



# GRANDMOTHER'S PATH GRANDFATHER'S WAY

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## NOTES TRANSCRIBING AND TRANSLATING

There are many decisions to make when putting an oral language into written form. Do we encode all the sounds that exist in the telling of a story? What is the accepted spelling of words? Which Hmong dialect will emerge as the written standard? Should all the pieces be written in the dialect in which they were spoken, or all in White Hmong? Do we write each syllable as a separate word, or put the syllables together, or hyphenate them? Do we adopt the writing conventions of English—punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, and common rules, like *be sure each sentence has a subject*? What about the translation—should it be as literal as possible, even if the English sounds unusual or non-standard? What about the formats of the sung poetry—should we adopt the traditional English form for stanzas, verses, and line breaks?

All of these questions arose, and were wrestled with again and again. We set up rules, and then changed them. We checked existing written Hmong, and adapted formats. We discussed possibilities with the contributors, and let their opinions guide us. As you find inconsistencies and errors in our written form, we would appreciate knowing about them.

The Hmong transcriptions are written in White Hmong, except for the Hmong Leng<sup>1</sup> sung poetry, in which the rhyme pattern would disappear if the pieces were translated into White Hmong. The words are considered as monosyllabic, and are joined by a hyphen if they usually appear side by side to represent a single ‘word’ (*me-nyuam, me-ntsis, dab-tsi*).

The dialect groups of Hmong are usually called ‘White’ Hmong and ‘Blue’ or ‘Green’ Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb* and *Hmoob Ntsuab*). In talking to those who are *Hmoob Ntsuab*, it appears that their name(s) have come from the White Hmong, and that they call themselves simply ‘Hmong’ (*Moob*). Long ago, they say, all Hmong were the same, but pressures of the Han Chinese to suppress their ethnic identity resulted in dividing of the Hmong into different groups, which developed different dialects and different styles of dress. The group that adopted the white skirt became known as ‘White Hmong’, and those with striped sleeves became ‘Striped Hmong’, and because all the groups had specific names, the original ones, who wore embroidered, appliqued, and batiked skirts, were dubbed *Hmoob Ntsuab* for the color of the indigo dye used in the batik. *Ntsuab* usually translates as ‘green’, but when referring to the dialect groups, it is

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<sup>1</sup> *Moob Leeg*, another name for the *Moob Ntsuab*, sometimes translated as ‘Blue’ Hmong, sometimes as ‘Green’ Hmong.

linked to the deep blue of the skirt. The color of the indigo is actually more like *xiav*. Another name for this group is *Moob Leeg* or 'Hmong Leng'; *leeg* translates as 'vein' or 'seam', and is a reference to the stitched patterns on the skirts. In the first edition, we used "Blue Hmong"; in this edition, we have changed it to "Hmong Leng", as this is how Laotian Hmong usually refer to their own dialect in contrast to *Hmoob Dawb*. The spelling 'Hmong' is retained, as this is how the name ethnic group, as a whole, is usually spelled.

Whenever possible, we disregarded what has been previously assumed to be true about the Hmong, and relied on the consensus or opinion of the local contributors. They have said again and again that details of life are different in different regions of the country, and those living in one region had no way of knowing about the ways of Hmong living in other regions. We hope that this approach will lead to discussion and the recording of details from many different regions, and that from these accounts, generalizations may be drawn.

## ZAJ LUS QHIA

Nyob zoo ib tsoom kwv-tij, neej-tsa, phooj-ywg hmov thiab tshua, thiab txhua-txhia haiv neeg. Kuv muaj lus zoo-siab tau ntsib nej sawv-daws. Kuv yuav hais txog qhov uas kuv tau txiav-txim siab sau phau-ntawv no, hais txog peb Hmoob lub neej yav puag thaum ub thiab tes-qav tes-num thiab peb tej txuj-ci, kev-lig kev-cai, cov lus uas muaj lub ntsiab tseem-ceeb thiab zoo rau peb Hmoob lub neej los lawm ntau tiam neeg. Yog li ntawd kuv thiaj cia siab tias, thaum uas nej nyeem phau-ntawv no tag lawd, nej yuav to-taub peb Hmoob. Kuv paub tias kev uas yuav sau ib phau-ntawv li no mas nws tsis yooj-yim; nws noj sij-hawm ntev thiab ntau heev. Txawm tias phau-ntawv no sau ib qho me-ntsis hais txog peb Hmoob lub neej xwb los kuj zoo dua li tsis muaj. Ib qho los mus mas peb Hmoob nyob los-tsuas teb, ib pab nyob ib sab ntuj es Hmoob thiaj muaj lo lus tias, *“Nyob ib tsab-teb ua ib tsab-txuj.”* Yog li qee qho ho tsis raug pes-tsawg li uas xav los thov zam-txim thiab.

Kuv paub tias, yog peb tsis muab cov laus tej lus sau cia nim-no mas thaum uas dua lawv tag lawm ces peb yeej yuav tsis paub peb Hmoob tej kev-lig kev-cai zoo uas, ***“Pog rhawv kab, yawg rhawv kev, pog ua cia, yawg ua tseg.”*** Ces ntshai yuav zoo li thaum peb Hmoob los tuam-tshoj rau xov-tshoj. Lub sij-hawm ntawd peb Hmoob tsis muaj ntaub-ntawv sau tseg cia, es nim-no peb thiaj tsis paub meej tias yog li cas tiag. Tsuas yog hnov cov laus hais dab neeg thiab piav puam-fab rau ib tiam dhau ib tiam, ib tis dhau ib tis xwb.

Nim-no kuv pom tias, peb Hmoob mas nce qib los mus lawm ntau. Sawv-daws tau kawm txuj-ci txawj-ntse, tus paub li cas los muaj, hos tus tseem tsis tau paub hlo li los kuj tseem muaj. Kuv tus kheej los tsis tau kawm ntaub-ntawv ntau, tiam-sis muaj lub siab puv npo, xav los sau phau-ntawv no kom tau los xyeem sawv-daws qhov-muag ib zaug, thiab tseg cia rau cov nyiam paub peb Hmoob. Kuv pom tias, kuv tseem tsis tau laus npaum li cas, sau ntshai yuav tsis raug cov muaj hnub-nyoog siab pes-tsawg.

Kuv xav thov lus koom-tes los ntawm nej, yog leej-twg muaj lub niam tswv-yim, txawj-ntse paub txog peb Hmoob li zaj es xav tias yuav muab sau tseg rau peb tej tub ki no los. Kuv txaus-siab yuav koom-tes nrog sau thiab.

