

Reconstructing Identity Through Feminist Voices in Hmong Folklore: A Cultural Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the gender dynamics within Hmong folklore, specifically analyzing the roles and representation of women in the narratives collected in "Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos" by Charles Johnson and Se Yang. Focusing on a period of significant historical migration and cultural upheaval, this study explores how traditional Hmong stories, often male-dominated, also contain powerful depictions of feminine intelligence, ingenuity, and supernatural influence that contribute to success and prosperity. The paper challenges the traditional patriarchal norms, emphasizing the need to elevate and understand the integral roles of women within Hmong folklore. This exploration is not just academic but also personal, as it aligns with the author's journey as a Hmong American woman seeking to understand and reshape her identity through the empowerment of female narratives in her cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

In Hmong oral tradition, captured within the pages of "Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos" by Charles Johnson and Se Yang, lies a collection of narratives that reveal the depth of the Hmong experience. This paper unpacks these stories, which were gathered from Hmong refugees in St. Paul, Minnesota, originating from various regions afflicted by war, most notably Laos. These accounts are more than remnants of a turbulent past; they are a testament to the resilience, aspirations, and dreams of a people seeking to make sense of their displacement and find their footing on foreign soil.

Through the lens of feminist critique, my analysis challenges the traditional portrayal of female characters within these narratives. Despite the customary focus on male protagonists, the folk tales in Johnson and Yang's compilation often celebrate female intelligence and acumen. Women emerge not merely as companions or spouses but as pivotal figures whose ingenuity, coupled at times with supernatural aid, brings about success and prosperity. This paper seeks to amplify these often-overlooked voices and examine the contrast in gender roles, thus presenting a more complete picture of Hmong cultural ethos.

By examining three traditional narratives and incorporating scholarly interpretations such as those by Willard B. Moore, my research illuminates the complexities and nuances of Hmong storytelling. The tales not only depict sacred and secular aspects of Hmong life but also act as cultural conduits, passing down values of cleverness, kindness, and resourcefulness. Yet, the question arises: do these narratives also inadvertently underpin patriarchal norms, thus influencing the perception and agency of Hmong women and girls?

As a Hmong American woman, my academic work in the scope of traditional Hmong stories is deeply personal, setting me on quest to reframe my identity through the empowerment of female narratives in Hmong folklore. This paper re-examines tales where women are not just mystical beings or supporters but are the heroes of their own stories. In doing so, it contributes to a transformative conversation about gender roles and the portrayal of women in traditional Hmong society. My exploration extends beyond the boundaries of the written word to embrace the living, breathing essence of oral tradition—where each telling is unique, and each story is a layer of Hmong identity. The analysis of narratives goes beyond mere dissection, employing a multi-vocal research framework—where I engage in both analytical examination and personal reflection to explore how these stories are told, their influence, and their impact on our culture.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study combines a literature review with in-depth narrative analysis. The primary source of data is the anthology *Dab Neeg Hmoob*, which contains oral histories recounted by Hmong refugees in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 1979-1981. Qualitative content analysis was the primary tool used to dissect these stories,

focusing on identifying and understanding the representation of gender roles, the interplay between male and female characters, and instances of women's empowerment or marginalization.

Further depth is added to this analysis by incorporating scholarly critiques of Hmong folklore, notably the contributions of Willard B. Moore, to contextualize these stories within the broader traditions of Hmong culture. This is complemented by a range of secondary sources, including academic discourse on the evolution of Hmong religious customs and the roles of female spiritual entities in Hmong society such as "The Meeting with Guanyon, the Goddess of Mercy, A Case Study of Syncretism in the Hmong System of Beliefs" by Kao-Ly Yang. This ethnographic approach aimed to discern how these narratives serve to perpetuate or challenge cultural values and norms, and their impact on gender dynamics within the Hmong community.

The research took a selective approach, drawing upon specific Hmong stories that offer varied perspectives on female roles. Narratives like "The Orphan and Ngao Zhua Pa" were analyzed for their multifaceted female characters—ranging from aquatic creatures to domestic workers, wives, and mythical beings. "Sister-in-law Nzeu and the Tiger" was chosen for its portrayal of a female character who evolves from obedience to wisdom. "The Woodcutter, His Rooster and His Wife" examines the transformation of the wife from a homemaker to a sagacious partner. Lastly, the contrasting narratives of "Xai and Sia" were examined, from the original oral story by Kia Lee, which presents the wife, Sia, in a supporting role, to Bao Xiong's adaptation where Sia is reimagined as the central hero of her own daunting adventures.

By placing these stories under the lens of feminist theory and leveraging personal insights as a Hmong American woman, this study explores the narratives in depth. This approach documents and critically examines the traditional and evolving portrayals of women in Hmong folklore, aiming to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender representation and empowerment within the cultural context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In "Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos" by Charles Johnson and Se Yang, the book's introduction emphasizes the purpose of collecting traditional stories, which allows the authors and readers alike, to engage with the Hmong community and understand their personal stories through their own voices: "an effort to let the Hmong tell us more about themselves than we have known, so that we can relate to them more appropriately and possibly help ease the trauma of their being violently uprooted and, sometimes after months or years of waiting in refugee camps, being transplanted in a strange foreign soil (Johnson and Yang, vii)." These stories were gathered from Hmong refugees between 1979-1981 in St. Paul, Minnesota—stemming from the Xiang Khouang province and various regions of Laos and Thailand, this movement represents a significant historical migration characterized by a mass migration sparked by the urgent need to flee from the conflict of war, escape persecution, and seek safety. As Charles Johnson notes in the introduction, this oral folk literature "is more than fairy tales (Johnson and Yang, xxx)" and serves as a beacon, illuminating the dreams, aspirations, and the resilience inherent to the Hmong culture. It is an earnest endeavor to capture the ethos of a people through the evocative power of their stories. Analyzing these stories reveals a fascinating dichotomy in the portrayal of gender roles. Men often take the helm as central figures in the action of these tales, while women are traditionally depicted as either potential partners or loyal spouses: "Men are the main characters in most Hmong folk tales, the ones who move the action. Women are seen as marriageable girls or as devoted wives. But in more than one story, it is the wife who, through her intelligence, sometimes through ruse, and often with help from miraculous powers or special wisdom, brings success and prosperity to her husband. This concept of an astute woman may represent an ideal in the Hmong mind, and would bear comparison with actual attitudes in real life (Johnson and Yang, xxviii)". Hmong folk tales frequently celebrate female intelligence and wisdom, and women also serve as central figures in many stories, using their cunning and often supernatural assistance to usher in success and prosperity. This nuanced representation challenges static gender roles and mirrors a deep-seated respect for the acumen of women within Hmong society.

