

Tourism Development and Changing Gender Relations in Sa Pa, Northwestern Vietnam

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Traditional Hmong Gender Roles

- Within the tightly-structured patriarchal Hmong society, Hmong boys and girls are raised with different expectations and values
- Hierarchical relations exist between men and women
- Men are said to be roots, trunks and branches, and women leaves and flowers
- The male is considered Hmongness

Hmong Women in Popular Perceptions

- *The “A Phu”s and Thao My tells her lifestory by To Hoai*

- “Living for a long time in misery, she gets used to it. Now My thinks she is also a buffalo, a horse. A horse is being sold from one shed to another, all it knows to do is eat grass and carry the goods... Even horses or buffalos have time to rest—at night they can stand to scratch, to chew; women and girls of this house only work and work, day and night.”

- “Fields around the Meo Vac area are all rocky—a piece of soil competes with three pieces of rock. You hurt your arms hoeing it. I cannot do it. My father[-in-law] is very cruel. When we get to the field, he allocates plots for all of us. You are allowed to eat only when you finish your plot. I am hungry, but I do not dare to eat, because I have not finished my plot. When I complete my work, people have finished all the rice already. In the afternoon, on the way back, I have to carry a bundle of wood. If I fall down, the bundle of wood will crush me. I try not to fall...”



Traditional Hmong Gender Roles in Lao Chai

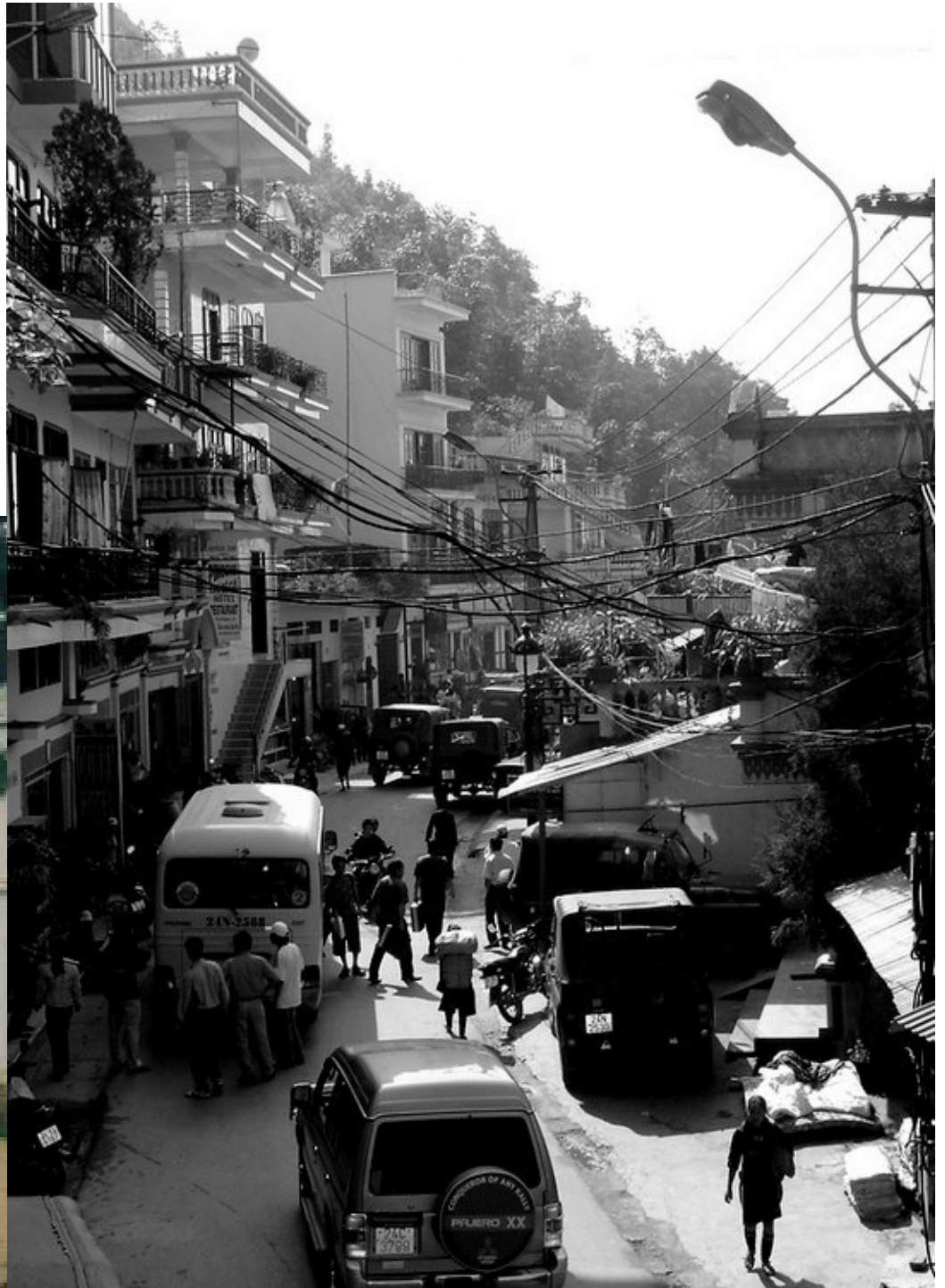
- Boys and girls learn different tasks
- Boys are given priority for education, with higher opportunities for government jobs in the future
- Boys are allowed to travel far to look for girlfriends
- Boys join military services and are sent to other provinces
- *Khw*, or hardship, is often mentioned by Hmong girls/women in regard to life in the village





Tourism Development in Sa Pa

- A French hill station
- A New Economic Zone
- A popular tourism destination – 81% increase between 2001 and 2004 (compared to 26% in the whole country)
 - International tourists
 - Chinese tourists
 - Vietnamese tourists





Participation of Hmong Girls in Tourism

- Selling handicrafts and working as tour guides
- Different roles that boys and girls assume allow girls to follow their grandmothers to Sa Pa town
- Peer influence plays an important role in drawing more girls to Sa Pa town
- To be the “good daughter” and “modern woman”



So assumes roles of wife and bread-winner in the family. These two roles are no longer mutually exclusive.



Mo decided to go back to the village to get married, while Chao remains in town and has risen to a position with greater responsibility in the hotel/travel agency she works for.