

The Mong Traditional Wedding

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This article gives an overview of the Mong traditional wedding ceremony. The discussions include an introduction, the origin of wedding, the similarities and differences between the Mong's and the Hmong's, the purpose of the Mong traditional wedding and how it functions in the Mong society within the context of the Mong culture, followed by the Mong wedding ceremony and a conclusion. It is important that Mong children need to have a good understanding of the purpose of the Mong wedding and acquire the necessary knowledge to maintain the tradition of a strong marriage because it keeps the Mong to stay connected with their family values, spirituality, and kinship.

Keywords: Traditional Wedding, Mong and Hmong, Wedding Ceremony, and Mong and Hmong Culture.

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Introduction

A wedding ceremony is a memorable event to all people in all cultures. It is an occasion that brings joy and happiness for the bride, groom, their families, relatives and friends of all ages. However, each culture has its own unique way to celebrate this important event. In the Mong culture, a wedding ceremony is considered to be the central occasion in life. It is an event where elders, relatives, friends and family members gather together to give *koobmoov* (blessings, prosperities, prayers and advice) for the newly wed couple. This signifies the commitment that the couple would share the rest of their lives together. For this reason, the elders view wedding ceremony as the most important occasion in a man's and a woman's life. Given this, the Mong elders do not want to lose this cultural tradition because it is central to the Mong culture.

During this wedding ceremony, it is believed that the souls of their families, relatives, friends and ancestors that passed away are also present at the ceremony to bless and support the bride and groom with a long lasting, happy and strong marriage. The wedding serves many purposes, such as proclaiming to the public that the bride and groom are married, informing the spirits of the bride's ancestors that she is leaving her home and serving as a notice to the spirits that she no longer needs their protection. After the wedding ceremony which is performed at the house of the bride, the groom's family informs the spirits of their ancestors that they now add another member to their family and ask them to protect this individual as well. This article provides an overview of the Mong traditional wedding based on the information shared by the Mong elders in the United States.

Methodology

The author uses the ethnographic approach to conduct this study. Data collection includes literature review, participant observation, and interviewing. The author interviewed eleven Mong and Hmong elders to gain their perspectives on the Mong traditional wedding.¹ The term "Mong" will be used for both the Mong and the Hmong

¹ These are names of the subject participants and their ages:

- Elder Cha Soua Hang (Mong spelling: Txhaj Suav Haam) is seventy-two years old.

throughout this article. For a deeper understanding of the Mong and the Hmong, readers are encouraged to read “The Mong and the Hmong” article (Thao & Yang, 2004 in Mong.ws). The ages of the elders participating in this research are based on their immigration documents, which are their green cards. According to the Mong elders, the ages that are reflected in the immigration documents were incorrect. The Mong people, who were born outside of the United States, do not have birth certificates to prove their ages. When these Mong elders applied to be admitted into the United States, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Services officers gave them a birth date based on the information gained during their interview process. In particular, the ages of their children were used as deciding factor to assign a birthday to them; therefore, their ages are not accurate.

The subject-participants, in this case, the Mong elders, are selected to represent the different clans and genders of the Mong society. During the author’s conversations with these elders, many themes were discussed regarding the rituals of the Mong wedding. The elders did most of the talking and the author did most of the listening. In order for the author to learn more and understand the elders’ reliving stories, he needed to relax and listen to them attentively.

A very important theme the elders described is the value of the Mong traditional wedding ceremony. The elders are very concerned that the younger Mong generation would gradually lose the sacred knowledge required to perform the traditional Mong wedding ceremony and other rituals within the Mong culture. The elders indicated that it is important for the young Mong to preserve these rituals so they can carry on the traditional values and their identity as Mong. These Mong elders worry about maintaining the Mong culture for the future because Mong children have placed less value on the Mong traditional wedding ceremony which is an important part of the Mong culture. Elder X.C. Lee (Xauv Tsheej Lis) described:

