

## **Gender as an Analytic Category in Hmong Studies: the failure of patriarchy, tradition, and culture**

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In this presentation, I focus my analysis on the productivity of academic texts in circulating and sustaining particular ideologies of Hmong women. While other regimes of representation have been contested, there is little attention on the production of, and implications of, gendered Hmong subjectivities in academic text. My purpose is to interrogate the concepts and the analytic frames that dominate “ways of seeing” and “speaking” about the lives of Hmong women and consequently also about Hmong men. My intentions are not about performing the ritual of criticism. It is to push scholars—the producers of academic texts—toward more reflexive analysis of paradigms that dominate studies of ethnic minority women.

In my analysis of ethnographic work, research reports and historical narratives I find that women are presented as subjects circumscribed and limited by Hmong society. My point of entry into these texts is not centered on arguments of accurate or inaccurate representations. The problems of these texts, I argue, are methodological and ideological. Ideologically, the conceptual tools used by academics presuppose a set of epistemologies about what it means to be Hmong women. In academic texts several dominant analytic concepts, such as “tradition,” “culture” and “patriarchy,” participate in interpreting Hmong women as subjects/objects living in a presupposed timeless patriarchal society. Methodologically, these analytic categories constrain the analysis and reproduce an ideological accounting of the actions of Hmong women within a patriarchal society; a society that precedes them and continues to control and define the parameters of what they can or cannot do. I argue that by doing this, academic texts treat Hmong women as objects of culture and not agents of culture.