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## “Neoliberal Diversity” at the University of California, Merced: Hmong Students Creating Belonging and Building Community

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## Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement

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### **"Neoliberal Diversity" at the University of California, Merced: Hmong Students Creating Belonging and Building Community**

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#### **Abstract**

Neoliberalism impacts the implementation of diversity in higher education, consequently this affects the place and meaning of diversity as it relates to Hmong students. Within the neoliberal university, *diversity* is increasingly co-opted to stand for institutional inclusivity and implemented to silence critiques about the academic industrial complex. I consider and examine the interplay between "neoliberal diversity" and Hmong students' experiences at the University of California, Merced (UC Merced). I use critical refugee scholar Y en L e Espiritu's (2014) *refugee* framework and Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard's (2014) *self-recognition* model to examine the Hmong Student Association. The data for this study is from a larger project that involves historical analysis, archival research, and interviews. My preliminary findings suggest that Hmong students problematize UC Merced's diversity. I argue that Hmong students' presence and actions force an interrogation of "neoliberal diversity" at the neoliberal university and they redefine recognition for themselves by creating belonging and building community and solidarity through their actions. This article counters the deficit discourse of Hmong students in education studies in that it reveals Hmong students have agency in creating their own belonging and lived experiences on campus.

Keywords: Hmong, "Neoliberal Diversity," Belonging, Neoliberal University

#### **Introduction**

Research on Hmong students in higher education has focused on academic success, access, academic attainment and challenges, or the model minority myth (Ducklow & Toft, 2019; Lor, 2008; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Pharn, 2018; Vang, 2017; Xiong & Lam, 2013; Xiong & Lee, 2011), but less in terms of their subjectivity in a neoliberal university and diversity discourses. Examining the neoliberal spaces and the diversity context which Hmong students occupy provides nuance to this body of literature. The discussion of diversity can be binary or exclusive, and at times, the



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narrative of diversity is selective about which student is understood or defined as underserved or underrepresented within certain services and areas of support. Even the discourses in higher education tend to exclude or make little mention of Hmong students' diversity experiences; instead, Hmong students are only discussed for topics like achievement gap, model minority myth, data disaggregation, and mental health (see Lee, 2008; Ngo & Lee 2007; Poon et al., 2016).<sup>1</sup> Often, this type of scholarship can produce damage-center research (Tuck, 2009) about Hmong students and frames their experiences as tied to a backward past, culturally static and stuck in time, welfare-dependent, deviant and delinquent youth, and unable to modernize or adapt (Jalao, 2010; Moua & Vang, 2015; Taylor, 2003; Vue & Mouavangsou, 2021). There is growing higher education literature around these topics that employs a more interdisciplinary approach and asset-based research which center Hmong voices and desires (Lee et al., 2020; Mouavangsou, 2018; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Vue & Mouavangsou, 2021; Xiong, 2021). However, there is little asset-based research on Hmong students within the scope of diversity issues and diversity's impact on them. My goal through the interdisciplinary and intersectional lens of critical race and ethnic studies, critical university studies, and critical refugee studies is to expose how "neoliberal diversity" in higher education creates intersectional structures of power that reinforces racial and social inequity by forming a façade of inclusivity.

In this article, I examine and interrogate power in the neoliberal university and how Hmong students find their place in higher education. My work adds to the asset-based research about Hmong students that centers Hmong experiences at the University of California, Merced (UC Merced). I employ and amend Indigenous scholar, Glen Coulthard's (2014) *self*-recognition model that seeks a reimagination of our social, cultural, and political environment. Coulthard rejects the liberal "politics of recognition" and centers a critical individual *self*-recognition and collective *self*-recognition. *Self*-recognition argues for a better understanding, one in which our cultural practices offer much more in regard to "the establishment of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world built on foundations of reciprocity and respectful coexistence" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 48). I reframe this model as one in which a community and/or individual recognizes themselves within a structure and system of oppression. Through forms of critical individual and collective *self*-recognition, a community/individual is able to find opportunities to nurture and create communities to practice collective self-determination.

