



2008

**[Special Issue on SEA Demographics] Featured Article:
Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese-Americans in the 2005
American Community Survey**

Mark Pfeifer

Editor, *Hmong Studies Journal*, editor@hmongstudies.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea>



Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pfeifer, Mark (2008) "[Special Issue on SEA Demographics] Featured Article: Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese-Americans in the 2005 American Community Survey," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

DOI: 10.7771/2153-8999.1104

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/jsaaea/vol3/iss1/8>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).



Volume 3

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed scholarly journal published by the National Association for the Education & Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans (NAFEA)

Special Issue on Southeast Asian American Demographics

Featured Article:

Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese Americans in the 2005 American Community Survey

Mark E. Pfeifer

Texas A & M University, Corpus Christi

Introduction

The figures included in this short article are from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) released by the U.S. Census Bureau in late 2006. The 2005 ACS data set involves estimates based on surveys distributed to only a subset of the U.S. population and is thus problematic in some respects. This concise article is intended to provide basic 2005 demographic, educational and socioeconomic data related to Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese in the United States. It is not intended as a comprehensive explanatory research paper of factors underlying contemporary demographic, educational, and socioeconomic trends in these four ethnic communities. These topics should ideally be the focus of additional quantitative and qualitative research. Most of the figures used in this article are from the “Cambodian alone or in any combination,” “Hmong alone or in any combination,” “Lao alone or in any combination,” and “Vietnamese alone or in any combination population” profiles including in the 2005 ACS.

Population

The 2005 American Community Survey estimates the Vietnamese population at 1,521,353, the Cambodian population at 241,025, the Lao Population at 209,627 and the Hmong population at 188,900 (Table 1).

Table 1

Ethnicity	Total Population
Cambodian	241,025
Hmong	188,900
Lao	209,627
Vietnamese	1,521,353
United States	288,378,137

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the **Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement**, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or **JSAAEA**.

All of these figures represent increases from the 2000 Census when the Vietnamese population was 1,223,736, the Cambodian, 206,052; the Lao, 198,203; and the Hmong, 186,310 (U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1). The Hmong estimates most likely do not include many of the more than 15,000 Hmong refugees that were resettled in the United States between 2004 and 2006.

Looking at the regional and state distributions by ethnic group, and beginning with Cambodians (Table 2), the largest numbers of Cambodians, (108,976) were estimated to live in the Western states, followed by the Northeast (47,161), the South (41,710) and then the Midwest (19,591). The 2005 ACS puts the top ten states in terms of Cambodian population in the following rank order—California (83,562), Massachusetts (24,172), Washington (16,082), Texas (12,112), Florida (7,889), Pennsylvania (6,194), Ohio (6,160), Minnesota (6,101), North Carolina (5,128), and Georgia (4,562) (Table 2). In contrast to the other groups, by far the largest number of Hmong were estimated to live in the Midwest (95,902) followed by the West (73,526), the South (12,621) and the Northeast (1,216) (Table 3).

The 2005 ACS figures demonstrate the continuing growth of Hmong populations in the Midwest in comparison to the West and other regions. This trend contrasts sharply to the 1990 Census, when the West (primarily California) had by far the largest Hmong population (Pfeifer, 2003). According to the 2005 ACS estimates, the top ten states in regards to Hmong population were California (65,345), Minnesota (46,352), Wisconsin (38,814), Michigan (7,769), Colorado (4,285), North Carolina (4,172), Georgia (3,324), Missouri (1,553), Florida (1,423) and Washington (1,380). It is noteworthy that comparing the 2005 ACS estimates to the 2000 Census figures, a substantial decrease in Hmong residents is apparent in North Carolina while significant increases appear to have taken place in Georgia, Missouri, and Florida, representing the emergence of new and/or growing Hmong communities in certain Southern states since 2000. The migration of Hmong to Missouri and the adjacent states of Arkansas and Oklahoma to engage in chicken farming has been documented in several articles in the mainstream press (Pfeifer, 2003).

The Lao regional distribution in the 2005 ACS was as follows—the West (95,574), the South (44,471), the Midwest (37,820), and the Northeast (15,382) (Table 4). The top ten states in terms of Lao population were California (63,318), Texas (12,643), Minnesota (11,636), Washington (10,638), Iowa (6,129), North Carolina (5,854), Georgia (5,546), Tennessee (4,781), Michigan (4,735) and Florida (4,035).

