

WEDDING RITUALS OF THE WHITE HMONG IN DONG VAN DISTRICT, HA GIANG PROVINCE ^(*)

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According to the 1999 general population census in Vietnam, the Hmong ethnic minority group in Vietnam has a population of 787,604, accounting for one percent of the country's entire population. The Hmong has several groups such as the White Hmong, Black Hmong, Red Hmong, Hybrid Hmong and Water Cat (Khong Dien, 1995, p. 123). Although some monographs on the Hmong have been published (Cu Hoa Van, Hoang Nam, 1994; Tran Huu Son, 1996; Diep Dinh Hoa, 1998), much still remains unknown about this ethnic group. In particular, there are very few extensive research studies conducted on different Hmong groups. In this paper, we attempt to clarify some characteristics of the wedding rituals of the White Hmong in Ho Quan Phin village, Ta Phin commune, Dong Van district, Ha Giang province. The wedding ritual of the White Hmong in Dong Van district includes the following steps:

1. Ceremony of Marriage Proposal (*mu dua po nia*)

The prospective groom's family asks a paternal uncle (*chi ro*) or an uncle (*chi cho*) and a match-maker (*lu me cong*) who comes from other family line in the village to pay a visit to the prospective bride's family to make the marriage proposal. The delegation often leaves home early in the morning. Before leaving, the family kills chicken for

the paternal uncle to conduct a ceremony to examine the chicken's feet (*sua sa cay*). In the Hmong's belief, if the chicken's feet curl, this is a positive sign and the marriage proposal ceremony will be successful. If the chicken's three toes curl and the fourth digit is extended, the ceremony is not advised to proceed because the delegation may not be welcome by the prospective bride's family. In the case of "bad luck" shown by the chicken's feet, two or three days later, the family kills another chicken to examine its feet for a second time. The chicken-foot ceremony is conducted in the same manner as the first.

On the day when the prospective groom's family leaves to visit the prospective bride's family, the paternal uncle leads the delegation, followed by the match-maker. On the way, it is imperative for the delegation to stop half way, which is identified as a break for lunch (*so no su*). The paternal uncle and the match-maker eat the cooked chicken (used in the chicken-foot ceremony) with rice. Then have a look again at the chicken's feet to predict how the conversation with the prospective bride's family will turn out. The Hmong think that if both feet of the chicken curl, the talk with the prospective bride's family will be easy. If three toes of a foot curl and one is extended, that is an indication that there may

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be some challenges. However, in reality, if the delegation so chooses, the paternal uncle and the match-maker will continue their journey on the same day. Upon arrival, the delegation is not allowed to enter the house right away, but must wait lined up in a horizontal row outside the main door (*xia menh*) (the paternal uncle stands on the left side and the match-maker on the right side) looking into the house where the altar dedicated to the House Spirit (*xu ca*) is placed. At this time, either the uncle of the match-maker, normally the paternal uncle is required to sing a song asking to have the door opened for their entry (*hai gia song*). When both have entered the house and stand in the living room in front of the House Spirit Altar while the paternal uncle sings a song about placing the umbrella (*tro cau*). While singing, the paternal uncle clamps his umbrella under his right arm. After singing, the paternal uncle and the match-maker sit down in the living room, next to the fireplace room (*sa kho tru*). After being offered cigarettes by the prospective bride's, they enter the fireplace room and return offering cigarettes to the prospective bride's father. Then the paternal uncle says to the prospective bride's father: "Please give us a torch to light the road" (*pu to y te chau to u po ke*). The father replies: "What family do two of you come from?" (*Ne o tu tu che tua?*). The paternal uncle and the match-maker reply: "We come from the family of Mr. A" (*Co ti lau a chay tua*). They then invite the prospective bride's father to smoke for the second time. After that, they return to the living room from the fireplace

room, stand in front of the House Spirit's Altar and sing a song urging the prospective bride's father to show them the way leading to their talks (*hai gia si song*). After singing the song, the paternal uncle and the match-maker return to the fireplace room and invite the prospective bride's father to smoke for the third time and say to him: "Please give us a torch to light the road". The father replies: "I only know to give birth to my daughter and raise her; I don't know who to marry her to now". For this reason, representatives from the prospective groom's family have to sing many songs, many times to get the father's approval to give them the torch "to show them the way", meaning agreement to marry his daughter off.

The process does not end with this ritual. The prospective bride's father asks the guests to then invite the prospective bride's paternal elder uncle (or younger uncle) to come over to discuss her marriage. Upon arrival, the prospective groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker invite the prospective bride's paternal elder uncle (or younger uncle) to smoke and say: "Please come with us to your niece's house to discuss her marriage". In the event his house is nearby, the prospective bride's paternal uncle asks the guests to sit down to wait for him while he goes to see the prospective bride's maternal uncle to discuss the issue. He then invites the guests to the prospective bride's maternal uncle's home to continue the discussion. After reaching an agreement, the prospective groom's paternal uncle, the match-maker, and the prospective bride's maternal uncle and paternal uncle

together go to see the prospective bride's parents for talks. The Hmong think that once the prospective bride's family allows the prospective groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker to invite the prospective bride's maternal uncle and uncle it means they accept the marriage proposal. If they do not agree, they will not ask them to go to invite the prospective bride's maternal uncle and uncle to come for discussion.

