essential to note that the linear assumptions work quite well with the ways that these constructs are commonly operationalized in cross-cultural psychological research. That is, the common practice is to develop quantitative measures of these constructs, which inevitably lead to indices of the theorized construct. The result of this method is necessarily to place individual research participants on a continuum of the a priori scale that is integral to the method. While Berry’s original complication of the traditional, unidimensional model of social change provides an important complication to our understanding of these processes, the epistemological enterprise to which it has given rise is still limited to linear conceptions of psychosocial change for migrants.

*Segmented Assimilation in Sociology*

In its sister discipline of sociology, a massive research enterprise has been built
around another complication of the traditional, unidimensional and unilineal conception of acculturation and assimilation. This has been primarily pioneered by Portes and Rumbaut (Portes, et al. 2009; Portes, et al. 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2005; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1994; Rumbaut 1997). Their complication of the traditional model rests on the central point that there is no single sector of society into which migrants assimilate, and in fact assimilation is not always such a desirable end for migrant families.

![Figure 14: "Paths of mobility across generations" (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006)](image)

As depicted in Figure 14, Portes and Rumbaut theorize multiple pathways to assimilation with distinct endpoints. One of their more important contributions to sociological perspective on migration includes the concept of “downward assimilation,” in which migrant youth adopt practices and socioeconomic lifeways characteristic of the American underclass. This may include countercultural practices such as gang activity and other socially deviant lifestyles. This model has a heavy socioeconomic emphasis, and is based in larger scale sociological datasets, such as Portes and Rumbaut’s Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS). Their model portrays each of three assimilative pathways based on different social conditions such as family factors, social capital, and modes of incorporation. These lead to different styles of acculturation—full, selective, and
dissonant. The latter is associated with downward assimilation.

As with Berry’s model, Rumbaut and Portes provide a wealth of interesting data and necessary complications of the traditional assimilationist framework. Also similar to Berry’s model, however, segmented assimilation only complicates this conception by adding additional “pathways” to assimilation in the host society. The very concept of pathways is indicative of the extent to which segmented assimilation maintains the linear thinking in the traditional model.

**Hmong and Acculturation**

While my present purpose is not to delve deeply into these theories, I simply want to draw attention to the fact that each of these research agendas maintain the linear thinking of the traditional acculturation and assimilationist thinking of the mid-twentieth century models, despite the added dimensions. These models have also been applied to explaining Hmong experiences of adaptation in the United States (Lee and Green 2010; Lee 2005b). The fundamental limitations of these applications lay in the *a priori* assumption that Hmong must be engaged in some sort of linear movement on one of the possible “pathways” to integration in American society. Again, these limitations are deeply intertwined with the epistemological enterprises on which they were built. Interval-level scales of measurement require conclusions of this sort, and indeed preclude non-linear assumptions out of the theory.

In what follows, I want to describe the more qualitative trends that are based on my person-centered ethnography of transnational Hmong families. Up to this point, I have argued that the evidence on moral discourse among Hmong in Thailand and the United
States points to the likelihood of a Hmong-specific cultural-developmental template (Jensen 2008) for autonomy, community, and divinity-oriented thinking. Compounding this conclusion with the theoretical expectations of bi-dimensional psychological acculturation or segmented assimilation might lead me to conclude that these Hmong families are perhaps experiencing “dissonant acculturation,” or perhaps becoming “ethnically identified.”

Doing so would force me to place them on these continuua in a way that does not square with the ethnographic realities that I document and the grounded cultural discourse analyses that I conducted on the vignette data. Let me be clear that by favoring the life-course explanation of generational differences in moral thinking, I am not concluding that psychocultural change is not occurring in a very real and meaningful way. However, the types of changes that I document in my person-centered interviews cannot be adequately characterized under the concepts of “acculturation” and “assimilation” as they are theorized in migration research—either in psychology or sociology. Rather than thinking about movement along these theorized continua, my interviews and ethnographic experiences suggest that a more grounded understanding of how resettlement and migration affect moral thinking is needed.

To this end, I will turn to a brief consideration of my grounded analysis of moral discourse in the transnational sample, along with several ethnographic observations to give context to that analysis. This extends beyond the deductive coding of moral discourse to the Three Ethics framework that has thus far been the thrust of this chapter.

Before proceeding, however, I must address one significant limitation to the present
data when it comes to staking claims about life-course development. The ideal basis for such claims would consist of a longitudinal sample of individuals, followed from adolescences into adulthood. While longitudinal data would provide a more definitive basis for such claims, the carefully selected sample of transnational families also allows me to stake claims about these phenomena, albeit with more limited validity. Given the prominent potential explanations for the intergenerational patterns observed in Wisconsin, the present transnational comparison at least allows the possibility of eliminating potential hypothesis about the root of these differences. For example, the observation of striking similarities in generational differences on all three ethics in both locations suggests that cultural experiences of resettlement do not provide powerful explanations for these trends. For this to be the case, one would have to assert the same type of pattern to be occurring in both the rural Hmong village in Thailand and the urban context in the United States where their relatives resettled. Given the prominent theoretical frameworks that I have put forward, these data at least suggest that a Hmong life course trajectory in which different ethics are differentially salient for different age groups provides a more complete explanation for the observed trends than one based on assimilation to a more autonomous or “Western” ideal in moral thinking for the younger generation.

One caveat to the present conclusions that could only be settled with longitudinal data regards the possibility of globalizing changes explaining the patterns for the younger generation in both locations. While cross-sectional data cannot exclude this explanation definitively, such a hypothesis would require an explanation as to why this might be the case. This hypothesis would also have to provide a more satisfying explanation for these
trends than the life-course explanation. Within contemporary anthropological theory, the concept of “neoliberalism,” may provide such a contesting argument (Bourdieu 1998). This argument would pose the possibility that with increased economic globalization and a move away from subsistence agriculture and toward wage-labor, that these economic and political practices instantiate neoliberal subjectivities—an arcane (yet trendy) way to gloss essentially liberal individualism. In fact, Tapp’s (2002) argument outlined in the previous chapter essentially argues a similar point. My response to this theoretical alternative is to say that increased urbanization and changing economic practices are indeed likely to affect the moral outlooks and self-concepts of people in both Thailand and the United States. However, I would also argue that this explanation—as Tapp argues himself—is more likely to hold sway for those who are moving to the urban centers and adapting their lives to distinct economic orders. The fact is that this tended not to be the case with my sample. In Chapter 2 I outline the demographic characteristics of the transnational families and others that I spent time interviewing during my fieldwork, and this basis works against the neoliberalism explanation for these intergenerational trends. This is not to say that many people from Ban Txuam are not relocating to urban centers such as Chiang Mai or Bangkok. They are. In fact, many of the families in the sample have close relatives who have done so. Nevertheless, within this sample of families where subsistence agriculture supplemented by subsidiary cash crops is the primary mode of production and the primary driving force of household economics, I observed quite similar trends in moral justification as their relatives in the urban Midwestern United States. I also have amassed sufficient ethnographic experience with these families, which leads me to believe that “neoliberal
subjectification” is not the primary driving force of moral justification for these families, at least in comparison to life course effects.

As a brief example, in Chapter 3 I describe the socialization of ritual practices that I theorize lead to the instantiation of ancestral personhood as both a self-concept and cultural model for understanding the life course. I described how some of the young men (one of whom was a close friend whom I lived with for a portion of my fieldwork) in their early thirties are starting to take the Hmong repertoire of ritual practice more seriously. During the *ua nyuj dab* ceremony, for example, I witnessed two of these younger men spend a good amount of time closely hunched behind their uncles who were engaging in the recitation of their lineage-specific utterances to their ancestors. In my interviews with them afterward, both of them expressed a significant motivation and obligation to begin to learn ancestral rituals. They describe how they will eventually have to carry the ritual burden forward for their families (both were married with young children), since their fathers would not always be able to do these ceremonies for them. They spoke of the need to learn the ritual elements and incantations necessary to *hu plig* (a soul-calling ceremony that is quite common throughout the year, but also constitutes an integral part of the new-year’s renewal ceremonies for each household), *ua nyuj dab* (as described in Chapter 3), *laig dab* (offer food to ancestral spirits), create one’s own *xwm kab* (the home’s spirit-altar), *fiv yeem* and *pauj yeem* (the rituals to supplicate for future blessing and repay the debt once such blessings are granted), and carry out the rest of the necessary new year’s ceremonies. Currently, they rely predominantly on their fathers or, in some cases, an uncle, to carry out such rituals for them when the time comes.
My central point here is that both of them are expressing a more intense interest and acting on that interest to learn the ritual practices. This ritual socialization on which they are embarking, coupled with the changing obligations in their lives to carry a more significant social burden in both ritual and other extended kinship activities, socializes a set of ethics that at least partially displace a once-prominent autonomy-driven way of thinking. I do not think this is a sea change in emphasis from autonomy-driven to community-driven thinking. In fact, my data do not suggest this to be the case. Despite the heavier emphasis on community-oriented justifications for the older generation (59% and 53% of total coded justifications in Thailand and the United States, respectively), autonomy-driven thinking still constituted a significant portion of their moral positions (22% and 29% of total coded justification in Thailand and the United States, respectively). Conversely, for the younger generation in either location, autonomy and community each occupied between 37% and 48% of the total coded moral discourse. Thus, while autonomy was more prominent in the younger generation as compared to the older generation, community ethics still constituted a significant portion of the moral reasoning.

What I am arguing, then, is that this life-course trend represents a relative shift in emphasis, rather than a sea change in moral thinking. These trends (and corollary trends in other migrant groups) need to be accounted for in any intergenerational analysis of the effects of migration on different generations of migrant youth. The models discussed above seem to ignore this possibility and put all of the explanatory weight on acculturation and assimilation for younger generations. The data I present in this chapter suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to intra-cultural life-course trends on these issues. Doing so will
possibly yield alternative explanations of our understandings of the effects of particular resettlement contexts on the psychosocial dynamics in migrant communities.

**Psychocultural Change in Resettlement**

While the present data suggest good evidence for a life-course trend in moral thinking, it would be naïve to pretend that complete displacement and resettlement in a new social context have no bearing on morality. In fact, I am very much convinced that this is the case. My theoretical qualm, however, is with the reflex to characterize these changes under the various rubrics of acculturation and assimilation, or even hegemonic neoliberal subjectification. For its part, anthropological scholarship also includes a significant consideration of issues surrounding hybridity and syncretism as prominent social processes in postcolonial contexts, and to a much more limited extend this is applied to migrants as well (for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Hickman 2007; Kulick 1992; Nederveen Pieterse 2009; Stewart 2005; Stewart and Shaw 1994; van der Veer 1994).

The value of understanding how different resettlement contexts affect personhood and morality in different ways will contribute to a better overall understanding of how migration affects the lives of those who relocate. Person-centered ethnography presents a particularly useful epistemological window into understanding how the experiences of migration and resettlement shape the subjectivities of migrants. This framework emphasizes the interplay and tensions between cultural models or schema and the idiosyncratic psychological processes of individuals who belong to the communities where these cultural models hold sway. As described by Levy and Hollan (Hollan 2001; Levy and...
Hollan 1998), this methodological outlook is particularly useful in grounding ethnographic analyses in the real experiences of those whom we seek to understand, and not to place too much theoretical weight on more “experience-distant” notions of culture or community.

I would argue that this method is also particularly useful in the context of understanding the effects of migration on the psychocultural experiences of migrants, and that this methodological perspective will allow us to challenge some more prominent theories of cultural change for migrants, such as those laid out above. Rather than seeking to understand the tensions and interplay between members of a group and the cultural models that provide structures of meaning for that group alone, the ideational space that cultural models inhabit is significantly more complex for refugee and migrant communities such as the Hmong. In other words, in addition to the admittedly complex interplay between everyday Hmong experiences and the cultural models that people recognize as “traditionally Hmong,” the picture is complicated by the addition of competing cultural models and schema that Hmong confront in the macrosocial contexts where they have resettled or migrated.

For example, many of the Hmong families that I have worked with in the United States cite the fundamental differences between Hmong and American conceptions of authority in the family. In Laos, I am frequently told, problems in the family were resolved by the patrilineal elders and clan members, who hold frequent councils to resolve disputes and arbitrate disagreements. In the United States, Hmong confront the policing power of the state, and my Hmong friends understand “the police” to be a competing institution with that of traditional Hmong social structure. These fundamentally distinct conceptions of
legal authority come into direct conflict, such as in cases of domestic violence. Hmong American friends have told me on several occasions of this particular type of conflict, explaining that police intervention threatens traditional authority structures and even the very core of Hmong kinship practices. They recalled that a common reaction to someone who calls the police rather than resorting to the counsel of one's elders is often to say, “the police are your relatives now, you don’t need us to solve your problems.”

From the person-centered ethnographic perspective, what is really key here is the way that these competing cultural models challenge one another, and that this space for negotiation becomes a much more complex one in which migrants themselves come to make meaning about moral principles and one’s relationship to one’s relatives. Thus, rather than dealing with a bidirectional tension between idiosyncratic psychodynamics and cultural-level schema, the migration context adds another dimension that must be accounted for in a person-centered analysis. This is not to simplify the dynamics between non-migrants and the cultural models they encounter, use, challenge, etc., as if to essentialize “American culture,” among others. But at the same time, I would argue that the significant sociopolitical changes that Hmong have undergone in migrating from the highlands of Laos to living in a comparatively urban, American sociopolitical context offers a uniquely complex context for Hmong to navigate quite disparate cultural models of personhood and moral ideation.