In discussing how Hmong folklore and stories often lack female presence or discredits their important roles, diminishing their purpose to aiding and benefiting the male figures in their lives, My research draws insights from three traditional narratives of women and *The Journal of American Folklore*, a review written by Willard B. Moore on the works of "Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends & Folktales from the Hmong of Laos," by Charles Johnson, a French teacher. According to Moore, Johnson's project had two main goals: to help Hmong refugees learn English and to preserve the oral literature of the Hmong people. The narratives collected cover a broad spectrum, from sacred stories linked to rites of passage and shamanistic practices to secular tales told in various contexts, including courting and cultural education of the young. Moore acknowledges that Johnson's collection provides a window into the traditional Hmong lifestyle and beliefs. This article highlights the complexity of Hmong oral narratives, which resist simple categorization into myths, legends, or folktales due to their deeply ingrained

cultural contexts and linguistic nuances. The narratives in the collection all have informal titles given by the informants themselves and include a wide range of topics that provide insight into traditional Hmong social structures, such as the origin of the world, the flood story, clan names, and the roles of women in society. The tales highlight the qualities valued in Hmong culture, such as cleverness, kindness, and resourcefulness, which are exemplified in narratives.

While traditional Hmong narratives often include animals as either helpers or adversaries, I see that these stories also reveal the discredit of important female roles, diminishing their purpose to aiding and benefiting the male figures in their lives. Whether other scholars agree with my perspective or not, there is some awareness of this conversation in Moore quoting Johnson's work: "If a man has a good wife, one with a kind heart and clever mind, they can live a happier and more prosperous life (Johnson 261)". Moore notes that while Johnson's book also challenges traditional stereotypes about Hmong culture, such as the notion that they are all subsistence farmers, the narratives emphasize on what constitutes a good marriage in Hmong culture, particularly valuing a wise and kind wife over superficial beauty as depicted in "The Legend of Nia Ngao Zhua Pa"—exploring themes like loyalty, material success, and the perils of superficial beauty, revealing the complexities of traditional Hmong life (More 361-363).

Some of the female roles depicted in traditional Hmong stories have a supernatural element to them such as magical capabilities or they are a mystical being like a dragon. But even when the female lead character is just an ordinary human, they are capable of extraordinary things like entering the world of the dead and defeating spirits for example. To further understand why women are portrayed with such traits, I turn to analyzing scholarly articles, including Borja's exploration of Hmong Americans' religious transformations and Yang's study on the syncretism of spiritual figures like Lady Kaying. These lenses help us understand the dual roles of women as both of traditional knowledge and spiritual healers in Hmong traditions; looking at stories that reflect women's place in Hmong society and their link to the spirit world. The stories might support social rules, offer lessons, or validate Hmong cultural actions. An article titled "Speaking of Spirits: Oral History, Religious Change, and the Seen and Unseen Worlds of Hmong Americans" discusses this and includes an interview about Hmong cultural practices and spiritual connections. It suggests that women are key in maintaining and sharing Hmong traditions and acting as bridges between our world and the spirit world. The case with Nao, a Hmong American woman, who leads a dual life as a university teacher education program coordinator and a traditional Hmong shaman offers an interesting insight into this study. As a refugee from Laos in the 1980s, Nao initially dismissed Hmong religion as backward and unscientific, aspiring instead to embrace modern practices in the U.S. until a mysterious illness undiagnosed by neurologists led her family to suggest a spiritual cause. A traditional ritual revealed that spirits were calling her to become a shaman. Women in traditional Hmong stories likely play various roles that reflect their cultural and spiritual beliefs, and like Nao, who had the calling to become a shaman with the gift of spiritual healing, they may be portrayed as keepers of traditional knowledge, as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual worlds, or as central figures in narratives that explain and give meaning to the world around the Hmong people.

In traditional Hmong stories such as folklore and ghost stories, women frequently emerge as ghosts or mystical entities, this might be because women play an important role in Hmong shaman beliefs and practices such as the spiritual entity Kaying or Lady Kaying. "The Meeting with Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy" by Kao-Ly Yang, Ph.D., is a case study of syncretism in the Hmong system of beliefs, which sheds light on the identity and origins of Lady Kaying (Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb), a spirit of fertility in Hmong culture. It reveals that Lady Kaying is essentially the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin, adopted from Mahayana Buddhism by the Hmong people in China. Guanyin was integrated into Hmong beliefs while retaining her roles as the "Bestower of Children", the "Guardian Angel", and the "Conductor of the Dead Children". This study also examines the influence of the goddess Lady Kaying. All the informants granted her the power of omnipresence, hearing everything, especially any children's cries, sufferings of unspoken pains or of physical abuses. She is perceived as the merciful guardian of all children until a certain age (Yang 13-14)." In shamanistic texts and rituals, Kaying is not only a fertility figure but also serves as a Dab Neeb—an auxiliary spirit aiding shamans. Confirmed by informants and scholars like Moréchand, Mottin, and Lemoine, Kaying's dual role is acknowledged. Kaying embodies two distinct aspects: the supportive spirit to the shaman and the divine figure with the gift of granting children. Lady Kayin is hailed by shamans during healing rituals and revered as a fertility god, she is a powerful symbol of the significant role that female spirits play within the fabric of Hmong culture, influencing its rituals and spiritual traditions.

While a range of scholars have studied Hmong folklore, I have had the unique privilege of working in this area firsthand. Oral storytelling is a ritual, like a sacred exchange in which the storyteller shares a tale and the audience listens quietly, often embracing the narratives of the story as truth. In a Wisconsin Life feature (a co-production of Wisconsin Public Radio and PBS Wisconsin), my novel, "Folklore" was highlighted, reimagining a traditional oral Hmong story into written form. My book focuses on the story of Xai and Sia, exploring Sia's journey

to the netherworld to save her husband. Xiong incorporates elements of Hmong culture, beliefs, and oral storytelling traditions into the narrative, aiming to record and preserve these stories for future generations. This book also explores themes of female strength, belief, and cultural heritage: “Xiong told producer Hope Kirwan about her take on the traditional folk tale and the power of belief.” Xiong explains her journey to adapting this folktale, stating,