At the prospective bride's house, after inviting her paternal uncle and maternal uncle to smoke, the prospective groom's paternal uncle or the match-maker sings the song *seng song* urging them to "intervene" in the proposal to marry off their niece. While the prospective groom's paternal uncle or the match-maker are inviting the prospective bride's maternal uncle and uncle to smoke, the prospective bride's parents sit waiting for them in the fireplace room or are temporarily banished to a near-by relative's house. During this meeting, the prospective groom's paternal uncle says to the prospective bride's maternal uncle and uncle: "We ask two of you to ask your niece's parents what wedding presents they expect?" (*Chi lo thia ta lau ne pa chu se nia chi no ho tau*). After exchanging opinions with the prospective bride's parents, her maternal uncle and uncle return to inform the prospective groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker of the amount of meat and wine the family requested. The discussion about the wedding present requests (*to san sai*) between representatives of the two families often lasts several hours before reaching a final agreement. Afterward, the prospective groom's paternal uncle and the

match-maker stand in the living room, in front of the altar singing a song announcing the agreement on the amount of meat and wine. After singing, they kowtow, praying to the House Spirit once and then proceed to the fireplace room to offer cigarettes to the prospective bride's maternal uncle and uncle. When in the fireplace room, a date is scheduled to bring meat and wine as wedding presents to her family. After this ceremony, they leave for home, without making a stop for lunch and without the umbrella (in the event the prospective bride's family does not agree to the proposal, the delegation will take the umbrella home).

2. Ceremony to hand over meat and wine for the first time (*cho cay cho*)

Back home, they inform the groom's parents and relatives about the amount of meat and wine asked for by the bride's family as well as the date scheduled to present the wedding presents to her family. After discussing and reaching an agreement, the family prepares the proposed amount of meat and wine and asks youngsters in the family clan or those in the village (who do not belong to the bride's family) to carry them to the bride's home. The ceremony that is held to hand over the meat and wine often occurs one or two days after the marriage proposal ceremony.

A 6-member delegation is led by the groom's paternal uncle and followed by the match-maker and four young men. Two carrying wine and the two carrying meat will be the last in the procession. The Hmong think the delegation must have an even

number of members and whether the wedding presents are more or less, the number of papooses containing them must be even. If they do not follow this custom, they believe the young couple, after marrying, will quarrel and lead an unhappy married life.

When the delegation nears at the bride's house, it is absolutely necessary to stop for lunch (*so no su*) and hold a ceremony to pray the Stone Spirit (*lay da*). The offerings include a rice ball, some meat, and a cup of wine, all of which are placed near the location where they stop for lunch. Normally, the groom's paternal uncle is the master of this ceremony. If he cannot manage it, the match-maker will take over the responsibility. After lunch and the ceremonial offering to the Stone Spirit, before resuming the journey, the paternal uncle and the match-maker check the four papooses containing the wedding presents (two containing wine and two containing meat) again, then arrange themselves as they were before, with the two men carrying wine in the front and two men carrying meat at the back.

Upon arrival, the delegation must enter through main door in the following order: the paternal uncle enters the house first, followed by the match-maker and the four men carrying wine and meat. Representatives of the bride's family, commonly her maternal uncle (*chi ro*) or her uncle (*trong trai nenh*), receive the wedding presents and put them in the living room in front of the altar dedicated to the House Spirit. The groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker take the initiative to try lifting

the papooses containing the wedding presents one after another with an intention to inform the family that everything they asked for is there. Then the bride's maternal uncle and uncle "re-examine" each papoose and list the contents to her parents and relatives. The wedding presents are then placed close to the fireplace room. On that day, whatever the number of guests is, the family only arranges three tables in the living room, two in front of the House Spirit Altar and one close to the fireplace room.

On the day the groom's family comes to bring the bride home, depending on the number of guests, her family may arrange five to seven tables, or more, but the number of dishes on each table must be odd, i.e. 3, 5, 7, 9... It is also noted that the number of cups of wine each guest have must also be odd, i.e. 1, 3, 5, 7... The use of odd numbers is explained by the Hmong as representing the time when the young couple are not yet husband and wife are not living together as a family. This notion is completely different to the Hmong belief of using odd numbers in the ceremonial offerings to the Cow Spirit (*nhu da*) and Bedroom Spirit (*da trong*) (Pham Quang Hoan, 1994).

According to common practice, eight people are seated at each table. The first table is reserved for the two men who carried wine and the bride's paternal uncles and younger uncles. The second table, and most important, called *trong menh cong* and is reserved for the groom's paternal uncle the groom's match-maker and the bride's maternal uncle and uncle and other representatives including the master of

ceremonies (*tu chu tri*), of the chief (*su ca*), and two relatives from the same generation as the bride's maternal uncle. Sitting at the third table are the two men who carried the meat and those of the same generation as the bride's family.