To this end, I will share one necessarily brief example from my person-centered interviews with transnational Hmong families that span Thailand and the United States. The discursive evidence on which I base my analyses demonstrates that both prototypical
“Hmong” and “American” models (as my interlocutors themselves often label them) come to bear on the moral reasoning and self-concepts of my Hmong interlocutors. The corpus of moral discourse and personal narratives that I have collected also demonstrates the complexity of how these families navigate the experiences of resettlement in a new context. I emphasize this complexity and seek to stay close to what my interlocutors themselves express in both their moral ideation and their personal views and histories, which I correlate with their moral discourse. In sum, I am seeking to capitalize on the virtue of the person-centered approach, which favors “experience-near” analyses of psychocultural phenomena, while seeking to account for the complexities of both individual respondents and the cultural models they navigate (Hollan 2001).

As I will show, this analysis challenges both the theory of segmented assimilation and the psychometric treatment of acculturation in psychology. Anthropological scholarship has been stronger in theorizing cultural change in postcolonial contexts, but less so in understanding cultural—and particularly psychocultural—change for migrants per se. A person-centered approach offers a means of addressing such questions, and providing much better “experience-near” ethnographic accounts of the lives of migrants.

A Hmong Youth in the United States

The personal experience and moral discourse of a young woman that I am calling Mary\(^\text{14}\) is telling in thinking about how resettlement experiences affects the dynamic between individual psychological processes and cultural models of morality and

\(^{14}\) She does in fact actually go by her English name, rather than her Hmong name, but this is a pseudonym.
personhood in Hmong families. Mary was born in Stockton, California. Her parents had migrated to the United States separately after each spending time in separate refugee camps in Thailand. They both completed high school and were married a few years after moving to the United States (in 1980). Mary was their first child, and she was 24 at the time I interviewed her.

When Mary was just a few years old, her family decided to move to Minneapolis to be closer to relatives and find work. They lived in what was then a fairly crime-ridden neighborhood. Mary recalls frequent shootings and violence on her street, and shortly before junior high her parents decided to relocate to a safer neighborhood in the suburbs, where Mary ended up going to High School. Mary describes this time in her life (i.e., when her family moved to the suburbs) as quite difficult, given both the expectations and limitations placed on her by her parents.

During the course of my interviews with Mary, she got quite emotional—to the point of hyperventilated sobbing—about her relationship with her parents. Throughout the course of her explanation, she repeatedly broke down and had to collect herself as she lamented the fact that her parents did not seem to value and support her ever since her early adolescence. She described the ways in which her parents tried to get her to conform to traditional gender roles of sociality; namely, that she stay home and do things around the house, rather than participate in social groups and after-school activities. When I asked what her life was like growing up, she responded:

“Well, as a kid, it was pretty normal. You know, just going out playing, but once when I started hitting that age of puberty, that’s when things started going downhill, because, you know, with the whole teenager thing, with the parent thing, that’s-
yeah, that's where it went downhill. Um..."

I asked for a clarification as to what she meant by “the teenager thing,” and “the
parent thing.” She clarified:

J: I was actually a lot more rebellious, but not in a bad way. Not as in like, going,
running way in the middle of the night, or doing bad stuff like that, but it's more like,
I want my independence. And I want to be able to do what I want to do, not as in,
you know, running out away like that. But, to be able to join sports, to be able to go
out for dance class, for stuff like that. But I never got the opportunity. I was pretty
much just stuck inside the house. I couldn't go out with my friends either. Never had
those opportunities, only a few occasions, maybe for the Hmong club in high school,
where I could stay after school...

What is striking to me about her characterization of her “rebellion,” is that she is
characterizing her behavior as rebellious against what she perceives the traditional Hmong
model of an ideal daughter to prescribe. The characterization of this “rebellion,” however,
also instantiates the authority of this traditional model, since the behaviors that she
characterizes as rebellious—participating in extracurricular activities and school sports—
would typically not be put under the rubric of ‘rebellion’ in a middle-class suburban
American youth cultural model of autonomy.

Mary’s socialization in high school and her desires to engage in the types of
activities that her friends were doing is certainly indicative of her desire to adopt a more
autonomous stance than perhaps her parents (and a traditional Hmong model of
daughterhood) would allow. However, it is not the case that Mary is simply replacing one
schema with the other, or even directly preferring one model. Rather, she is pitting these
models against each other, and arriving at a more complex interpretation of her own
desires. She repeatedly characterizes these as “rebellious” throughout our interviews, but
distinct from the types of rebellion that we might call more countercultural.

*Moral Discourse*

Interestingly, these experiences recounted to me during my interviews with Mary correlate with her moral discourse that I collected in her vignette-drive interview. Mary’s response to these vignettes is telling about how her experiences with her parents and navigating this complicated moral landscape affect her personal moral reasoning.

Throughout the personal history and narrative interview and in other discussions with her, Mary constantly critiqued the traditional gender roles that she saw as burdensome and limiting of her personal potential. However, in her comments on the third vignette (regarding the husband beating his wife for going to a movie without his permission), I was surprised by the extent to which her response to this vignette mapped fairly well onto what I would call the modal cultural model of spousal relationships and obligations. In essence, her response to this vignette is that the husband should not have beat his wife because this is an excessive response. However, she also argues that the wife’s actions are fundamentally wrong as well, perhaps even more so than the husband’s response. This emphasis on the wife’s lack of piety to her husband in this vignette was the modal response of Hmong in my sample of transnational families. Further, her assessment of why the act of beating is wrong is drawn primarily along the lines of what Shweder and colleagues (Shweder, et al. 2003) have articulated as the ethic of community. This ethic revolves around the primary importance of the social relationships and a communally

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15 This point of argument is based on the entire body of discourse collected with the families in Thailand and the United States. The model and gendered norms she recited fit fairly well with the most common responses to this vignette.
embedded self in ethical considerations. For example, Mary argued that beating was wrong because of the way that the family's reputation might spread and reflect negatively on their family. To this response I asked if the reputation is the most important consideration. Mary responded, “not necessarily just the reputation, but within the husband and the wife—their relationship with each other. Because you know, with a lot of abuse, she’s going to leave him.” She does subsequently state the wife’s physical integrity to be a concern, which would fit under Shweder’s rubric of “autonomy,” vis-à-vis the ethic of community. However, this concern seems to be secondary to the importance of upholding the marriage relationship.

Later in her exegesis of her moral stance I asked Mary what her conception of an ideal wife looks like. Interestingly, she initially responded by explicitly citing what she understood the Hmong ideal to be. This directly reflected many of the traits and expectations that she had lamented her parents forcing on her as a teenager—domesticity, limited freedom of personal recreation, spousal piety, etc. She directly responded to this “traditional” model of womanhood by arguing that more freedom should be allowed to Hmong women in the United States, but with limits. She still argued that significant limits need to exist against truly deviant behavior, but issues of personal freedom of leisure and movement should be loosened. However, she made the qualification that these changes should be made in the United States, but not necessarily for her relatives in Thailand. Mary frequently referred to Hmong in Thailand as if they were the epicenter of traditional culture. She seemed to allow for the possibility that what she understood as the “traditional” cultural model of womanhood is proper for them to live, but that Hmong in the
United States should loosen their conception and allow for a slightly higher degree of freedom.

It was interesting to see Mary struggle with these different representations of gendered expectations, and to map this onto her personal experience with her parents, which obviously has affected her in a very deep emotional way. The person-centered approach on which I based my interviews, ethnographic observations, and my analyses of these data lead me to pay close attention to these tensions between what Mary treats as “traditional” Hmong cultural models and how she plays with those in her own idiosyncratic way.

Conclusion

I think it would be inappropriate to take more “experience-distant” theoretical models like segmented assimilation and apply it to Mary’s experience, as the nuance of her experience and how it affects her moral reasoning would be lost. The interplay between her personal experiences with these issues, the values her practices have socialized, and her assessment of traditional Hmong models that bear on this behavior call into question some of the more simple accounts and linear assumptions of acculturation and assimilation from various social science disciplines. Person-centered ethnography provides a unique epistemological means of dealing with this complexity and trying to make sense of the idiosyncratic experiences of migrants, while still accounting for the extent to which cultural models from the “traditional” as well as the resettlement context provide structures of meaning for those experiences.

One response to Mary’s situation might be to say that this experience is perhaps just
a nuanced way in which this particular youth in the United States is acculturating (albeit slowly) toward a more Americanized way of thinking about family, kinship, and gender. Several points work against this possibility. First, in Chapter 3 I presented a similar response to a vignette by a Hmong youth in Thailand. Similarly to Mary, Pov’s moral discourse on the first vignette also demonstrated the tensions between the cultural models that he is navigating (i.e., ancestral personhood and Buddhist notions of individual Karma). Some of this nuanced navigation was revealed in his moral discourse, as I sought to show in that chapter. In both of these cases of Hmong youth defending their moral stances, they wrestle between cultural models that they and others label as traditionally Hmong and cultural models that they and others commonly attribute to the majority groups in each location—Americans and Thais. In Chapter 4, I attribute this moral struggle to a form of value pluralism that is developing in the younger generation. In sum, youth seem to be struggling with multiple, competing ethics that vie for attention in their moral considerations.

Elsewhere I have documented a similar trend with medical reasoning and health-seeking behaviors among Hmong in Alaska (Hickman 2007). In this research I argue that Hmong are involving healing ideologies from their “traditional” system and integrating biomedical philosophies to develop altogether new diagnostic systems that have the capacity to distinguish between physical and spiritual ailments. This new diagnostic system suggests treatment-seeking from either shamans (or other traditional practitioners) or physicians for particular ailments with particular etiologies. In a similar way, Mary and Pov have their own ways of dealing with the collusion of multiple normative models of morality
and kinship. I have sought here to explicate at least some of the nuance of these situations, and to show that the result is much more than a unilineal shift from more-or-less Hmong to more-or-less American—a characterization that would be necessitated by the models of acculturation and assimilation outlined earlier in this chapter. Rather, I argue that it is essential to consider how various cultural models come into play with each of these youth. In some cases this may lead to a degree of moral-cognitive ambivalence (as described in Chapter 4), or perhaps a unique resolution in which a traditional gender model is argued for, but also altered in the process (as in the case of Mary).

Further evidence against simplistic accounts of acculturation, assimilation, or neoliberal subjectification are found in the overall intergenerational trends of moral thinking in the last two chapters. In each study, the younger generation manifested higher degrees of autonomy-oriented thinking, while the older generations manifested higher degrees of community-oriented thinking. Given that these trends held constant in two very distinct locations of migration, and given that these trends do not provide obvious predictions of acculturation frameworks for both locations, I argue that these trends represent an important trend across the Hmong life course. I reinforce this claim with ethnographic descriptions of how many Hmong youth start to change their thinking when they orient themselves more seriously toward traditional ritual (as in Chapter 3). Hmong youth are more disposed to autonomy-oriented thinking as a result of the requirements of their place in the course of life. As Hmong get older, however, they begin to take on responsibilities of both parenting and caring for aging parents, and as they begin to become more responsible for the ritual practices that I describe, their daily concerns begin to
require a more community-oriented set of ethics. At minimum, my findings throughout this dissertation suggest that the life course dimension of moral thinking merits further empirical and theoretical consideration, and that the cultural-developmental template approach (Jensen 2008) provides potentially fruitful insights into the complexities of psychocultural development for migrant groups like the Hmong. Migration research and cross-cultural accounts of psychocultural change should take these potential life course trends into consideration when seeking to understand the adaptations of both youth and adults to various sorts of social contexts.

While I have sought to argue for a strong life course dimension in understanding the patterns of moral thinking described herein, I have also sought to lend a greater understanding to some of the nuanced ways in which Hmong life is changing in the diaspora. It is apparent, for example, that language shift represents a real and serious hurdle to the often-expressed concerns of Hmong elders and youth about the future of their cultural traditions. It also seems clear that the changing social organization of Hmong communities in the diaspora are leading to new forms of ritual practice, such as the transnational outsourcing of ritual that led to the ceremonies described in Chapter 3, or the messianic movements described in Chapter 2. I have also only briefly nodded to important shifts in gender identities and the gendered dimensions of moral ideation and personhood, since my focus has been on the intergenerational dimensions of these processes. All of these phenomena suggest further ethnographic attention as we seek to understand the how the unique circumstances of the Hmong diaspora lead to other sorts of psychocultural adaptations.
Throughout this dissertation I have sought to lend some explanatory light to the admittedly complex picture of how Hmong families are adapting to unique social circumstances as they have relocated from one place to another. The goal has been to add to our overall understanding of how migration affects the psychocultural aspects of morality and personhood—fundamental building blocks of human experience. In the end, cultural practice and subjectivities are all variable. Perhaps no group embodies a narrative of cultural change better than the Hmong, as represented in the storycloth in Chapter 2. It is therefore apposite to close this monograph with a White Hmong proverb collected by Ernest Heimbach (1996:461) that reflects Hmong transmutability:

Hla dej yuav hle khau; Tsiv teb tsaws chaw yuav hle hau.
When you cross a stream take off your shoes; When you move to a new place you ought to change headman.
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Appendix A: Moral Vignettes and Questions

The following vignettes were presented to research participants. The following order of questions corresponds with the interviews as conducted in Chapter 5. Following these six vignettes, the order of questions (along with 4 alternative vignettes) are listed in the order they appear in Chapter 4 in the Wisconsin study. After each vignette, the series of 10 questions (the same in both chapters) were asked and interviewees’ responses were followed with probes as necessary in order to solicit moral discourse around the topics addressed in the vignettes. Some vignettes were derived from Shweder et al.’s (2003) comparative research in India and the United States, while others were ethnographically grounded in local ideas of morality as well as actual occurrences in my field site.