“I first heard the story of Xai and Sia probably when I was in grade school. Every night my mom would tell us stories. I mean, we would always go to sleep with some kind of tall tale. Essentially, Hmong folklore is orally told stories, not a lot of it has been recorded or published. So, it makes it very unique and every time somebody tells the story, it’s a little bit different because they either inherited it from their father or grandfather or somebody from a long line of generations (Kirwan)”. Here, I mention that traditional Hmong narratives has predominantly been told through the voices of Hmong men. I also give reasons for adapting this particular tale, “So the second time — when I heard the story of Xai and Sia again — it was about two years ago and mom and I were driving at 6 a.m. to the farmers’ market. And I was like, “Hey Mom, you know, the hero of the story is actually the wife.” My mother disagrees with me and she says “No, I think it’s the husband, because, you know, he has supernatural powers and she wouldn’t survive without him.” But I was like, “In the story, the wife saves him and she goes on more than one journey to do that. That makes her the hero of the story.” As a young girl growing up, I didn’t realize that we had any stories featuring strong female characters. This story definitely has one, and for years, I never thought of it that way because of the way it was told. Whenever they talk about Sia (in the story of “Xai and Sia”), they cut her actions or her events short. So, I created a hero’s journey for her for the second portion of the story (Kirwan)”.

From childhood, I was taught to respect elders and never question them, taught to listen and stay quiet; a practice that has held for generations, especially during oral storytelling sessions. My adaptation of “Xai and Sia” in the novel “Folklore” reclaims the Hmong storytelling heritage by preserving it for future generations and altering the gender narrative through Sia’s character. This retelling emphasizes female heroism, steering away from the traditionally male-dominated oral tales and offering a fresh perspective on the enduring influence and transformative power of storytelling.

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

The Story of “The Woodcutter, His Rooster and His Wife”

A short narrative that emphasizes the issue of diminishing of the female roles and purpose to aiding and benefiting the male figures in their lives found in Johnson’s collection is “The Woodcutter, His Rooster and His Wife”, where the wife of a poor woodcutter manages a difficult situation cleverly when visited by a king, leading to the woodcutter's promotion to district chief. In the beginning, a poor woodcutter and his wife lived near a forest, with no money but a beloved rooster that the woodcutter treasured for its beauty and intelligence: “Every morning when he went to the forest to cut wood, the woodcutter would stop and see the rooster. “Goodbye, my beauty,” he would say. In the evening, when he came home, he always spoke to the rooster again. “Hello again, you smart little rooster,” he said.

Such affection and attention is not mentioned towards his wife. The title is fitting, suggesting that the Woodcutter values his rooster more than his wife—he makes it a ritual to speak to the rooster every morning and evening, highlighting the importance of the rooster in his daily life.

One morning, after the woodcutter said goodbye to the rooster, he went to work. His wife cleaned house. While she was sweeping, a rich man came to her door (Johnson 8-10).”

The wife's role is depicted as a housewife with domestic responsibilities and supporting her husband, while the husband's role is as the breadwinner and head of the household. This traditional perspective can be seen as diminishing the wife's role to merely aiding the male character, reinforcing male dominance and the gender hierarchy within the community.

The rich man claims to be the king in need of rest and asks to stay in their home, to which the wife agrees. However, she was concerned about how they would feed the king: “She had nothing but the rooster, so she killed it and cooked it for the king (Johnson 13).” Upon learning that his wife killed the rooster to feed the king visiting them, the husband yells at his wife and beats her.

Nws qw hais tias,
 "Dabtsi?
 Koj muab kuv tus lau qaib tua?"
 Ces nws txawm muab poj niam ntaus
 ces poj niam txawm quaj quaj.
 "Vim li cas
 koj muab kuv tus lau qaib tua?"
 Nws poj niam teb hais tias,
 "Kuv muab koj bus lau qaib
 ua ib pluag mov rau huab tais noj."



He yelled, "What?
 Killed my rooster?"
 Then he hit her and
 she began to cry.
 "Why did you kill it?"
 She answered,
 "I cooked your rooster
 for the king."

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Image from The-Woodcutter-Level-2, By Shoua Yang,
 Edited by Charles Johnson

This image conveys a great deal. In our society today, domestic abuse in the Hmong community is still often not talked about or reported to officials. Abuse in traditional Hmong marriages are largely kept within the family, leaving serious matters to the clan leaders—who are only men, some elderly and traditional—to resolve. How can we ethically resolve spousal abuse, particularly when it involves men whose upbringing may have instilled in them a prejudiced perspective on gender roles?

In a narrative structure, this event in the tale would represent the story’s dramatic arc—in other words, the domestic abuse is the climax of the story. The hierarchy in traditional Hmong marriage is rooted in tradition and practices such as the tale of “The Woodcutter, His Rooster and His Wife”.

Tus poj niam teb hais tias,
 "Kuv tus txiv chim
 vim rau qhov kuv ua
 ib nyuag pluag mov me me
 rau koj noj xwb.
 Koj yog huab tais
 ua li cas ais kuv yuav tsis muas npua
 tua rau koj noj.
 Ais kuv yuav muab ib tug nyuag qaib
 me me us rau koj noj xwb."



The woman said,
 "My husband is angry
 because I cooked
 a small dinner.
 You are the king.
 I didn't buy a pig
 for your dinner.
 I just cooked
 one small chicken."

18

Image from The-Woodcutter-Level-2, By Shoua Yang,
 Edited by Charles Johnson

After the husband beats the wife, she lies to protect him. What purpose does this narrative serve in highlighting such a lesson? Is it reinforcing male dominance? The message translates to "A GOOD WIFE MUST BE SUBMISSIVE INCLUDING ENDURING VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE." The king, a figure of authority, asks her what is wrong when he heard the commotion, giving her the opportunity to speak up for herself and free herself from an unhappy and abusive marriage. Yet, she chooses to protect her abuser. This says a lot about the upbringing and expectations of female roles as daughters and wives.

While I appreciate the preservation of our culture's history in the written form, I still wonder about the transmission of certain lessons through oral tradition, particularly during a time when access to knowledge was limited in various ways to the Hmong people such as the decades pre and post the Vietnam War—for those generations are the ones leading our community today.

Then... "The king was pleased and said, "You speak very politely. You and your husband are good people. You are poor but you gave me all you had. I will give you some silver and gold. Your husband will be the headsman of the district. You will be rich (Johnson 19)."

The hard work of the wife leads to the success of her husband, there is no mention of a reward for her other than the king's emphasis, "You speak very politely (Johnson 19)". The king said that she and her husband are good people, which is upsetting for me as the reader to know the truth that her husband is not a good person.