Additionally, I also use *the refugee* as a framework through which we can understand the experiences of Hmong students in a neoliberal university. *The refugee*, as Yêñ Lê Espiritu (2014) articulates, is a person who acts and is not a victim nor a legal category, instead they are intentional beings and their experiences relate to war or, in this context, to other structures of power, such as the neoliberal university. Moreover, *the refugee* and their displacement force an interrogation of "the established principles of the nation-state and the idealized goal of inclusion and recognition within it" (Espiritu, 2014, p. 10). *The refugee* framework functions "to establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems" (p. 10). In a way similar to how Espiritu employs *the refugee*, in this article I employ Hmong students to interrogate and expose the systemic issue of neoliberal diversity. In addition to inhabiting a space of neoliberal diversity, these students who may have refugee parents or are refugees themselves also experience *refugee displacement*. I reframe *refugee displacement* within a nation-state to "diversity displacement" that occurs in a structure or space of power, i.e., a neoliberal diversity where one does not belong. Diversity displacement in this context is defined as the experience where racialized bodies exist at the neoliberal university and within neoliberal diversity but they feel neither belonging nor support. This experience shapes these students' thoughts and their practices with community and solidarity in the context of

neoliberal diversity. Employing Espiritu's and Coulthard's frameworks allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences of Hmong students that counters deficit research by centering the desires of Hmong students in education. I use these frameworks in analyzing historical documents of a Hmong university student organization: mission statement, e-flyer for an event, and newsletter; all of these preliminary findings stem from a larger project.

In my larger work, I argue that neoliberal universities reinforce racial and social inequity by forming a façade of inclusivity through neoliberal diversity. In this article, I argue that Hmong students' presence and actions force an interrogation of neoliberal diversity at the neoliberal university and redefine recognition for themselves by building community and solidarities through their actions.

### **Neoliberal Diversity at the University of California, Merced**

Within the neoliberal university, *diversity* is increasingly co-opted to stand for institutional inclusivity, and implemented to silence critiques about the academic industrial complex. UC Merced is a neoliberal university where neoliberal diversity is employed in the service of recruitment, marketing, advertisement, garnering more financial resources, and fulfilling other ultimately market-related goals. Hundle and colleagues (2019) frame "neoliberal diversity projects" at UC Merced through liberal multicultural ideologies, diversity discourses, and the neoliberal university's relation to "racial formation" and "racialization" process by connecting "university development to the 'racial crisis' of neoliberalism" (p. 179). They argue that neoliberal logics of governance, particularly "neoliberal developmentalism" and "neoliberal diversity projects," sustain the neoliberal university, UC Merced. The work of Hundle et al. frame structural campus "diversity" as "the visible appearance of Black and brown bodies on our small campus [UC Merced] and their access to higher education" (p. 175). My focus on neoliberal diversity at UC Merced precedes from my definition of neoliberal diversity as diversity imbued with neoliberal mechanisms which show the positive experiences and values of difference while internally enacting covert, disguised, or insidious violence among the university campus community and towards racialized bodies. This piece centers on the exclusion of voices, particularly Hmong student voices. It examines the operations of "diversity" and how power wielded by "diversity" in the neoliberal university is used, at times, to recognize and other times to ignore certain racialized bodies while marketizing all racialized bodies when it benefits and suits the neoliberal university.

Located in California's Central Valley, largely an agricultural region characterized by a diverse population and substantial wealth disparity, UC Merced has, since its inception, enrolled a diverse, predominately non-white student population. By 2010, UC Merced was designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) by the United States (US) Department of Education. This designation makes UC Merced eligible for funding and private grants from the US Department of Education, Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development. According to UC Merced's Center of Institutional Effectiveness (<https://cie.ucmerced.edu/overall-enrollment-totals>), the student demographics for Fall 2020 reveal a campus body that is predominately Hispanic/Latinx and Asian. However, the majority of campus resources support Hispanic/Latinx students.

While UC Merced was born neoliberal, neoliberal diversity was organically embedded in the formation of this neoliberal university over time. The importance of campus diversity became increasingly more apparent. In 2016 at the 2020 Groundbreaking of UC Merced, Uplifting People Power to Resolve Issues of Spaces and Equity (UPRISE), a diverse body of undergraduate and graduate students, demanded a vision of UC Merced that uplifted the concerned and marginalized

voices of students (Hundle et al., 2019). Between 2018 and 2019, UC Merced moved to create its affinity cultural centers/spaces and hired its first Associate Chancellor of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion/Chief Diversity Officer. By 2020, the university had continued to expand its diversity office and to strongly brand itself as a “diverse campus” through its continued and strong promotion of its Hispanic and Latinx student body and its continued recognition by the US Department of Education as an HSI. This designation continues to allow the university access to federal and private grants, which can continue to support programs for Hispanic and Latinx students. Through the HSI identity, UC Merced continues to see itself as a *diverse* campus and its brand and message its diversity through specific racialized bodies, Hispanic and Latinx students.