After drinking and eating, three empty tables are left in the living room. The master of ceremonies brings out four papooses containing wine and meat from the fireplace room to the living room and put them in the same place where the groom's delegation placed them earlier. Then he gets four cups of wine to place on the second table and offers wine to the bride's maternal uncle and uncle individually, and informs them that all preparations have been completed. Afterward, the bride's maternal uncle, uncle and the master of ceremonies, and the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker sit at the *trong menh cong* table.

The master of ceremonies pours four cups of wine and offers them individually to the bride's maternal uncle, uncle and match-maker. Then he invites them to "check" the wedding presents brought by the groom's family. After finishing the inspection of four papooses containing wine and meat, the master of ceremonies goes to the fireplace room while the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker and the bride's maternal uncle and uncle return to the *trong menh cong* table. The bride's uncle pours four cups of wine and offers them one by one to the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker and the bride's maternal uncle. All four of them toast to say farewell (*hau cho phai che*). He then pours another four cups of

wine to offer the groom's paternal uncle and uncle giving them two cups each.

After the farewell drink, those who sit at the *trong menh cong* table hold a ceremony called changing places (*long tro*). The groom's paternal uncle stands in the match-maker's place, the match-maker stands where the bride's maternal uncle was, who in turn replaces the bride's paternal uncle; her paternal uncle then replaces the groom's paternal uncle. After this action, the bride's uncle pours another four cups of wine and hands over to the groom's paternal uncle to offer them to the four men who carried the papooses of wedding presents. After drinking wine, the four men carry the empty papooses and walk through the main door straight back to the groom's house. The bride's uncle pours another four cups of wine to offer to the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker; two cups for each of them. This action is called returning the umbrella drink (*tro cau*). The bride's paternal uncle then takes the umbrella from under the House Spirit Altar and hands it over to the groom's paternal uncle. Finally, the delegation leaves the house through the main door and returns to the groom's house.

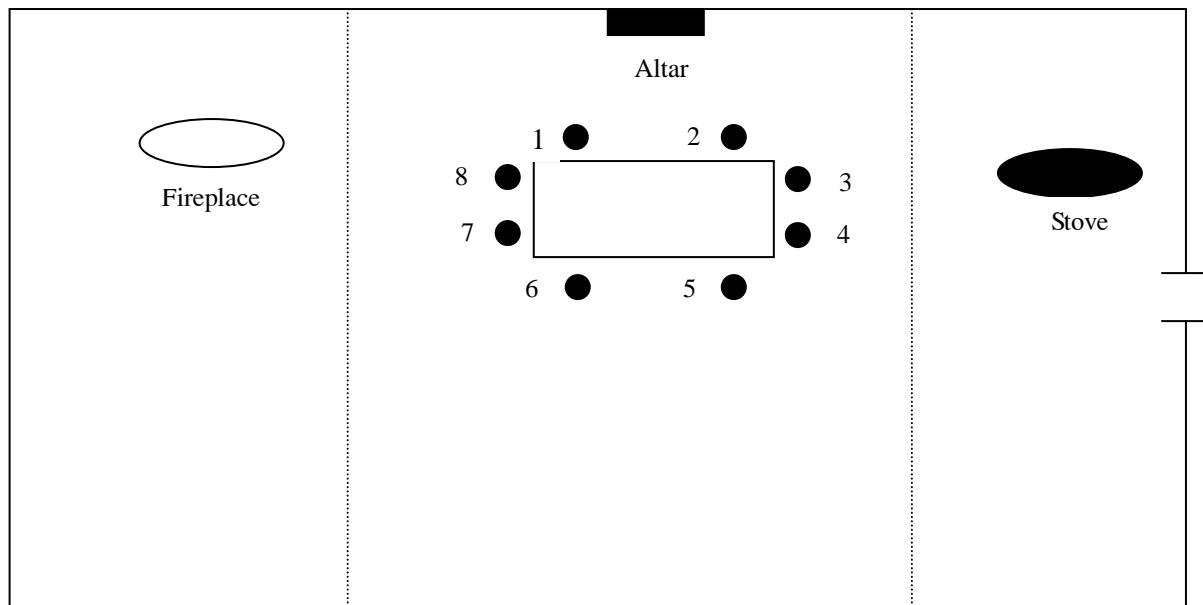
Upon their return, the groom's family throws a quaint party for all those who took part in the handing over wine and meat ceremony. Different to the bride's family, the number of trays (tables) at the groom's family is always even: 2, 4, 6... At the party, the match-maker informs the family the date fixed for the wedding and the wedding presents (wine, meat, cash, clothing) requested by the bride's family.