Vignette Order in Chapter 5, The Transnational Comparison

1. Muaj ib tug tub thiab nws li txiv, nkawv nyob ib lub zog. Lwm hnub tus txiv ua kev txhaum loj heev, thiaj li poob suav npe heev, ua kom tus tub txaj muag tshaj. Tux tub xaiv mus nyob ib lus zos tshiab, thiab nws xaiv pauv npe thiab pauv lub xeem, ua kom tsis muaj leej twg paub nws yog leej twg li tub. Tus tub tsis leej nws niam txiv li ntawv, puas txhaum?

   A father and son lived together in their village. One day, the father committed a serious moral transgression that made him lose face, and made the son very embarrassed. The son decided to move to another village, and he changed both his given name and his clan name, so no one would know whose son he is. Is a son that does this morally wrong?

2. Muaj ib tug tib neeg Hmoob yog ib tug ua luam. Nws paub ib qhov chaws yuav khoom pheej yig heev ces nws coj los muag kim hauv nws lub zos. Nws muag kib ib yam rau cov kwp tij thiab cov qhua. Thaum nws kwp tij noog nws tias yuav khoom li ntawv qhov twg thiaj li pheej yig heev, nws tsis qhia lawv vim rau qhov nws ntshais lawv yuav ua luam ib yam nws ces nws yuav ua luag li qub tsis tau lawm. Tus tibneeg no puas txhaum?

   There was a Hmong businessman who knew of a particular place to by goods very cheap. He would purchase the goods and bring them to his village and sell them at a more expensive rate. He would sell them for the same price relatives and non-relatives. When his relatives asked him where he bought the goods cheaper, he refused to tell them, fearing that they would compete with him and potentially ruin his business. Is this person morally wrong to do so?

3. Ib tug poj niam mus saib “movie” tsis qhia nws tus txiv. Thaum nws rov qab los txog tsev, nws tus txiv hais tias, "yog køj ua dua, kuv yuav muab køj ntaus.” Tus poj niam rov qab ua dua, tus txiv muab nws ntaus sab heev.
*A young married woman went alone to see a movie without informing her husband. When she returned home, her husband said, “If you do it again, I will beat you.” She did it again, and he beat her. (the husband)*


*A letter arrived addressed to a 14-year-old son. Before the boy returned home, his father opened the letter and read it. (the father)*


A daughter-in-law and her husband’s mother live together, but don’t get along and argue a lot. The daughter-in-law one day suggests to her husband that they leave his father and mother’s house to live by themselves in a separate home. His mother responds that this is not prudent, but that one must live with one’s parents. Who should the son listen to, his wife or his mother?


One day a family converted to Christianity from traditional Hmong religion. A few years later, their father died. They performed a Christian funeral for him, given that they were all Christian. However, a while later the father’s spirit returned to torment the family. They prayed and prayed to have God send his spirit away, but he kept returning. So, they decided to do a traditional Hmong funeral to send his spirit away, to the ancestral village. Upon doing so, his spirit never returned, and the family went back to practicing Christianity. Did this family commit a moral error?
Vignette Order in Chapter 4, The Wisconsin Study†

1. *A poor man went to the hospital after being seriously hurt in an accident. At the hospital they refused to treat him because he could not afford to pay. (the hospital staff)

2. A son promises his father that he will carry out the Hmong traditional funerary rites for him, but once he passes away the son decides not to and just buries him the way Americans do. (the son)

3. *A letter arrived addressed to a 14-year-old son. Before the boy returned home, his father opened the letter and read it. (the father)

4. A married woman goes to Thailand with another woman, her friend, against the wishes of her husband. While there she cheats on her husband and sleeps with another man. (the married woman)

5. A man and his wife convert to Christianity from traditional Hmong animism, against the will of his parents. (the couple)

6. *A young married woman went alone to see a movie without informing her husband. When she returned home, her husband said, “If you do it again, I will beat you.” She did it again, and he beat her. (the husband)

* Vignettes 1, 3, and 6 were taken directly from Shweder et al. (1987:40-41)

† Vignettes 3 and 6 are constant, although presented in a different order. Vignette 5 taps a similar issue as Vignette 6 in the Chapter 5 version.
Questions to Follow Each Vignette

1. Is *the behavior under consideration* wrong?
   a. Tus/cov (neeg) no puas ua txhaum?

2. Why is what this person did wrong / not wrong?
   a. Vim li cas?

3. How serious is the violation? [Not a violation; A minor offense; A somewhat serious offense; A very serious violation]
   a. Txoj kev txhaum no hnyav npo li cas? [Tsis txhaum; Txhaum me me xwb; Txhaum ntau; txhaum ntau heev]

4. Is it a [sin]?
   a. Tus/cov (neeg) no puas muaj txim?

5. Would you stop a person from *the behavior under consideration*, or would you have anything to say to him or her?
   a. Koj puas cheem ib tug neeg ua li ntawd, los yog koj puas muaj los lus hais rau nws?

6. What if no one knew this had been done. It was done in private or secretly. Would it be wrong then?
   a. Yog tsis muaj leej twg paub lawv ua li ntawd, lawv puas tseem ua txhaum?

7. Would it be best if everyone in the world followed *the rule endorsed by the informant*?
   a. Yog sawv daws coj li (køj hais), koj xav tias lub ntiaj teb puas yuav zoo dua?

8. What if, in a large council of Hmong people, they wanted to *change the culture/practice*. Would it be okay to change it?
   a. Yog tias cov thawj coj Hmoob tag nrho tuaj ua ke thiab xav hloov *(kev cai no)*, koj xav tias zoo los tsis zoo?

9. Have you ever known anyone who has *done the practice under consideration*?
   a. Koj puas paub leej twg ua li ntawd?

10. Do you have anything else to add?
    a. Koj puas muaj lus dab tsis ntxiv
Appendix B: Coding Manual for the Ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity

Lene Arnett Jensen, 2004
Clark University, MA, USA

Index of Categories within each Ethic

**ETHIC OF AUTONOMY**

1. Punishment Avoidance (to self)
2. Reward Seeking (to self)
3. Self's Physical Well-Being
4. Self's Psychological Well-Being
5. Self's Interest
6. Other Individual's Physical Well-being
7. Other Individual's Psychological Well-being
8. Other Individual's Interest
9. Fairness and Reciprocity
10. Conscience (guilt)
11. Virtues (autonomy-oriented)
12. Responsibility (for self)
14. Rights
15. Other Autonomy

**ETHIC OF COMMUNITY**

1. Punishment Avoidance: Social Sanctions
2. Reward Seeking: Social Benefits
3. Others’ Physical Well-Being
4. Others’ Psychological Well-Being
5. Others’ Interest
6. Important Socially-Defined Person's Authority
7. Customary or Traditional Authority
8. Legal Authority (of social institution)
9. Virtues (community-oriented)
10. Duty (to others)
11. Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of Social Group
12. Social Order or Harmony Goals
13. Other Community

**ETHIC OF DIVINITY**

1. Punishment Avoidance (from God(s))
2. Reward Seeking (from God(s))
3. Self's Physical Well-Being (Body as God’s temple)
4. Interest of Self’s Soul
5. Other’s Physical Well-Being (Body as God’s temple)
6. Interest of Other's Soul
7. Important Spiritually-Defined Person’s Authority
8. Customary or Traditional Authority (of spiritual/religious nature)
9. Legal Authority (of religious institution)
10. Authority of Natural Law
11. Scriptural Authority
12. God(s)’ Authority
13. Conscience (when God-given)
14. Virtues (divinity-oriented)
15. Duty (as spiritual/religious being)
16. Other Divinity

**CODING GUIDELINES**

1) A justification is defined as a statement that can be coded within the manual as a subcode.

2) Code every justification that participant (P) provides to explain his/her moral evaluation. Do not code justifications that P may mention but which support another (e.g., the opposing) moral evaluation.

3) Code parsimoniously. Give only one code if a P elaborates on a justification by giving multiple example or mentions different but related aspect of an argument. (Though see also 4).

4) The same subcode may be assigned more than once to P's justifications of his/her moral evaluation. This should only be done when the P clearly is describing different justifications; for example, that divorce is wrong because it often leaves children to be raised under poor financial conditions (Community-Other's Interest), and that divorce is wrong because it is bad for society (Community-Other's Interest).

5) A justification should be assigned only one subcode. Do not assign multiple codes to one justification, but choose the one code that is most applicable.

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6) Do not assign a final code to justifications that are insufficiently described. For example, a justification may be an example of one subcode which could be classified within two or more ethics (e.g., Divorce is wrong because it shows a lack of respect. This is a case of a Virtues subcode, but without knowing in regards to whom or what divorce shows a lack of respect, a final Ethics code cannot be assigned. For example, a lack of respect for God would be classified within the Ethic of Divinity whereas a lack of respect for one’s spouse would be classified within the Ethic of Community).

7) Ethic of Community subcodes may be further differentiated. Specifically, a differentiation between family, peers, and society may be useful for the subcodes. For example, one may differentiate whether “others’ interest” pertains to family, peers, or society at large.

RELIABILITY CODING

Provide the transcribed interview to a second rater with the coded justifications underlined or otherwise marked. The second rater assigns a code (Ethic and subcode) to each of the underlined justifications. Reliability is assessed on the Ethic, typically using Cohen’s Kappa. (Reliability may also be assessed for subcodes).

ETHIC OF AUTONOMY: Moral discourse within the ethic of autonomy defines the person as an autonomous individual who is free to make choices, with few limits. Justifications within this ethic center on an individual's rights, needs, feelings, and well-being. What restricts a person's behavior is mainly a prohibition on inflicting harm to oneself and others, and encroaching upon the rights of other people. The ethic also includes a concern with equality.

SUBCODES, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

Punishment Avoidance (to self)
Definition: Avoidance of adverse consequences where focus is on harm or cost to self rather than on the social context of sanctions experienced by self.
Examples: “The child would know never to do that again because he'll just get hit again.”

Reward Seeking (to self)
Definition: Action is done so that actor can receive immediate benefits. The focus is on the benefits to the self rather than on who provides the benefits or the relationship within which the action-benefit exchange takes place.
Examples: “I cheated on the exam because I hoped to get a better grade.”

Self's Physical Well-Being
Definition: Hurting the body, causing or failing to relieve hunger or thirst, injury, discomfort, pain, etc. of the self. This category includes references to the absence of physical harm and to the promotion of physical well-being. (It does not address when the body is described as belonging to God, or as a temple of God. See Ethic of Divinity).

Examples: “People who are terminally ill may commit suicide. They should be taken out of their pain and misery. They have no hope of enjoying life.” “Abortion is wrong in that it has a lot of ramifications; for example, a lot of times it can affect a woman's ability to conceive children.”

**Self's Psychological Well-Being**

Definition: Causing or failing to alleviate unpleasant emotional states to one’s own psyche, such as sadness, frustration, fear, and anger. The category includes references to the absence of psychological harm and to the promotion of psychological well-being.

Examples: “Incest is destructive to the perpetrators as it encourages the sick part of them.” “When you do what is right, you get a certain peace of mind.”

**Self's Interest**

Definition: Advancing or protecting (or failing to do so) interests, goals, wants, or the general welfare of the self.

Examples: “By committing suicide, one is not giving oneself a chance to obtain a better life.” “Abortion is wrong. You have to consider that children give so much more than they take. They give so much purpose to your life.”

**Other Individual's Physical Well-Being**

Definition: Hurting the body, causing or failing to relieve hunger or thirst, injury, discomfort, pain, etc. to individuals other than oneself. This category includes references to the absence of physical harm and to the promotion of physical well-being. The Ethic of Autonomy is used when the harm is caused to an individual that the actor has immediate interaction with regarding the issue at hand. (See also Ethic of Community for cases of third person’s well-being).

Examples: “If I divorce my husband it might really hurt him, including even physical ramification.”

**Other Individual's Psychological Well-Being**

Definition: Causing or failing to alleviate unpleasant emotional states to individuals other than the self, such as sadness, frustration, fear, and anger. The category includes references to the absence of psychological harm and to the promotion of psychological well-being. The Ethic of Autonomy is used when the harm is caused to an individual that the actor has immediate interaction with regarding the issue at hand. (See also Ethic of Community for cases of third person’s well-being).