With a much larger overall population size, Vietnamese were somewhat more widely distributed throughout the regions of the United States compared to Lao and especially Cambodian and Hmong. The 2005 ACS estimated that the largest number of Vietnamese resided in the Western states (694,859), followed by the Southern states (425,248), the Northeast (162,707) and the Midwest (135,520) (Table 5). The rank order of the top ten states by Vietnamese population in the 2005 ACS estimates included California (539,150), Texas (159,107), Washington (60,543), Florida (55,555), Massachusetts (48,583), Virginia (48,035), New York (39,131), Georgia (37,159), Pennsylvania (35,111), and Oregon (25,684).

Table 2

Cambodian Population in the U.S.	
United States	217,438
Northeast	47,161
Midwest	19,591
South	41,710
West	108,976
California	83,562
Massachusetts	24,172
Washington	16,082
Texas	12,112
Florida	7,889
Pennsylvania	6,194
Ohio	6,160
Minnesota	6,101
North Carolina	5,128
Georgia	4,562
Connecticut	4,174
Virginia	4,047
Illinois	3,899
New York	3,364
Oregon	3,284
Maryland	2,639
Utah	2,183
Colorado	1,969
Tennessee	1,633
New Jersey	1,528
Oklahoma	1,157
Kentucky	856
Iowa	788
Arizona	776
South Carolina	697
Michigan	648
Kansas	610
Wisconsin	596
Missouri	586
Nevada	549
Alabama	535
Hawaii	443
Louisiana	350
Alaska	128
Indiana	121
Arkansas	0

Source: B02006. Asian Alone by Selected Groups, Universe

"Data for the following geographic area(s) cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small." Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming, Puerto Rico

Table 3

Hmong Population in the U.S.	
United States	183,265
Northeast	1,216
Midwest	95,902
South	12,621
West	73,526
California	65,345
Minnesota	46,352
Wisconsin	38,814
Michigan	7,769
Colorado	4,285
North Carolina	4,172
Georgia	3,324
Missouri	1,553
Florida	1,423
Washington	1,380
Alaska	1,285
Oklahoma	1,168
Oregon	1,091
South Carolina	1,010
Texas	660
Tennessee	622
Illinois	545
Massachusetts	506
Iowa	499
Ohio	370
Pennsylvania	355
Connecticut	271
Arkansas	203
Utah	140
New York	84
Virginia	39
Alabama	0
Arizona	0
Hawaii	0
Indiana	0
Kansas	0
Kentucky	0
Louisiana	0
Maryland	0
Nevada	0
New Jersey	0

Source: B02006. Asian Alone by Selected Groups, Universe

"Data for the following geographic area(s) cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small." Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming, Puerto Rico

Table 4

Lao Population in the U.S.	
United States	193,247
Northeast	15,382
Midwest	37,820
South	44,471
West	95,574
California	63,318
Texas	12,643
Minnesota	11,636
Washington	10,638
Iowa	6,129
North Carolina	5,854
Georgia	5,546
Tennessee	4,781
Michigan	4,735
Florida	4,035
Oregon	3,860
Nevada	3,854
Illinois	3,784
Kansas	3,294
Arizona	3,279
Wisconsin	3,026
Ohio	3,000
Hawaii	2,917
Colorado	2,892
Virginia	2,790
Utah	2,682
New York	2,545
Connecticut	2,534
Pennsylvania	2,431
Arkansas	2,338
Louisiana	2,097
Indiana	1,578
Alaska	1,562
Maryland	1,306
South Carolina	1,114
Massachusetts	966
New Jersey	923
Oklahoma	633
Alabama	589
Missouri	282
Kentucky	253

Source: B02006. Asian Alone by Selected Groups, Universe

"Data for the following geographic area(s) cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small." Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming, Puerto Rico

Table 5

Vietnamese Population in the U.S.	
United States	1,418,334
Northeast	162,707
Midwest	135,520
South	425,248
West	694,859
California	539,150
Texas	159,107
Washington	60,543
Florida	55,555
Massachusetts	48,583
Virginia	48,035
New York	39,131
Georgia	37,159
Pennsylvania	35,111
Oregon	25,684
Illinois	25,017
Louisiana	23,463
Maryland	22,513
North Carolina	21,897
Minnesota	21,810
New Jersey	20,976
Colorado	20,370
Michigan	17,938
Arizona	15,873
Ohio	14,705
Oklahoma	14,286
Missouri	14,579
Kansas	12,278
Connecticut	9,396
Utah	9,366
Tennessee	8,651
South Carolina	8,453
Indiana	8,355
Hawaii	8,264
Nevada	7,444
Iowa	7,206
Arkansas	6,467
Alabama	6,183
Wisconsin	5,728
Kentucky	5,001
Alaska	921