3. Ceremony for re-agreement of wine and meat

About a month after the marriage proposal ceremony, the groom’s family prepares a jar of wine and two live chickens (a rooster and a hen weighing about 0.8 - 1 kg each) kept in a bamboo cage to be taken to the bride’s house (normally a person is sent to the bride’s family to inform of the date and time of arrival of the groom’s delegation). On a pre-arranged day, the groom’s father together with a helper called *mu seo song* leave for the bride’s family. The father goes first and is followed by *mu seo song* who carries on his shoulder a chicken cage and a wine canteen tied to a bamboo pole stretching about 1.5 meters long.

Upon arrival, the father and *mu seo song* enter the house through the main door, and leave the chicken cage and wine canteen in a corner of the living room next to the fireplace room. They then proceed to the fireplace room, here, they are offered cigarettes by the girl’s father. While the boy’s father is sitting in the fireplace room, *mu seo song* asks the girl’s father to go to the living room to hand over to him the two chickens and a canteen of wine. They then both return the fireplace room to smoke. The girl’s father asks relatives to kill 3 chickens, including the two chickens brought by the boy’s father. After cooking them, they chop the chicken into pieces, arrange the pieces on plates (the number of plates must be odd) and put the plates on the tables in the living room. Then guests and hosts sit at the tables in the following order (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



- Note:**
- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Groom’s father | 5. Bride’s uncle |
| 2. Bride’s father | 6. <i>Mu seo song</i> |
| 3. Bride’s paternal uncle | 7. Bride’s paternal uncle’s son |
| 4. Bride’s maternal uncle | 8. Bride’s uncle’s son |

According to customs, the father of the future groom and *mu seo song* are required to stand and offer cigarettes to all members of the bride's family present at the ceremony, such as her father, her maternal uncle, her uncle and her maternal uncle's son. *Mu seo song*, on behalf of the groom's family says to the bride's father and her relatives: "Under the family's arrangements, we are here today to claim the union of our families through marriage and re-discuss the amount of wine and meat, although an agreement has already been reached by both sides" (*Tau nhìn cho si chinh, nong ne u tua dau ty y chia denh cu chua thia trua lu cau cho to tau cho chan o to tu tau pa*). The groom's father adds: "Today the two families being joined together in marriage meet to re-discuss the agreement on the amount of wine and meat already agreed upon" (*Nong ne u o tu cu chua si chi chia tho pa, lu trua cay cho tu to o to thong di*). The bride's father replies: "The two sides have already reached an agreement, so there is no change" (*Tu tau o to tha p, chi mua da chi long sia*). The groom's father continues: "Although the agreement has been reached, today as the two families meet, can I propose a reduction of some wedding presents?" (*Tu tau o to tha pa do nho ly u o to cu chua chi pu to ne sat ho tro y chi tau chi tau?*). The bride's father replies: "How much do you think is reasonable to reduce, please tell me?" (*Nho ly di chinh chua ho tau thia phu sia, pu chay chia tha do?*). Then, the groom's father says immediately: "Although the two sides have reached an agreement, the final decision is made today as we meet again. In the

opinion of the groom's family, may we propose 30 kg of meat, 30 liters of wine and 30,000 VND? With regard to the procedure of handing over the wedding presents, we must to follow the traditional customs" (*Cho chau o to tu tha pa tau chi chua u o to cu chua si chi thia chinh ta, cho chau di chinh u pe chau chia cay, sua phung su to ly do khua chi cho tau u dua ua co chau*). The bride's father agrees to the proposal of the groom's family.

4. Ceremony to inform of bringing the bride home

A month prior to the wedding, someone from another family line so-called *mud dau si* is asked to accompany the groom's father go to the bride's family to set a date and time to bring the bride home. The offerings brought and the sequence of trip is similar to the ceremony of re-agreement on wine and meat. Upon arrival, *mud au si* says: "Today we come here to reach an agreement that 30 days from now we'll bring the bride home" (*Nong ne u tua qui teng si chinh chia de cho tu xi chua y ly ti nong ne*). The groom's father adds: "According to customs, we have the day, month and hour selected and the only day - the 30th day of next month is the best day to bring the bride home" (*Tro phong so tay so tu nhìn cho nong ly lu song do ly y ly ty nong ne chain ha thia sinh phu*). The bride's father replies: "I fully agree. I never select a date to marry off my daughter" (*lu ne u thong di ta huh u. U chi thau tu ky tang nong sa sai*). Then a cordial farewell meal is served to representatives of the two families.

5. Ceremony to bring the bride home (wedding)

On a fixed day, a delegation from the groom's family goes to the bride's family to bring the bride home. The delegation is normally comprised of 11 members. They bring along wedding presents including 30 kg of pork, 30 liters of wine, 30,000 VND, a pair of live chickens (a hen and a rooster) in a cage, and a sickle. The groom carries on his shoulder the chicken cage and a sickle tied to a bamboo pole. The pork and wine are kept in papooses and carried by the two cooks (*su ca*) and the 30,000 VND is kept by the master of wedding ceremonies (*dua li*). In addition to those wedding presents, the delegation also brings along 7 bottles of wine, 5 boiled chickens, 2-3 pieces of pork or beef, a linen bag containing cooked rice to be eaten along the way, a bundle of incense and a farmer's pipe. The paternal uncle leads the delegation, carrying in his hand an umbrella made of colored paper with a scarf tied to its handle. At present, each family line has 1-2 paper umbrellas called *lu cau* to be used in the ceremonies of marriage proposal and wedding by its participants. Under the Hmong customs, if the groom's family delegation brings a black umbrella to the bride's family during the marriage proposal ceremony, they will be fined by being forced to drink wine until they are inebriated.