LI NTAWD,
 NCO NTSOOV HAIS TIAS
 TAU POJ NIAM ZOO,
 NWS KUJ YUAV PAB TAU TUS TXIV
 MUS TAG NWS LUB NEEJ.



SO REMEMBER,
 IT IS IMPORTANT
 TO HAVE A GOOD WIFE.
 SHE WILL KNOW HOW TO HELP A MAN
 ALL HIS LIFE.

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Image from The-Woodcutter-Level-2, By Shoua Yang,
 Edited by Charles Johnson

The folktale ends with the moral of the story written in bold letters with the image of the wife: “SO REMEMBER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A GOOD WIFE. SHE WILL KNOW HOW TO HELP A MAN ALL HIS LIFE (Johnson 20).” By emphasizing the importance of a “good wife” for a man’s success and well-being, traditional Hmong stories like this one sustains patriarchal structures.

A good husband is also needed in a marriage, given that it is partnership. This story, however, lacks any mention of a “good husband.” The husband’s poor behavior remains unchallenged, yet he ultimately receives a reward. This narrative perpetuates toxic masculinity.

The concept of a “good wife” is deeply rooted in cultural, social, and historical contexts, which often carry a mix of traditional expectations. Traditionally, a “good wife” was often defined by her ability to manage household duties, support her husband, and raise children effectively. However, these roles have evolved, and the expectations have expanded in contemporary societies.

The stigma surrounding the term “good wife” arises from the pressure it places on women to conform to specific roles or behaviors deemed “ideal” by societal standards. This stigma often leads to judgment and criticism of women like myself who choose to prioritize their careers, have different family dynamics, or challenge traditional roles—I am in my thirties, unmarried, and currently supporting my parents.

Addressing this stigma involves promoting understanding and acceptance, challenging stereotypes, and supporting inclusive behaviors and policies. Reducing the stigma on a “good wife” is crucial for fostering social integration and improving the well-being of individuals who might otherwise be marginalized.

Though the narrative elevates the importance of women, it also simultaneously limits their portrayal in this 46-sentence short tale of “The Woodcutter, His Rooster and His Wife”, which was orally told, recorded, and transcribed in both Hmong and English nearly word for word. Seeing women depicted primarily in service to men can influence young women and girls’ own sense of agency and purpose. The moral of the story—explicit, yet ambiguous—especially when presented without a female perspective or voice, further shapes and solidifies gender roles within the community. The absence of female voices in these narratives implies that stories are often told from a male perspective, which can limit the representation of women’s experiences, desires, and perspectives. This lack of representation not only marginalizes women within the narrative context but also in societal and cultural framework of the community, as these stories play a role in transmitting cultural values and norms across generations.

In my opinion, the words “A GOOD WIFE” leaves room for interpretation, making this meaning ambiguous. What makes a married woman a good wife? There is not one right answer as individual relationships are unique, especially in modern society where both men and women engage in professional careers. Furthermore, with younger couples or less traditional marriages in the Hmong community, the female partner doesn’t have to “KNOW HOW TO HELP A MAN ALL HIS LIFE” to be a good wife—proof that this traditional belief is outdated and is no longer the only accepted social norm within the community. This may be because younger Hmong American generations speak less of the Hmong language making it difficult to pass on oral and traditional stories among other cultural beliefs and practices.

The Story of “Sister-in-law Nzeu and the Tiger”

Another tale in Johnson’s collection that is meant to portray female roles as obedient or submissive is “Sister-in-law Nzeu and the Tiger”, where a traditionally subservient younger sister becomes the heroine by identifying a tiger disguised as a man, which contrasts with her expected social role. Subservient means obedient and accommodating, which is quite the opposite of speaking up and acting on one’s own terms—for in this story, though Nzeu is described as the most subservient sister-in-law, she often denies and challenges the tiger disguised as a man. Another version of this story is similar told from beginning to end, featured in a children’s book *Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam* by Norma J. Livo & Dia Cha, the title is slightly different with Hmong spelling of Nzeu to Yer, which is an English spelling of the name: “Sister-in-law Yer and the Tiger”. In this enchanting Hmong folktale, Yer is a clever young woman who outsmarts a tiger. The story begins with Yer goes to stay with her sister and brother-in-law during the time “when the corn still came to the people’s homes when it was ripe (Livo and Cha 69)”.

I image corn stalks walking in groups to people’s homes during harvest season, offering their ears and seeds to feed many. This bizarre, fantastical detail opens a window into a world where the boundaries between the natural world and human society are fluid with magical realism, setting the stage for a narrative where the extraordinary is possible. This makes me wonder, how can a story so wildly imaginative and mystical be used to contribute to sustaining the patriarchal structures within Hmong culture.

One day, a tiger devours Yer’s sister’s husband, and then disguises himself as a man wearing his clothes and heads toward the man’s home. However, Yer is not fooled by a tiger in human clothes and even warns her sister, “Her comes somebody. He is dressed like your husband, but he looks like a tiger (Livo and Cha 69)”. Even after Yer’s sister, easily fooled, insists that the tiger wearing her husband’s clothes is indeed her husband, Yer called out to the tiger, “You are not my brother-in-law (Livo and Cha 69)”, clearing confront the tiger and making herself an obvious target. Once the tiger enters the house, the tiger eats Yer’s sister and her children, then it becomes a game of survival between Yer and the tiger. First, she threw a “handful red peppers from and ashes at his eyes (Livo and Cha 70)”,

temporary blinding the beast. This buys her time, allowing Yer to send a distress message detailing the grim events to her family through a talking crow who often visits her.

Yer befriended a talking crow that visits her regularly, even during her travels to babysit for her sister. More than resourceful and wise, Yer must also be gentle and kind to develop such a trusting relationship with a talking bird from the wild such as a crow.

Together, Yer and her family orchestrate a plan to kill the tiger, creating a pit to trap the tiger after utilizing Yer as bait: “Tiger, tiger. My family is here. They want to talk to with you. I will be your wife. My parents and my brothers and sisters have come to give me to you (Livo and Cha 71)”. Hearing this news causes the tiger to hurry into the house and he falls down the pit. The story abruptly ends with the following sentence and image:

Yer’s brothers then killed the tiger with their spears, and Yer’s family took her home with them.



There is a child in the attic with Yer because her role is a babysitter. However, at this point in the story, Yer’s older sister and all three of her children had been eaten by the Tiger overnight.

Image from “Folk Stories of the Hmong: Peoples of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam” by Dia Cha and Norma J. Livo

This image supports the portrayal of Yer as an obedient helper.

