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MY LO: A REFUGEE-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE ON REFUGEE PROTECTION MECHANISMS: THE CASE OF THE LAO HMONG REFUGEES IN THAILAND. ADVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. DR. VIRA SOMBOON, Ph.D., CO-ADVISOR: MICHAEL HAYES, Ph.D., 63 pp.

In a state-centered paradigm, the refugee regime has diverted the application of its moral obligations of protection to serve state interests. It has moved away from the object of its protection—the refugee herself—to prefer policies and practice of political convenience.

Looking closely at the experience of the Lao Hmong refugees in Thailand, this study contends that the refugee perspective must regain its validity in dictating protection policies. When asked to define refugee protection, their experience with it and their expectations of it, Lao Hmong refugees invoked basic principles of human rights: right of livelihood, freedom from fear, freedom of movement, right of education, cultural and religious freedom, etc.

Most importantly, they frame their protection demands within the respect and full realization of their human dignity, self-sufficiency and self-determination. Their experience validate the idea that refugee protection must not seek to provide solutions to the circumstances of being a refugee but rather it must seek to empower refugees to decide what solution suits their aspirations best.

Recommendations include practical programmatic considerations (e.g. the strategic use of technology to promote self-sufficiency) and wider policy guidelines (e.g. signing and ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention).

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