Examples: “In the case of incest between consenting adults, there does not seem to be any emotional harm to others.” “My decision to divorce my wife was right because it was psychologically destructive to her to stay in the marriage.”

**Other's Individual's Interest**

Advancing or protecting (or failing to do so) interests, goals, wants, or the general welfare of individuals other than the self. The Ethic of Autonomy is used when the interests pertain
to liberties and a person's freedom to make choices. (See also Ethics of Community and Divinity).

Examples: “It didn't have an impact on anyone's life except my own.”

**Fairness, Reciprocity, Golden Rule**

**Definition:** Treating like cases alike and different cases differently; proper ratio or proportionality of give and take in an exchange; doing to others what you would have them do to you.

**Examples:** “She was not treated fairly. She was fired without justification and was given no opportunity to defend herself.”

**Conscience (guilt)**

**Definition:** Your conscience will feel bad because you know you have done wrong or will not feel bad because you do not believe you have done wrong or think you have done right. Use Ethic of Autonomy when the conscience is seen as a psychological part of the person. When conscience is described as a psychological feeling of guilt. (See also Ethic of Divinity).

**Examples:** “There would be a sense of guilt if I did not tell her the truth, it would bother me unconsciously.” “Abortion is wrong because afterwards people have great problems with guilt. So they are doing themselves a disservice.”

**Virtues (autonomy-oriented)**

**Definition:** Attitude or trait which, if manifested in the situation would make behavior right, if not manifested would make behavior wrong. If informant talks about vice, then manifestation of attitude or trait would make the behavior wrong, and absence of trait or attitude would make it right. Also habitual manner of action. Virtues include gratitude, respect, devotion, loyalty, sympathy, love, etc. Use Ethic of Autonomy when the virtues pertain to individuality and freedom, such as respecting another's choice. When the virtues are not related to a person's dignity or social role. Virtues related to handling of individual property. (See also Ethics of Community and Divinity).

**Examples:** “I didn't tell her full story out of respect for her boundaries.” “It was alright for me not to reference the source in my essay because I was creative and came up with things of my own.” “Committing suicide is a sign of weakness. You are running away from life, but you have to face life.”

**Responsibility (for self)**

**Definition:** Taking responsibility for one's own actions (or failing to do so). The code does not include taking responsibility for others. (See Ethic of Community).

**Examples:** “Abortion is wrong because if they made the choice to have sexual relations and got pregnant, then they should take responsibility for their actions.”

**Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of an Individual**

**Definition:** When means serve ends that are beneficial or pertain to an individual.

**Examples:** “Physical discipline is a good way to teach a child right from wrong. It helps them learn about life and gain self-control.”
Rights
Definition: Entitlement to be treated or not treated in a certain way, or to act or abstain from acting in a certain way. The category includes references to a person's right not to be forced to engage in an activity, and the absence of voluntary consent.
Examples: “Ending one's life is one's own decision. It's one's right to make that decision.” “Abortion is wrong because the child has a right to life.”

Other Autonomy
Any other justifications centered on the self or other individuals.

ETHIC OF COMMUNITY: Moral discourse within the ethic of community describes the person in terms of her membership in groups, such as the family, the community, or the nation. Persons are described as acting in terms of their social roles, such as mother, scout leader, or American. The view is that our roles bind us together in intricate relations of differing obligations. The ethic also includes a concern with promoting the welfare, goals, needs, and interests of social groups.

SUBCODES, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

Punishment Avoidance: Social Sanctions
Definition: Avoiding adverse reactions from other people in one's social group; includes gossip, rumors, fines, beatings, prison, loss of job, salary cut, etc.
Examples: “Incest will have a lifelong effect on the girl in the form of social condemnation.”

Reward Seeking: Social Benefits
Definition: Action is done so that actor can receive social benefits.
Examples: “When you do what is right, you get more respect in the long run.”

Others’ Physical Well-Being.
Definition: When physical harm is caused to a collective entity. This category includes references to the absence of physical harm and to the promotion of physical well-being. When physical harm is caused to persons, third parties, who are not directly involved in the decision making pertaining to the moral issue.
Examples: “Divorce is wrong because it is harmful to all family members. It preys upon their physical health.”

Others’ Psychological Well-Being.
Definition: When psychological harm is caused to a collective entity. This category includes references to the absence of psychological harm and to the promotion of psychological well-being. The category also applies to a case where a person is not directly involved in the issue at hand but will be affected due to her relationship with an actor who is directly involved in the issue.
Examples: “When a terminally ill commits suicide, the family will know that there is nothing they could have done and will not feel insecurity.” “My decision to divorce my wife was right because the situation was psychologically destructive to my children.”

**Others’ Interest**
Definition: When the focus is on the interests of society or some other form of collective entity. When the focus is on someone who is not directly involved in the issue at hand but who will be affected due to her relationship with an agent who is directly involved in the issue.

Examples: “Suicide is wrong as society needs its people.” “To have an affair with a married man would be mitigated by the fact that it would not affect the wife if she did not know.” “Divorce is wrong because it does a lot of harm to society. You miss a key element if you're a single family and this ends up harming society.”

**Important Socially-Defined Person’s Authority**
Definition: Important person's, such as parents or social leaders, have taught or exemplified that it is wrong or right.

Examples: “Abortion is wrong from the way that I have been taught by my parents.”

**Customary or Traditional Authority**
Definition: Our practices or traditions or customs go against it and indicate it is wrong, or encourage it and indicate it is right. It is what we do, or what we do not do. When focus is on custom or tradition as socially derived, as opposed to instituted by a transcendental authority. (See also Ethic of Divinity).

Examples: “There is a cultural taboo against incest.” “I did not remarry because society does not accept it.”

**Legal Authority (of social institutions)**
Definition: When one must obey the law because it is of social origin.

Examples: “I shouldn’t have taken the candy at the store because it’s against the law.”

**Virtues (community-oriented)**
Definition: Attitude or trait which, if manifested in the situation would make behavior right, if not manifested would make behavior wrong. If informant talks about vice, then manifestation of attitude or trait would make the behavior wrong, and absence of trait or attitude would make it right. Also habitual manner of action. Virtues include gratitude, respect, devotion, loyalty, sympathy, love, etc. (Use Ethic of Community when the virtues pertain to familial and communal relationships, such as familial loyalty. (See also Ethics of Autonomy and Divinity.)

Examples: “It is questionable whether one can love one's kin as it is proper for intimate partners to love each other.” “I didn't want to go back on my word that I had given to my sister.” “Divorce is wrong because when you make a promise you should keep it. Honesty and integrity are traits. They are valuable and valued in the community.”

**Duty**
Definition: An obligation of station to behave in certain ways in certain
circumstances due to one's status or position (e.g., father, son, etc.). The category includes absolution from duty. Use Ethic of Community when the duty in question derives from a familial, social, or communal role, not when duties transcend society and culture, or pertain to a person's duties to a divine or higher order. (See also Ethic of Divinity.)

Examples: “When a parent commits incest, he abdicates his responsibility to look after his child's welfare.”

**Means-Ends Considerations: Ends of Social Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When means serve familial, social, or communal ends.</td>
<td>“Lying about my Jewish identity does not alleviate the problem and make people realize that their conceptions of Jews are false.” “Sati is not rational. It was for another time, nowadays ladies are no longer confined to the home and remarriage is also possible.”</td>
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</table>

**Social Order or Harmony Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding chaos or disorder. May imply the extremity, if not the violence, of the war of all against all. Promoting to perpetuation of order within any social group.</td>
<td>“Suicide is very impractical, if everyone just killed themselves when others weren't doing what they wanted, we'd have a real mess on our hands.” “Divorce is wrong. The goal is to united and bringing a house together. You can't stand there divided because you'd create turmoil.”</td>
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**Other Community**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any other justification centered on social groups or the ways that actions has ramifications beyond those immediately involved.</td>
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</table>

**ETHIC OF DIVINITY:** Moral discourse within the ethic of divinity envisions the person as a spiritual entity. A person's behaviors are to be in accordance with the guidelines rendered by a given spiritual or natural order. Thus the person avoids degradation and comes closer to moral purity.

**SUBCODES, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES**

**Punishment Avoidance (from God(s))**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding punishment from God(s) or unmentioned Higher Order(s). Includes avoiding consequences such as a decline in one's relationship with God.</td>
<td>“One reason that I would not have an affair with a married man is that I'm afraid of God's punishment.” “We couldn't keep the money that wasn't ours, because to purposely choose to do what's wrong it sets us up for one bad thing after another.” “To divorce is not God's first choice, and therefore if you're not going to live God's first choice, you can't expect God's first blessings either.”</td>
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**Reward Seeking (from God(s))**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action is or should be done so that actor can receive benefits from</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
God(s).

Examples: “In heaven, I will see the bird again that I rescued. I will go to heaven.” “Sati is a good act, it will ensure the woman's salvation.”

**Self's Physical Well-Being (Body as God's temple)**

**Definition:** When the self’s body is described as God's rather than the person's. (See also Ethic of Autonomy.)

**Examples:** “It's wrong to take drugs because it would harm my body, and your body is God's temple.”

**Interest of Self’s Soul**

**Definition:** When the interest promoted or hindered pertains to the self’s spiritual interests, status, or soul. (See also Ethics of Autonomy and Community.)

**Examples:** “It would be degrading to my soul.”

**Other’s Physical Well-Being (Body as God’s temple)**

**Definition:** When the another person’s body is described as God's rather than the person's. (See also Ethic of Autonomy.)

**Examples:** “I told her not to drink alcohol because it would harm her body which is like a temple to God.”

**Interest of Other’s Soul**

**Definition:** When the interest promoted or hindered pertains to another person’s spiritual interests, status, or soul. (See also Ethics of Autonomy and Community.)

**Examples:** “Remarriage is wrong because children that are born to that union are illegitimate children. This has lifelong ramifications, in that it hinders their witnessing for Christ.” “Sati is wrong. The wife should remain alive and finish the work her husband has not completed. In this way, his soul will find peace.”

**Important Spiritually-Defined Person’s Authority**

**Definition:** Important persons have taught or exemplified that it is wrong or right. Use Ethic of Divinity when the person is seen as a representative of God or the divine. (See also Ethic of Community.)

**Examples:** “According to the Pope, abortion is wrong.”

**Customary or Traditional Authority (of spiritual/religious nature)**

**Definition:** Practices or traditions or customs go against it and indicate it is wrong, or encourage it and indicate it is right. It is what we do, or what we do not do. Use Ethic of Divinity when the tradition or custom is religious, when a tradition or custom is seen as having a divine origin or being divinely sanctioned. (See also Ethic of Community.)

**Examples:** “As a Brahmin it is right for me to work as a cook. Most of us chose our occupation according to our tradition.”

**Legal Authority (of religious institution)**
**Definition:** When the law is regarded as instituted or sanctioned by divine authority. (See also Ethic of Community.)

**Examples:** “The law commands us to observe certain guidelines regarding food preparation and consumption.”

**Authority of Natural Law**

**Definition:** It is wrong because it is unnatural, or right because it adheres to natural law.

**Examples:** “Suicide is wrong because it is unnatural. That's just not the way it was supposed to happen. That's not the way life was supposed to end.”

**Scriptural Authority**

**Definition:** The scriptures have stated in the form of injunction or as revealed truth that it is wrong or right.

**Examples:** “The Bible says that incest is wrong.” “Thou shalt not steal.”

**God's Authority**

**Definition:** God has indicated or exemplified by action or otherwise that it is wrong or right. Doing what is pleasing or not pleasing to God. This category includes references to violating the sacred, committing sacrilege.

**Examples:** “We are given life by a Supreme Being and it is not in our hands to end it.” “Divorce is wrong because the two people coming together is a picture of Christ and his bride. That's supposed to be a sacred picture.” “Abortion is wrong because God gives life and it's a God given privilege to raise the child.”

**Conscience (when God-given)**

**Definition:** Your conscience will feel bad because you know you have done wrong or will not feel bad because you do not believe you have done wrong or think you have done right. Use Ethic of Divinity when the conscience is the soul, or a part of the self through which a higher authority is experienced. (See also Ethic of Autonomy.)

**Examples:** “Our God-given conscience tells us that it is wrong to take one's own life.”

**Virtues (divinity-oriented)**

Attitude or trait which, if manifested in the situation would make behavior right, if not manifested would make behavior wrong. If informant talks about vice, then manifestation of attitude or trait would make the behavior wrong, and absence of trait or attitude would make it right. Also habitual manner of action. Virtues include gratitude, respect, devotion, loyalty, sympathy, love, etc. Use Ethic of Divinity when the virtues pertain to a person's status as a transcendental being, or when the virtues pertain to traditions that have a divine basis. (See also Ethics of Autonomy and Ethic of Community.)

**Examples:** “To commit suicide shows a lack of respect for human life.” “You should strive to be holy as God is holy.” “You should honor the marriage vow. I respect the institution of marriage as sanctioned by God”
**Duty (as spiritual/religious being)**

Definition: An obligation of station to behave in certain ways in certain circumstances due to one's status or position (e.g., Muslim, Brahmin, etc.). The category includes absolution from duty. Use Ethic of Divinity when the duties obtain due to a person's status as a human being, or as a faithful person, or result from being sworn to uphold a divine order. (See also Ethic of Community.)