Marriage is a life commitment. But, now our young people view marriage like buying a car. If they decide not to keep their marriage, they just walk away. It’s like you buy a new car to drive for a few years, when a new model comes out and it’s better. Then, you trade it in your old one for a newer model or sell your old car and buy a new one. These young people’s marriage is like that. Mong marriage is not like a game. When you decide to marry that person, you live with that person until the day you die. You cannot sell your wife or husband. You cannot just walk away to marry another person. The younger generation of Mong living in America does not understand the meaning of marriage. This is the reason why in the United States, more Mong are getting divorced. In the old country, marriage is very strong and we do not have many divorces like in America (X.C. Lee, personal communication, June 22, 2001).

The high divorce rate and the rapid change with regard to Mong marriage in the last three decades in the United States are a cause for concern for the Mong elders. Divorce rarely occurred in Laos where the Mong came from. The elders stated that these changes increasingly became a major interference to the Mong traditional wedding ceremony and to their belief system. In order to understand the Mong belief system and the traditional values with respect to the Mong wedding ceremony, the rest of this article will examine the origin of the Mong wedding and how it came about.

Origin of the Mong Traditional Wedding

The subject participants recounted the origin of Mong traditional wedding ceremony when *Yawm Saub* (a Creator) showed the Mong how to get married and how the wedding ceremony should be conducted. Before that, the Mong did not know how to conduct a marriage ceremony. They saw other living things living as couples or pairs (“*nyob muaj txwj muaj nkawm*”). Then, the Mong asked *Yawm Saub* to show them how to establish a family

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- Elder Boua Tong Yang (Npuag Tooj Yaaj) is eighty-nine years old.
 - Elder Phoua Moua (Phuab Muas) is eight-two years old.
 - Elder Xao Cheng Lee (Xauv Tsheej Lis) is seventy-four years old.
 - Elder Lee Xiong (Lig Xyooj) is seventy-eight years old.
 - Elder Xia Xiong (Ntxhias Xyooj) is eighty-three years old.
 - Elder Nhia Cha Yang (Nyaj Rom Yaaj) is eighty-seven years old.
 - Elder Tong Yao Her (Tooj Yob Hawj) is eighty-five years old.
 - Elder Nhia Lue Her (Nyiaj Lwm Hawj) is ninety years old.
 - Elder Boua Lang Xiong (Npuag Laaj Xyooj) is sixty-two years old.
 - Elder Zong Chao Lor (Zoov Tshaus Lauj) is sixty-nine years old.

like other living things. *Yawm Saub* told the Mong to conduct a wedding ceremony, a process of bringing a man and a woman together to live as husband and wife. In the wedding ceremony, they need to honor their ancestors' souls. They have to use chickens and pigs as an offering to honor the souls of their ancestors. Then, their family members, relatives, and friends would consume the meats during the wedding ceremony. One important symbol in the Mong wedding is the use of a closed umbrella tied with a striped band of cloth called "*sivceeb*." The Mong believe that this umbrella enfold the best wishes and the blessings for the bride and groom for a prosperous future (*Lub kaus yog qaws plig nyaj plig kub, plig qoob plib loo, plig tsaj plig txuv, plig tub plig kiv hab tug plig nyaab moog ua neej*). The umbrella needs to be closed at all time. It can be only open at the groom's house at the very end of the ceremony.

The slaughtering of chickens and pigs reflects an old Mong saying that the chickens must bleed from the ears and the pigs from the nose, which means that these animals are witnessing the union between a man and a woman coming together as husband and wife. The married couple must take the lives of these animals seriously because the animals are sacrificed to honor their ancestors' souls. If their marriage ends, it is considered disrespectful to the souls of their ancestors.