Like the day the ceremony of marriage proposal was held, when the delegation bringing the bride home has

nearly arrived at the bride's house, they stop for lunch and pray to the Stone Spirit. The food for lunch includes two cooked chickens, two pieces of pork or beef, rice and two bottles of wine. After lunch, the master of ceremonies puts some rice and slices of pork in a wooden spoon and pours wine into a cup then places the offerings by the side of the "sacred" stone and prays. The master of ceremonies stands in front of the stone, holding the spoon containing slices of pork on his right hand and a cup of wine on his left hand says prayers for the dead of the previous three generations (grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents) of Hmong family lines, asking them to ensure the safe and sound journey to the bride's house and back home. After praying to the Stone Spirit, the delegation continues the journey to the bride's house.

Upon arrival at the bride's house, the groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker invites the bride's maternal uncle and uncle to smoke and asks for the identification of the master of ceremonies for the bride's side (also called *dua li*), in order to meet with him. Then the bride's maternal uncle and uncle offer cigarettes to the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker and introduces the master of ceremonies to the groom's delegation. Afterward, the groom's paternal uncle, the match-maker and the master of ceremonies take turns offering drinks and cigarettes to the bride's maternal uncle, uncle and master of ceremonies

representing the bride's family. The bride's maternal uncle and uncle say to the groom's delegation: "You come from faraway, please have lunch and after that we'll discuss procedures". A representative of the groom's delegation replies: "We've just had lunch, so allow us to sit and wait here".

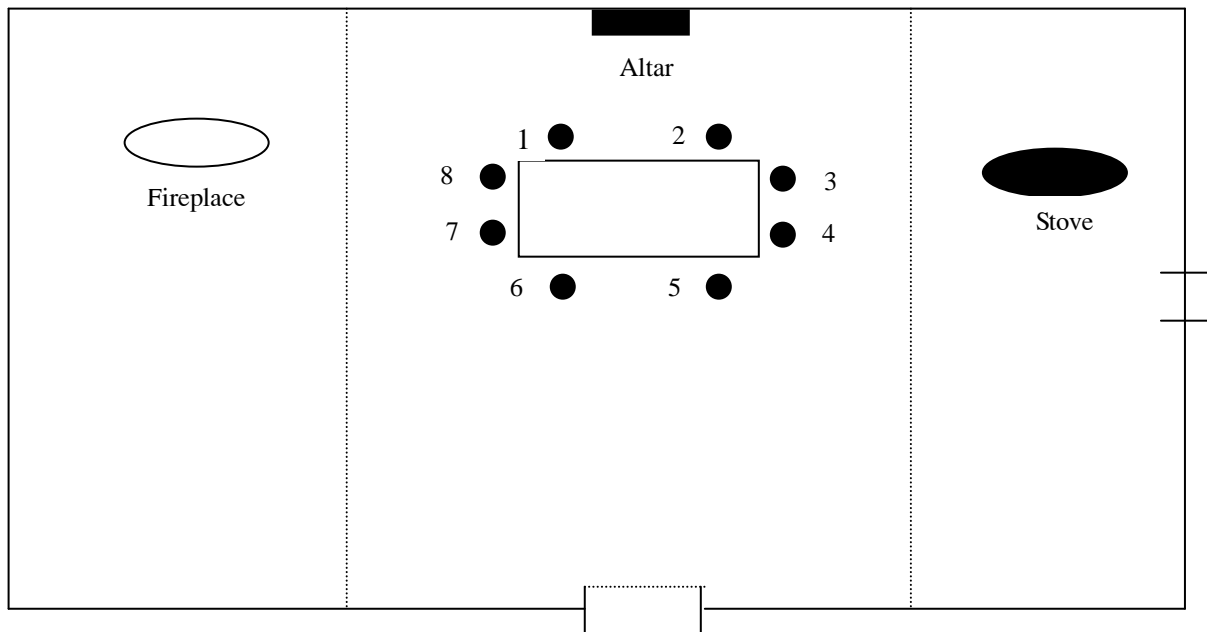
After lunch, the master of ceremonies of the bride's family puts four cups and two bowls of soybean curd (each containing four small pieces) on the *trong menh cong* table and asks the bride's paternal uncle and the match-maker to sit at this table. He pours wine into the four cups and offers the bride's maternal uncle and uncle and the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker, each a cup. The bride's uncle then pours wine into the four cups and gives two cups to the master of ceremonies of the groom's family and two cups to the master of ceremonies of the bride's family, at the same time he assigns tasks to them. In turn, the master of ceremonies of the groom's family pours wine into the four cups to offer to the bride's maternal uncle and uncle and the groom's paternal uncle and match-maker, each one cup. After that he takes out a bottle of wine and a cooked chicken from a papoose to place on the *trong menh cong* table, and then puts a cage containing two live chickens, a bottle of wine and 30,000 VND on the same table. He invites the master of ceremonies of the bride's