Examples: “Since we will die, there is an obligation to do something while we are alive.” “Taking one's life is wrong because God created man that we might serve Him and love Him and glorify Him.”

**Other Divinity**

Definition: Any other justification centering on God(s), divine being, spirituality, religion, the soul, sin, sanctity, purity, pollution, etc.

**OTHER CODES**

Justifications that cannot be coded as Ethics of Autonomy, Community, or Divinity:

**Involuntarism**

Definition: The actor is judged not to be a moral agent because of age, acting under duress or compulsion, infirmity, incapacity, etc. If the actor is simply judged not to be a moral agent and no reference is made to who might step in the actor’s place, the justification cannot be coded as an ethic of autonomy, community, or divinity.

**Categorically Right or Wrong**

Definition: When the participant only states that an action is right or wrong and that no reason is necessary or can be given.
Appendix C: Trends of Moral Discourse Appealing to Competing Ethics

This appendix summarizes the various tensions that were manifest in interviewees’ responses to moral vignettes. Each table gives the data, separated by vignette, for the total number of instances in which each combination of different ethics were appealed to in the moral justifications in the same vignette. Following each table is a summary of the types of moral tensions or compounding of multiple justifications toward the same moral end that were characterized by the appeal to both ethics in each vignette.

Compounding of Autonomy and Community:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomy/Community</th>
<th>VIGN #1</th>
<th>VIGN #2</th>
<th>VIGN #3</th>
<th>VIGN #4</th>
<th>VIGN #5</th>
<th>VIGN #6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 : Generation = Young</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : Generation = Old</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Autonomy and Community in conflict

Vignette #1: The main conglomeration of ethics here is a compounding of the individual’s rights to be healed, along with a doctor’s duty to heal the sick, given his station in society.

Vignette #2: The two ethics invoked here include the son’s individual suffering that will be basically the result of his failure to fulfill his duty to his father.

Vignette #3: Respondents wrestled with the competing goods of the father’s right to and obligation toward his son (protection) and the boy’s right to privacy. This was much stronger in the younger generation.
Vignette #4: This single case weighed in the individual psychological ramifications in addition to the social ramifications of the incident.

Vignette #5: For the most part this conflict involved the opposing goods of individual religious choice and the communal effects of those choices, namely their inability to participate in traditional ritual after conversion. For 026_F_Old the tension was between communal unity and the needs of individuals to seek healing, since Christianity is often seen as a means of obtaining healing as an alternative to shamanism.

Vignette #6: This conflict was solely perceived in the younger generation. It constituted a friction between the wife’s right not to be beaten, with her perceived need to give deference to her husband, or in several cases at least to respect the marriage as a social institution.

Notes:

The beating vignette, the son's letter, and the cheating episode all seem to bring out the feelings of discomfort and competing moral values that the younger generation seems to struggle with. One the one hand, they seem to feel a fundamental moral disapproval of what is happening, while at the same time recognizing that in an (their parents') alternative traditional Hmong framework these things make complete sense. These struggles are interesting in their own right, in that they show how people deal with competing values.

One seemingly pervasive perception among the older generation is that the new American norms involve a heavy intervention of the state into family life. This is reflected in the reluctance of older Hmong to state that the Father as an outright ability
to read his son's mail without recourse. This perception of the state's intervention into family life has a long history with Hmong in the United States, particularly with regards to health issues.

### Compounding of Divinity and Community:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/Divinity</th>
<th>VIGN #1</th>
<th>VIGN #2</th>
<th>VIGN #3</th>
<th>VIGN #4</th>
<th>VIGN #5</th>
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<td>1: Generation = Young</td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Generation = Old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</table>

#### Table 15: Community and Divinity in conflict

Vignette #1: In this vignette the divinity discourse was used to compound the community ethic in such a way that the community principles were first listed (i.e., that the doctor should cure the man because of his station in society as a doctor), but then reinforced by recognizing that God or heaven would know his actions, and even punish him for his actions and not being a straight person.

Vignette #2: This vignette provoked a compound of the communal nature of obligations and not lying to one's father in particular with the belief that not receiving the proper funeral spells dire consequences for the deceased, and that the spirit of the deceased will likely retaliate as a consequence. [Summaries: A. Value culture & Funeral as sacred; B. Duty to father and injuring clan & father's spirit will punish him; C. Promise to the father & father's spirit will punish son; D. Keeping promise to elders & Father's spirit will grant blessings if you give him the funeral; E. Lying is bad to everyone & because God knows you are not a straight person; F. Lying is bad & post-]
mortal spirits enforce this through punishing mortals; G. Failure to fulfill obligation & father's soul will suffer."

Vignette #3: None.

Vignette #4: Community and Divinity came together here in the assertion that marital infidelity leads both to a breaking of the social norms and institutions essential to Hmong life, as well as a sin against being a straight person in God's eyes.  [A. Sin against institution of marriage & God's will or commandment; B. Breaking the social norm of marital chastity & Sinning against God - God will know what you did.]

Vignette #5: In this single instance the person argued that one should do as the parents direct, but that in some instances, such as seeking healing from a new church, then one can do so (even against the parents' will) and it will only be a small transgression, since they are seeking healing and not simply going against the parents' wishes.

Vignette #6: None.

**Compounding of Autonomy and Divinity:**

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<tr>
<th>Autonomy/Divinity</th>
<th>VIGN #1</th>
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<td>1 : Generation = Young</td>
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<td>2 : Generation = Old</td>
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Table 16: Autonomy and Divinity in conflict

Vignette #1: None
Vignette #2: This was somewhat primed for by my question as to whether the father would suffer spiritual consequences from his son’s failure to perform the proper funeral, to which this person responded of course he would. Autonomy, Community, and Divinity were all invoked in this response, in that the son would suffer psychologically for not fulfilling his obligation to his father, and further that the father will suffer spiritually for not receiving a proper burial.

Vignette #3: None.

Vignette #4: Two compounding reasons are given as to why the woman was wrong to cheat in this vignette. The most salient is that God has commanded not to commit adultery, and there are sever scriptural and spiritual reasons why he has done so. Further, it will scar the children of the marriage mentally for knowing the rest of their lives that their mother cheated on their father, and for this reason it is also wrong.

Vignette #5: Both of these interviewees asserted that Christianity has an a priori moral authority, and that it is therefore not wrong to convert to be a Christian, but that there is actually a moral imperative to do so. They both also cite the necessity of a freedom of religion as an autonomous virtue on top of this.

Vignette #6: This person argued that fairness and reciprocity should reign, in that one should not be subject to physical beatings by those who may be more powerful to inflict them. In addition, she invoked the example set by God or Jesus, in that this is not how they express their anger or teach - in other word invoking God’s moral authority to say that this is a wrong way to engage in a relationship.
Appendix D: Three Ethics by Gender in Wisconsin

Figure 15: Male moral profiles in Wisconsin

Figure 16: Female moral profiles in Wisconsin
Appendix E: Survey Forms

A1-Leej twog yus coj haaw koj lub tsev?
   =Who is the leader of your household?

***************
[Nyeem los yog hais "Tsaj Kev Thov Muab Kev Koom Tes Ntaaw Koom Haum Tshawb Nhiaj" rau tus coj los yog tus nrog koj sib tham]
   =[Read the consent script and ask permission to do the interview to the leader or the interviewee]

***************

A2-Koj txheeb ze li cas rau tus coj haau lub tsev no?
   =Who is being interviewed? (the leader, the leader’s wife, the leader’s child, etc.)

A3-Lub tsev no muaj pes tswag leej?
   =Total f of people in the household?

A4-Nej tsev neeg yog Hmoob xem dab tsi?
   =What clan is your household?

A5-Hauv koj tsev neeg ua nrog koj nyob tab sim no muaj pes tswag nkwam niem tsiv thib lub nyab?
   =How many married couples in the household?

A6-Thaum nej hu plig noj tsib peb caug, muaj pes tswag yim hu plig ua ke?
   =When you hu plig at the end of the year, how many houses do it together with you?

A7-Muaj pes tswag leej hu plig ua ke tag mho?
   =How many people total?

X- Niuab Nhiaj Raw Tswa Neeg: =Household Demographics:

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Page 3 is a duplicate of page 2 for additional family members.

B- Koj puas muaj txeeb ze nyob tim teb chaws Amerikas?
-Do you have relatives in America?

B1A- Lawv mus ua hauj lwem xwb los yog lawv mus nyob tim ub?
-Are they temporary migrants or permanently living there?

B1B- Koj cov txeeb ze nyob lub zos twg? los yog qhou twg.
-Where are your relatives located in the U.S.?

B2- Ntawm ib vaam thiv /Wok/ib hi/los yog ib xyoo nej tu nej cov txeeb ze sib tham /saup/ntawm los yog tu nej txais ntawm cov txeeb ze pes tsaws zaus?
-How many times a year/month/week do you talk to or write/receive letters from your relatives in the U.S.?

B3- Koj puas muaj lawv na npaws xow tooj los yog chaw nyob?
-Do you have contact information for them?

B4- Lawv txeeb ze li cas rau koj?
-What type of relatives are they, i.e., how are you related to them?

B5- Koj paub cov kwv tij no paub li cas?
-How did you come to know these relatives?
C- Koj puas muaj cov txeeb ze nyob rau lwam lub teb chawes?
-Do you have relatives in other countries?

C1A- Lawv mus ua hauj lwam xwvb los yog lawv muay tim ub?
-kow they temporary migrate or permanently living there?

C1B- Lawv nyob rau quov twg?
-Where are they located?

C2- Ntawm ib vaam thiv (ib)hli/los yioj ib xyoo nej tau ngov cov txeeb ze sib tham/sau ntawv los yog tau txais ntawv ntawm cov txeeb ze pes baws zau?
-How many times a year/month/week do you talk to or write/receive letters from your relatives in this country?

C3- Koj puas muaj lawv na npawv xuv tooj los yog chaw nyob?
-Do you have contact information for them?

C4- Lawv txeeb ze li cas rau koi?
-What type of relatives are they, i.e., how are you related to them?

C5- Koj paub cov kwv ti j no paub li cas?
-How did you come to know those relatives?

D- Ntawm ib xyoo nej kwvtau nyiaj npaum li cas?
-What is your household annual monetary income?

E1- Koj ua koi li teb, los yogy koj qe j lawv li teb ua?
-Do you rent or own land?

E2- Koj muaj teb pes tsawg laj?
-How many hectares owned?

E3- Koj qe j teb pes tsawg laj?
-How many hectares rented?

F1- Koj sau qoob los dab tu?
-What crops do you harvest?

F2- Koj cog _ los pes tsawg xyoo lawv?
-How many years have you harvested these crops?

F3- Koj cog noj los yogy koi cog muay xwvb?
-How they for consumption or sale?

F4- Nej cog dab tsi los yogy ua dab tsi ua ntej thuam nej tisau tau cog yam no?
-What did you used to do or harvest before this crop?
G- Xyoo no koj puas niitav tib neeg ua teb?
- Did you pay people to help work your fields this year?

G1- Xyoo no koj niitav cov tib neeg ua teb pes tawg hnb?
- About how many days this year did you pay people to work for you?

G2- Ntawm ib hnb no, koj niitav tib neeg ua teb pes tawg leej?
- What was the average number of people you would hire in one day?

G3- Pes tawg percent (%) koj niitav cov kvw tij neej tsa xwb?
- What percentage of your hired labor was with relatives?

G4- Ib hnb no koj them npaum li cas rau ib tug tub zog?
- For paid labor, what was the average price paid for one day?

H- Xyoo no koj puas pauv zog mrog leej tawg ua teb?
- Did you exchange agricultural labor with any one this year?

H1- Xyoo no koj pauv zog mrog lawv pes tawg hnb?
- About how many days this year did you work for exchange labor?

H2- Pes tawg percent (%) koj pauv zog mrog koj cov kvw tij neej tsa xwb?
- What percentage of your trade labor was with relatives?

I- Xyoo no koj yim neeg puas mus ua zog ua teb?
- Did you or others in your household work for other people in their fields this year?

I1- Lawv ua pes tawg leej?
- How many people?

I2- Ib xyoo no ib leej mus ua zog pes tawg hnb?
- How many days did each person work?

I3- Pes tawg percent (%) lawv ua zog rau k vw tij neej tsa xwb?
- What percentage was for relatives?

I4- Thau a nej mog lawv ua zog ib hnb, lawv them ib leej npaum li cas?
- For paid labor, what was the average price paid for one day?

J- Ntawm nej lub tsiv nej muaj pes tawg lub:

K- Ntawm nej lub tsiv nej muaj pes tawg lub:

K1- Nej muaj pes tawg yam tsiaj? (Tai) (Tiaw yam)
- How many types animals do you have? (Write each)

K2- Nej muaj pes tawg tsiaj? (Ou) (Rau tag nhu)
- How many of each?

L1- Koj yim neeg muaj pes tawg leej mus ua haaj loem rau loem lub teb chaws?
- How many people in your family have migrated to another country for work?

L2- Lawv nyob ntwm lub teb chaws tawg?
- Which country?

L3- Lawv mus pes tawg xyo?
- How many years were they gone?