Kuv paub tias peb Hmoob tuaj txog teb-chaws no, tej zaum muaj qee tus Hmoob yeej nrhiav kev sau txog peb Hmoob lub neej. Tiam-sis vim tisis muaj sij-hawm thiab tsis muaj nyiaj-txiag txawm-peem xwb. Xyoo no lub caij tsev-kawm-ntawv so, kuv ho tau txais kev pab los ntawm Zellerbach Family Fund los mus sau phau-ntawv no.



Tshaj thiab tshwj-xeeb, kuv thov ua tsaug ntau-ntau rau cov phooj-ywg nrog kuv koom-tes, puag thaum pib txog rau thaum kawg. Lawv cov npe xws li: **Qhua-pov Vaaj, Swm-looj Vwj, Faiv-nee Vaaj, Nom-yeeb Vwj, Tooj-yig Vaaj**, thiab **Tooj-zaj Vwj**. Nws tsis tas li no, phau-ntawv no sau ua lus As-mes-lis-kas thiab lus Hmoob. Kuv koom-tes nrog ib tug phooj-ywg As-mes-lis-kas, nws npe hu ua **Judy Lewis**. Nws pab kuv sau thiab kho ua lus As-mes-lis-kas kom raug, es thiaj tau ntawv Hmoob thiab ntawv As-mes-lis-kas sib xyaws. Qhov tseem-ceed mas yog lub tsib-lus Hmoob rau lus As-mes-lis-kas yuav tsum kom hais mus sib-raws los tias yog kiag. Kuv ntseeg thiab cia siab tias, yog kab twg los-puas lo twg tsis meej nej yuav zam-txim.

Raws li kuv tau tshuaj xyuas hauv tej tsev rau ntaub-ntawv loj, mas yeej tsis tshua muaj peb Hmoob tej ntaub-ntawv hlo li. Tsuas yog qee tug neeg missionary Europe thiab America tuaj txog peb teb-chaws es sau xwb, ces qee-yam kuj raug ntau yam kuj tsis raug. Yog li ntawd thiaj ua ib qho rau kuv xav sau phau-ntawv no. Kuv xav tias yog peb Hmoob sau peb Hmoob li zaj, mas peb yuav sau tau li peb Hmoob lub siab nyiam thiab raws li Hmoob tiag.

Tom-ntej no mus, mas peb Hmoob yuav vam-meej thiab tsis vam-meej, los yog nyob ntawm peb cov me-nyuam kev kawm txuj, kawm ci. Kuv thov caw thiab nquas hu txog ib tsoom Hmoob, tsis hais tus hluas tus laus tub-ntxhais yuav tau kawm-ntawv, txuj-ci kom ntau thiab nco-qas-ntsoov peb Hmoob cov kev-lig kev-cai yam uas zoo, siv tau, uas tseem-ceed los coj, es tuav peb Hmoob lub meej-mom. Kuv xav kom peb Hmoob yuav tau xav kom tob tiag-tiag, saib puas tsim nyog peb tso Hmoob tej txuj-ci tseg. Nyob sab ntuj tim ub, mas peb Hmoob muaj npe hu raws Hmoob tias, Hmoob sua, Hmoob nyab-laj, Hmoob los-tsuas, Hmoob thaib. Nim-no peb tuaj txog rau sab ntuj teb-chaws no yuav muaj Hmoob As-mes-lis-kas.

Kuv tus kheej xav tias, txawm yog peb coj tug yam-ntxwv ib yam ib lub teb lub chaws lawm los, peb no yeej tseem muaj tug yam-ntxwv zoo li tus Hmoob thiab. Yog li ntawd tsim nyog kawg, peb Hmoob yuav tsum kawg peb Hmoob li ntiag tug, yuav zoo dua li mus kawg luag tej li tug. Kuv cov lus uas ntsib nej muaj li no xwb, cia siab thiab vam tias phau-ntawv no yuav muaj nuj-nqis rau nej tsis ntau los kuj tsawg.

Ua tsaug ntau,

**Vaaj Lwm**

## PREFACE

Greetings to all those of my clan, other clans, dear friends and people of other ethnic groups. I am glad to meet you all here. I will describe how I decided to write this book that is about our Hmong way of life in the old days, our work, our knowledge, our customs, and the words that have been meaningful to our way of life for generations. Therefore, I hope that when you finish reading this book, you will understand us Hmong. I know that the task of writing a book like this is not easy, and it consumes a lot of time and energy. Even though this book contains only a sampling of our Hmong ways of life, it is better than nothing. For one thing, when we lived in Laos, we lived in many different regions, and Hmong have a saying: *"Live in one part of the country, do things one way."* (*"Nyob ib tsab-teb ua ib tsab-txuj."*) Because of this, some of the writing may not correspond exactly to what you know; please excuse the differences.

I know that if we don't take the words of our elders and write them down, when they are all gone, we will not know our Hmong life and customs, as when ***"grandmother makes the path, grandfather makes the way; grandmother keeps things alive, grandfather passes them on."*** (*Pog rhawv kab, yawg khawv kev; pog ua cia, yawg ua tseg.*) I'm afraid that it will be the way as it was when we left China to go to Laos; at that time we Hmong did not have any writing to record the past, and now we are not sure what really happened then. We have only the elders to tell folktales and parables, from one generation to another.

Now I can see that we Hmong have progressed a long way. Everyone can get an education, knowledge, and skills; there are some who aren't very educated, and some who are. As for myself, I did not have very much education, but I have the desire to write this book, so that these pieces will appear before everyone's eyes one time, and to preserve some of our past for those who are really interested in knowing Hmong. I see that I am not quite old enough, and what I write might not fit exactly with those who have more age and more knowledge.

I am willing to cooperate with any of you who has an idea or knowledge about our Hmong stories and wants to preserve them for our young generations.

I know that since we Hmong have come to this country, there have been many Hmong who have tried to find a way to write about Hmong life. But because there is not enough time, or enough money, not many have done it. In 1984 during the summer break from school, we received the help we needed from the Zellerbach Family Fund to

write this book. A very special thank-you has to go to the group of friends who helped us, from beginning to end. Their names are: **Khua-pao Vang, Shue-long Vue, Fai-neng Vang, Nao-ying Vue, Tong-yee Vang, and Tong-ga Vue.** In addition, this book has been written in English (American) and Hmong. I transcribed the oral version into written Hmong, and then into English, but it is very difficult because English is not like Hmong at all. An American friend helped me; her name is **Judy Lewis.** She helped me write and fix the English, so that it is correct, and so that the Hmong and the English correspond exactly, and that the meaning is true. I believe and hope that this is the case, and if there is any line or word that is not clear, please excuse.

Based on our searching through libraries, it seems that there are no books written by Hmong about Hmong. There are only a few books, written by European or American missionaries who came to our country and wrote what they understood. Some of what they wrote corresponds with the way things were, and some does not. This is one reason that I wanted to write this book. I think that we Hmong should write about our oral knowledge, so what is written will reflect what we really believe, and what is truly Hmong.