families to check the wedding presents brought by the groom's family to see whether they are in accordance to the agreement. Then he returns to his seat at the *trong menh cong* table to inform the bride's maternal uncle and uncle about the wedding presents. Representatives from both families enter the area where the four paposes containing wedding presents are put to have a taste of wine to see whether it is good and try weighing the paposes. The group then returns to their seats at the *trong menh cong* table. The bride's maternal uncle and uncle hands all wedding presents to the chief (*trong ca*) to prepare the meal.

After cooking, they place the food on three tables in the living rooms; and other tables in the yard or in the kitchen. What is noteworthy is that each table has eight people and whether the tables are placed in the living room, in the kitchen or in the yard, each person is only allowed to drink 1, 3, 5, 7... cups of wine.

Sitting at the first table are the paternal uncle, the match-maker and the master of ceremonies of the groom's family and the maternal uncle, uncle, master of ceremonies, the one who is in charge of logistics and the chief of the bride's family. The Hmong call this table the main table (*trong menh cong*) and those who sit at this table play a decisive role in the wedding ceremony (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



- Note:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Groom’s paternal uncle | 5. Bride’s uncle |
| 2. Bride’s maternal uncle | 6. The match-maker of the groom’s family |
| 3. The one in charge of logistics | 7. The master of ceremonies of the groom’s family |
| 4. The chief | 8. The master of ceremonies of the bride’s family |

Sitting at the second table are the bride’s uncle (on the paternal side) and uncle (on the maternal side), two best men, the groom, the bride’s brother (elder or younger), the person who helps the bride’s uncle on the maternal side, called *chay chua su*, and the person in charge of food, called *su ca*.

Sitting at the third table are the wives of the bride’s paternal uncle and maternal uncle, the wives of the bride’s younger uncle (on the paternal side) and her elder (or younger) brother, called *tu ua lua*, the daughter of the bride’s paternal uncle, the wife of the bride’s uncle (on the maternal side) and the woman in charge of food preparations, called *nia pha tra*.

After eating, the one in charge of logistics asks the cooks to clear everything from the *trong menh cong* table, then puts on this table two bowls and four cups (each bowl containing two or four pieces of soybean curd). He hands over the table to the master of ceremonies of the bride’s family to make preparations for procedures to bid farewell the bride to go to the groom’s family. The master of ceremonies asks the one in charge of logistics to bring 5 bottles of wine offered by the groom’s family to be put on the *trong menh cong* table and the four papooses containing the wedding presents to place in the living room for the bride’s family to “re-check” yet another time. They request he remind family members and relatives to present wedding

gifts to the bride if they want. At this moment, the bride's brothers and sisters ask him to take the farewell money to the bride to hand it over to the groom's parents. The bride's younger brother and nephew carry a trunk (*ky tru*) containing the dowry out to the living room for the master of ceremonies of the bride's family to hand over to two young men (*phi la*) from the groom family's delegation to "carry" it home.

After handing over the trunk containing the dowry to the two young men, the master of ceremonies of the bride family says to the one in charge of logistics: "Open the door to release the cow" (*khi trong cua tro nhu lo*). The one in charge of logistics replies: "After plowing the upland fields, we'll release the cow" (*lay te ta u thia tro nhu*). Then he and the master of ceremonies from the groom's side ask the groom and the two best men to stand in front of the main door (the groom stands in the middle between the two best men), looking toward the House Spirit Altar and making 30 – 40 kowtows to the ancestors (*pe chu trong*) of the bride's family. Then the master of ceremonies of the bride's family, standing by the side of the *trong menh cong* table, calls the names of the living relatives of the bride's family by order from oldest to youngest, when a name is read, the groom and the two best men have to kowtow to that person two times. Then the groom and the two best men have to kowtow to the House Spirit and the Door Spirit two times.

After the conclusion of these two ceremonies, the groom, the two best men and the bride's uncle (on the maternal side)

take the four paposes of wedding presents and the trunk containing the dowry placing it in the front yard. Meanwhile, the wife of the bride's uncle (on the maternal side) and a young woman who has been recruited to help welcome the bride (*tu na lau*) stand outside near the main door waiting for the bride to come out from her room. At this moment, the bride's younger brother and her nephew take the bride's hands and "pull" her (each takes one of her hands) out from her bedroom to the living room through the main door to the gate and to the cross-road. Then the bride is released. The custom of taking the bride's hands to "pull" her is called *tua te*. When being pulled, the bride covers her face with a handkerchief and cries. She is followed by the wife of her uncle (on her maternal side) and young woman chosen to help welcome the bride. At the cross road close to her house, the groom and the best men have to kowtow to her younger brother and nephew, each two times. When the two young men release her hands, the wife of her uncle takes her right hand and pulls her lightly and whispers: "Please come with us" (*lo pe mu*), then she goes first, followed by the bride with the young woman chosen to help welcome the bride following in last. The groom and the two best men can either walk ahead of or after them.