L4- Lawv puas rov qab los?
- How long they returned?

L5- Lawv rov qab los thau m tawg lawm? / Lawv puais rov qab los thau m tawg?
- When did they return? / When will they return?

L6- Ib bli lawv sa niyaj npaum li cas los rau nej xwb?
- How much money do/did they send home per month on average?

M- Lub tsiv no muaj pes tawg lub chaw?
- How many rooms does the house have?
### PIB LUB KAW SUAB TAM SIM NO

**P:** Yog tus coj los yog nws tus poj niam los Nplog teb los:

**P1:** Koj teh nyob zos yej tawg rog twg? (sau tag nhrh)
- If from Laos: What refugee camps did you live in? (not all)
- How long did you live in each camp?

**P2:** Koj nyob ho nenawn pawm teh laum lub zos yej tawg rog?
- How did you come to Paklang?

**P3:** Thaum nyob tim zos yej tawg rog, nej paus mauj teo hauv kev uas yauv mus tim Ameitas teh los yog lem lub teh chaws?
- Did your family have the opportunity to migrate to the U.S. or elsewhere?

**P4:** Thaum nyob tim lub zos yej tawg rog, nej paus xav mus tim Ameitas teh?
- Did you want to migrate to the U.S.?

**P5:** Yog vim li cas thiaj xav mus Ameitas teh? Yog vim li cas thiaj tis xav mus Ameitas teh?
- Why or Why not?

**Q1:** Yog koj mauj ib qhov teeb meem (zoo li ksw tij twaag, tus mauj nyaj, yus yuav tsam ua kev cai tshoo, los yog mauj teeb meem), leej twg uas yog tus koj bu tsaj pub koj?
- In time of difficulty, who do you call for help or support (social networks)?
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

**Q2:** Lawv nyob rau qhov twg?
- Where do they live?

**Q3:** Lawv tsheeb ze li cas rau koj?
- How are they related to you?

**R1:** Tus coj li niam tsxv yug qhov twg?
- Where were the leader’s parents born?

**R2:** Tus coj li peg yawg yug qhov twg?
- Where were the leader’s grandparents born?

**R3:** Tus coj li yawm tsxv niam tais yug qhov twg?
- Where were the leader’s parents-in-law born?

**R4:** Koj tsev neeg mauj pes tsawg tiam nyob rau tim Teb Chaws Thabi?
- How many generations has your family been in Thailand?

**R5:** Pes tsawg yuox?
- How many years?

**R6:** Koj tsev neeg mauj pes tsawg yuox nyob rau tim lub zog Paklang?
- How many years has your family lived in Paklang?

---

**S1:** Yog vim li cas koj tsev neeg thiaj los nyob ntawm lub zog Paklang no?
- Why did your family come to Paklang?

**S2:** Nej nyob qhov twg ua netj tsaj Paklang?
- Where did they live before coming here?

---

**T:** Kuv xav thow kom koj xav tsxg ib tug tib neeg uas koj paub zoo. Koj qhia rau kuv tsxg nws tsxj kev nyob, nws tus cuj pwnm, thiah nws tus xeeb ceem?
- Think about someone you know really well, well enough to describe. Think of someone whose behavior, character, and nature you feel like you could describe in detail. Now tell me about their character, behavior, and nature.

---

**U:** Yog thaum koj xav tsxg ib tug tib neeg uas koj hwm nws. Yog ib tug tib neeg ua neej tsim tsaj thiab ua qhov zoo, thiah nws yog ib tug tib neeg siab zoo. Tus tib neeg no mauj dab tsi uu rau nws uu neeg zoo?
- Think of a person that is very moral and has a very good heart, a person that you respect very much. What makes this person a good person?

---

**V:** Yog thaum koj xav tsxg ib tug tib neeg uas koj tis hwm nws. Yog ib tug tib neeg tisua ua neej tsim tsaj thiab ua qhov phen, thiah nws yog ib tug tib neeg siab phen. Tus tib neeg no mauj dab tsi uu rau nws uu neeg phen?
- Now think of a person that is very immoral or has a very bad heart? What makes this person a bad person?
Note: In the United States version of the survey, questions were simply altered to fit the U.S. context, such as housing construction being altered to include housing type, language proficiency in English rather than Thai, and Page 4 included locations in Thailand rather than in the United States.
Appendix F: Examples of Moral Discourse Coded to Each Ethic

This appendix contains examples of transcribed and translated discourse pertaining to each subcode of the Three Ethics, using the coding framework established by Jensen (2004). This is designed to give the reader a more complete and qualitative sense of how the Three Ethics framework was applied to Hmong moral discourses. These examples span generations and locations, and where an example is missing, there was no transcribed coding reference available. These categories correspond directly to the coding structure outlined in Appendix B.

**Autonomy**

**A1--Punishment Avoidance (to self)**

[18:47.8 - 19:13.8]


[Translate:

P: If I could say something to him, this is what I would say, "Your business is profitable right? If it's profitable you're going to do it right? But, if you take too much of their money, they'll find out and stop wanting to do business with you." That's what I would say to him. People know the only reason why you do business is because you make a profit. If you make only a little profit at a time, then you are able to stay in business with them longer, but if you make too much profit, then you will run out of business very quickly." That's what I would say.]

**A2--Reward Seeking (to self)**

[49:43.9 - 50:06.4]

P: Ib yam li tias, kuv ntseeg peb hmoob kev cai qub no xwb yog tias qhov kev cai qub no yeej tsis pab kuv li ces, kuv yeej tsis ntseeg thiab. Tseem ceeb mas, lwm tus mas xav txawv, tiam sis kuv xav
mas kev ntseeg kev cai dab qhua no yeej ntseeg hom twg los yeej tau tag nro li, yog yam pab tau koj mas koj mam nsteeg ho yog pab tsis tau koj ces koj txhob ntseeg.

[Translation:

P: For example, I believe in the old culture. If this old culture didn’t help me, then I wouldn’t believe in it. Others believe differently. I believe in the old culture, but it’s okay to believe in anything. If it helps you, then believe in it. If it doesn't help you, then don't believe in it. ]

A3--Self’s Physical Well-Being

P: Yog ntau sab nraug lawm ces yeej muaj thib.
I: Muaj thiab? Muaj txim li cas?

P: Muaj txim rau qhov muab niag poj niam ntau sab nrau heev lawm ne. Yog ib tug tib neeg, nws muab ntau sab sab ces nws kuj muaj txim.

[Translation:
P: If he hit her a lot then it’s wrong.
I: Why is that?
P: Because he hit the wife very badly, she is a person, and so hitting her very hard is wrong (connotation: and has consequences).]

A4--Self’s Psychological Well-Being

[3:31.9 - 3:46.7]
I: Ua cas pauv lub npe thiab pauv lub xeem tsis txhaum?

P: Qhov ntawd ko mas, ib yam li yus twb poob suab poob npe, txaj muag lawm nes, ces yus kuj mus pauv ces nyaj tej zaum yuav tsis txhaum, lub npe thiab lub xeem xwb neb.

I: Ces pauv lub npe, pauv lub xeem tsis tsua tseem ceeb puas yog?

P: Aw.

[Translation:
I: Why is it not wrong to change your name and surname?

P: Because you are already embarrassed and ashamed and so you go and change your name and surname. It's not wrong. It's just your name and surname.

I: So changing your name and surname is not that important right?}
P: Right.]

**A5--Self's Interest**

[16:40.0 - 16:52.4]


[Translation:]

P: He's doing business so he has to sell it expensive so he can make a living. So he is not wrong. It's just business.]

**A6--Other Individual's Physical Well-being**

[38:06.3 - 38:23.0]

P: Because that is a serious case of domestic abuse. And of course if her safety, since he harmed her, he's definitely is in big trouble.

**A7--Other Individual's Psychological Well-being**

[34:24.8 - 34:38.9]

I2: Yog vim li cas, ntawv hluas nkauj hluas nraug es tus txiv hos txhaum thiab?

P: Yog ntawv hluas nkauj hluas nraug ces nws kuj muaj kev txaj muag los nws kuj muaj kev ub kev no mas los. Es nws thiaj li tse nws thiaj tus siab rau nws txiv no.

[Translation:]

I2: Why is it wrong for the father if the letter is a girlfriend/boyfriend letter?

P: If it's a girlfriend/boyfriend letter then it is wrong because the son will be embarrassed because of what is written. This is why he is upset with his father.]

**A8--Other Individual's Interest**

[27:52.4 - 28:27.7]

P: Txhaum vim hais tias, nws tsis muab kev khoom tev rau tus tub paub ua ntej tso. Rau qhov hais tias, txoj hauv lwm ntawv yog tus tub xub ua lawm. Yog twb yog muaj neeg paub tus tub lawm mas,
tus tub thiaj li, lawv thiaj xav tuaj rau nws. Tiam sis yuav tsum, ua ntej mas, yuav khom tsis txhaum mas, yuav tsum yog nws noog tus tub tso hais tias, "yog li ntawv tub, lawv xav tsab ntawv ntaws tuaj rau koj, mas yog koj tsis khoom saib, yog koj tsis tau saib no, kuv saib ua ntej puav tau?" Mas qhov ntawv, yuav tsum tau thov kev pom zoo mas li saib mas thiaj yog.

[Translation:
P: He is wrong because he did not allow his son to see the letter first. It's suppose to be the son who opens the letter first. Whoever knew the son sent the son the letter because it was meant for the son. In order for it not to be wrong, the dad has to ask the son, "Son, someone sent you a letter. If you're too busy to look at it and haven't looked at it yet, can I look at it first?" The dad has to ask for permission first before reading the letter.]

A9--Fairness and Reciprocity

[16:46.7 - 17:10.1]

P: Ua lag ua luam no me me. Noj me me koj saib tus tug muaj tus tug txom nyem heev, pab tus ntawv, tus tug txom nyem heev, pab tus ntawv, tsis pub koj muaj muaj, tsis pub kom pluag pluag. Koj ua lag ua luam koj txhob noj ntau noj me ntsis xwb noj li kaum puaxees no xwb mas. Noj li kaum leej tsib leej kaum puaxees xwb tus tug txom nyej koj pab. Qhov no mas thiaj tsis txhaum kev cai. Tsis txhaum lub ntuj. Ho koj noj txog tsibcaug puaxees rau yimcaum puaxees tus tug rua los koj noj tas nrho ces, yeej txhaum.

[Translation:
P: In doing business, only make a little profit. Make a little profit look for who is in need. If you see someone in need, help them out. Don’t let anyone be too rich or too poor. When doing business, don’t take too much advantage of people; only make a little profit, maybe 10 percent. Only make it a little profit so you can help out those in need so you won’t break any rules. But if you make 50 to 80 percent profit, taking advantage of everyone, then that is wrong. ]

A10--Conscience (guilt)

[31:16.6 - 31:36.6]

I2: Tus txiv puas tseem txhaum?
P: Ua li cas, los yeej txhaum.

I2: Yog vim li cas nws hos txhaum? Twb tsis muaj leej twg paub ne.
P: Nws txhaum rau nws tus kheej nes.

I2: Nws txhaum rau nws tus kheej?
P: Nws paub hais tias nws tus kheej paub nes ces nws yeej yuav tsum txhaum.
I2: Nws paub rau nws tus kheej ces nws txhaum lawm los?
P: Txawm nws tsis paub los nws yeej paub lawm ces yeej yuav tsum txhaum.

[Translation:
I2: Is the father wrong?
P: No matter what, he is wrong.
I2: Why is he wrong? No one knows
P: He's wrong to himself.
I2: He's wrong to himself?
P: Even though no one knows, he knows and so he knows he is wrong.
I2: If he knows himself then he is wrong?
P: Even if he doesn't know, he already does so it's wrong.]

A11--Virtues (autonomy-oriented)
[22:35.3 - 23:41.5]

P: I believe that um, as a couple and as a new family you have to live on your own so you can walk on your own, domestic issues and grow on that side. As well as learnign how um, how to survive as a couple, as a family without parents always unconsciously or inadvertently trying to help you for every little detail. You need to build those skills, those survival skills, and most Hmong family couples do not get that when they live with their family. #00:23:11-3#
I: Uh huh. #00:23:13-5#

P: Most house is provided, the food is provided, um, (unclear) the mom and dad is taking care of the kids when they cry, and so their skill set is building up much later in life and that's not giving them the early start that they need to become more proficient or, or, or self-sufficient in this society.

A12--Responsibility (for self)
[57:56.0 - 58:14.0]
I: Oh, why is it different between a 14 year old and a 24 year old?
P: I don't know I guess between a 24 year old knows a lot better now, he's an adult now. He should be able to handle whatever that letter is. For a 14 year old, he, you know is still a kid, and whatever that letter is, it maybe some sort of trouble or whatever it is. So, he wouldn't be able to handle it.
A13--Means-Ends Consideration - Ends of an Individual

[27:32.9 - 27:56.9]

P: I don't think there's anything morally wrong. It's business. I feel that whatever he's in right now, it's still business for him. cause even though if he's, if he knows that they're, if he tells them, there is going to be competition. But if he doesn't tell them, then he can continue on dealing the business. I don't think it's really going to be a, it's really going to put too much affect on how he does it.