Whether we Hmong will prosper or not in the future depends on the education of our children. I encourage all Hmong, not only the young or the old, the boys or the girls, to get as much education as possible and to remember well our traditions and customs—the ones that are good, are useful, are important—and to hold on to our Hmong identity. I hope that all Hmong will consider deeply whether or not it is right that we cast away all our Hmong knowledge. In my opinion, even though we adopt many of the ways of the environment we are in, we should still retain some of the ways that make us Hmong, as well. There are Chinese Hmong, Vietnamese Hmong, Lao Hmong, Thai Hmong, and now it is very appropriate that there will be American Hmong. We must keep some of our own pieces, not just hurry to grab all the pieces from other people to replace our own.

This is all that I have to say to you, and I hope and trust that this book will be valuable to you, not the most, but not the least.

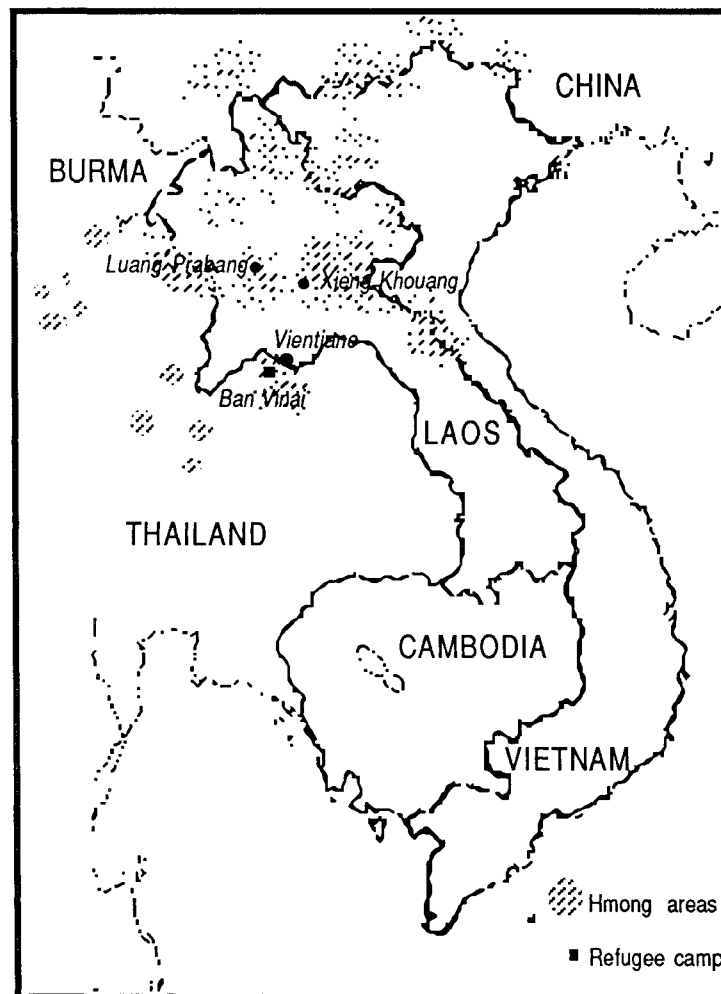
Thank you,

**Lue Vang**

## BACKGROUND: THE HMONG

### WHERE DO THE HMONG COME FROM?

The most recent home of the Hmong people living in the United States has been Laos. Laos is a landlocked country, lying between China, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The country is mountainous, with very few large cities, but many isolated villages, where many of the more than sixty minority groups live. The climate is tropical: a dry season (December to May), and a rainy season (June to November). There are tropical jungles, and scrub growth (small trees, bushes, and tall grass) in areas where fields have been abandoned.



## HISTORY

The Hmong have been a group of people without a homeland for at least 4,000 years. The history of the Hmong people is difficult to know, because there are no written records of their history. Some experts believe that at one time in the past, the Hmong must have had a highly developed civilization, because their culture has a complex and sophisticated legal system, which does not fit with most societies who are “slash-and-burn” farmers.<sup>2</sup>

The Hmong history has been passed down through legends and ritual ceremonies, from one generation to another. The legends tell of a time when Hmong lived in a cold land, covered with ice and snow, and where night lasted for half the year. The Hmong were living in Western China before the Han Chinese lived there, but they were always known as outsiders or barbarians, because they spoke a non-Chinese language, and wore special clothes that were not like Chinese. To avoid conflict with the Chinese, the Hmong settled in remote mountain areas, living and supporting themselves with agriculture. When the Chinese attempted to force the Hmong to become Chinese, giving up their language, customs, dress and life-style, many groups of Hmong refused, and the Chinese persecuted them and attempted to kill the leaders. This caused the Hmong to move southward, looking for places where they could live in peace. Eventually, about 200 years ago, Hmong began to be found in northern Vietnam, in the mountainous areas near the Laotian border. Over the last 200 years, groups of Hmong have moved further and further south, into Laos, where they again settled in the high mountains, far away from the majority group (the Lao people), who lived in the lowlands near the rivers and flat fields. The Hmong in Laos were eventually taxed by the government, and because they had very little money, they were allowed and encouraged to pay the head tax with raw opium, which grew well in their mountain fields. Like the British in China, the French used opium profits to finance their colonial empire.

When the Communists began to come into Laos in the 1950's, the Hmong villagers had to choose to join the Communists or move on. Some Hmong joined the Communists, but the most moved on and on, until they reached the lowlands in the center of Laos. There they were contacted by the United States in the early 1960's to become a guerilla army to fight the Communists and help U.S. pilots who were shot down over Laos. The Hmong became a loyal and hard-fighting army, supplied and supported by the United States, and managed to keep the Communists from winning for about 15 years; they were called the “U.S. Secret Army”, and people in the United States did not know about them until after the war was over. When the Communists

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<sup>2</sup>Bernazik, 1970.

won in 1975, the Hmong who were U.S. allies had to flee for their lives. The Communists have tried to eliminate all the Hmong in Laos, because they were such strong supporters of the United States.

No one knows for sure how many Hmong lived in Laos before the war, since there was no census taken, but experts estimate that there were about 300,000. About 30,000 to 40,000 Hmong died while fighting as the Secret Army, and about 150,000 have made it safely to Thailand as refugees. No one knows how many died trying. There are today about 90,000 Hmong who have come to the United States and another 35,000 Hmong children who have been born here. There are still about 40,000 still in Thai refugee camps, in 1990. Some Hmong have lived in Ban Vinai, the major Hmong refugee camp, for fifteen years.

Since the Hmong lost their homeland thousands of years ago, they have tried to find a place to live in peace.... in China, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand, and now, since 1975, in France, Australia, South America, and the United States. Throughout these 40 centuries, the Hmong have remained indentifiable as Hmong, because they have maintained their own language, customs, beliefs, costume, and ways of life, while also adopting the ways of the country in which they live.