Source: B02006. Asian Alone by Selected Groups, Universe

"Data for the following geographic area(s) cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small." Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming, Puerto Rico

Age Distribution

The 2005 ACS data made it very clear that of the four Southeast Asian groups, Hmong by far had the youngest profile while Vietnamese most closely reflect the age profile of the United States population as a whole. The median age of Hmong in the 2005 ACS was 18.3 years, just about half the median age of the United States population (Table 6). The next youngest age profile belonged to Cambodians at 25.3, followed by Lao at 29.1 and Vietnamese at 33.4 years.

Table 6

Median Age	
Cambodian	25.3
Hmong	18.3
Lao	29.1
Vietnamese	33.4
United States	36.4

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Divorce Rate

According to the 2005 ACS, all four Southeast Asian groups, had estimated divorce rates that were around half of the American average (10.2% of persons 15 years and over) (Table 7). The lowest estimated divorce rate was apparent among Hmong (3.3) and Cambodians (4.0), followed by Vietnamese (5.3) and Lao (6.3).

Table 7

Percentage of Divorce Rate; Persons 15 Years and Over	
Cambodian	4.0
Hmong	3.3
Lao	6.3
Vietnamese	5.3
United States	10.2

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Language

Table 8 shows that about 45% of Cambodians, Hmong and Lao reported in the 2005 ACS that they speak English “less than very well.” The Vietnamese figure was a bit higher at just over 50 percent. All four groups were between 50% and 60% on this variable in the 2000 census (U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 4). The somewhat higher proportion of Vietnamese reporting that they speak English “less than very well” in the 2005 ACS is likely related to the greater numbers of Vietnamese who have arrived in the United States after 1990 compared to Cambodians, Lao and to a lesser extent, the Hmong (Table 8).

Table 8

Percentage that Speak English “Less Than Very Well”; Population Five Years and Over	
Cambodian	44.2
Hmong	47.7
Lao	45.6
Vietnamese	51.6
United States	8.6

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Table 9 displays the proportion of the four ethnic groups who report that they speak a language other than English at home in the 2005 ACS. The percentage was very high among all four of the Southeast Asian ethnic groups. Vietnamese were at 84%, Cambodians at 84.7%, Lao at 87.8%, and Hmong at a rather remarkable 95.3%. These figures show the continued use of the ethnic language at home remains at a very high level among the Southeast Asian ethnic groups. Hmong parents, in particular, with a strong historic minority identity emphasize home use of their heritage language as a means to maintain ethnic identity among children and youth (Withers, 2004; Lee, 1999).

Table 9

Percentage of Speakers of Other Languages Other Than English at Home; Population Five Years and Over	
Cambodian	84.7
Hmong	95.3
Lao	87.8
Vietnamese	84.0
United States	19.4

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Educational Attainment

Looking at educational attainment, the 2005 ACS estimates show Vietnamese 25 years and over most closely approximated the U.S. figures as a whole while the other Southeast Asian groups showed lesser levels of attainment but gains from figures enumerated in earlier censuses. According to the 2005 ACS, 18.2% of Vietnamese possessed a Bachelor’s Degree, compared to 17.2% of all Americans over 25 years old and 7.3% of Vietnamese held a Graduate or Professional Degree, compared to an estimated 10% of all Americans (Table 10).

11.1% of Cambodians over 25 held a Bachelor’s degree and 3% possessed a graduate or professional degree according to the 2005 ACS figures. Among the Lao, 9.2% over 25 held a Bachelor’s degree and 3.2% a graduate or professional degree. According to the 2005 ACS data, 7.5% of Hmong over 25 possessed a Bachelor’s degree while 2.2% held a graduate or professional degree (Table 10).