Hmong students at UC Merced provide a particularly useful means to examine how neoliberalism impacts diversity. As a small percentage under the Asian category, Hmong students (2%), offer a case study to interrogate how the neoliberal diversity values and recognizes only particular bodies on campus. Hmong students’ presence on a non-predominately white institution sheds light on how structures of power operate within a neoliberal context as it relates to diversity. UC Merced is an interesting site of study because of the demographic location of the Hmong community. According to the Hmong National Development (HND) report (2013) drawing from the 2010 US Census, the city of Merced is one of the ten largest metropolitan and micro area concentrations of Hmong people, but Hmong students are not reflected or recognized within the diversity discourse at UC Merced.

### **Hmong Students Countering Neoliberal Diversity**

Through the neoliberal university’s branding and messaging of a *diverse* campus, students like the Hmong student body experiences diversity displacement at UC Merced. The university creates the façade of diversity and inclusion through the evidence of collecting data on specific *diverse* racialized student body numbers and the creation and expansion of the diversity office, which continues to highlight and value certain racialized bodies. Thus, Hmong students are omitted *as Hmong students* from this diversity framework. This experience of diversity displacement for Hmong students within neoliberal diversity reveals the problem of inequity that exists within the neoliberal university’s diversity power structure and operations. Hence, there is a need to interrogate neoliberal diversity and expose the inequity. Hmong students as a case study force the examination of inclusion, as to whose racialized bodies belong, and recognition, as to whose racialized bodies matter, at UC Merced. In response to the overt message and branding that UC Merced is an HSI or a *diverse* campus that does not see them, Hmong students know they must create spaces for themselves.

In forming belonging and countering the politics of recognition at UC Merced, Hmong students know they have to rely on themselves and their Hmong community on campus to survive. Recognition can be acknowledgement by UC Merced, but for Hmong students they are not looking for institutional acknowledgement by being a campus organization. Rather, they employ the university’s method of recognition, particularly creating a campus organization, in order to access university resources to create collective *self*-recognition for themselves. Thus, Rican Vue (2021), whose work centers on Hmong students at another University of California campus, argues that Hmong students enact creative praxis through student-initiated collective efforts to combat institutional invisibility by creating change, resistance, and transformation in the social, curricular, and cultural spaces of the university. Hmong students create their own communities and solidarities, in the ways Coulthard (2014) outlines, through their collective *self*-recognition. These

students also act in the ways of Espiritu's (2014) *refugee* by being intentional beings who recognize the neoliberal inequity and that institutions do not care about them. Thus, caring for themselves falls upon them and they have to create belonging through creative praxis. Hmong students continue to cultivate care through the celebration of their culture, commitments to community, and collaborative relationships. In asserting their own agency, Hmong students expose inequity by celebrating their culture, language, commitments to community, and collaborative relationships. I will examine how Hmong students accomplish this agency through Hmong Student Association's (HSA) critical collective *self*-recognition at UC Merced.

### **Hmong Student Association Mission**

At UC Merced, Hmong students counter the politics of recognition with creative praxis by forming HSA, an on-campus student organization, to create belonging and nurture their culture and identity. The creation of HSA in 2006 indicates that Hmong students were actively invested in creating an institutional space of belonging at UC Merced. HSA's mission statement illustrates students' agency to dream and create a space within the neoliberal university for Hmong students.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, HSA's mission statement highlights Hmong students' efforts to create belonging on campus. The mission statement is reflective of Hmong students' experiences within the context of neoliberal diversity at UC Merced. Their mission states:

To promote and educate a deeper understanding of Hmong history, culture, and tradition; promote and encourage higher education; provide community opportunities and to network with the community; provide a strong academic and social support system for members; develop leadership skills amongst members; and be a volunteer-based student organization. (Hmong Student Association, *Mission* section)

This mission statement illustrates how HSA practices critical individual and collective *self*-recognition in that HSA leaders and officers build community and solidarity through their organization's purpose and relationships between members, among the local Merced community, and the broader community at large, across generations of Hmong students.