For the Hmong who are in the United States, the young people are quickly becoming American, and are busy with school, an opportunity which most minority groups did not have in Laos. The young are no longer learning the oral history from their elders, and as the old people die, the knowledge of the Hmong also dies. Also quickly disappearing are the needlework and silverwork skills of the Hmong, as the young people don't have time to learn and practice the arts.

## ETHNIC MAKE-UP

Hmong are not Chinese, Thai, or Lao. Their beginnings are not known for sure, but anthropologists believe that the Hmong and the Mien had common ancestors in the long ago past, and those two groups are not closely related to any other ethnic group in Southeast Asia.

## RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

About 10% of the Hmong have been converted to Christianity by missionaries, but the rest are animists. The beliefs in spirits transcend all aspects of life—location and structure of the village site and the individual houses, location of the fields, growing of crops, sickness and healing, location of burial sites, marriage, childbirth, and death.

If one gets sick, it is possibly because his spirit has been scared away, or has been stolen from the body by evil spirits. If the crops don't grow well, it might be that the farmer didn't appeal to the field spirits and crop spirits enough. If an epidemic happens in the village, it may be that the protective spirits are unhappy. The livestock (chicken, pigs, cattle) are important for sacrifice to the spirits on various occasions.

A shaman can communicate with the spirit world, and is important in diagnosing and curing illness. Herbalists possess special knowledge of herbs that can heal sickness. Since there are no birth certificates and family geneology records, the specific details of the various spirit rituals are one way for relatives to identify one another as having a common ancestor several generations ago. The songs and chants of the shaman contain much of the oral history and aesthetic language of the past generations.

## LANGUAGE

The Hmong language is probably related most closely to the Mien language, both in the same branch of the Chinese-Tibetan family of languages. Hmong may have had a written form centuries ago, but no one knows for sure. It has been an oral language, maintained as a distinct language, for at least 4,000 years. There are two main dialect groups, White Hmong and Hmong Leng, which are mutually understandable. Missionaries in Laos in the mid-1950's developed a way to write Hmong, using the Roman alphabet (A-B-C's), so that they could write a Hmong Bible. Hmong in Laos were not allowed to learn the written Hmong language in school; those few who had the chance to go to school learned to read and write Lao, the national language. After escaping to Thailand in 1975, Hmong began to learn to read and write the language they speak.

There is an alphabet devised by an unschooled Hmong villager, Shong Lue Yang, in the early 1960's, called 'Pahawh Hmong' (*Paj Hauj*). A messianic religious movement has grown up around this man and his writing system, which he said was given to him by God as proof that he was the messiah. Despite the controversy that surrounds Shong Lue Yang, he is the only known non-literate villager who devised a credible and useful way to encode his language without outside influence. Not only that, he devised a writing system for the Khmu as well, his mother's ethnic group. Linguists in the United States are now working with his students to learn more about the alphabet and the life of this unusual man. He was killed in the 1970's by other Hmong who suspected that he was a Communist sympathizer.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LANGUAGE

The Hmong language has lexical tones, which give similar sounding words different meanings. There are eight tones, which differ from each other in pitch (high-low), length (short-long), and contour (falling, rising, level, breathy, abrupt end). The words begin with one of 56 different consonant sounds, some of which are very very similar, as close in sound as the 't' in 'top' and the 't' in 'stop'. After the consonant beginning comes a vowel sound; there are 13 different vowels. The word is pronounced on its tone, and changing the tone changes the meaning. In English, we say that we don't use tones to differ the meaning of words, but consider the following:

<b>Now.</b>	meaning	(At this time.)
<b>Now?</b>	meaning	(Right this minute?)
<b>Now!</b>	meaning	(Don't delay any longer!)

Each pronunciation of the word 'now' is slightly different, and English speakers understand the implicit differences in meaning. This is especially true of words used in a sarcastic manner: 'oh great!' or 'really nice'. In this same way, Hmong words that differ only in tone have different meanings, and the differences are as great as between any two words in English. For example:

<b>pab</b>	('pah', short, level, high)	<i>help</i>
<b>paj</b>	('pah', longer, falling, high to middle)	<i>flower</i>
<b>pav</b>	('pah', longer, rising, middle to high)	<i>tie</i>
<b>pa</b>	('pah', long, level, high middle)	<i>breath</i>
<b>pas</b>	('pah', short, level, low)	<i>stick</i>
<b>pam</b>	('pah', longer, low, falling, abrupt end)	<i>blanket</i>
<b>pad</b>	('pah', longer, low, rising and falling)	—
<b>pag</b>	('pah', longer, low, falling, breathy end)	<i>melon</i>

The Hmong language contains words borrowed from Chinese, Thai, Lao, French, and now, English, much like English borrows words from French (*rendezvous*), Spanish (*rodeo*), and other languages.

The written form of Hmong looks like this:

### ***hmoob ntsuab***

**hm**= 'm' (with air through the nose)

**oo**= 'ong' (the 'o' is halfway between a short 'o' (*cot*) and a long 'o' (*boat*))



**b=** tone marker: high pitch, short duration, level contour (the 'b' does not make a sound)

**=Hmong**

**nts=** 'nj' (as in *injure*)

**ua=** 'oo-ah' (as in *pursuable*)

**b=** tone marker (is not pronounced; high, short, level)

**=Njua**

Together it is **Hmong Njua**, or Green Hmong.

## DIALECT GROUPS

There are two main sub-groups of Hmong, White Hmong (*Hmoob Dawb*) and Hmong Leng (*Hmoob Leeg*, often called *Hmong Njua* —*Green or Blue Hmong*), but there are several other sub-groups. Local contributors of the Hmong Leng group say that long ago there was only one kind of Hmong, but that because the Han Chinese tried to subjugate them, they became divided up, and gradually developed different dress style and different dialects. Those who adopted white skirts became known as 'White Hmong', those with striped sleeves became 'Striped Hmong', and the original group, who wore indigo-blue batiked skirts with long strips of applique and embroidery, were named 'Hmong Leng' or 'Hmong Njua' by the others. They call themselves simply "Hmong" (*Moob*). White Hmong usually speak only their dialect, while Hmong Leng speak both.

The system used for writing Hmong, the Romanized Popular Alphabet, was developed in a White Hmong village. Most printed materials are written in White Hmong, and speeches are given to mixed groups in White Hmong. However, the only dictionary produced in the United States is Hmong Leng.<sup>3</sup>

## HANDICRAFTS

The Hmong are perhaps best known for their elaborate clothing. The Hmong Leng women know the technique of batik, with intricate patterns that form the base for the baby-carriers and skirts. The White Hmong women are well-known for their reverse

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<sup>3</sup>Xyooj et al., 1983.

applique, with sections of fabric cut in intricate patterns, tucked under, and stitched to a base cloth. The Hmong Leng skirts are covered with appliqued bands, squares, and triangles, all in complex patterns learned from mothers and mothers-in-law. The skirts are pleated in hundreds of tiny pleats.