The wedding ceremony normally lasts for many days. The Mong told *Yawm Saub* (a Creator) that the wedding ceremony is too long and they do not have activities to fill these days. *Yawm Saub* referred the Mong to learn *zaajtshoob* (wedding chants) and perform *kev tshoobkug* (wedding rituals) from *Yawm Zaaj Laug* (great grandfather dragon who lives under the sea). After the Mong learned the wedding chants and the wedding rituals from *Yawm Zaaj Laug*, they named the wedding chants after the great grandfather dragon that is called *zaajtshoob* (Dragon's wedding chants). *Yawm Saub's* and *Yawm Zaaj Laug's* sacred knowledge was passed on to the Mong and they have practiced the Mong traditional wedding ceremony from generation to generation until today.

In the Mong traditional wedding ceremony, individuals acting as negotiators representing the groom's and the bride's families called the *mejkoob* (the negotiators - persons who know the wedding chants and rituals) are needed. They perform a very important function as negotiators between the groom's family and the bride's family and they are in charge of the wedding ceremony. Thao (2005) stated that the Mong have two types of formal wedding called, "*Qhebrooj Tuam Ntsaa* and *Tshoobzawj* or *Tshoobcoj*." In the Mong traditional wedding ceremony, it requires only one *mejkoob* from each side of the family for a wedding celebration called, "*Qhebrooj Tuam Ntsaa*" (where the groom's family comes to the bride's family to formally request the hand of the daughter for marriage). This formal wedding takes days to celebrate and needs two *mejkoob*; whereas in the Hmong traditional wedding ceremony, two *mejkoob* are selected from the groom's and the bride's families for a total of four. The two *mejkoob* selected by the family are called, "*Txiv tuam mejkoob* and *Lwm mejkoob*." *Txiv tuam mejkoob* means the lead negotiator and *Lwm mejkoob* is the assistant negotiator.

The elders expressed their concerns that one to two days wedding celebration are not enough to fulfill the requirements of a good Mong traditional wedding. However, due to the busy schedules of the people living in this complex society, the elders stated that the Mong traditional wedding ceremony is no longer celebrated like the way they used to, such as in their old villages on the mountains of Laos.

The process of selecting a *mejkoob* is very important. One *mejkoob* is selected by the bride's family and usually is the bride's uncle or an elder who is a close family member. This *mejkoob* is called the *mejkoob huv tsev* (in-house negotiator representing the bride's family). The other *mejkoob* is called the *mejkoob saab nrau* (outside negotiator representing the groom's family). This *mejkoob* should be related to the groom's family. He may also be a related clan member. In contrast, the Hmong traditional ceremony requires four *Mejkoob*. Two *mejkoob* will be selected from the bride's family and two from the groom's family. It does not matter whether how big or how small the wedding ceremony will be conducted. Elder B.L. Xiong (Npuag Laaj Xyooj) asserted that:

There is a difference when the Mong married to the Hmong or vice versa. If the bride's family is Mong, then the groom's family needs to have only one *mejkoob*. But if this bride's family is Hmong, the groom's family must have two *mejkoob*. There is also some variation in the wedding rituals between these two groups. The Mong has a ritual to feed the spirits of their ancestors ("*laigdlaab tshoob*"); whereas the Hmong does not (B.L. Xiong, personal communication, May 25, 2003).

The Mong traditional wedding ceremony requires both sides of the families to be present. In the Mong's wedding, the groom side of family needs to have a *mejkoob*, a *nam taisntsuab* (a bride's maid, a single woman or young girl whose job is to keep a close eye on the bride), a *phijlaaj* (a man or young man who pairs up with the groom to bow), and a *tub risnraa* (a man or young man who carries the food and blankets). The bride side of the family also needs to have a *mejkoob* (a man who must be knowledgeable about the Mong wedding ceremony) and a *tub laubcawv* (a man or young man who serves beverages).

Similarities and Differences Between the Mong's and the Hmong's Wedding Ceremony

To compare the Mong's with the Hmong's traditional wedding ceremony, there are similarities as well as differences. For example, similar numbers of people are required to perform the functions at the ceremony. The Mong requires a total of two negotiators, one representing the groom's family and another representing the bride's family; whereas the Hmong need a total of four negotiators, two representing the groom's family and two representing the bride's family, which include one *Txivtuam mejkoob* (lead negotiator) and *Lwm mejkoob* (an assistant negotiator) from each side of the families. Therefore, the Mong require a total of two *mejkoob*; whereas the Hmong would require a total of four *mejkoob* at all time.