When Hmong students promote and educate about Hmong history, culture, and tradition, they are making visible their identity on a campus that makes them invisible. This act of making themselves visible reveals that Hmong students are, to use Espiritu's term "intentional beings," making known who they are at UC Merced and that they collectively recognize the need to support others like them who are looking for belonging. HSA's action to create their organization to support themselves expose neoliberal diversity and diversity displacement at UC Merced and reveals that Hmong students have to do the work of creating space for them to promote and educate about Hmong history, culture, and tradition for their livability and survival.

HSA also builds community and solidarity by promoting and encouraging Hmong students to pursue higher education and graduate from college. The promotion and encouragement demonstrate critical engagement about HSA's purpose in the neoliberal university.<sup>3</sup> This purpose is not necessarily in support of the neoliberal university, instead, HSA's programming efforts suggest that the organization is intentional about creating space for younger generations. In their collective *self*-recognition, they support the next generation of Hmong and Southeast Asian students from across the state and locally by hosting their annual *Educational Conference* every

fall semester and by awarding scholarships to high school seniors and attendees of their conference. In this way, they continue to build a broader community with students who are not at the university, but to support these students when they arrive at such an institution.

Hmong students must create their own space to support and center their identity because the racialized bodies valued by neoliberal diversity does not include Hmong students. However, this is not to say Hmong students seek recognition from the neoliberal university. They recognize the lack of support for their identity such that they foregrounded their culture, history, and tradition, and support future generations in pursuit of their higher education endeavors. Despite not being valued by their institution, they discovered ways to exist and create belonging for themselves and the next generation of Hmong students.

In the ways Espiritu uses *the refugee* framework, Hmong students through HSA expose the façade of neoliberal diversity at UC Merced. Through HSA, they are critical and intentional beings who use creative praxis. HSA's collective *self*-recognition and their creative praxis redefine their inclusion at UC Merced despite the university not recognizing Hmong students as part of the *diverse* campus. Moreover, HSA's creative praxis and critical collective *self*-recognition also challenges the established idealized goal of inclusion and recognition within the neoliberal university.

### **HSA Event and Community**

As intentional beings and through collective *self*-recognition, HSA leaders and members create belonging for themselves and other Hmong students at UC Merced by planning and implementing events that focus on Hmong culture.<sup>4</sup> This cultural focus ties directly to the essential role that culture plays in their organization, as evidence by their mission statement. Hmong culture is central to their identity and the collective *self*-recognition of this organization. Like Espiritu's *the refugee*, HSA leaders are intentional beings who enact collective *self*-recognition. Although they are not recognized through neoliberal diversity and diversity displacement, they must create cultural programs tied to their Hmong identity. One way they do this is through weekly meetings during the academic year for their members to create a space for collective community and engagement with one another. It is a space where they can teach and share about their culture. In this way, they create collective *self*-recognition among and for each other by creating belonging. At the same time, their actions help them practice collective self-determination for their organization despite experiencing the diversity displacement maintained by neoliberal diversity.

HSA nurtures belonging within the organization through connecting with the Hmong community in Merced. For instance in an e-flyer for an HSA's event, HSA highlights the topic of shamanism in the Hmong culture by bringing together Lee Lor, a member of the Hmong community and former Merced County Supervisor, and Ya Yang, a UC Merced Hmong student researcher. As the e-flyer notes, the event focused on Lee Lor sharing how "her family continues to practice shamanism and has a diverse family with different religious beliefs" (<https://www.facebook.com/HSAUCM>). Additionally, HSA invited Ya Yang to share his research about a Hmong shaman's journey and the complexities of health issues, which was part of his university research project.

This event reflects the creative praxis that HSA as an organization must employ to create belonging and nurture themselves on campus through the Merced community. Because the university does not recognize their cultural identity, HSA must search for connection with those in the Hmong Merced community like Lee Lor to speak about their cultural practice of shamanism.

