

## ABSTRACT

### THE RHETORIC OF THE HMONG: IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE BORDERLANDS

The Hmong are undergoing a process of acceptance and rejection in forming their new Hmong American identities. As borderlands citizens, the Hmong's new identities reflect the bicultural communities around them, and therefore, exemplify both Hmong and American values. In their formation of this identity, the Hmong are reevaluating all aspects of their history and culture, and their rhetorical gestures illustrate a reconceptualization of Hmong ways within the context of America, thereby reconfiguring Hmong American hybridity.

As the Hmong accept certain western ideals and preserve certain Hmong traditions, their transnational, collective, and individual identities and ideologies change accordingly. Organizations like Stone Soup and Lao Family are assisting Hmong Americans in this process through the programs they offer, while also promoting Hmong visibility. Their gestures and language highlight the Hmong people as an asset to the wider community.

The Hmong's identity negotiation is particularly influencing the lives of Hmong American women as they struggle for gender equality. Their stories and their negotiation of a new identity are being portrayed through the literary works of Hmong American women, particularly those of Kou Vang. Through rhetorically significant acts, Hmong Americans are all obtaining new identities and voices, marking the start of a new era for the Hmong people in America.

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