With respect to the differences between the Mong and the Hmong when conducting their wedding ceremony, the Mong requires a *kaavxwm* (a man who is in charge of the wedding ceremony selected by the bride's family) and a *tub risnraa* (an individual who is responsible to carry the belongings or the luggages for the couple); whereas the Hmong do not have these two individuals. The Mong have 32 *Xeej cawv* (32 rounds of wine serving) at the table during the ceremony. Each round of wine serving has a unique name for it, such as *XeejCaw Poobdlaag*, *XeejCaw Pomthaaj*, etc; whereas the Hmong do not have as many *Xeej cawv* like the Mong and the names for all the rounds of wine serving are not very clear from the subject-participants.

Thao and Yang (2004) asserted that due to the lack of knowledge about the Mong people, westerners have subsumed the Mong as a subgroup of the Hmong in the United States. However, the Mong and the Hmong are two distinguishable groups of people (See more discussion of the difference between these two groups in Thao and Yang's article on "The Mong and The Hmong" in *Mong Journal* (Mong.ws).

The Mong elders that the author dialogued with indicated that most of the Hmong were from the Mong. Thao (1999b) conducted a study on the Mong community in northern California and found that, "Many Hmong (White Hmong) admitted that their ancestors were Mong (Blue Mong)" (p. 109). The Mong language is beautiful and it is much more difficult to learn than the Hmong's. Those Mong who lost their language quickly pick up the Hmong language. The Hmong language has more slangs and is easier to learn. This is also true when applied to the rituals and chanting songs. The Mong rituals are richer in terms of their language, much more rigorous, and more complex than the Hmong's (e.g. wedding chanting songs and funeral chanting songs). On the issue between the Mong and the Hmong, Thao's (2002) research confirmed that even though there is a language difference between the Mong and the Hmong, they have cross married between these two groups and have lived in a peaceful society together at the turn of century.

Recently, the issue between the Mong and the Hmong has become a topic of discussion in the communities. Thao and Yang (2004) noted that the debate on this issue emerged at the California State Department of Education level to insure that there is equal access and equity in education for Mong-speaking children and their parents. Research stated that historically the Mong originated from China. The Chinese call them "Miao." Today, with respect to the use of language, the Mong who live in China have mixed their language with the Hmong's.

In addition, the elders also indicated that some of the wordings in the Hmong's chanting songs came from the Mong language. When listening to the Hmong's chanting songs, there are mixed words, which are Mong. According to Thao's research, the "Mong Leng are 'Veins of the Mong,' implying that the Mong Leng carry the life blood of all Mong (Thao, 1999a, p. 3). This information helps us understand that in early history, the Mong language was the proto or main language.

Purpose of the Mong Traditional Wedding Ceremony

It is important not to misunderstand and/or to misinterpret the Mong sacred traditional wedding ceremony with respect to the collection of *nqe-tshoob* (bride price). It is a custom for the parents of the bride to collect the *nqe-tshoob* (bride price). This bride price is not a dowry, but serves as a security deposit to ensure that the groom takes the marriage seriously. If the couple has a happy marriage, then the bride's parents would keep the bride price. However, if there is a conflict or a dispute between the couple and the groom was found to be at fault, then, the bride's family would take their daughter back and keep the bride price. All the gifts given by the bride's parents and close family members considered to be valuable, would have to be returned back to the bride's parents if the groom divorces her. If the bride divorces her husband, then her parents need to return the bride price to the husband's family. However, since the Mong arrived in the United States, it does not matter who is at fault, the parents of the bride do not return the bride price to the groom's family.