Table 10
Percentage of Educational Attainment of Persons 25 Years and Over

	Vietnamese	Cambodian	Lao	Hmong	U.S.
Less than H.S. Diploma	27.7	40.9	35.6	50.0	15.8
H.S. Graduate or Equiv.	23.0	24.7	30.5	20.5	29.6
H.S. Graduate or Higher	72.3	59.1	64.4	50.0	84.2
Some College or Associates Degree	23.8	20.2	21.5	19.8	27.5
Bachelor's Degree	18.2	11.1	9.2	7.5	17.2
Graduate or Professional Degree	7.3	3.0	3.2	2.2	10.0
H.S. Graduate or Higher, Males	77.3	65.2	69.4	59.7	83.8
H.S. Graduate or Higher, Females	67.5	53.6	59.2	40.6	84.6
Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Males	28.4	17.5	13.3	12.7	28.5
Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Females	22.8	11.1	11.5	6.8	26.0

(Figures for U.S. population in parentheses)

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

It is significant that all four of the Southeast Asian groups more than doubled their proportions holding Bachelor's and graduate or professional degrees in comparison to 1990 Census data (Um, 2003). The greater Vietnamese advances may be explained at least in part by the history of a higher level of availability of educational opportunities in Vietnam compared to Laos and Cambodia. It also important to remember that the 2005 ACS data only measures educational attainment among those adults older than 25 and does not show enrollment or completion figures among younger Southeast Asian Americans.

Gender differentials related to educational attainment within the Southeast American ethnic groups are also apparent in the 2005 ACS data. Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese men displayed substantially higher rates of high school completion, and Bachelor degrees and graduate or professional degree completion compared to their female counterparts within the ethnic group (Table 10). It is again important to remember that these figures involve the population of adults over 25. In the Hmong communities of Minnesota and other states, many college admission counselors for the past several years have noted the much higher admission and completion levels of Hmong females relative to Hmong males, a gender trend (mirroring that of many other minority groups in American higher education) that does not show up in the 2005 ACS dataset (Seying, 2004; Vang, 2004).

Household and Family Size

In terms of household size, Hmong stand out as having an average household size of 5.30 persons, more than double that for the United States as a whole of 2.60 persons (Table 11).

Table 11

Average Size of Households (Persons)	
Cambodian	3.88
Hmong	5.30
Lao	3.77
Vietnamese	3.30
United States	2.60

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

The 2005 ACS estimates the Cambodian average household size at 3.88 persons and the Lao household size at 3.77. Among the four groups, Vietnamese were closest to the U.S. average at 3.30 persons. Looking at average family size in the 2005 ACS, the same rank order holds, Hmong were at 5.50, Cambodians at 4.12, Lao at 4.08 and Vietnamese at 3.73 compared to 3.18 persons in the average U.S. family (Table 12).

Table 12

Average Family Size (Persons)	
Cambodian	4.12
Hmong	5.50
Lao	4.08
Vietnamese	3.73
United States	3.18

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Disability Status

There are two categories of particular interest when looking at the disability status figures from the 2005 ACS. The first of these is the percentage of persons five years and over with a disability. Looking at these figures, all four Southeast Asian American groups were below the figures for the United States as a whole—14.9%. Cambodians were at 12.5%, Lao at 12.5%, Hmong at 11.3% and Vietnamese at 10.3% (Table 13).

Table 13

Percentage of Persons with a Disability Status; Persons Five Years and Over	
Cambodian	12.5
Hmong	11.3
Lao	12.5
Vietnamese	10.3
United States	14.9

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

However, considering the percentage of persons with a disability over 65 years old, all four Southeast Asian Americans groups showed higher percentages than the 40.5% of Americans over 65 as a whole. According to the 2005 ACS estimates, 55.8% of Hmong over 65 had a disability, as did 55.1% of Lao, 49.1% of Cambodians and 43.1% of Vietnamese.

Citizenship Status and Native-Born Status

Reflecting the differential age structure of the four Southeast Asian American groups, the 2005 ACS estimated that 51.3% of Hmong were Native-Born in the United States, compared to 41.7% of Cambodians, 40.3% of Lao, and 35.7% of Vietnamese (Table 14). Conversely, Vietnamese showed the highest percentage of foreign born—64.3%, compared to 59.7% of Lao, 58.3% of Cambodians and 48.7% of Lao.

Table 14

Percentage of Total population of Native Born	
Cambodian	41.7
Hmong	51.3
Lao	40.3
Vietnamese	35.7
United States	87.6

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Some major differences are apparent among the four Southeast Asian American groups in terms of the percentage of the total population that were naturalized U.S. Citizens. According to the 2005 ACS estimates, 45.5% of Vietnamese were naturalized citizens, compared to 34.5% of Lao, 31.5% of Cambodians and 25.1% of Hmong (Table 15).