This case serves as an example of how neoliberal diversity and diversity displacement marginalize Hmong students and as a result, HSA find themselves as intentional beings who must form connections outside of the neoliberal university for their Hmong cultural practices. The connection with the Hmong Merced community helps to nurture and provide deeper understanding of shared Hmong cultural practices. These cultural practices, as Coulthard (2014) articulates, build upon established relationships within and between peoples from foundations of reciprocity and respectful coexistence. Having an event center on Hmong cultural practices, such as shamanism, HSA, through their collective *self*-recognition—displays how Hmong culture connects and offers a deeper relationship within and between Hmong students on campus and the Merced Hmong community. Through shared cultural practices, connections help form deeper relationships of being Hmong on campus and belonging to a larger local Hmong community. In this way, Hmong students know the Hmong community and can reach out for cultural support and knowledge without feeling the diversity displacement within neoliberal diversity on campus. This event also illustrates the reciprocity and respectful coexistence of the relationship of Hmong students on campus and the Hmong community in Merced. This relationship allows for participation, exchange of knowledge, and mutual engagement. Through this interaction with the local community, HSA demonstrates a collective *self*-recognition that goes beyond the neoliberal university and into the local Hmong community to create belonging.

## HSA Newsletter

HSA's collective *self*-recognition informs its leaders and officers as intentional beings in their action to build community and solidarity and to create recognition of Hmong language in their weekly newsletter. HSA includes Hmong language lessons in this newsletter. For example in the April 17, 2019 newsletter, they outlined 7 tones as their standard heading, follow by a phrase for the week:

### 7 Tones

High-falling: poj | female | -j

High: pob | ball | -b

Mid: po | spleen | -no consonant at end

Low: pos | thorn | -s

Mid-rising: pov | to throw | -v

Low (creaky) (long low rising): pom | to see | -m

Mid-falling (breathy): pog | grandmother | -g

(White Dialect)

Phrase Of The Week:

(Aphorism)

**Ib Quav Tsuag Tsuam Ib Tsu Mov**

Hmong Writing = \*Pronunciation\* = English Translation

**Ib** = \*eee\* = one/a

**Quav** = \*qoua\* = poop

**Tsuag** = \*choua\* = rat

**Tsuam** = \*choua\* = stack/on top of



**Ib** = \*eee\* = one/a

**Tsu** = \*choo\* = rice cooker/steamer

**Mov** = \*maw\* = food

**Ib quav tsuag tsuam ib tsu mov= \*eee qoua choua choua eee choo maw\***  
**= One little bad thing can ruin the entirety of that thing**

Given the essential relationship between language and identity, the HSA's focus on language is an important means to promote and educate each other about their cultural identity.

Diversity displacement through language practices at UC Merced can be analyzed through this newsletter to interrogate the structures of power at UC Merced. The particular usage of the "equal signs" in the newsletter disrupts the neoliberal diversity façade:

Hmong Writing = \*Pronunciation\* = English Translation

**Ib** = \*eee\* = one/a

The "equal signs" show how Hmong words have equal recognition as the English words. The ways the "equal signs" are placed in the newsletter illustrate the equal value of power with Hmong words and English words. Coulthard's (2014) collective *self*-recognition helps to read HSA's language structure of "equal signs" as understanding their cultural practice of learning Hmong language as valuable and coexisting with English language despite the message of neoliberal diversity that dictates that only certain languages are important. Learning their mother tongue falls on HSA as student-run organization to create belonging. Rather than waiting for UC Merced to recognize Hmong students, HSA members teach Hmong language to each other through their newsletter.

Language is an example of how diversity displacement within neoliberal diversity takes place where only certain languages are offered and taught at UC Merced. This neoliberal diversity space ostensibly promotes inclusion, but the heritage languages of its diverse population are limited to Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. Hmong language is not offered or taught. Thus, HSA must partake in collective *self*-recognition in response to the needs of incorporating their Hmong language into campus space. In this way, HSA could create belonging among themselves since the university does not recognize a need for their Hmong language. Through collective *self*-recognition, this newsletter demonstrates the ways HSA members retain their culture despite the messages that prioritize neoliberal values, such as the emphasis on what is most marketable, including languages with the highest economic value.

## Conclusion

When UC Merced brands itself as a *diverse* campus, its neoliberal diversity discourse leaves out voices like those of Hmong students and many other minoritized students. Hmong students at UC Merced reveal the façade of inclusivity that neoliberal universities make through neoliberal diversity. Through this exposure, these students show that while they add to the *diverse* make-up of the campus for the university, they will have to navigate belonging on their own. Neoliberal diversity creates diversity displacement of Hmong students, whereby there is no recognition of Hmong students at the neoliberal university. However, through organizations like HSA and collective *self*-recognition, Hmong students create recognition for themselves. They have to form creative praxis to live and thrive for themselves as individuals and collectively as a community. However they do it, they are intentional beings who advance critical individual and collective *self*-

recognition to live and survive in an institution that does not discern them within the university's larger construct of diversity.