Chindarsi (1976) did a study on the Mong in northern Thailand. However, he did not examine deeper into the meanings and the purposes of the Mong marriage. He interpreted that the Mong buy their wives, sell their

daughters, and discredit the Mong's polygamy. Again, since he did not have a good understanding of the Mong's phrase "*yuav quaspu*" ("getting married to a wife"), he transliterates this phrase as "buying a wife." He thinks that "a wife is considered [to be] a form of property, which can be bought and sold the same as any other property" (p. 67). After all, the Mong spend a lot of their time searching for their wives. Anthropologist Geddes (1976) interpreted this phrase differently. He asserted that, "to a person who is not an anthropologist familiar with such systems the high bride-price may [be] given the impression that women are bought and sold like chattels" (p. 58).

Also, Chindarsi (1976) did not understand the full values and the reasons why some Mong had more than one wife. Geddes (1976) stated that "additional wives are gained by economic success which in turn they facilitate" (p. 128). The elders responded to this issue that some Mong males married more than one wife because their first wife does not have any heirs to carry on their names. In another words, the couple does not have any children. In the Mong tradition, the sons serve as a form of social security system to look after their parents and carry on the family name and their sacred tradition and rituals. In addition, because the lifestyle of the Mong requires intensive labor, they need a larger family. This means that every member contributes to the welfare of the family and produces more financial resources for the family. They depend on the labor of their family members to cultivate the land that produces food for the family.

The Mong elders said that the Mong traditional wedding ceremony needs to be conducted for two reasons. First, the biggest and most important ceremony takes place at the home of the parents of the bride. At the bride's home, the groom's family needs to provide *ib nkawm qab* (a pair of chicken) for the parents of the bride to offer a meal to the house spirits (*laig dlaab*). For comparison purpose, the Hmong do not have this ritual in their wedding ceremony. Chickens are slaughtered to prepare a small meal for the house's spirits and the spirits of the ancestors. These spirits are called to join the family to celebrate the wedding. In addition, a pig called "*Npua luamxwm*" will be slaughtered to sacrifice to the spirits of the ancestors of the bride's family to inform them that the bride is getting married, is no longer a part of her family, and no longer needs their protection.

Also, these spirits are asked to ensure that the bride is guided and is protected by them until she gets to her husband's home where she would be protected by the spirits of her husband's side of the family. This is the reason when a new child is born into the family, the Mong have to perform a ceremony call *hu-plig* (soul calling). This *hu-plig* ceremony is to give a name for the child and to welcome the child and his/her spirit to join the family. In addition to the *hu-plig* ceremony, a *laig dlaab/dluav xubntoos* (meal offering to the spirits of the house and ancestors) also done to inform them that there is a new person being added to the family and they need to protect and guide him or her.

The ceremony of *laig dlaab/dluav xubntoos* meal is always conducted when a person is leaving the house or passes away. This ceremony must be performed to inform the spirits of the house and of the ancestors as well. Chindarsi's (1976) study on the Mong's religion in northern Thailand also indicated that once the child was being named and was introduced to the spirits as a member of the household, then he or she will be protected by the spirits. He also asserted that "The birth ceremony is held by the father for his babies who are three days of age, to accept them into the world and introduce them to the spirits involved so that the spirits may look after them and make them rich and happy" (Chindarsi, 1976, p. 52). Symonds (1991) did a study on Mong's views of cosmology in northern Thailand and added that that after the child was given a name then the child becomes a true human being for the family. The child was named on the third day after birth. Birth, marriage and death are all interconnected with the life cycle. Elder C.S. Hang (Txhaj Suav Haam) stated that:

When we give a name to a new child, we let our *dlaabqhuas* (house spirits and ancestors' spirits) know. When this child get married or dies we have to let our *dlaabqhuas* know, too. When we bring a *nyaab* (daughter in-law) to join and live with the family in the home, we must inform our *dlaabqhuas* (C.S. Hang, personal communication, March 15, 2001).