The traditional forms of needlework are changing in the United States, as women sew square pieces using elements of traditional design in new colors and combinations. In addition, the people living in the Thai refugee camps are producing scenic panels, which show the history and the past life with embroidered pictures. These are like history books, written by people who don't know a written language. After Charles Johnson produced a series of illustrated bilingual folktales, the stories began showing up on scenic panels. The words are copied stick by stick, as English-speakers might copy a Chinese character. The illustrations have become more and more elaborate, and as time goes by, more original folktales appear on panels. Starting in the late 1980's *paj ntaub* began to arrive in the U.S. from Laos.

## DRESS

Hmong dress has dialect group differences and regional differences. It is possible to look at a person and tell which group she belongs to, and where she came from. The White Hmong women wear black pants or white pleated skirts, with embroidered aprons, and highly decorated shirts. Hmong Leng women wear colorful appliqued batik pleated skirts, with long black aprons, and black shirts. Each group wears an intricately decorated collar piece in the back, the White Hmong with the decoration showing, the Hmong Leng with the decorated side facing down. The costume is covered with silver necklaces, coin belts, and coin bags. The regional differences are mainly in the type of headdress worn. The men wear black pants (the Hmong Leng men's pants are baggy and short, with a long crotch), black shirts, some with intricately embroidered edges, with long sashes around the waist, and silver necklaces, coin belts, and sashes. The headdress for the men is a Chinese-style black cap, decorated with embroidery.

Traditionally, each girl of marriageable age spent about a year making a beautiful new costume, to be worn for the first time at the new year. The costume was testimony to her skill, creativity, and willingness to work hard.

## EDUCATION

In the late-1950's there were only about thirty Hmong attending college, all in foreign countries. While living in villages, there was little opportunity to attend school,

and even if there was a school, the family had to be able to spare the labor, and have silver saved up, to send a child away to live with someone else and attend school. When families left the mountains for the lowlands, there were more opportunities for school and less requirement for field work if the fathers were employed as soldiers. Thus, more children attended school, even a few of the girls. The schools taught Lao, the national language, so children had to learn in Lao. Overall, about 95% of the Hmong now in the U.S. had no school at all, and of those who went to school, most went for three years or less. The more fortunate children had six years of school, and read and write Lao.

Those who have been in the refugee camps for years have attended classes taught in Thai or Hmong, and may have learned some English.

## CULTURAL/SOCIAL

### *WHAT IS IT TO BE HMONG ?*

To be Hmong means that you speak the language, observe the customs and roles, live in patrilineal groups, and identify yourself as Hmong. If you were born in a different ethnic group, and adopted by a Hmong family, you would be Hmong if you speak Hmong, act like a Hmong, and call yourself Hmong. You could marry outside the Hmong group, and your children would be Hmong, if you are male. For a female who marries outside the Hmong group, the children are not Hmong— their ethnic/cultural group is the same as the father's.

### *PLACE IN SOCIETY*

The group is always more important than an individual. It is the reputation of the group that is important, and people govern their actions by knowing that bringing shame to the clan or the lineage group will affect the group's ability to form good marriages in the future. Leadership is important, whether in the family, the village, the clan, or the region. Leaders have special qualities, knowledge of customs and law, and have demonstrated that they make decisions that are fair and good for the society. Individuals in the society consult their leaders about decisions, and turn to them for counsel, advice, and settlement of disputes.

### *CLANS*

Hmong society is divided into about 18 or 19 clans, shown by the "last name". The clan name is preceded with 'Hmong': Hmong Vang, Hmong Vue, Hmong Cha,

Hmong Xiong, Hmong Lee, Hmong Mua, Hmong Kha, Hmong Yang, Hmong Her, Hmong Lo, Hmong Thao, Hmong Pha, Hmong Chue, Hmong Cheng, Hmong Kong, Hmong Hang, and Hmong Kue.

A person has responsibilities to clan brothers and sisters, and in turn can count on them for support and help. A person cannot marry someone with the same clan name, even if they are of different lineages from different areas. Even a Hmong Vang from Thailand cannot marry a Hmong Vang from California. However, two clans may prefer to strengthen their clan alliances by having many marriages to tie two clans together. A preferred marriage arrangement is to maternal “first cousins”.

## *FAMILY*

To Hmong, ‘family’ means much more than “father-mother-children”. Marriages are based on personal choice, but the choice of a mate is often from an allied clan, and the marriage is not just a union of two people, but a union of two clans. Divorce is rare, and the family responsibilities are divided with well-defined roles. The husband has responsibility to know the traditions, the customs, the oral history, the lineage, the details of the groups rituals, to interact with others, to make the major decisions about the future of the family. The wife takes care of the money, raises the children, and in Laos, did much of the daily work, including field work, making clothes, cooking, and tending livestock. The older children have responsibility for the younger children, and children are given their share of work at an early age. By the age of 13 or 14, Hmong are able to carry on the actual work of supporting the family, but are still learning the ways of the culture, and even if married, are part of the parent’s household for a number of years to come. In Laos, a good future was dependent on the number of children one had, particularly sons, as they would have responsibility for caring for elderly parents, and providing an appropriate funeral. As the elders are respected for their knowledge, the grandfather retains his family leadership role for as long as he lives, but once his son takes over the position of family head, he acts as an advisor. When married, a girl becomes part of her husband’s family, although she does not change her last name. Traditionally, girls hope to marry at 13 to 15 years of age, and the responsibility for raising the children properly is shared by the parents and the grandparents, as well as other household members. Families live together in extended family groups, with the house enlarged as the sons marry, bring home wives, and begin their families.

## VALUES

The major values held by Hmong society are:

1. ensuring the family's welfare and reputation;
2. respecting others;
3. knowing Hmong customs and appropriate behavior;
4. using one's talents and abilities; being skillful;
5. knowing the family's specific ways of worshipping the home spirits;
6. fulfilling one's proper role in society;
7. fulfilling obligations to clansmen and in-laws;
8. being practical and handling money well;
9. being independent of non-Hmong groups;
10. being self-reliant (supporting your family throughout the year);
11. not lying, misbehaving, committing crimes, or otherwise bringing shame to your group;
12. working hard;
13. producing visible signs of hard work—livestock, silver, gold;
14. tolerating others, and avoiding conflict with others.

## FOLKTALES

Folktales teach, much like Aesop's Fables do in the United States. There are folktales for different audiences and different situations. There are a few folktales which are well-known, although it is difficult to know whether the few folktales which have been written down, to date, are the well-known folktales, or whether they became well-known because someone wrote them down.