Asset-based research, like this one, offers new ways to understand Hmong student experiences in the neoliberal university. Centering the actions of Hmong students through their student-run organization exemplifies Hmong students as intentional beings who enact creativity and care for each other and the next generation. Hmong students have desires in education and centering those desires allow researchers to see Hmong students' holistic experiences at the university. Their experiences help to expose and inform how neoliberal diversity is harmful and violent to racialized bodies no matter how it is framed to show diversity as a good thing (e.g., recruitment, marketing, advertisement, garnering more financial resources, etc.) for neoliberal universities. With Hmong students as two percent of the student body, this percentage should not relegate them to less than other racialized bodies or that they are undervalued as part of the campus community. I hope this article serves to encourage scholars to continue asking critical questions and conduct asset-based research about Hmong students. In addition, I hope many staff, faculty, researchers, and diversity and inclusion staff/offices who work at the neoliberal university move to think critically about possibilities to understand all students, regardless of their numbers, in order to better serve *diverse* students.

Though Hmong students have had to navigate and find belonging, they should not need to do this work on their own, despite the neoliberal university and its neoliberal diversity. Cases such as HSA at UC Merced highlight this understanding that the work is also the responsibility of staff, faculty, researchers, and diversity and inclusion staff/offices and it falls upon them not to resort to the violence of neoliberal diversity. Instead, those who are charged to conduct the university's academic, operational, and support functions must be as Espiritu's (2014) *refugee*, or intentional beings, and as Coulthard's (2014) *self-recognition* framework—critical individuals and critical collectives in their own *self-recognition* in order to do this work. In order to support students and to create meaningful lived experiences and opportunities for students, university educators and campus leaders must offer better supportive services, teach with care, conduct asset-based research, and actively provide cultural support to and acknowledge and recognize the value *diverse* students bring.

### Notes

1. I use "Hmong students" in this article to refer to Hmong Americans who are first, 1.5, or second generation since student demographics at UC Merced is not disaggregated. I also use the spelling of "Hmong" to be consistent with the spelling used by the HSA at UC Merced.
2. HSA's Mission is not dated because the 2018 website suggest the organization created the mission in 2018. However the founding of HSA was in 2006 and according to their facebook page post dated October 1, 2022 on the 16th anniversary of their founding, HSA states, "The establishment of HSA gave these students an environment to feel welcomed by having an organization dedicated to their ethnicity and culture" (Hmong Student Association). This Facebook post on their 16th anniversary aligns with their mission. Thus, this alignment suggests that when the organization was created in 2006 they had to have created a purpose for their organization per guidelines of UC Merced registered clubs and

organizations. Thus, from HSA's Facebook page with photos archived since their founding suggests HSA events have centered on key purposes outlined in the HSA Mission.

3. I draw from David Harvey (2005) and Wendy Brown (2015) in framing neoliberalism in my work. Harvey defines neoliberalism, first as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2) and Brown examines neoliberalism as a type of economic reason that is largely going unnoticed in dismantling democracy. Her theory is that neoliberal rationality spreads the model of the market to all areas and activities in society, including spaces where money is not involved, and produces the homo economicus, that is, by constructing human beings as market actors at all times and within all spaces (p. 31).
4. Student percentages were extracted from "Overall Enrollment Totals: Headcounts" via Institutional Research and Decision Support (IRDS), UC Merced from Fall 2020 under Race (<https://cie.ucmerced.edu/overall-enrollment-totals>). The office name changed from IRDS to the Center of Institutional Effectiveness and the data is accessible from <https://cie.ucmerced.edu/undergraduate-geographic-origins>. Computations of Hmong student percentages was from the raw data (Fall 2020) provided by the IRDS office on February 19, 2021. I have used the broader racial categories as outlined by UC Merced so the data remains consistent.

### About the Author



**May Kao Xiong** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Interdisciplinary Humanities program at the University of California, Merced where she situates her research within the fields of critical race and ethnic studies, critical refugee studies, history, education studies, and Asian American studies. Her research is on the implications of diversity within the context of the neoliberal university. Complementary to her research, she also draws from her more than ten years of professional experience in higher education on diversity issues: intersectional identities, underrepresented and first-generation populations, and student development and achievement.

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