While the bride is being pulled out of her house, the paternal uncle, the match-maker and the master of ceremonies of the groom's family remain seated at the *trong menh cong* table, drinking wine to bid farewell the bride's maternal uncle and

uncle and continue the ritual. At this time, the master of ceremonies of the bride's family no longer sits by the *trong menh cong* table, but retreats to the fireplace room or the kitchen, finishing his assigned task. At the *trong menh cong* table, the bride's maternal uncle pours four cups of wine to offer the groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker two cups each, then they change trade places, called *ti trong* (or turning the table). The bride's maternal uncle then pours another four cups of wine to offer the groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker, each, another two cups, in the ritual called drinking to return the umbrella (*hau cho cho cau*). If the groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker cannot drink the wine, they have to sing the song "welcoming umbrella" to ask the bride's uncle to help drink them. In case they do not know how to sing the song, they must each drink two cups of wine. If they refuse to drink, the bride's maternal uncle will not return the umbrella to the groom's delegation. While the groom's paternal uncle and the match-maker are undertaking the procedure to "get back the umbrella", the groom's delegation leaves the house very slowly, waiting for both of them.

On the way back home from the bride's house to the place of the "sacred stone" where the delegation stops for lunch, the delegation does not have a fixed line up. However, after lunch, the delegation has to follow the order: the groom's paternal uncle, followed by the match-maker, the master of ceremonies, the bride, young woman chosen

to help welcome the bride followed by the remainder of the delegation.

Upon their return to the groom's house, the paternal uncle, the match-maker, and the master of ceremonies enter the house first, while the wife of the bride's uncle, the bride and the young woman chosen to help welcome the bride stand in a row waiting outside the main door: the wife of the bride's uncle stands first, the bride in the middle and young woman chosen to help welcome the bride stands last. Meanwhile, the groom, the best men and the two young men who "carried" the trunk containing the dowry of the bride stand waiting in the front yard.

Then the family gets a rooster for the head of the family clan (*lau nenh xenh*) to hold the *lu cay* ceremony. In this ceremony, the head of the family clan takes the rooster's legs and moves them over the bride's head three times in a counter-clockwise direction and three times in a clockwise direction and then releases the rooster in the yard. While the head of the family clan is holding this ceremony, the wife of the bride's maternal uncle holds an umbrella in hand, opens it and turns it to the direction of the house. Young woman chosen to help welcome the bride holds another umbrella in hand, opens it and turns it to the direction of the yard. The Hmong explain that the *lu cay* ceremony is held out in order to drive away evil spirits from the bride and to receive her as a member of the groom's family. The wife of the bride's maternal uncle and the young woman chosen to help welcome the bride escort the bride to her new happy room. Here the bride takes a

short rest, changes from her wedding gown, folds it carefully and put it into the trunk containing the dowry. She then goes to the kitchen to meet and talk with other members of her husband's family. According customs, after the *lu cay* ceremony, the groom, the best men and those who carry the trunk containing the bride's dowry are allowed to enter the house. The trunk containing the dowry and blanket and mats (if any) is placed in the bride's bedroom while the papooses and wine canteens are handed over to helpers in the kitchen.

6. Official wedding ceremony (*cheng cho*)

The Hmong consider the day the bride is brought home to the groom's home the official wedding and two situations can possibly take place. In the first situation: If on the day the bride is brought home, each member of the delegation is offered 2 tea cups by the chief of the groom's family before sitting at the table to eaten the evening of the official wedding day, the chief has to invite the groom's parents, paternal uncle, the match-maker, the master of ceremonies, the maternal uncle and his wife and relatives from both paternal and maternal sides to sit at three tables placed closely together horizontally in the living room. On each table is a jar of wine, a bowl of soybean curd and many cups and bowls arranged together on the two sides of the table. The attendees of the official wedding sit at three tables by hierarchical order from the oldest to the youngest disregarding gender. This is called the singing and drinking ceremony called *tro cho*. On that day, the bride and bridesmaids are present

at the wedding party but do not sit at the tables as they feel "sad". The groom goes back and forth around the three tables but does not sit at any. He tries to stay sober and awake. During the three nights of the official wedding, the bride and young woman chosen to help welcome the bride sleeps in the newlywed's happy room. Meanwhile, the groom sleeps upstairs (*lung tha*) or in the living room. Beginning the fourth day after the official wedding, the newlyweds are allowed to share a bed in the happy room. In the second scenario, on the day the bride is brought home, if members of the delegation are only offered a meal without being offered tea, on the *chenh cho* evening, the groom's family also arranges three tables together in the living room. On each table is only a jar of wine and cups and bowls are not arranged close together by the sides of the table and the number of cups and bowls is less than that in the first scenario. Attendees can sit wherever they want, without any arrangement by hierarchal order.