Folktales tell how people came to live on the earth, how Hmong came to be, how Hmong clans started, how the moon and the sun came to be in the sky, why the crops have to be carried in from the fields, not to underestimate the youngest one or the orphan, how to be a friend, etc. There are tales which tell the history of the Hmong, and of historical problems with the Chinese and others. There are folktales which teach people how to be good Hmong and how to carry out customs.

Folktales differ somewhat according to the audience. Folktales for children tend to be shorter, simpler, and with a single message. Folktales for adults tend to be more complicated, with more characters, hidden meanings, symbols, and old words or 'flower words'.

One situation in which folktales are told is during the long nights preceding someone's funeral. People come from all over to stay with the family, and the visitors stay awake all night, keeping watch over the family and (in the old days) the deceased; the house of the deceased is supposed to be the one house in the village with lights on (fires burning) all night. One way to pass the time and keep people from dwelling on unhappiness is to tell folktales. Usually these groups are all men, and the folktales may be long and complex, humorous, clever, and full of hidden meanings.

Children's folktales are told as the time and situation allows. Sometimes the father, who watches the children while the mother prepares the meal, will tell the children short stories or songs. Grandparents tell stories, and anytime that people are gathered together and have spare time, such as during the New Year, folktales may be told.

Storytellers vary in their skill. Skillful storytellers remember the story well from the past generation, and add color and details, but the story line remains essentially the same. In this way, folktales are seldom exactly alike, but those with knowledge can agree on which folktales are 'right', and which ones are fabrications.

Story titles are very literal: 'story about being an orphan', 'story that tells about loving your parents', 'Hmong story'. The word for story (*zaj dab neeg*) translates literally as, 'group of words-spirit-people'.

*DAB NEEG*  
**NRUAB HNUB THIAB HMO NTUJ**

Thaum ub mas muaj 9 lub hnuv, 9 lub hli. Nws tau tsaus-ntuj los tsaus ntev heev. Nws tau kaj-ntug los kaj ntev heev ces tib neeg ntiaj-teb ua tsis tau noj. Lawv chim, lawv thiaj mus txua ib rab hneev 9 dag taub 8 dag nta, muab tua tua hnuv.

Hnuv thiab hli ntshai ntshai ces hnuv thiab hli tsis kam tawm tuaj. Ntiaj-teb tsaus-ntuj tau 7 xyoo haj yam ua tsis tau noj. Ntiaj-teb tib neeg thiaj tias yuav tso tus tsiaj dab-tsi mus hu es lub hnuv thiab lub hli thiaj yuav tawm tuaj!

Tso nyuj mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj, hnuv thiab hli kuj los tsis tawm thiab.

Tso tsov mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj los tsis tawm.

Tso lib-nyug mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj los tsis tawm.

Thiaj li tias yog no cia tso qaib mus hu. Qaib hu hu ces lub hnuv thiaj li mam tawm tuaj, thiab lub hli mam tawm tuaj ua-qab es thiaj muaj nruab-hnuv thiab hmo ntuj los rau tib neeg ntiaj-teb tau ua noj ua haus.

Tus hais yog **Nylaj-lauj Vaj**

*FOLKTALE*  
**WHY IS THERE DAY AND NIGHT?**

Long ago, there were nine suns and nine moons. When it was night, it was night for a very long time. When it was day, it was daytime for a very long time. The people of the world could not work enough to have sufficient to eat, and they were angry. They made a cross-bow nine *dah*<sup>4</sup> long and eight *dah* wide, and went to shoot the suns. The suns and the moons were very afraid and were not willing to come out. The earth was dark for seven years and people of the world could do no work to get food to eat.

They said, "What kind of animal can go and call the suns and the moons to come out?"

They sent the bull to call, to see if the sun and moon would come out, but they would not.

They sent the tiger to call, to see if the sun and the moon would come out, but they would not.

They sent the bird, the *lee-nyu*<sup>5</sup> to call, to see if the sun and the moon would come out, but they would not.

Then they sent the rooster to call, to see if the sun and the moon would come out. The rooster called and called, and the sun came out for a little while (daytime), and then the moon came out for a little while (night). Since that time there has been daylight and nighttime, so that the people can work, and have enough to eat, and they have lived until now.

Storyteller: **Nhia Lor Vang**

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<sup>4</sup>*dag*: unit of measure, the distance between the tips of the fingers when the arms are held shoulder high, stretched out to the side; about five feet.

<sup>5</sup>*lib-nyug*: bird similar to a hawk



*DAB NEEG*  
**NPAWG-HLOB THIAB NPAWG-YAU**

Puag thaum ub muaj ob tug npawg. Ib tug npawg-hlob thiab ib tug npawg-yau. Nkawd sib raug zoo heev ces muaj ib hnuv nkawd txawm sib yaum mus ua-si tom hav-zoov. Nkawd mus mus ces ntsib ib tug niag dais-nees. Tus npawg-hlob txawm khiav mus nce ntoo lawm. Ces tshuav tus npawg-yau, nws nce tsis tau ntoo. Nws txawm pw khwb-rwg rau hauv pem teb. Tus dais-nees los muab tus npawg-yau hnia hnia ncig ib lwm tas, tsis tom tus npawg-yau. Tus dais-nees txawm cia li khiav rov-qab dua tom hav-zoov lawm xwb. Tus npawg-hlob ho nqes los txog.

Tus npawg-hlob txawm los nug tus npawg-yau hais tias, "Npawg-yau, tus dais-nees los hnia hnia koj. Nws ho tsis tom thiab tsis khawb koj. Tus dais-nees hais li cas rau koj no?"

Tus npawg-yau txawm hais rau tus npawg-hlob hais tias, "Tus dais-nees los hnia hnia kuv nws tsis tom thiab tsis khawb kuv. Nws hais rau kuv hais tias, 'Txawm yog ua kwv-tij kwv-npawg zoo npaum li cas los yog txog thaum uas ib tug yuav tuag es ib tug ho tsis pab, ces kom tsis txhob ua kwv-tij kwv-npawg ntxiv lawm los tau no.' "

*Zaj dab neeg no mas yog piv tias: ua phooj ua ywg nyob, yuav kom zoo tiag mas yuav yog thaum uas muaj yam zoo los kom ob leeg tau. Hos yog ho muaj yam phem los kom ob leeg yuav-tsum sib pab tiv kom dhau no.*

Tus hais yog **Tooj-zag Vwj**

FOLKTALE  
**THE OLD FRIEND  
AND THE YOUNG FRIEND**

Long long ago there were two friends, one older and one younger. They were very close friends. One day the two of them decided to go play in the jungle. There they met a horse bear<sup>6</sup> (a bear the size of a horse). The older friend ran quickly and climbed a tree to the very top, leaving the young friend below. The young friend couldn't climb trees, so he laid face down in the dirt. The horse bear circled the boy, sniffing and sniffing him from toe to head, but didn't bite or scratch him at all. Then the bear suddenly left, and went back his own way.