Table 15

Percentage of Naturalized Citizens of the Total Population	
Cambodian	31.5
Hmong	25.1
Lao	34.5
Vietnamese	45.5
United States	5.1

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

It is likely these differences are at least somewhat correlated to how long the bulk of persons in these groups have respectively resided in the United States and also the significant differences in age structure between Hmong and the other three groups. A larger proportion of Hmong are under 18 years old and born in the United States as citizens with no need to apply for naturalization. The 2005 ACS estimates that 26.8% of Cambodians were not U.S. citizens, compared to 25.2% of Lao, 23.6% of Hmong and 18.8% of Vietnamese (Table 16). Conversely,

according to these same figures, about three-fourths of Cambodians, Lao and Hmong were U.S. citizens while just over 80% of Vietnamese possessed U.S. citizenship (Table 17).

Table 16

Percentage of Total Population who are not Citizens	
Cambodian	26.8
Hmong	23.6
Lao	25.2
Vietnamese	18.8
United States	7.2

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Table 17

Percentage of Total Populations with U.S. Citizenship	
Cambodian	73.2
Hmong	76.4
Lao	74.8
Vietnamese	81.2
United States	92.8

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Time of Arrival

According to the 2005 ACS estimates, the four Southeast Asian ethnic groups showed notable differences in terms of the periods in which large portions of their foreign-born populations arrived in the United States. Lao appear to be the most established of the groups. The 2005 ACS estimates that 85% of Lao entered the United States before 1990, 11.3% between 1990 and 1999 and just 3.7% after 2000 (Table 18). Cambodians displayed a similar pattern. According to the 2005 ACS estimates, 77.1% of Cambodians arrived in the United States before 1990, 13.1% between 1990 and 1999 and 9.8% after 2000 (Table 18).

Table 18

Percentage of Foreign Born

Time of Arrival	Lao	Cambodia	Vietnam	Hmong
Entered U.S. Before 1990	85.0	77.1	46.7	56.2
Entered U.S. Between 1990 and 1999	11.3	13.1	41.7	31.4
Entered U.S. After 2000	3.7	9.8	11.6	12.5

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Hmong and Vietnamese displayed much higher proportions of their populations who arrived in the United States in later periods. According to the 2005 ACS estimates, 56.2% of Hmong came to the U.S. before 1990, 31.4% between 1990 and 1999 and 12.5% after 2000 (Table 18). According to the 2005 ACS figures, 46.7% of Vietnamese arrived in the United States before 1990, 41.7% between 1990 and 1999 and 11.6% after 2000 (Table 18).

Table 19

Percentage of Total Population of Foreign Born	
Cambodian	58.3
Hmong	48.7
Lao	59.7
Vietnamese	64.3
United States	12.4

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

It should be noted that Hmong refugees continued to arrive in the United States in modest numbers through the mid-1990s to late 1990s and again in the 2004-2006 period while much of the Vietnamese foreign-born migration after 1990 likely reflected the substantial amount of family reunion immigration that was occurring with Vietnamese-Americans sponsoring relatives to come to live with them in the U.S. from Vietnam. Table 19 shows the percent of the foreign born population.

Income

In terms of Median Household Income, the Vietnamese (\$50,736) and Lao (\$50,482) actually exceeded the figure for the U.S. as a whole (\$46,242) according to the 2005 ACS estimates while the Cambodian (\$44,955) and Hmong figures (\$39,225) were somewhat below the U.S. average (Table 20).

Table 20

Median Household Income	
Cambodian	\$44,955
Hmong	\$39,225
Lao	\$50,482
Vietnamese	\$50,726
United States	\$46,242

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Looking at Median Family Income, the figures were similar, Vietnamese (\$55,832) and Lao (\$52,248) were near the U.S. figure (\$55,832) while the Cambodian (\$44,883) and Hmong estimates (\$38,335) fell short of the average for the entire U.S. population (Table 21).

Table 21

Median Family Income	
Cambodian	\$44,883
Hmong	\$38,335
Lao	\$52,248
Vietnamese	\$54,227
United States	\$55,832

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

It is important to note that the estimated income figures for all four Southeast Asian American groups have increased significantly since the 1990 census, showing the upward mobility of all four ethnic groups in American society (Um, 2003).

Poverty rate figures from the 2005 ACS replicate the income figures, Vietnamese (12.3%) and Lao (13.9%) were closest to the overall U.S. figure (10.2%) while Cambodians (19.3%) and Hmong (32.7%) exhibited higher poverty rates (Table 22).