A14--Rights

[34:33.9 - 34:42.6]

I: Yog vim li cas txhaum?

P: Txhaum qhov hais tias tsab ntawv ntawd lawv xa tuaj rau tus tub puas yog? Tsis yog tus txiv li ces tus txiv muab nyeem lawm ces tsam txhaum tus tub ces tus tub tsis zoo siab.

[Translation:

I: Why is it wrong?

P: Because the letter is for the son not the father and the father just reads it like that then it is wrong to the son. The son won't be happy.]

A15--Other Autonomy

[26:21.8 - 27:12.0] #00:26:21-6#

P: I don't think she deserves to get her ass whooped just for that. Yeah, it's pretty wrong.

I: Is there anything she could do to get, to deserve getting her ass whooped?

P: No, not really. I mean, she did not tell him, but that's, that's only going to a movie. It's not like she's seeing other guys.

I: What if she was seeing another guy; does that give the husband the right to beat her?

P: It doesn't give him the right, but I wouldn't say anything about it if I knew about it. I'd just be like, that's what she gets for doing that.
Community

C1--Punishment Avoidance - Social Sanctions
[3:19.2 - 4:57.9] #00:02:10-1#

P: Because he's already part of his clan already, his previous clan. If he is going to run away that means he can't marry his clan, can't marry his, the new clan he is in, he's going to have a much tougher life. The son is going to have a much tougher life.

I: Why would it be tougher?

P: Because he is more restrictive to who he can choose with the laws, with the cultures I guess.

I: So it's all about the marriage taboos?

P: Um, that's one. I believe the other one is also (Hmong). Because after that, if he is in trouble too, then who's really going to help him out? The people on his side, his biological side, or the people who have adopted him? And, I would think that that's going to be a struggle he, that person will face.

I: (Hmong). Ok, so what's worse, leaving to go to a new village or changing his clan?

P: Leaving to a new village.

I: Why is that?

P: Because I feel that ah, the problem he is right now, he still couldn't fix it. And if he's just run away from his problem, it will soon or later catch up to him. Even if he is going to change his name, that's also bad too, but I think that if he can't solve the problem it's

C2--Reward Seeking - Social Benefits
[2:25.5 - 3:43.9]

P: But (2:25 unclear) to be here in the US, I think that it's kind of slightly wrong because over here it's not a bigger deal because you know it's kind of been incorporated into American style too. I mean, family lifestyles, so, doing that so it kind of, I don't know. I find it kind of wrong here because you know you still have to connect with your family here in America because it's not a smaller village over here. You're, it's a vast big America and you cut off all ties with your own relatives, you [I: uh huh] you know, whenever you need help, how are you going to find them again? [I: yeah yeah yeah] You know, but um, that's kind of my opinion on that.

I: So when you say it's kind of the American style of doing things, what do you mean by that?
P: Because we’re here in America, and um, like I said, it’s bigger here and if you have to cut off ties with your family, you’ll live out on your own out in the middle of nowhere, it doesn’t matter where and when you don’t have any more connection with your family, or any Hmong relatives around or anybody, like that it’s a lot harder to get by [uh huh]. Depending if, you know, depending that certain individual they completely incorporate into the American lifestyle, but if they still maintain some of the Hmong values, morals, and you know family thing, to completely cut off all ties here in America, you’re just completely [yeah] like on your own.

C3—Others’ Physical Well-Being

[30:37.1 - 31:05.5]

P: Txhaum rau lub ntuj me ais. Tab sis nws, qhov no mas, nws me me ais xwb. Hos yus kom txhaum loj no mas, txhaum rau qhov hais tias thaum yus niam laus es, luag khv v tsis tau noj lawm nas, es yus tsis pub rau nws noj los yog ua li puag tas koj hais, yus txiav es yus tsis yuav yus txiv ntawv mas, qhov no txhaum loj heev. Qhov no thiaj txhaum loj xwb. Hos yog hais tias yus faib tsev xwb lau no ces txhais tau hais tias, tsis txhaum loj.

I: Es kuv xas noog koj ib yam, koj siv los lus txhaum ntuj,

[Translation:
P: You have wrong the heavens a little. But just a little. The big wrong here is when your mom is old and cannot work and you don’t help her or like what you said earlier, you cut your parents off and don’t want them anymore. That is the big morally wrong here. But if you split the house then that is not that bad.

C4—Others’ Psychological Well-Being

[25:36.7 - 26:12.5]

P: Tsis txhaum.

00:25:37-0 I: Yog vim li cas?

00:25:38-1 P: Vim hais tias tus txiv txhawj ne yom. Zaum ua ntej nws twb mus ib zaug ua ntej lawm, tus txiv twb hais tias yog mus ces kom qhia yom. Vim hais tias tus txiv txhawj txhawj, tus txiv xav kom tus poj niam mus qhov twg los qhia es nws thiaj li paub, es nws thiaj li tsis nrhiav nrhiav, thiaj li tsis tos tos hais tias, xyov mus ua twg, nploj tsis paub mus twg laui, ces nws txhawj txhawj. Nws xav kom qhia, qhia hais tias mus qhov no ces tus txiv nyob tsev tus txiv hais tias, au, mus qhov no lawm ces nws mus ib pliaq nws los xwb. Ces nws hos tsis nco qab txhawj lawm. Tiam sis mas yog tus poj niam mus es tus poj niam tsis qhia es mus yeej mus lawm los ces yus npau taws ne yom.

[Translation:
P: It's not wrong.
I: Why isn’t it wrong?
P: Because he is worried. The first time he told her already to tell him when she goes somewhere because the husband is worried. The husband wants her to tell him where she’s going whenever she goes out. That way, he won’t be so worried and won’t have to keep looking for her and waiting for her and thinking about where she is and such. He just wants her to tell him where she’s going so that the husband can be at home and know exactly where she is and not worry. But if the wife keeps going like that then the husband is bound to get angry.]

C5--Others’ Interest [the good of the collective]
[16:50.3 - 17:00.4]
[Translation: He is selling it too high. It is too expensive. People cannot buy because they cannot afford it. They don't have the money for it.]

C6--Important Socially-Defined Person’s Authority
[51:57.9 - 52:21.5]
P: I would talk to my mom because personally, I wouldn’t want to stay in the same house if I’m married. I wouldn’t want to stay in the same house as my parents. But she is your mom, and your wife is your wife, but she’s your mom. So I guess you got to listen to your mom, but I would want to move out anyway. I wouldn’t want to live in the same house, personally, but in that situation, I guess you got to, I don’t know.

C7--Customary or Traditional Authority
[2:04.3 - 2:30.4]
I: Ua li cas?
[Translation:
I: Why is that?

P: Because, according to Hmong culture, you can't change your surname at all. He has to keep his surname. You can change your name if you want. It's okay to but you can't change your surname. So he is wrong because he changed his surname. So according to Hmong tradition, he cannot change his surname, but then this is just a story.

C8--Legal Authority (of social institution)

[49:32.8 - 50:37.4]

P: It is how the community thinks, how the community has come to change to say that violence is not really a solution, right? #00:49:46-1#

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. #00:49:48-0#

P: So the society is not, the Hmong community has it's own laws and rules that govern first and most of the issues get resolved there, then if it doesn't, then it escalates to the country, the US laws. But you're be amazed at how a lot of issues have been soved under the table within the Hmong laws. #00:50:09-7#

I: Yea, yeah, yeah. #00:50:09-7#

P: So in that context, I would get the Hmong laws support here. Because most people no longer think that it's ok. #00:50:21-7#

I: So they tend to agree more that it's wrong to beat. #00:50:21-8#

P: Yeah. #00:50:22-8#

I: And so even if it's solved outside of the US courts and police and everything, they still in the United States tend to say ok, that's wrong. You should pay her clan this much or something like that. #00:50:34-2#

P: Yeah.

C9--Virtues (community-oriented)

[6:47.5 - 7:25.4]


I: Pua yog?

P: Mm.
I: Ces, nws txhaum vim rau qhov nws muag kim kim xwb? Los yog puas muaj dab tsis ntxiv nws txhaum.


[Translation:
P: Because you buy it at a cheap price. You should sell it a reasonable price. That way, you'll be a happy person. But if he did it like that, then he has a bad heart.

I: Really?

P: Yes.

I: Then, does his only fault lie in selling it at an expensive price? Or is he doing wrong in other ways?

P: He's wrong because he purchases it at a cheap price, then comes over and sells it at an expensive one. By doing this, he is showing that he doesn't care his people or his family. He wants to be the only one to make a lot of money.]

**C10--Duty (to others)**

[2:09.4 - 2:16.9]

P: Li cas los yeej yog yus niam yus txiv yom? Yog tsis muaj lawv yus yeej tsis muaj thiab ne yom?

[Translate:

P: No matter what, they are still your parents right? Without them, there wouldn't be you either, right?]

**C11--Means-Ends Considerations - Ends of Social Group**

[22:35.3 - 23:41.5]

P: I believe that um, as a couple and as a new family you have to live on your own so you can walk on your own, domestic issues and grow on that side. As well as learnign how um, how to survive as a couple, as a family without parents always unconsciously or inadvertently trying to help you for every little detail. You need to build those skills, those survival skills, and most Hmong family couples do not get that when they live with their family. #00:23:11-3#

I: Uh huh. #00:23:13-5#

P: Most house is provided, the food is provided, um, (unclear) the mom and dad is taking care of the kids when they cry, and so their skill set is building up much later in life and that's not giving them the early start that they need to become more proficient or, or, or self-sufficient in this society.
C12--Social Order or Harmony Goals

[27:44.4 - 28:04.4]


I: Puas yog?

P: Mm. Yus mus nyob nyias mus nyob nyias mas, kaj siab, tsis txhaum.

[Translation:

P: No, she’s not doing anything wrong either. The wife isn't wrong. If they don’t like each other and split up and go their separate ways, there is more freedom there. If they are happy like this, then there is nothing wrong. By living together, it seems like they never get along. It’s sad.

I: Really?

P: Yes. If they’re happier living on their own, then there is nothing wrong with that. ]

C13--Other Community

[4:38.6 - 5:21.9]

P: Es yus niam yus txiv ua yus poob suab npe ces yus txaj muag ces yus tsis lees yus niam yus txiv mas, xav los, kuv xav los mas, txawj yog ua rau yus poob suab npe los yog yus niam yus txiv yug yus lawm mas, tse yus yuav tsum lees ua yus niam yus txiv.

I: Vim rau qhov lawv yug yus xwb?

P: Vim rau qhov lawv yug yus xwb.

I: Tsis muaj lwm qhov hais rau yus hais tais yus yuav tsum lees yus niam txiv yog vim rau qhov lawv yug yus xwb. Puas yog?

P: Aw, vim rau qhov lawv yug tau yus lawm, mas yus yuav tsum lees lawv ua niam ua txiv. Yog tsis muaj lawv, lawv tuag tas lawm mas, yus kuj mus ua mas, kuj tau los lawv tseem nyob ntawd, yus tsis lees lawv ua niam ua txiv mas, yus mus pauv yus lub xeem, yus mus pauv yus lub npe es yus tsis lees lawv mas, xav los yeej muaj kev txhaum.

[Translation:

P: So if your parents did something bad that embarrassed you and you ran away and changed your name, that is wrong because they are still your parents and they’re the ones that gave birth to you, and so you shouldn’t do that.
I: Because they gave birth to you?

P: They gave birth to you.

I: There isn’t anything else that tells you, you shouldn’t do that because they gave birth to you right?

P: Right. Because they gave birth to you, you have to accept them always. If they were gone then you can change your name and such but if they are still alive and you go and change your name and run away then that is wrong.

**Divinity**

D1--Punishment Avoidance (from God(s))

[1:10:54.8 - 1:11:30.1]


[Translation:

I: The law of heaven here is if it’s like that then they have wrong heaven’s law to love everyone. The law is that you have to love everything not just humans. So manybe, next time, the heavens will punish you by not letting you know next time when someone is selling something very expensive to you. Maybe this is what you’ll have happen next to you. This is heaven’s law, according to men’s law, there is no wrong.

D2--Reward Seeking (from God(s))

D3--Self’s Physical Well-Being (Body as God’s temple)

D4--Interest of Self’s Soul

[33:27.1 - 33:50.8]
P: Muaj kev txhaum qhov hais tias, yus twb mus ntseeg Vaj Tswv, ua cas yus ho tsis mus nsteeg kom tiag tiag. Yus coj dab, yug ho tsis coj tiag tiag. Ua li no ces, tus tuag ntawv na, tus ntsuj plig mus tsis tau qhov twg li na.

I: Au, puas yog?


[Translation:

P: They are wrong because if you leave to believe in God, then why don’t you really believe? If you believe in the old culture, Shamanism, then why don’t you really believe that? If you do this, then when somebody dies, then his or her spirit won’t be able to go anywhere.

I: Really?

P: The spirit will go to the wrong places. Nobody will welcome his or her spirit. The spirit won’t be able to go to the Spirit World. They spirit won’t be able to become a new person in the next life. The person who can’t choose between religions is doing something wrong.]