Yer’s three brothers—the male characters in the story—throw in their spears and kills the vicious beast, claiming the glory of heroes. This story also has a family effort added to the success of defeating the devious Tiger, for their strange and hasty plan involves the help of Yer’s parents, sisters, and brothers. Even so, Yer’s character drives much of the story. She is the only one who sees through the giant talking cat’s disguise dressed as a man, outsmarts the Tiger multiple times, temporarily blinds it long enough for her family to arrive to assist her in digging a pit in the ground large enough trap the enchanted beast, and then offers herself up as a sacrifice to lure the deceiving creature into the trap. Unlike the fairy tale of “Beauty and The Beast”, this grim tale has twists and turns, where the beast is the villain and the young girl is the hero. Allow me to take the stage and be the first to appropriately retittle the story as “Yer, The Brave and Clever Animal Whisper: Good with Children, Great with Tigers”. Mic drop.

The themes of this story explore roles of women, family dynamics, moral aspects, and the supernatural. Ultimately, this is a survival story, in the genre of horror because of a monster in the house theme. In traditional Hmong narratives, female characters are often degraded to supporting roles, their actions and fates defined by the male characters. Though her brothers were the ones who executed the tiger, Nzeu / Yer demonstrates agency and intelligence, characteristics that challenges the expectations of subservience—therefore, challenge the traditional patriarchal norms. Yer’s actions are pivotal to the family’s plan to defeat the tiger, highlighting themes of women’s agency, the supernatural, and the importance of family unity in the face of adversity.

The Story of "The Legend of Nia Ngao Zhua Pa"

Johnson's work recording and transcribing the story of "The Legend of Nia Ngao Zhua Pa" includes three versions that explore complex cultural themes and is also known as "The Orphan and Ngao Zhua Pa", which features an orphan boy and his interactions with two women: Nia Ngao Zhua Pa, who embodies natural beauty and Hmong virtues such as hard work, cleverness, and loyalty, and her rival, Nia Ngao Kou Ker, though extremely beautiful, she is characterized as lazy and selfish. In these tales, the orphan boy's journey towards success is marked by various helpers and obstacles, including spirits and animals, reflecting the Hmong community's values. The first version of the story ends with the hero reclaiming his virtuous wife, Nia Ngao Zhua Pa, after forsaking her. The second version ends with the hero losing her forever. In the third version, they escape together to the sky. These stories pass on lessons in traditional Hmong life, covering topics like healing practices, shamanism, rites of passage, social structures, music, village life, reincarnation, and family values. My research will focus on the social structures and family values of this tale, which are pillars to understanding the patriarchal structures within Hmong culture. In one version of Johnson's work, the story of "*The Orphan and Nia Ngao Zhua Pa*" unfolds with an impoverished orphan who assists an old woman in cutting wood. The woman, revealed to be a good witch, offers to help the orphan find a wife despite his lack of parents and poverty. Following her instructions, the orphan encounters and marries Nia Ngao Zhua Pa, a woman capable of magical feats that significantly improve their lives.

Puag thaum ub,
muaj ib tug yawg Hraug Htsuag
tau pab ib tug poj niam txiav taws.
Tus poj niam no
mas yog ib tug Foj Dab Pog.
Nws hais rau Nraug Ntsuag hais tias,
"Koj tsis nuaj niam tsis muaj txiv
ua li koj puas xav yuav poj niam?"



Once, a poor orphan helped
an old woman cut wood.
She was a good witch.
She said,
"You have no father or mother
to take care of you.
You need a wife."

5

Image from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

The lead male character is called "the orphan". There is no actual name for him. He is described as a young boy who is an orphan living in poverty. He has no skill or trade. His kindness in helping an old woman cut wood earns him the favor of a witch, who in return help him gain a wife after telling him, "You have no father or mother to take care of you. You need a wife (Johnson 5)." There is that rhetoric again—that a wife's role is to take care of her husband. Though the page is numbered at 5, that is the first page of the story. The narrative of "having a good wife" is stated in the first three sentences of the story, making it a central theme of the story.

Ces Nraug Ntsuag
 txawm mus zaum ntawm ntug kev zov tos.
 Ua cia txawm pom peb viv ncaus
 caij peb tug nees
 phem phem lo lo quav tuaj.
 Nraug Ntsuag txawm nrog tus thij peb tham.
 Nws txawm nrog Nraug Ntsuag los tsev
 thiab ua nws poj niam.



So the orphan went to the road
 and sat down.
 Three sisters rode by.
 Their horses were covered
 with manure.
 But the orphan talked with
 the third girl.
 She went with him
 to be his wife.

8

The witch instructs the orphan to wait on the road and once he sees three sisters passing through with horses, he must talk to the third girl and she will become his wife. That's exactly what happens: "But the orphan talked with the third girl. She went with him to be his wife (Johnson 8)." Such portrayal is not reflective of real-life dynamics and represent a significant problem within this specific social framework of our culture.

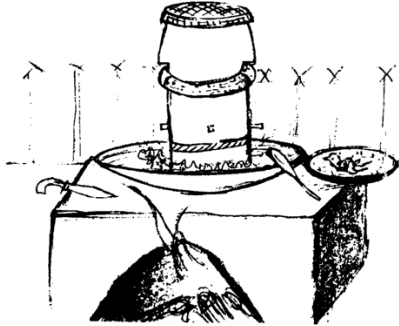
Image from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

This lesson might inadvertently suggest to young boys that initiating a conversation with a girl is sufficient to gain her willingness to marry them. Similarly, it could imply to young girls that it is acceptable to marry the first man who approaches them. In experiences of first and second-generation Hmong Americans, many traditional marriages originate from initial meetings during social gatherings and other chance encounters. Imagine meeting someone only once and then being married to them for the rest of your life. These marriages often occur during these individuals' teenage years. Young individuals, still not fully matured into adulthood, find themselves having children and constructing lives for which they may not be mentally or emotionally ready.

These marriages often occur during the individuals' teenage years. Young individuals, still not fully matured into adulthood, find themselves having children and constructing lives for which they may not be mentally or emotionally ready.

After orphan marries Nia Ngao Zhua Pa, it is revealed that she is capable of magical feats that significantly improve their lives like turning objects into food and a house.

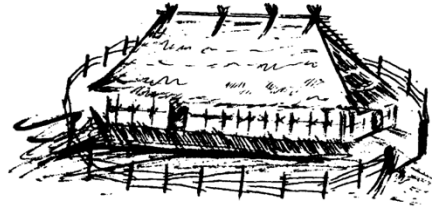
Nws muab ib ya txhu
 coj los ua tcoj los ua tau ib tsus mov,
 muab ib lub paj
 coj los ua tau ib tug qaib.
 Nkauj Zuag Paj thiab nws tus txiv
 tau noj mov zaub tsau npo
 li nkawd siab nyiam.