The older friend climbed down from the tree and asked the young friend, "Young friend, the horse bear came and sniffed and sniffed you from toe to head, but didn't bite or scratch you at all. What did the bear say to you?"

Then the young friend said to the old friend, "The horse bear came and sniffed and sniffed me from toe to head, but didn't bite or scratch me a bit. He said to me, 'Even though you two have been very close friends for a long time, now, when danger comes, one doesn't help the other.....it seems that your friendship has no value anymore.'"

*This story explains: in friendship, it is fitting and right that when there are good things then friends share them. And when there are bad things then friends must help each other endure and overcome them.*

Storyteller: **Tong Ga Vue**

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<sup>6</sup>tus dais nees

**DAB NEEG  
HNUB-QUB**

Thaum ub tsis muaj hnuv-qub li niaj hnuv nim no.

Puag thaum ub huab-tais qaum-ntuj muaj ib tug ntshais. Nws lub npe hu ua Niam-nkauj-hnuv-qub. Nws mob ib lub txia loj loj rau ntawm ib sab caj dab. Ces txawm tsis muaj neeg nyiam thiab yuav nws li. Nws tsis muaj txiv yuav. Nws txawm khiav mus ua tsev nyob rau puag tom plawv hav-zoov. Nws nyob ib leeg thiab nws muaj ib tug aub ua nws luag xwb.

Nws mus nyob nyob txawm muaj ib tug niam-tais-poj-dab tuaj pom. Tus niam-tais-poj-dab hluv hluv nws. Niam-tais-poj-dab txawm muab nyiaj muab kub ntau ntau rau nws. Nws ua neej muaj txiag thiab nplua-nuj heev.

Nws tuaj mus yuav khoom tom zos. Nws muab nws cov nyiaj cov kub coj tuaj yuav khoom tas. Thaum nws rov los txog tsev, nws cov nyiaj cov kub twb rov-qab los nyob hauv tsev tos nws lawm. Nws ho muab nqa coj mus pub rau tej neeg zej zog ib leeg ob peb lub, los luag pheej muab xa rov-qab tuaj rau nws. Nws ib leeg thiag muaj nyiaj thiab kub xwb. Nws xav coj mus pub rau luag lwm tus, los pub tsis tau li.

Ces muaj ib hnuv nws txawm muab txawb mus rau tim tej qab-roob qab-ha. No na has ua cav nws cov nyiaj thiab kub txawm mus khuam rau qhov-chaw uas nws txawb mus. Ces nws muab nws cov nyiaj thiab kub txawb txawb mus rau qhov-tshia-qhov-chaw tag. Ua ciav txawm mus ua tau ib niag ntuj hnuv-qub ntsa-qas-iab. Ces nim no saum-ntuj thiag li muaj hnuv-qub ntsa-qas-paug.

Hais rau sawv daws paub hais tias cov nyiaj mus ua cov hnuv-qub dawb, ci dawb pom kev zoo. Cov kub mus ua cov hnuv-qub tooj-dag, ci daj pom kev tsis heev.

Tus hais yog **Tooj-zag Vwj**

*FOLKTALE*  
**WHY ARE THERE STARS IN THE SKY?**

Once there were no stars in the sky like there are now.

Long ago the king of heaven had a daughter, named Princess Nou Kou<sup>7</sup> She had a big goiter on the side of her neck. Nobody liked her, and there wasn't any young man to marry her. She did not have a husband. She ran away to build a house deep in the heart of the jungle and she lived there alone. She had only a dog to be her companion.

She lived there for a long time. There was a mother ghost<sup>8</sup> who came along and saw her. The mother ghost loved her and took care of her. The mother ghost gave a lot of silver and a lot of gold to Princess Nou Kou, therefore, she became very very wealthy.

One day she went to buy things in the village and she used the gold to pay for the the things she needed. She returned to her home, and all the gold was already there, waiting for her. So she took the money and gave it to the villagers, a few pieces to each one, but the silver and gold always came back to her. She was the only person to have silver and gold. She wanted to give away her wealth to other people, but she couldn't; the pieces always came back to her.

One day, she took the pieces of silver and gold and threw them everywhere—to the top of the mountain, to the foot of the mountain, every place—the pieces stuck where they landed. She threw all her pieces of silver and gold, and suddenly, there was a great sky full of blinking stars. That's why the sky now has stars flashing and twinkling.

The silver pieces became white stars, very clear and bright enough to see well; the gold pieces became yellow stars, not quite clear and not quite bright enough to see well.

Storyteller: **Tong Ga Vue**

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<sup>7</sup> *hnub-qub*: star

<sup>8</sup> *niam-tais-poj-dab*

**DAB NEEG  
TSHUAV NQE**

Puag hnuv caj thaum ub muaj ob niam txiv, nkawd yug tau ib tug tub los ces tus tub txawm tuag lawm. Nkawd rov muaj dua ib tug, yog tus ob yug tau los, los kuj tuag lawm thiab. Tsis ntev tom qab nkawd ho yug tau ib tug tub, yog tus peb, los kuj tuag lawm thiab, ces nkawd thiaj mus yuav tau ib tug me-nyuam nyuj los tua rau nws, coj nws mus faus tas. Tau tsis ntev tom qab no nkawd ho rov qab muaj dua ib tug tub yug tau los yog tus plaub. Nyob nws muaj hnoob nyoog tsib xyoos. Muaj ib hnuv tus me-nyuam txawm mob-mob yuav tuag, nkawd ob niam txiv muaj ib tug txiv nees txheeb-dawb nyob hauv nkuaj; tus tub txawm hais rau nws txiv hais tias, "Txiv, kuv pheej mob-mob ua luaj no, yog tim tus txiv nees txheeb-dawb hauv nkuaj xwb. Yog koj kam muab nws tua no mas kuv thiaj li yuav nquag, hos yog koj tsis kam, mas tej zaum ntshai kuv yuav tuag xwb."

No ces leej-txi xav tias, "Ab....kuv twb yug tau ntau tus tub lawm es tsis tau ib tug los yuav li, mas tsam yog tim tus nees tiag. Cia kuv ho muab tus nees tua saib kuv tus tub puas yuav zoo los nrog kuv nyob." Leej- txi rho hlo ntaj xa tib nkaug nees plab, nees tuag kiag, rov hlo los txog tsev na has tus tub twb tuag lawm thiab.

