

index as well as a helpful glossary of Arabic terms that appear in the text. The reference notes are detailed and thorough. The book does not have a bibliography separate from the reference notes.

Reviewed by: Jess Hollenback
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Patricia V. Symonds. *Calling in the Soul: Gender and the Cycle of Life in a Hmong Village*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004). xlix, 326 pp., \$45 cloth.

Hmong Americans are a diaspora group that came from Laos after leaving southern China in the early 1800s. The U.S. C.I.A. recruited a Hmong army during the 1960s to assist with the American military campaign against communism in Southeast Asia. Hmong refugees began arriving in the United States in 1975 following the collapse of the pro-American Laotian government. There are now about 200,000 Hmong Americans.

One of the biggest challenges in understanding the adaptation of Hmong Americans is the dearth of knowledge about their traditional way of life. Since the Lao People's Democratic Republic remains inaccessible to social scientists, one avenue for investigating the pre-migration culture of Hmong Americans has been to examine contemporary Hmong settlements in Thailand. Patricia V. Symonds' *Calling in the Soul* is a welcome addition to this line of inquiry. The book is an anthropological study of traditional Hmong gender roles as they are manifested in birth and death rituals.

Symonds is superbly qualified to write about the Hmong. She spent over a year living in a remote Hmong village in Thailand and became fluent in Hmong. The book is further enhanced by photographs and drawings of Hmong families, homes, ceremonies, and alters. Another unique feature is the inclusion of long ritual songs and chants in both English and Hmong.

Symonds directly addresses one of the most salient aspects of Hmong social life: it is "a very strictly gender-stratified culture"

(173). She skillfully explains how in Hmong culture "women's role is to be private and silent, men's is to be public and vocal" (163). Yet she also notes the ways in which Hmong culture acknowledges women's power. Women are valued for their reproductive capacity because new life enables ancestors' souls to reincarnate. Hmong women are also acknowledged for their skill in sewing "flower cloth" (embroidered garments) that protects against evil spirits and is used to dress corpses for their journey to the afterlife.

Although *Calling the Soul* only covers the Hmong in Thailand, traditional Hmong definitions of masculine and feminine have proved to be an especially important topic for understanding their cultural adjustment in the United States. They continue to define kinship through patrilineal clans and practice arranged marriages and bride wealth. Gender roles are also relevant for social problems in the Hmong community such as early marriage for female teenagers, polygamy, and domestic violence.

In addition to addressing gender roles, *Calling the Soul* adds to our understanding of Hmong religion and spirituality through its study of birth and funeral ceremonies, illness and medicine, and shamanic rituals. These are important topics because Hmong Americans are one of the few groups in the United States to practice animism. They have also experienced very high rates of conversion to Christianity, ranging from one-third to one-half in different Hmong communities. For both topics, gender and religion, *Calling the Soul* provides information that previously required consulting the decades old research of French anthropologists, some dating from the colonial era.

Reviewed by: Jeremy Hein
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Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) xi, 318 pp, \$69.95 cloth..

Andrew Pilkington's *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain* (2003) is a comprehensive and systematic study of race and ethnicity in contemporary Britain. The