In the Mong traditional wedding ceremony, more chickens and pigs are used for food if needed. Traditionally, the Mong wedding lasts for many days. The elders all agreed that the Mong have shortened the wedding ceremony since they have arrived in the United States from several days down to one day because people have to travel from far distance and every one has a very busy schedule. Usually, a wedding is set for the weekends. This way, family members, relatives and friends can participate in the ceremony. Some of the elders indicated that, in Laos the wedding lasted for at least two to three days. Only a few ceremonies last for four days because of the cost. The groom's and bride's families have to have a lot of money to buy pigs and chickens for food. Also, many *mejkoob* are not willing to conduct longer ceremonies because they have other things to do. They do not want to hold long wedding ceremonies because it takes a lot of preparation and time. The *mejkoob*, family members, relatives and friends need to return home to work or to go to school. The elders said that today's *mejkoob* are not very

knowledgeable about the Mong wedding's rituals compared to those in the old days. The elders stated that today the *mejkoob* have too many things to worry about, and they do not have time to master all the wedding chants. The elders are not satisfied with the way some of the *mejkoob* in the United States perform their duty during the wedding ceremony. When they requested the *mejkoob* to recite certain chants, some of them keep making excuses that they have neither studied them nor know them. Elder X. C. Lee (Xauv Tsheej Lis) who is a *mejkoob* expert stated:

Today, our *Mejkoob* are taking a short cut. They do not take time to go from detail to detail because it takes too long. The wedding ceremony is being shortened into a one-day ceremony and many things have been cut out. If the *Mejkoob huv tsev* (in-house negotiator representing the bride's side) requested the *Mejkoob saab ntsau* (outside negotiator representing the groom's side) to recite the chants, the outside negotiator often apologizes to the in-house negotiator and the bride's parents that he does not know the chants. We know that he knows but he only makes excuses so they can keep the ritual moving on during the ceremony (X.C. Lee, personal communication, June 22, 2001).

The Wedding Ceremony

In the early part of the ceremony, the groom and *phijlaaj* walk to stand in the middle of the living room facing toward the altar in the house of the bride's parents and the in-house *mejkoob* verbally guides them to bow to the bride's parents and their close family members. Near the end of the wedding ceremony, the bride and groom sit at the table with both sides of the *mejkoob*.

Then, the bride's parents, grandparents and close uncles join them at the table. This part of the ceremony is called *Kawmmoo* (to advise and counsel). This time is reserved for them to advise and counsel the bride and groom on how to be a responsible wife or a husband. The bride's parents, grandparents and uncles each will give individual advice to the bride and groom on how to start a family. Sometimes, the parents of the bride do not want to sit at the table because it is too emotional, so an uncle will sit in on their behalf. During this *Kawmmoo*, it is very emotional because the tie is being cut between the bride and her family. The bride will no longer be a *nkaujxwb* (a celibate) and she will no longer be considered a member of her biological family. She is leaving her parents' home to live with her husband and becomes a member of his family. Often, the bride and her parents will break down in tears when the bride is informed that she is no longer a part of her biological parents and her side of family. Her parents and her relatives will perceive her, as *Moog Ua Luas* (become an outsider) which is a member of her husband's family. Her close relatives and friends also cry with the bride along with her brothers and sisters for being torn apart while they try to comfort each other.

In the last part of the ceremony, the *mejkoob* of the two sides announce the bride price, clothing and other valuable items that are given by the bride's parents to the newly wed couple. These items are given to the bride to *chivpeev ua neej* (to begin her own family). Then, the bride family's *mejkoob* gives the final messages to the groom family's *mejkoob* to take them to the groom and his side of family. The messages are for them to love the bride, to take good care of her, and to provide her with shelter, food, and protection. Now, the bride and groom are pronounced as husband and wife, witnessed by the *mejkoob* of both sides of the family. If anything happens to this couple, such as a family dispute in the future, the *mejkoob* will be the people would make sure that both sides of the families are informed about the dispute. To certain extent, the *mejkoob* are viewed as part of the decision making for the best interest of the bride and the groom.