She cooked a whole dinner
 with half a grain of rice
 and one flower.
 She and her husband ate
 all the rice and chicken
 they wanted.

12

Thaum noj hmo tag lawm,
 Nkauj Zuag Paj
 hais rau Nraug Ntsuag hais tias,
 "Ua li cas koj yuav tsaug zog ua luaj!"
 Ces Nraug Ntsuag txawm mus pw
 saum lub txaj nplooj ntoos lawm.
 Thaum nws tsaug zog tsim los
 no has ua cia
 nws pw hauv ib lub tsev zoo zoo nkauj
 vuam liab vuam ntsuab.
 Lub tsev no yog Nraug Ntsuag
 thiab Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj nkawd lub.



After dinner,
 Ngao Zhua Pa said to the orphan,
 "How sleepy you are!"
 And her husband went to sleep
 on a bed
 of leaves.

When he woke up
 he was in a beautiful house.
 It was painted red and green.
 It was a house for him and
 Nia Ngao Zhua Pa.

13

Images from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

Using magic, Nia Ngao Zhua Pa is willing and able to provide food and shelter for her husband, the orphan. She has MAGIC, meaning she is powerful, and yet she settles for this boy upon meeting and talking to him only once.

However, their happiness is short-lived. They have a jealous neighbor, Nia Ngao Kou Ker; described as a young pretty girl. The orphan becomes greatly influenced their jealous neighbor, believing false accusations against his wife, Nia Ngao Zhua Pa.

Ces txawm muaj ib tug hlau nkauj
 zoo nkauj, hu ua Niam Nkauj kub Kaws,
 nyob tsis deb ntawm nkawd.
 Nws pom Hraug Htsuag
 thiab Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj nkawd
 nyob lub tsev zoo nkauj neev.
 Nws hais tias,
 "Nkawd ua zoo neej neev.
 Kuv tsis paub hais tias
 ua li cas nkawd ho yuav ua zoo neej heev
 ais kuv ho yuav txom nyem!
 Kuv yuav ua kom nkawd
 tau txais kev nyuaj siab."



Now, a pretty young girl,
 Nia Ngao Kou Ker,
 lived in a house nearby.
 She saw Ngao Zhua Pa and
 her husband
 in their beautiful house.
 "They are so rich!" she said.
 "I don't know why they are rich
 and I am not!
 I'll make trouble for them."

14

Ces nws txawm mus tom Nraug Ntsuag.
 Nws hais ntau yam phem
 rau Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj.
 Nws hais rau Nraug Ntsuag hais tias,
 "Cuj hnuv Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj
 haus cuaj taig htshav zaj!"



So she went to the orphan.
 She said bad things about
 Nia Ngao Zhua Pa.
 "Your wife drank
 dragon's blood,"
 she told him.
 "She drank nine bowls
 of dragon's blood
 in nine days!"

15

Images from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

The accusation behind someone drinking dragon's blood is accusing that person of not being human—they're evil—and should be feared like a demon, witch, or monster.

This causes him to become unhappy with his wife. Then, driven by the neighbor's manipulation and promises of a better marriage with her, the orphan demands Nia Ngao Zhua Pa to leave. In response, she uses her magic to erase all traces of their prosperity and disappears into a lake.

Ces nws txawm nqes
 mus rau nram hav dej lawm.
 Thaum dej nyab txij pob taws,
 nws hais tias,
 "Txiv Nraug Ntsuag xam cia kuv rov los
 ais wb ua neej nyob ua ke dua las mas
 Nraug Ntsuag."

Tiamsis Nraug Ntsuag teb hais tias,
 "Kav tsij khiav mus tsawg tsuag,
 kuv yuav rawm yuav kuv niam zoo nkauj."



And she went away,
 out into the lake.
 When the water came up
 to her knees,
 she said,
 "Oh, Orphan, let me come back
 and we will live together."

But the orphan answered,
 "Go quickly.
 I'm in a hurry to marry
 my new sweetheart."

22

Nws nqes mus dej nyab txij dua
 nws ho rov tig dua
 los hais rau Nraug Ntsuag hais tias,
 "Nraug Ntsuag, thov cia kuv rov
 ais wb ua neej nyob ua ke dua las mas.
 Thov thiab las mas txiv Nraug Ntsuag!"

Tiamsis txiv Nraug Ntsuag teb hais tias,
 "Kav tsij khiav mus nrawm nroos,
 kuv rawm rawm yuav
 kuv niam zoo nkauj li lawm os!"



When the water came up
 to her hip,
 Ngao Zhua Pa turned again.
 "Orphan, let me come back
 and we will live together.
 Please, Orphan!"

But the orphan only answered,
 "Go quickly.
 I am in a hurry to get
 my pretty new wife."

23

Images from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

There's no mention of who's idea is it for her to disappear into a lake. In a different and oral version of this tale, descending into a lake makes sense as she is a goldfish that an old fisherman helps the orphan boy obtain from that lake, and later she is revealed to be the daughter of a dragon who dwells in lakes and rivers—explaining her magic abilities. In this version of Johnson's work, she's not a dragon princess, but a woman who has magic. Entering a lake because her husband pressured her to leave their marriage suggests force or deliberate self-endangerment—both are concerning and unacceptable.

After the orphan's wife is gone, Johnson's version states that the orphan is left with nothing, no house or possessions. He realizes his mistake too late and fails to recover what he lost with his first wife. He marries his deceiving neighbor, Nia Ngao Kou Ker, but remains unfulfilled and regretful, longing for Nia Ngao Zhua Pa. The story ends with the orphan seeking advice from a wise man named Shao, "Shao knows everything. I'll go ask him what to do (Johnson 31)."

Ces Nraug Ntsuag txawm mus cuag Saub
thiab nrog Saub tham....



And so the orphan did that.
He went to talk with Shao....

32

Image from "Hmong Folklore - Orphan Boy and Niam Nkauj Zuag Paj", by May Yang, Edited by Charles Johnson

The tale illustrates the impact of greed, jealousy, and manipulation, contrasting the initial happiness brought by Nia Ngao Zhua Pa's magic with the downfall caused by the orphan's susceptibility to negative influences. Typically, narratives featuring an orphan boy or girl suggests that they are in their teenage years, implying a stage of life where they may lack the capacity to for mature decision-making. Their limited life experiences can leave them vulnerable to manipulation. Which offers insight into the orphan's shortfall and poor life choices.

