

CLAN SYSTEM

The social organization is based on a last name infrastructure called the clan system. There are 18 original clans: Chang, Cheng, Chu, Hang, Her, Fang, Kong, Khang, Kue, Lee (Ly), Lor (Lo), Moua, Pha (Phang), Thao (Thor), Vang (Voung), Vue, Xiong, and Yang. Back then in China, each clan also had a second name that they affiliate with (see figure 2). All clans fall into one of five tribes and each tribe is named according to recognizable features of their distinct traditional costumes. Even though there are several tribes (Blue/Green, White, Striped, Black, and Flowery) in the Hmong society, all tribes recognize the same clans. Keep in mind that this only applies to Hmong in Laos. The Hmong in China, Thailand or other places may have different last names.

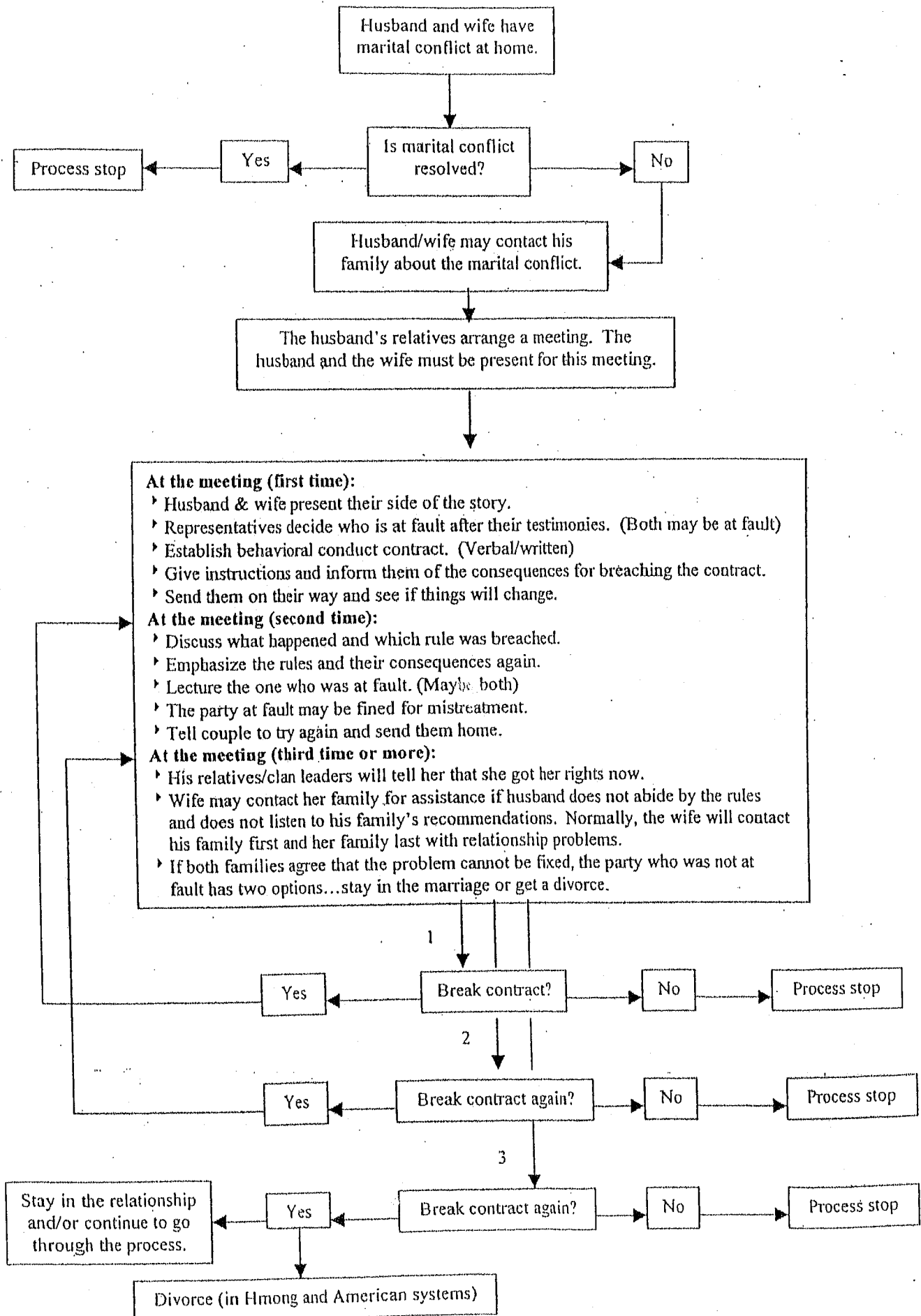
Each clan has clan representatives called clan leaders. Clan leaders have a great deal of power and control over the villagers and/or community. They solve problems in the community, resolve conflicts between two or more families, resolve issues between spouses, and act as counselors, judges, and mediators. How one becomes a clan leader depends on one's patience, charisma, wisdom, popularity, mental maturity, life experiences, and a good understanding of how the clan system works. Some become leaders because their fathers were leaders.