The marriage will establish an ongoing mutual trust and relationships between both sides of the groom's and the bride's families as *ua neej ua tsaav* (becoming relatives), and both parents become *Cuag* (a term that both sides of the parents call one another). Both families are responsible to make sure that the marriage does not break up. They hope the marriage will last forever. Again, the groom and *phijlaaj* walk back and stand in the middle of the living room facing the bride's parents' altar. This time, the groom family's *mejkoob* verbally guide them to bow and thank the bride's close family members, such as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters-in-law, house's and ancestors' spirits. When this process is completed, the bride's family *mejkoob* grants the permission for the groom's family *mejkoob* to take the bride to the groom's family. The groom's family members who come to help in the ceremony, the outside *mejkoob* representing the groom's family, the groom and his newly wedded wife can then leave the bride's home.

Another important part of the Mong wedding ceremony involves the welcoming ceremony of the bride at the end of groom's family. When the bride arrives at the groom's house, the groom and his parents prepare a meal to thank the *mejkoob* for his work ("*tam mejkoob*"). They also take this opportunity to thank all the individuals who take part and assist in the wedding ceremony, including the groom's side of close family members. Everyone,

including the groom's *mejkoob*, all the individuals taking part in the wedding ceremony at the bride's house, the groom's parents, his grandparents and uncles, is invited to formally sit at the table. The groom's family *mejkoob* reports and confirms all the valuable items that were given to the newly wed couple to the parents of the groom and his families. This report also includes all the messages that were sent by the *mejkoob* of the bride's side. Then, the groom stands with a male partner in the middle of the house facing the altar. The groom's family *mejkoob* verbally guide them to bow and thank the groom's parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, the spirits of the house and those of his ancestors. The *mejkoob* opens the umbrella and gives it to the newly wed couple to put it away. After that, an uncle of the groom leads the groom to bow as a way to give thanks to the *mejkoob* and all the individuals who have helped the groom during his wedding ceremony.

On the other side the bride's family, after the groom, their wedded daughter, and others have left the house, the bride's parents and family members also prepare a meal to give thanks to their *mejkoob* on her side and to thank all the individuals who took part in the wedding ceremony. Everyone in the bride's side of the family will have a meal together to conclude the wedding ceremony before they return to their homes.

Conclusion

The Mong traditional wedding is a crucial ceremony according to the Mong cultural tradition. If two people live together without going through this traditional wedding ceremony, then the Mong do not consider them as a married couple. Elder N.C. Yang (Nyiaj Rom Yaaj) stated:

If they do not go through the wedding ceremony and they already lived together, then we consider them disgraceful couple. In our culture, they are not allowed to live together until they were granted permission from our wedding ceremony (N.C. Yang, personal communication, July 15, 2001).

The elders stated that if a couple does not honor the Mong traditional culture and they get married without paying respect to their parents, elders, uncles, family members, friends, house spirits, and ancestors' spirits, then they will not have a happy marriage. They will not have children, good fortune, long lasting marriage and a long life because they receive no blessing from both sides of the families and, most importantly, from the spirits.

The elders made a strong suggestion that people should not perceive the Mong traditional ceremony as a means for buying or selling children with respect to the bride price. The Mong traditional wedding ceremony is conducted to ensure that the bride and the groom have a strong marriage. Bride price represents a form of providing security for the bride and her family in that the groom and his family are serious about the marriage. In addition, it connects both sides of families (the bride's and the groom's) together as an extended family. This relationship through marriage has tightly developed over their lifetime and is still very strong among the subject-participants with their parents, grandparents, great grandparents, etc. This relationship is only lost when they lost contact with these individuals.

It is important for Mong children to preserve the Mong traditional wedding ceremony so that they can continue to have strong families, clans and kin relationships in this highly complex society. The wedding is a very important part of Mong customs and it needs to be preserved as the central foci of the Mong culture. From this study, the author learned that there are many elements to the Mong traditional wedding ceremony. Therefore, the author encourages more studies to be conducted in order to obtain a full understanding about the complexities of the Mong traditional wedding ceremony and their implications on the Mong.

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