D5--Other’s Physical Well-Being (Body as God’s temple)

D6--Interest of Other's Soul

[35:00.2 - 35:23.6]

P: Lawv coj ob txoj kev cai lawv yuav tsum yog ib tug neeg txhaum. Ib tug neeg no yeej coj tsis tau ob txog kev cai no, koj hais puas yog?

I: Yog.


[Translate:

P: It’s not right to follow two religions. You're saying that a person cannot follow two religions right?

I: Yes.

P: If you’re going to believe in Shamanism, then stick to only Shamanism so that when you’re parents die, their spirits can survive in the next life. If you’re going to believe in Christianity, then stick to Christianity so that when you’re parents die, they can move onto the next life instead of wandering around aimlessly and hungry. ]
D7--Important Spiritually-Defined Person’s Authority

[3:23.6 - 3:36.6]

P: Txoj kev cai no mas yog hais tias yog yus tsis yuav yus niam yus txiv mas nws txhaum raws kev cai ntuj vim yus niam yus txiv yug yus nes yom? Aws, mas yuav tsum txhaum rau poj koob yawm txwv.

[Translation:
P: In this situation, if you don’t want to belong to your parents, then you are the one that is wrong because your parents are the ones that bore and raised you.]

D8--Customary or Traditional Authority (of spiritual or religious nature)

[35:00.2 - 35:23.6]

P: Lawv coj ob txoj kev cai lawv yuav tsum yog ib tug neeg txhaum. Ib tug neeg no yeej coj tsis tau ob txog kev cai no, koj hais puas yog?

I: Yog.


[Translate:
P: It’s not right to follow two religions. You’re saying that a person cannot follow two religions right?

I: Yes.

P: If you’re going to believe in Shamanism, then stick to only Shamanism so that when you’re parents die, their spirits can survive in the next life. If you’re going to believe in Christianity, then stick to Christianity so that when you’re parents die, they can move onto the next life instead of wandering around aimlessly and hungry. ]

D9--Legal Authority (of religious institution)

[1:12:37.2 - 1:13:15.3]

P: Tej zaum, tus ua tuaj thov yus ntawv mas, nws hais tias yus yuav deb deb los ces yus ncim lub sij hawm thiab ntawv lawm ntau ntau. Thiab yus los deb deb lawm, ces cia thov nws pab qhia es, nws tsis muaj nyiaj cia nws mus yuav khiag ntawv qhov chaws ntawv no. Tej zaum lawv twb tuaj thov zoo li no rau yus xwb. Lawv tsis muaj nyiaj thiaj tuaj thov tsis. Yog yus tsis kam li lawm es yus yuav
noj lawv tuag tis es cia yus ib leeg pom xwb no ces qhov yus tsis kam no ces txhaum kev cai ntuj qhov yus tsis kam. Ces txhais tau hais tias cuaj kaum lawm.

I: Ces tsis hais rau lawv yuav qhov twg, txhaum loj dua muag khim dua rau lawv puas yog?

P: Aw.

[Translation:

P: Maybe the one who comes to ask you will say that you bought it far away and so you've wasted some time and the distance is long. And you've come from far so please teel him because he has no money and he'll go buy it from there. Maybe they only come ask you nicely like this. They have no money and that's why they ask. If you don't let at all, and you want to suck them dry and only you know the secret, and so you don't tell, it's wrong to the heavens because you wouldn't let.

I: So if you don't tell them where you got the stuff from it's a lot more wrong to sell it to them at the wrong price?

P: Yes.

D10--Authority of Natural Law

[1:12:37.2 - 1:13:15.3]

P: Tej zaum, tus ua tuaj thov yus ntawv mas, nws hais tias yus yuav deb deb los ces yus ncim lub sij hawm thiab ntawv lawm ntau ntau. Thiab yus los deb deb lawm, ces cia thov nws pab qhia es, nws tsis muaj nyiaj cia nws mus yuav khang ntawv qhov chaws ntawv no. Tej zaum lawv twb tuaj thov zoo li no rau yus xwb. Lawv tsis muaj nyiaj thiaj tuaj thov tsis. Yog yus tsis kam li lawm es yus yuav noj lawv tuag tis es cia yus ib leeg pom xwb no ces qhov yus tsis kam no ces txhaum kev cai ntuj qhov yus tsis kam. Ces txhais tau hais tias cuaj kaum lawm.

I: Ces tsis hais rau lawv yuav qhov twg, txhaum loj dua muag khim dua rau lawv puas yog?

P: Aw.

[Translation:

P: Maybe the one who comes to ask you will say that you bought it far away and so you've wasted some time and the distance is long. And you've come from far so please teel him because he has no money and he'll go buy it from there. Maybe they only come ask you nicely like this. They have no money and that's why they ask. If you don't let at all, and you want to suck them dry and only you know the secret, and so you don't tell, it's wrong to the heavens because you wouldn't let.

I: So if you don't tell them where you got the stuff from it's a lot more wrong to sell it to them at the wrong price?

P: Yes.

D11--Scriptural Authority

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**D12--God(s)’ Authority**


P: Txhaum rau qhov hais tias, tej zam yus tiab nsteeq lawm tiab sis ho yus rov qab los ua kev cai ntawv ces, tej zaum tsam Vaj Tswv tsis nyiam yus li qhov ntawv no xwb.

[Translation:

P: It could be wrong because you already believed in Christianity, but you came back to the old ways. Perhaps God wouldn’t like that. ]

**D13--Conscience (when God-given)**


00:49:26-3 P: No mas, tsis yog kev cai plaub ntug. No mas yog kev cai xa xaj na xwb. Yog lawv mus nsteeq Yexus qhov ntawd, es nws txawj nsteeq, nws kuj zoo thiag thiag. Tus los nsteeq dab los nws tsis yog hais tias yuav nsteeq ib tug dab, nws tsuav yog nsteeq kev cai dab qhua ua raws li nws nsteeq niam nws txiv. Nws nseem nsteeq dab los nws yeej tsis txawj coj, nws tsis txawj nsteeq kuj tsis zoo thiab. Ua yog tus nib neeg ntawd nsteeq Vaj tswv ntawd nws los ua kev cai dab qhua tas, rau nws tus leej txiv ntawd, nws ros qab mus ua nws Yexus hos los, kuj yuav tsis txhaum li. Es yuav txhaum qhov twg, yeej tsis txhaum li.

00:50:13-9 I2: hos yog tias nsteeq li ntawd xwb?

00:50:15-8 P: Yes.


[Translation:

P: This is not a problem of traditions. It’s just religion. If they go and really believe in Christianity then that is good. Those who come and believe in the spiritual worship is not believing in just one spirit but the Hmong tradition according to their parents. Even if he believes in the Hmong traditional religion, he probably doesn’t know what to do. If he doesn’t know how to believe, it’s not that good. So if they believe in Christianity and then go back and do a Hmong traditional funeral for their dad and go back and believe in Christianity again, then that’s not wrong. How is it wrong? It’s not.

I2: And if they just believe that?

P: Yes.
I2? So if they do that then it’s not wrong to the Christianity religion either?

P: It’s not wrong to the Christianity religion either. It is also not wrong to the Hmong Tradition either. You’ve already done it. For this, you need a cow and you already did that and so when you go back to believe in Christianity, you can. The spirit is resting. It’s like the eyes see the outside. We’re the ones who went and did it. It’s not wrong at all. The spirit is resting. Believing in Christianity is not wrong.]

D14--Virtues (divinity-oriented)

[1:14:17.2 - 1:16:31.6]

P: Vim yus tsis ua teb mas yus thiaj li ua li ntawv tab sis yus thiaj tsis kam qhia lawv tab sis yog yus yuav tau los mas yus txhob muag khim kim heev. Yus tsua tsaj kom, tsaj me me aib li yus noj tau thiab yus rov qab ua, nws tau qhov ua yus mus yuav los thiab kom tsaj ib qhov me rau yus, yus nyob tau, thiab yus muaj me ntsis cia. Tab sis kuv tseem mus yuav koom mas, muaj tej tug mas, lawv muaj kim kim heev. Lawv yuav ib npam los xwb mas, lawv twb muab muag li ua 4-5 npam lawm, no lawm nas. Ces qhov no yog qhov txhaum, txhaum kev cai ntuj txhaum qhov no thiab os.

I: Txhaum kev cai ntuj. Txhaum kev cai ntuj vim rau qhov tsis caj cees.

P: Tsis caj cees. Txhaum rau qhov hais tias tsis caj cees ces cai ntuj mas, ntuj yeej hais thiab yuav tsui yog caj cees.

I: Los?


[Translation:  

P: What you buy, you shouldn’t sell it so expensive. You should only rise the price a little from what you had to buy it. When someone else buys something and sells it to you, you don’t want them to
sell it to you at an expensive price. I have been shopping where I’ve seen people buy something for cheap and then sell it for an expensive price. This is wrong to the heavens.

I: So it’s wrong to the heavens because he’s not treating others right.

P: It’s wrong to the heavens because he’s not treating others right and the law in heaven says you have to treat everyone right.

I: Really?

P: Yes, have to treat everyone right. The Hmong says when you plant your fruits, those are your fruits. If some people come to your farm and want to ask you for some of your crops but can’t find you anywhere and they eat some of your fruits, they are not wrong. But if they were to pick some more fruits and bring it home or if they throw away some of the fruits then that is wrong. But if they cannot find the owner of the fruits and would have asked the owner if they knew who the owner were, and they eat the fruits then that is not wrong. Heavens’ law is like that. The heavens love everyone and so if there are some people who are hungry and eat the fruits, then it’s okay. If they came to eat the fruits because they were so hungry and you as the owner saw and you curse them, the heavens will punish you even if you are the owner of the fruits.

D15--Duty (as spiritual or religious being)

[1:19:20.2 - 1:20:10.4]


[Translation:

P: It is a sin because they believe in many things and they’re not sticking to only one. Whatever you believe, you should only stick to that. You can’t believe this and then that and then this. Maybe God will punish those who do that but I don’t know. Because they believe in many things instead of just one. It means that they are not serious about what they believe. So it’s like they will believe in this now but later will believe in that. This means that they really don’t believe in anything. You should only believe in one religion. If you believe in one thing and that thing turns out not to be good and you switch then that is fine. Maybe the next thing you believe will help you.]

D16--Other Divinity
Appendix G: Personhood Interview Prompts

1. Lub neej li keeb kwm (Life history)
   a. Hlob li cas (What was it like growing up)
   b. Niam txiv tu yus li cas (Parental rearing and teaching)
   c. Ua nyab ua vauv (When you became a son or daughter-in-law)
   d. Nim no køj tu køj li menyam li cas? (How do you rear your children)
   e. Yus lub neej puab thaum ub txawv txav li cas yus lub neej nim no (How is your life as a child/youth different from your life now)

2. Yus kev ntseeg (Beliefs)
   a. Koj coj kev cai dab tsi? (What religion/belief system do you follow)
   b. Hauv køj lub siab køj ntseeg puas yog li [lawv kev cai] hais tiag tiag? (Do you believe ___ in your heart that it is actually true [metaphysically])
   c. Koj li kev cai puas muaj dab tsi køj tsis tshuas ntseeg? (Are there any beliefs or points that you don’t quite buy or believe)
   d. Txog kev tuag køj puas xav ntau? Kov puas ntshais kev tuag? (Do you think much about death? Are you afraid of death?)

3. Kev ua niam ua txiv (Parenting)
   a. Koj puas muaj kev xav tias tus poj niam yuav tsus hwm tus txuv dua log yog tus txiv yuav tsum hwm tus poj niam dua? (How do you feel about the idea that wives need to respect and mind husbands more than husbands respect/mind their wives?)
   b. Koj thiab køj (tus txiv/tus poj niam) puas muaj teeb meem qhov no? (Have you and your spouse had a problem with this in any respect?)
   c. Thauk køj tu ib tug nyab/vauv, puas nyuaj køj? (When you became a son or daughter-in-law, was it difficult for you?)
      i. Nyuaj qhov twg? (How?)
      ii. Koj puas tau nrog (niam txiv/niam tais yawm txiv) sib ceg los yog muaj tEEb meem li ntauv? (Did you fight or quarrel with your parents-in-law?)
   d. Koj xav li cas txog Hmoob li kev cai ua niam thiab txiv? (What do you think about Hmong traditional gender relations?)

4. Hmoob li "ekalat" (Hmong identity)
   a. Yog ib tug tib neeg Hmoob ntawv teb chaws Thaib puas nyuaj? (IS it difficult
to be Hmong person in Thailand?

b. Puas muaj tib neeg saib tsis tau Hmoob? Zoo li cas? (Are there people that disrespect Hmong? How?)

c. Koj puas tau muaj teeb meem li ntawv hauv koj lub neej? (Have you encountered this or had problems with this in your life?)

d. Cov Hmoob puas txom nyem ntau dhau lwm haiv neeb ntawm teb chaw no? (Do Hmong suffer more than other people in this country?)

e. Koj puas zoo siab yog ib tug tib neeg Hmoob? Yog vim li cas? (Are you happy to be a Hmong person? Why/why not?)
Appendix H: Distribution of Three Ethics Profiles by Generation and Location

Thailand Older Generation

United States Older Generation

Thailand Younger Generation

United States Younger Generation