The story of "The Legend of Nia Ngao Zhua Pa" reflects patriarchal structures within Hmong culture through the portrayal of female characters and their roles. Nia Ngao Zhua Pa, despite her magical abilities and contribution to their well-being, is subject to the orphan's decisions, reflecting the subservient position of women. She becomes disposable when her husband is faced with jealousy and manipulation, further emphasizing the lack of agency afforded to female characters. The narrative underscores the reinforcement of masculinity and patriarchal authority, with the orphan's decisions, influenced by external opinions, leading to the destruction of his happy marriage and prosperity.

Why is the orphan portrayed as the male protagonist? Before the age of a dozen-plus character archetypes like the antihero and the bully, there were commonly three to six stock characters in traditional stories and literature including plays: the hero/heroine, the villain, the sidekick, the damsel in distress, the mentor, and the fool/jester. If I were to compare the orphan to a stock character, he is THE FOOL. In the work "Modern Traicomey and the Fool", author Faye Ran explores the traits of the fool, stating that, "The derivation of the word "fool" is the Latin "follis," meaning a pair of bellows expelling empty air; extended to persons, it implies insubstantial thought, and applied to phenomena casts doubt on the "finality" and even the "reality" of fact. Perhaps the prevalence of the fool may be accounted for through its definition as a type of person who is both ridiculous and inferior, one who represents the failure, and consequences of failure, of the individual who does not internalize or function according to given social values and standards (Ran 26)". This definition of the fool closely describes the orphan.

This story contributes to understanding how Hmong traditional stories perpetuate gender roles and patriarchal values, particularly in their portrayal of women's roles and the emphasis on male authority. The contrast between the dominant male narrative and the lack of or silence of female voices is evident, as Nia Ngao Zhua Pa's abilities and desires are secondary to the whims of the male protagonist and the jealous neighbor. The implications for women's self-perception within the community are significant, as the story illustrates the consequences of male dominance and the marginalization of female voices and agency.

The Story of "Xai and Sia"

The narrative of "Xai and Sia" is a treasured piece of Hmong folklore, recognized throughout the Hmong people in different parts of the world including the United States. Despite this story being widely told in Hmong oral tradition, the only version committed to print is the adaptation I published in 2020 under the titled "FOLKLORE", which is based on the verbal account by Kia Lee, my mother—in her late sixties at the time—and a refugee from the Vietnam War. This folktale was passed down to her by her father, who inherited the story from his father. Tragedy strikes at the very beginning of the narrative: Xai, a newlywed husband, falls victim to a vile group of ghostly women. Compelled by a parching thirst for water, he is lured by the sound of a stream coursing through the forbidden woods against his wife's advice to wait for her return after fetching water from their home. It is here that he unwittingly drinks from the misleadingly pure waters, a guise for the ghostly trap set before him. This leads to a mysterious illness that swiftly claims Xai's life by the day's end. In the oral tale of "Xai and Sia" by Kia Lee, Sia is merely a wife who goes on two journeys to save her husband—yet the husband's role is emphasized in almost every major point of the story, essentially making him out to be the hero though he is the one who needs to be rescued not once, but twice. In my adaptation of Xai and Sia (oral story by Kia Lee), Sia is portrayed as the hero of the story and is ultimately given a proper hero's journey in the haunting and dangerous quests help her husband cheat death. Within this tale, there is a notable and fascinating figure: a female spirit, who conjures up Xai's psychical body from the grave on the third day of his burial. Mirroring her is another ghostly, who accompanies Xai from his reincarnation journey. When Xai enters a limbo-like world to become reincarnated, his living wife cannot go with him, but he is followed by a host of female spirits (described as the spirits of dead women). Then, when Xai emerges as a large blue beast after his reincarnation, a single female spirit of the dead is sitting on his back as if she has silently claimed him.



Image from the book cover of "FOLKLORE", by Bao Xiong

This book cover is an illustration of Xai's majestic return from his reincarnation as a giant blue tiger. Before him stands Sia, his devoted wife, who followed him to the afterlife with the aim of taking him back to the realm of the living. On his back is the female spirit, cradling a jeeg—a traditional Hmong musical instrument revered for its soul-stirring melodies at celebrations of life during new years and weddings, and passages to the afterlife during funerals. It's also cherished as a magical entity, able to bless or cause harm if the instrument is displaced or mishandled. The presence of this jeeg in the spirit's embrace is a riddle wrapped in a mystery—how did it come into her possession? Where did she get it? How did she get it from a mystical realm where the dead go to get reincarnated? Also, they still linger in limbo or some place in the world of the dead when they return from the reincarnation realm.

These parts of the narrative sparked my curiosity, prompting me to ask my mother about the two female spirits, "Who are they? And why did they choose him? Why did one spirit raise him from the dead? And why did only one return with him from reincarnation, and why did she sit on his back like she's his master? He became a giant beast and she's sitting on his back confidently with a magical instrument that can bless, harm, and ferry the dead." My mother's answer was, "I don't know. She's just a spirit that wants Xai. That's just the way it was always told." I asked her, "Could the spirit who raised Xai from the dead also be the same one from the one who returned with him from his reincarnation?" Again, my mother replies, "I don't know. Why do you ask so many questions. Just listen to the story." Against my mother's requests to simply enjoy the story without questioning the events or characters, my curiosity grew, leading me to question every perplexing detail and explore the depths of 'why' and 'how' with eager inquiry.

I began to see the old tale in a new light—strong female figures dominated the major events of this grim story—making me even more eager to preserve this tale. Therefore, I persuaded my mother to recount the tale while I record her voice and then later translated it into written form. As the narrative took shape on paper, I found myself captivated by these two ghostly female characters. Their presence was so alluring and very similar that I merged them into a single character—a powerful spirit that tenaciously cling to Xai, unyielding in her hold. It is as if she personifies fate itself, returning at the story's close to claim Xai's soul once again in a hauntingly poetic cycle. This also led me to creating an origin story for her, as she is depicted as a villain. For weeks I wondered about her life as a human, how she died, and why. How did she come into her powers? The other female spirits around Xai does not possess the same kind of abilities or magic that she has. Kia Lee's oral folktale took 3 months to translate and transformed into a substantial 25-page written narrative. In crafting an origin story for the female spirit and a hero's journey for Sia (Xai's wife), my adaptation of the folktale evolved into a 121-pages dark romance novel, a story that make sense to me as a storyteller.