Table 22

Percentage of Poverty Rate of All Families	
Cambodian	19.3
Hmong	32.7
Lao	13.9
Vietnamese	12.3
United States	10.2

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

While the poverty rate remained disproportionately high among Hmong-Americans, it is notable that the estimated poverty figure among Hmong families in the 2005 ACS was less than half of the 66% poverty rate enumerated among Hmong families in the 1990 census (Pfeifer & Lee, 2004).

Homeownership Rate

Considering homeownership rates, it is significant that all four Southeast Asian American ethnic groups exhibited homeownership rates above 50% in the 2005 ACS showing that members of all communities are making major progress in achieving this aspect of socioeconomic advancement typically associated with the “American dream.” Aligning with the income-related data, homeownership rates among Vietnamese (64.8%) and Lao (61.9%) mostly closely paralleled that of the U.S. population as a whole (66.9%) while Cambodians (52.1%) and Hmong (50.9%) possessed somewhat lower levels of homeownership (Table 23).

Table 23

Percentage of Home Ownership Rate	
Cambodian	52.1
Hmong	50.9
Lao	61.9
Vietnamese	64.8
United States	66.9

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Occupational and Industrial Concentration

Table 24 shows the different classification systems the U.S. Census Bureau uses for occupational distribution.

Table 24

Percentage of Civilian Population in Occupational Distribution; 16 Years and Over

	Cambodian	Hmong	Lao	Vietnamese	U.S.
Management, Professional and Related Occupations	20.7	19.6	16.3	29.9	34.1
Service Occupations	16.8	19.2	15.6	24.6	16.3
Sales and Office Occupations	25.7	25.0	21.9	18.7	25.9
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.7
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	4.4	3.7	5.4	5.9	10.0
Production, Transportation, and Materials Moving Occupations	32.0	31.7	40.0	20.6	13.0

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

According to the 2005 ACS estimates, Cambodians, Hmong and Lao were strongly concentrated in production, transportation, and materials moving occupations (these are mostly jobs often categorized as manufacturing), while Vietnamese were also overrepresented in these jobs compared to the U.S. population as a whole but to a considerably lesser extent. Cambodians, Hmong and Lao displayed representation levels similar to the U.S. population as a whole in service occupations and sales and office occupations though Hmong were to some extent overrepresented in service jobs and Lao slightly underrepresented. Cambodians, Hmong, and Lao were underrepresented compared to the overall U.S. population in management, professional, and related occupations and construction, extraction maintenance and repair occupations. The Vietnamese occupational distribution differed considerably from the three

other Southeast Asian American ethnic groups. As mentioned above, Vietnamese were less represented in production, transportation, and materials moving occupations while they showed a greater presence in management, professional, and related occupations as well as service occupations. Like the U.S. population as a whole, a very small proportion of the Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese labor force worked in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.

Examining industrial distribution figures (Table 25), replicating the occupational distribution figures, Cambodians, Hmong and Lao were strongly concentrated in manufacturing jobs.

Table 25

Percentage of Industrial Distribution Civilian Population 16 Years and Over

	Cambodian	Hmong	Lao	Vietnamese	U.S.
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting and Mining	1.0	1.5	1.4	0.5	1.7
Construction	1.6	1.3	2.1	2.6	7.7
Manufacturing	33.5	32.7	39.6	22.9	11.9
Wholesale Trade	3.8	1.9	2.8	2.2	3.5
Retail Trade	13.1	11.5	11.6	10.2	11.6
Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities	2.3	1.3	2.5	3.4	5.0
Information	2.1	3.2	1.9	2.6	2.5
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Rental Leasing	3.8	6.7	5.1	5.6	7.3
Professional, Scientific, and Management and Administrative and Waste Management Services	6.2	6.7	4.7	7.9	9.9
Educational Services and Health Care and Social Assistance	9.8	17.8	9.3	12.5	20.7
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation and Accommodation and Food Services	14.8	11.0	11.5	9.3	8.5
Other Services	4.1	4.3	5.0	17.4	4.8
Public Administration	3.8	2.0	2.3	2.8	4.8