After the official wedding ceremony is the closing meal (*cong cho*). On that day, after breakfast (there are only four dishes of food on each table), the groom's family prepares a lunch – the closing lunch with pork and wine. According to the Hmong customs, the number of tables and dishes for this closing lunch is the same as that of the official wedding party. While the cooks are preparing wine and food for lunch, the one in charge of logistics authorizes the master of ceremonies to present gifts to members of the delegation participating in bringing the bride home. The gifts are as follows: The

groom's paternal uncle, the match-maker and the master of ceremonies is each given 1 kg of pork and 2,000-4,000 VND; the maternal uncle 1 kg of pork (if not, 4,000 VND); and his wife, bridesmaids and best men, each receives 3,000-4,000 VND. In the witness of the one in charge of logistics, the maternal uncle, his wife and relatives, the master of ceremonies hands over to the groom's father the money presented by the bride's brothers, sisters and relatives before her departure to the groom's family. The hand-over is held in the living room near the House Spirit Altar. After receiving the money from the master of ceremonies, the father forwards it to the newly wed couple.

7. Ceremony to take the son and daughter-in-law through her house (*tro mu tru kho chong*)

After the lunch ending the three-day wedding ceremony, the husband's parents take the newlyweds to make the first visit the wife's family which is called taking the son and daughter-in-law to pass through the door of the wife's house. This ceremony is often held in the afternoon. They bring along a bottle of wine. On the way to the wife's family, the father leads, followed by the mother and the newlyweds. At the wife's family's home, the delegation is welcomed with a cordial meal. However, before eating, the wife's parents hand the bottle of wine brought by the husband's family to the family chief to offer to the ancestors. During the meal, the parents and in-laws advise the young married couple to be industrious in production, produce more rice and keep their family happy for a hundred years. In the

next morning, after breakfast, the husband's parents and the newlyweds return home.

In the first three years after the wedding, the young married couple often visits their wife's parents on the 3rd and 4th day of Tet (the Lunar New Year Festival). On the first day of Tet, their husband's parents take them to visit the wife's parents, bringing along a bottle of wine and a piece of pork weighing about 2 kg to wish them happy New Year. On that day, when everyone sits at the table and after the wife's father already offers cigarettes to everyone, the groom stands in front of the table (at the side opposite to the altar dedicated to the House Spirit) listening to the father read out the names whom he has to kowtow to once the name is read. On the second and third day of Tet, the young married couple visits the wife's parents alone and also brings with them presents like on the first day of Tet.

On the first day of Tet, the husband's parents and the newlyweds stay over night at her parents' house and return home the next morning. At the Tet of the following years, the young married couple can stay at the wife's house for two or three days, but when they return home, they must go together. By so doing, according to tradition, they will lead a happy life in the future.

In the past, when their daughter got married, the parents often gave her a she cow or a sow for breeding. This custom remains popular today among the Hmong. It originates from the belief that a daughter must have a cow to be sacrificed to offer to the soul of her father (or mother) when he (she) passes away.

According to Hmong custom, after the wedding, the bride lives with her in-law's family. Yet there are cases in which the groom goes to live in the wife's family if the family has no sons. In case the married couple does not have a son after living together for a long period of time, the husband is allowed to get a concubine. If the concubine does not give birth to any sons, the family then marries off their daughter, but with the consensus between both the husband and the wife and the daughter's husband must live in the family.

In Hmong society, in the past as well as at present, divorces are rare. The Hmong have a strict regulation on marriage relations and loyalty. If a married man who has children shares bed with an unmarried woman (even with the consent of the wife), he has to pay a fine of 10 liters of wine and 10 kg of pork to relatives. If he breaks the regulation for the second time, he is punished by "hu do" meaning his sin will be announced to households in the village. The violator has from house to house to inform the community of his mistake and promise not to repeat the mistake again. In addition, he has to pay 20,000 VND to each of the two people who accompany him. If he deliberately breaks the regulation for the third time, he will have to pay a fine comprised of pork, wine and rice enough for the villagers (a person from each household family) to eat and drink at the house of the head of the village. The violator also has to repair 300 meters of the village road or plant at least 100 trees on hills. If any tree dies, he is responsible for replanting it.

If a married woman has an adulterous relationship with an unmarried young man or a married man, she also has the same penalties. Married men and married women who share bed will also suffer the same penalties.

It is commonly known, up to now, the White Hmong in Dong Van district still preserve many traditional elements of wedding rituals. These factors not only reflect the ethnic characteristics but are also of educational significance to individuals and community in the protection of environment and natural resources. Extensive knowledge and full awareness of the cultural values of ethnic groups will contribute to resolving many problems with the ethnic minority communities, including the Hmong community.

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