Moth House Press

March 8, 2021 · 🌐

Here's to women and being born powerful!

Source: Kia Lee and Xai Vue (two old Hmong people)

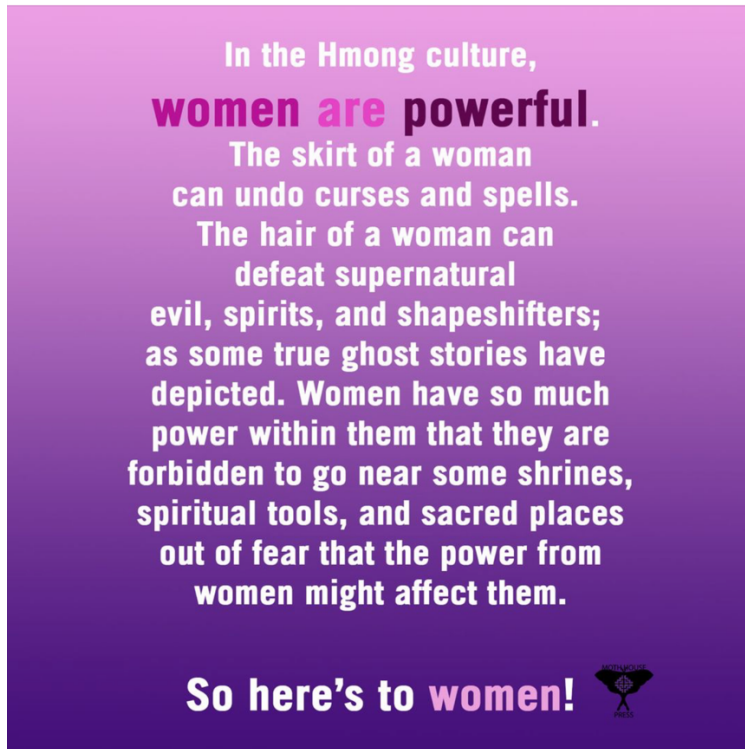


Image from Moth House Press

In my late twenties, I learned that women are powerful in my culture. My mother goes on to tell me that we are healers and protectors. We are born with magic as my mother explains, “The skirt of a woman can undo curses and spells. The hair of a woman can defeat supernatural evil, spirits, and shapeshifters. Women have so much power within them that they are forbidden to go near some shrines, spiritual tools, and sacred places out of fear that the power from women might affect them.”

This is the lesson that should be taught to young girls and children. How profoundly different my self-perception might have been, had I been aware of this belief from my earlier years. As an adult, I had to unlearn some things including certain beliefs. The lessons we learn at young ages become part of our belief system. Keeping knowledge from young minds out of fear will only limit their growth and potential. Empower children and people so they can be better healers and stronger protectors. From knowledge comes liberation, and with it, the power to change minds and the world.

Studying the world of traditional Hmong storytelling, I've come to appreciate its unique charm, where dark themes like illness, abuse, and death are plainly displayed, but these tales often conclude without clear resolution and main characters remain underdeveloped. This intriguing style stands in stark contrast to the narrative depths I've studied in literature and writing, where character arcs and structured plots are often well crafted. These two narrative worlds, with their distinct approaches to storytelling, have broadened my understanding of the art of storytelling. I am changing narrative that teaches the lessons of women's roles in society is to support men, particularly their husbands. I want to craft stories that ignite an inspiring spark across all genders, especially encouraging young girls and Hmong women to nurture their curiosity, to pursue the answers they seek, to connect dots in their own unique ways, and to reason independently. My narratives will urge them to raise their voices, to possess the bravery to carve their own distinct paths, and to embrace and fall in love with their reflections in the mirror. After all, how can two strangers forge a successful union like marriage without internally knowing who they are or what they want? As a

Hmong American woman, I strongly feel that it's time to reconstruct my identity, and one way of doing this is through feminist voices in Hmong folklore.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of gender roles in traditional Hmong stories has unveiled a pattern wherein male figures are predominantly celebrated for their courage and leadership, casting a shadow over the narrative presence and significance of female characters besides their supportive roles filled with traditional values and morals. This gender imbalance not only mirrors but also perpetuates patriarchal values within the Hmong community, affirming male dominance in both social and familial hierarchies.

My study reveals how such narratives potentially shape the ambitions and self-perceptions of Hmong women and girls, who might see their future as confined to the roles depicted in these stories. The relative absence of powerful female protagonists underscores a broader societal norm where women's contributions are undervalued, potentially stifling female leadership and diminishing self-esteem.

However, adaptation of "Xai and Sia" serves as a beacon of transformation, demonstrating how the reimagining of traditional stories like folklore can contribute to reshaping identity and amplifying feminist voices within the Hmong tradition. By solidifying this narrative in written form, it is my intention to provide a singular version of the story that elevates the female character as a hero, creating a fixed reference point that diverges from the fluidity of oral tradition.

This research has significant implications for understanding how narratives shape gender identity within the Hmong community and highlights the potential for storytelling to evolve in ways that reflect and advance contemporary values. Future research might benefit from comparative analyses between Hmong folklore and that of other cultures, or from a deep dive into lesser-known Hmong tales, further understanding the hidden power of women's roles and their depiction. There lies a rich field of study in reinterpreting traditional tales to foster a more inclusive narrative landscape—one where women's voices and experiences are not only heard but celebrated.

LIMITATIONS

This study relies primarily on the anthology "Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos," and various Hmong folklore translated works by Charles Johnson which, despite its cultural depth, represents Hmong folklore told through a group of people from a specific time and place—the late 1970s to early 1980s in St. Paul, Minnesota. This limitation in scope means the research might not encapsulate the full diversity of Hmong storytelling traditions across different regions and eras. Additionally, the translation and transcription of these oral tales from spoken word to written text involves subjective decisions that may alter the original narratives.

The analytical framework of this research is significantly shaped by feminist critique and personal insights, providing a fresh perspective on the narratives but potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. This approach emphasizes subjective interpretations, which, while deepening the cultural and personal understanding of the tales, might not resonate across all scholarly or cultural contexts.

Lastly, the focus on the portrayal of female characters in Hmong folklore, though crucial for examining gender dynamics, neglects other cultural dimensions that could offer a broader understanding of Hmong lore. Future studies might explore a more comprehensive range of themes and characters to provide a more complete view of Hmong storytelling. Additionally, my dual perspective as a Hmong American might influence interpretations, blending traditional Hmong values with American experiences in ways that could affect the accuracy of the cultural portrayal.

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