The clan system worked well for the Hmong people in all aspects of life (especially for support and conflict resolution). The clan system indirectly encourages close communications between family members and relatives. Each clan functions independently and protects each other in times of trouble. As a result, trust, stability, and security is very important in the community.

In the United States, the clan system does not function at full capacity due to conflicts and barriers encountered in the new environment and society. Many times when there is a serious conflict between two Hmong parties (clans), the law prefers it to be handled by the judicial system and not by the clan leaders. As a result, clan leaders and the Hmong community become confused, angered, and frustrated because they are not familiar with the legal system. Settling disagreements, disputes, and disciplining children are some issues faced by the Hmong in the western world. For example, increased truancy, large number of runaways, children involved in gang activities, and early marriages due to pregnancies. In some of these cases, problems might arise between clan leaders and the American's judicial system because some issues are to be negotiated within families to maintain harmony and peace. Yet, it is exploited by the court in length which could create more hatred or disruption in the healing process.

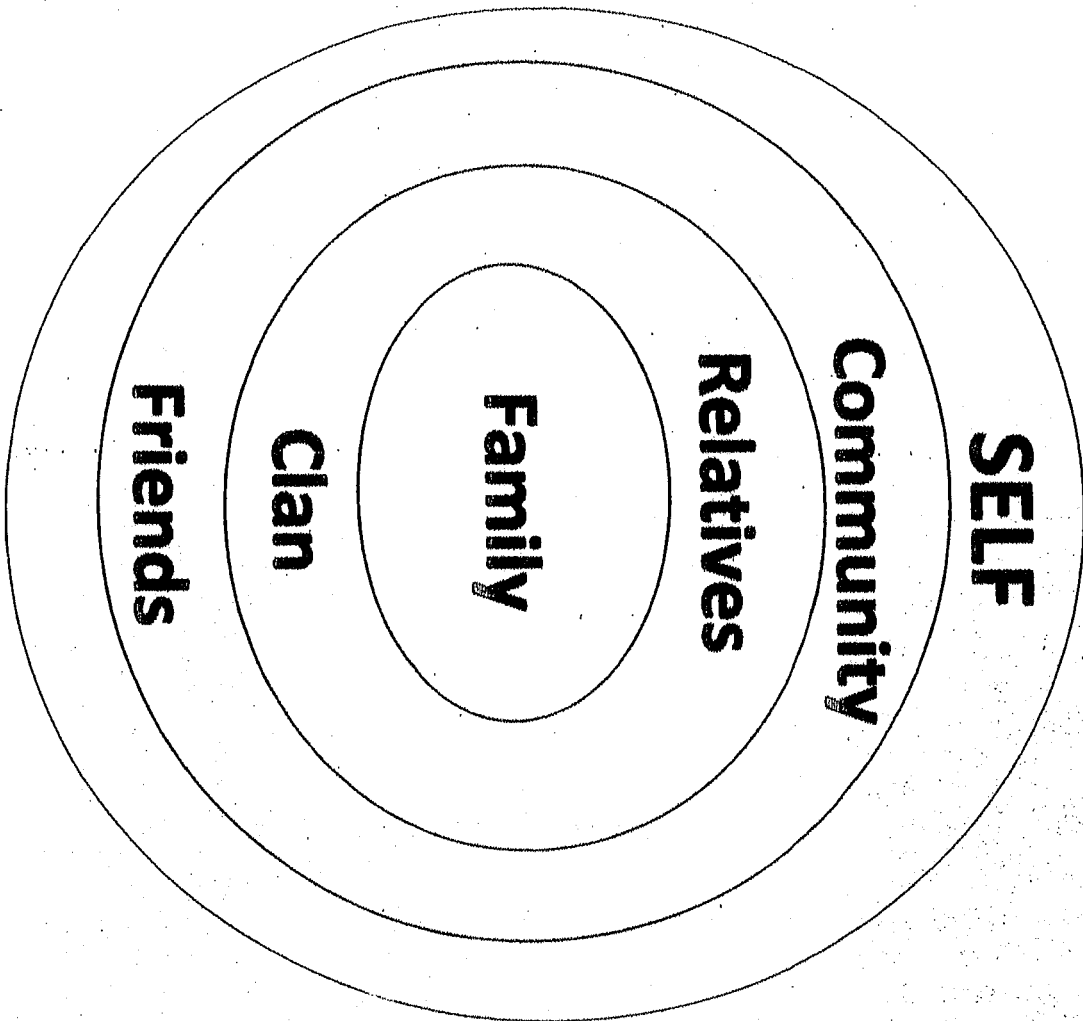
Another reason for the devaluing of clan leaders is that the younger generation lacks the appreciation and understanding for the clan system and the leaders' roles and responsibilities. They often overstep clan leaders and adopt the western ways of finding solutions to conflicts. In addition, as younger generations assume leadership roles and many elders die many of the Hmong traditional ways of conflict resolution may very well become endangered and then extinct as time passes. As Hmong families become educated and Americanized, they have a tendency to decrease their reliance on the clan system.

Hmong Marital Conflict Resolution Process



FAMILY SYSTEM

HIMONG



WESTERN

