



Transcend[®]

Hmong

Who are the Hmong?

Archaeologists believe that the Hmong are descended from Siberians who emigrated to China thousands of years ago. At first they lived in peace with the Chinese, but by 2700 B.C., there were rifts between the Chinese and the Hmong, and centuries of war, persecution and eventual flight to Indochina followed. The Hmong Kingdom was destroyed by the Chinese in the 10th century, and centuries of attempts to reestablish the historical kingdom continued until modern times when the Hmong assisted the American troops in the Vietnam War. The word Hmong means “free men,” perhaps reflecting this group’s historical quest for freedom.

What are the clans?

Many Hmong groups share the same legend about the origin of clans. The legend holds that the Hmong resulted from the union of a brother and sister after the earth became flooded and everyone else had died. God ordained that they be married because there were no other people left on earth. But when a baby was born to them, it did not have human features. God told the parents to cut the baby up into pieces, and throw each piece to a different place. The next morning, they awoke and discovered smoke coming out of the huts where their son’s divided remains fell. In each hut was found a married couple with a different surname. These original couples are the mythical ancestors of the current-day 18 distinct Hmong clans.

Chinese historical records, however, imply that Hmong clan names were borrowed from Chinese family names, presumably for registration by Chinese officials. The Hmong people gradually adopted these surnames as their own.

Whatever the origin of the Hmong clan system, it is the basis on which the people recognize one another as kin or non-kin. If a person is of a particular clan, s/he will be welcomed into the house of another person belonging to the same clan even if they have never met one another before. Their relationship will be closer still if they are also of the same sub-clan. Persons of the same clan or sub-clan without any known blood relationship refer to one another as “relatives.”

Where do Hmong people live?

After the Vietnam war, tens of thousands Hmong fled to Thailand, where many remain in refugee camps. About 150,000 Hmong left the refugee camps to come to the U.S. Most settled in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California.

White or Blue?

Like all languages, Hmong has dialects or regional differences. The two principal Hmong dialects are White (Hmong Daw) and Blue* Hmong (Mong Leng). The colors refer to the clothing traditionally worn by the speakers of that dialect and represent their clan affiliation.

In general, the best choice for your written documents is White Hmong. This is because White Hmong reaches the largest numbers of people and speakers of Blue Hmong are generally able to read White Hmong. Conversely, speakers of White Hmong cannot easily read Blue Hmong.

English should always accompany Hmong materials. This is because many elder Hmong people do not read Hmong, but members of their families would likely be able to read the English.

* Blue Hmong is also sometimes referred to as Green Hmong.