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

According to the 2005 ACS estimates, more than one-third of the labor force of each of these groups worked in such jobs. Cambodians were overrepresented in retail trade, transportation, warehousing and the broad category of utilities and arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services. Hmong and Lao were also overrepresented in the category of arts; entertainment and recreation; and accommodation and food services, while Hmong and Lao also showed distributions close to the U.S. average in retail trade. Unlike Cambodians and Lao who were underrepresented, Hmong displayed labor force proportions not far off the U.S. norm in the categories of educational services, and health care and social

assistance. Among the other various categories, Cambodians, Hmong and Lao were underrepresented in construction; transportation, warehousing and utilities; professional, scientific, and management and administrative and waste management services as well as public administration. Again, the Vietnamese industrial distribution figures differed significantly from the other three Southeast Asian ethnic groups. Vietnamese showed a lesser concentration in manufacturing and figures fairly closely approximating the U.S. labor force as a whole in the categories of retail trade; information; arts, entertainment, and recreation; and accommodation and food services. Particularly noteworthy was the Vietnamese concentration in the other services category. This category includes a variety of technical service jobs including those associated with the engineering and computing professions.

The 2005 ACS also provides occupational distribution breakdowns by gender (Table 26 and 27). Not unexpectedly, the main gender differences in job distribution among the Southeast Asian ethnic groups were the greater concentrations of men in production, transportation, and materials moving occupations (primarily manufacturing jobs) and the more substantial female concentrations in service and sales and office occupations.

Table 26

Percentage of Civilian Male Population in Occupational Distribution; 16 Years and Over

	Cambodian	Hmong	Lao	Vietnamese	U.S.
Management, Professional and Related Occupations	19.3	19.4	16.1	31.0	31.3
Service Occupations	16.2	17.7	12.6	17.4	13.2
Sales and Office Occupations	18.4	17.7	15.5	16.3	17.9
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.5	1.2	1.1	0.4	1.0
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	8.2	6.4	8.9	10.6	17.9
Production, Transportation, and Materials Moving Occupations	37.3	37.6	45.7	24.3	18.7

(Figures for U.S. population in parentheses)

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

Conclusion

The 2005 American Community Survey shows the continued growth in the Southeast Asian American population. Other notable trends are continued substantial demographic differences (Age Structure and Household Size) between Hmong and the other Southeast Asian American groups. Compared to 1990 and 2000 census data, the 2005 ACS makes it clear that members of the four Southeast Asian American groups are making substantial socioeconomic and educational progress with time in the United States though each group has come to the United States from very different circumstances and past experiences in Southeast Asia and is advancing at a different trajectory.

There is also considerable internal diversity *within* Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese communities in the United States. For example Hmong in the Central Valley of California live very different lives in many ways compared to Hmong in Georgia. National level survey data such as that found in the 2005 ACS do not bring out this diversity. To provide a

fuller picture of contemporary Cambodian, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese lives in the United States, case studies are needed (utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data) of the socioeconomic experiences and continued social adaptation of these four groups at the local level in both urban and rural settings in the different regions of the United States.

Table 27

Percentage of Civilian Female Population in Occupational Distribution; 16 Years and Over

	Cambodian	Hmong	Lao	Vietnamese	U.S.
Management, Professional and Related Occupations	22.4	19.9	16.6	28.6	37.3
Service Occupations	17.4	20.8	19.2	32.8	19.9
Sales and Office Occupations	33.6	33.1	29.6	21.4	35.2
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3
Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	0.3	0.7	1.2	0.6	0.8
Production, Transportation, and Materials Moving Occupations	26.1	25.1	33.1	16.4	6.5

Sources: S0201. Selected Population Profile in the United States

References

- Lee, P. (1999). *Language maintenance and language shift among second-generation Hmong teenagers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco.
- Pfeifer, M. (2003). The Hmong in America. In E. Lai & D. Arguellas (Eds.), *The new face of Asian Pacific America: Numbers, diversity and change in the 21st Century* (pp. 96-98). San Francisco and Los Angeles: Asian Week and UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press.
- Pfeifer, M., & Lee, S. (2004). Hmong population, demographic, socioeconomic and educational trends in the 2000 Census. In *Hmong census publication: Data and analysis* (pp. 3-11). Saint Paul and Washington DC: Hmong Cultural and Resource Center and Hmong National Development.
- Seying, K. (2004). What you cannot see in the U.S. 2000 Census. In *Hmong census publication: Data and analysis* (pp. 26-28). Saint Paul and Washington DC: Hmong Cultural and Resource Center and Hmong National Development.
- Um, K. (2003). *A dream denied: Educational experiences of Southeast Asian American youth, issues, and recommendations*. Washington, DC: Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2000). 2000 US Census, Summary File 1 (SF1). QT-P7. Race alone or in combination for American Indian, Alaska Native, and for selected categories of Asian and of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander: 2000. Retrieved June 13, 2007 from <http://factfinder.census.gov>

- U.S. Census Bureau (2000). 2000 US Census, Summary File 4 (SF4). DP-2. Profile of selected social characteristics: 2000; Categories of Cambodian Alone or in any Combination, Hmong Alone or in any Combination, Lao Alone or in any Combination, Vietnamese Alone or in any Combination. Retrieved June 13, 2007 from <http://factfinder.census.gov>.
- Vang, H. (2004). Hmong American women's educational attainment: Implications for Hmong American women and men. In *Hmong census publication: Data and analysis* (pp. 23-25). Saint Paul and Washington DC: Hmong Cultural and Resource Center and Hmong National Development.
- Withers, A. (2004). Hmong language and cultural maintenance in Merced, California. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 28(3), 425-462.

About the Author



Mark E. Pfeifer, PhD, Session Coordinator. Dr. Pfeifer is an Academic Librarian at Texas A & M University in Corpus Christi. He is also editor of the Hmong Studies Journal and the Hmong Studies Internet Resource Center (www.hmongstudies.org). From 2000 to 2007, he ran the Hmong Resource Center library at the Hmong Cultural Center in Saint Paul.



Volume 3

Journal of Southeast Asian American Education & Advancement

www.JSAAEA.org

A peer-reviewed
scholarly journal
published by the
National Association
for the Education &
Advancement of
Cambodian, Laotian,
and Vietnamese
Americans (NAFEA)

Editor

Dr. Wayne E. Wright
University of Texas, San Antonio

Associate Editors

Dr. Chhany Sak-Humphry
University of Hawaii

Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam
California State University, Long Beach

Book Review Editor

Dr. Leslie Turpin
School for International Training

Creative Works Editor

Phouang Hamilton
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Special Advisor

Anne Frank
University of California, Irvine, Southeast Asian Archives

Editorial Assistant

Mariana Kuhl
University of Texas, San Antonio

Comments and questions for the editorial staff may be directed to jsaaea@lists.sis.utsa.edu

Editorial Review Board

Dr. Carl L. Bankston III
Tulane University

Dr. Phala Chea
Lowell Public Schools

Dr. Changming Duan
University of Missouri, Kansas City

Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger
University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Peter Nien-Chu Kiang
University of Massachusetts, Boston

Dr. Stacey Lee
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Dr. Pollie Bith-Melander
Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center

Dr. George Chigas
University of Massachusetts, Lowell

Dr. Sophal Ear
U.S. Naval Postgraduate School

Dr. Samlong Inthaly
Minneapolis Public Schools

Dr. Kevin K. Kumashiro
University of Illinois, Chicago

Dr. David Chanpannha Ley
Montgomery County Public Schools

Dr. Sue Needham

California State University, Dominguez Hills

Dr. Max Niedzwiecki

Rights Working Group

Dr. Clara Park

California State University, Northridge

Dr. Loan T. Phan

University of New Hampshire

Dr. Karen Quintiliani

California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Fay Shin

California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Yer J. Thao

Portland State University

Dr. Khatharya Um

University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Terrence G. Wiley

Arizona State University

Dr. Bic Ngo

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dr. Leakhena Nou

California State University, Long Beach

Dr. Mark Pfeifer

Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

Dr. Bounlieng Phommasouvanh

Minnesota Department of Education

Dr. Kalyani Rai

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Dr. Nancy J. Smith-Hefner

Boston University

Dr. Myluong Tran

San Diego State University

Dr. Linda Trinh Vo

University of California, Irvine

Dr. Zha Blong Xiong

University of Minnesota

Dr. Kou Yang

California State University, Stanislaus

Doctoral Student Editorial Review Board

Keo Chea

University of Pennsylvania

Loan Dao

University of California, Berkeley

Ha Lam

Arizona State University

Vanna Som

Harvard University

Giang Pham

University of Minnesota

Tinou Tran

University of Houston, Texas

Phitsamay Sychitkokhong Uy

Harvard University

Vichet Chhuon

University of California, Santa Barbara

Annie BichLoan Duong

San Joaquin County Office of Education

Ravy Lao

University of California, Santa Barbara

Rassamichanh Souryasack

University of California, Santa Barbara

Layheng Ting

State University of New York, Albany

Loan Tran

University of California, Santa Barbara

Yang Sao Xiong

University of California, Los Angeles