Tus nees los tuag. Tus tub los kuj tuag tag lawm, ces leej-txi chim heev. Nws niaj hnuv quaj mus rau txhia txoj ke. Muaj ib hnuv nws mus ntsib phab-nyas-eeb. Phab-nyas-eeb nug hais tias, "Yog ua cas koj niaj hnuv yuav quaj rau txhia txoj ke li no naj."

Nws hais tias, "Yog kuv tus tub thiab tus txiv nees puav leej tuag tag lawm, es mob kuv siab hwm. Kuv thiaj li tsav quaj ua luaj no."

Phab-nyas-eeb hais tias, "Yuav kom koj nrhiav pom koj tus tub, mas koj taug txoj kev no mus lawm pem roob, ces muaj ib lub tsev loj-loj. Koj tus tub thiab tus txiv nees txheeb-dawb nyob pem."

Nws txawm taug txoj kev ntawd mus txog pem lub tsev uas phab-nyas-eeb hais. Nws thiaj li saib na has ua cas to ib lub qhov dua dab nrag teb lawm. Nws pom ib tug qhev-zov-rooj-vag. Tus qhev hais tias, "Koj yuav tuaj mus dabtsi?"

Nws hais tias, "Twb yog kuv yuav tuaj mus nrhiav kuv tus tub. Ua li koj puas pom kuv tus tub uas muaj hnub-nyoog tsib xyoos xwb, nws caij ib tug txiv nees txheeb-dawb?"

Ces tus qhev-zov-rooj-vag thiaj hais tias, "Kuv pom kawg, las mas. Kuv yuav coj koj mus ntsib koj tus tub, tabsis cia kuv ua rau koj saib tso, koj tus tub twb los yuav luag txog tam sim no ntag. Kuv muab koj zais rau qhov no, nws los rau koj saib ib plia. Kuv mam li coj koj mus ntsib tau nws. Koj nyob qhov no mas koj tsis txhob nti, thiab txhob ua nws pom koj. Koj hais tias nws yog koj tus tub, no uas yog koj pom nws tas mas nyaj koj yuav tsis quaj lawm laub."

Tus qhev-zov-rooj-vag txawm muab leej-txi cev khaub ncaws hle los kho rau ib tug niag dauj-khaub-hlab hnav, thiab muab yawg zai rau hauv ib chav tsev. Kom nws xauj hauv ib lub me-nyuam qhov me-me mus rau ntawm tus dauj-khaub-hlab.

Ces nws pom nws tus tub caij kiag nws tus txiv nees txheeb-dawb ya plo los tsaws ntua rau nraum qab khav, nws muab nees khi nkaus tas. Nws ya ntxiag los txog ntawm rooj vag. Nws nug tus qhev-zov-rooj-vag tias, "Kuv hnov tias niag yawg laus tuaj no dua twg lawm. Sim qhia kuv soj."

Tus qhev-zov-rooj-vag thiaj coj kiag nws tus tub los taw nkaus rau tus niag dauj-khaub-hlab. Tus tub rho hlo ntaj xa tib ntag dauj-khaub-hlab tu nrho ua ob ya, thiab cem hais tias, "Tus neeg no, phem tsis phem mas nws tshuav kuv nqe. Kuv mus sau nqe ob zaug tsis tau li. Zaum peb nws mam li muab ib tug me-nyuam nyuj rau kuv xwb. Zaum plaub no kuv mam mus dag tau nws tus txiv nees xwb. Nws tseem tshuav kuv nqe ntau heev," ces nws rov qab lawm.

Ces tus qhev-zov-rooj-vag thiaj los hais rau yawg hais tias, "Zaum no koj puas pom? Nws tsis yog koj tus tub na...yog thaum ub koj tshuav nws nqe koj them tsis tas, nim no yog nws los sau nqe ntawm koj xwb. Es txij li no mus koj tsis txhob quaj quaj lawm." Ces ua nwg nws kua muag tu nrho rov qab los tsev lawm.

Zaj dab neeg no mas hais txog cov neeg uas pheej yug tsis tau me-nyuam los yuav li mas yog thaum ub yus tshuav luag nqe them tsis tas. Es yus tuag ua ntej lawm ces tiam no luag thiaj rov los tsib nqe. Yog leej twg yug tau ob peb tug me-nyuam tuag tag lawm es tsis tau yuav li, mas yuav-tsum tua nyuj, tua twm ntau ntau rau kom yus thiaj li yug tau me-nyuam los yuav.

Tus hais yog **Swm-looj Vwj**

## FOLKTALE COLLECTING THE DEBT

Long long ago there was a couple, and they had a son. Their son died. They had another son, the second son, and this son also died. A short while later, they had a third son, who also died. They decided to go buy a calf to sacrifice for his funeral ceremony, and then they buried him. Not very much time passed, and they had a fourth son. One day, when he was five years old, he became very very ill, ready to die. The mother and father had a gold stallion in their stable. The son said to his father, "Father, I have been so ill like this only because of your gold stallion in the stable. If you are willing to kill your horse, then I will recover, but if you're not willing to do this, then I'm afraid that I may die."

So the father thought, "Ah.....I have already had many sons, and yet this is the only son who has lived.....maybe it is really that horse.... Let me kill the horse, and I will see if this son will recover to go on living with me." The father pulled out his sword and stabbed the horse in the stomach, and the horse instantly died. He pulled the sword back out and went inside the house, and his son was already dead, too.

The gold stallion was dead. The fourth son was dead, too. Both gone, and the father's heart was broken. So everyday he cried everywhere, looking for them.

One day he went to see a king, Pa-nya-eng<sup>9</sup>. Pa-nya-eng asked him, "What's wrong with you? Why do you cry everyday, going everywhere, like this?"

The father replied, "It is because my son and my stallion are both dead, and my heart is very sick. That's why I cry so much."

Pa-nya-eng said, "You want to find your son....then follow this path to the mountain, and there you will see a large large house. Your son and your gold stallion are there."

So he did just that. He followed the path up to the mountain, and arrived at a house, just as Pa-nya-eng had said. As he looked at the house, it seemed like a hole opened up, and he could see into a village of departed spirits. He saw a guard at the gate. The guard asked him, "Why have you come here?"

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<sup>9</sup>*phab-nyas-eeb*

He replied, "I have come here to search for my son. Have you seen him? He's five years old, and riding a gold stallion."

The guard then said, "I did indeed see him. I will take you to see your son, but let me check first..... ah, your son is almost here right now. I will hide you here, and when he comes, you look at him for a moment. Then I'll take you to meet him. You stay here and don't move, or let him see you. You say that he is your son, but when you've seen him, then you won't cry anymore."

The guard took the father's clothing off, and put the clothes on a cross of sticks, to make a scarecrow, and then he hid the father in a room. He told the father to look through a tiny hole into the next room, and watch the scarecrow.

Then the father saw his son riding the gold stallion, flying up to the fence surrounding the place of departed spirits. He tied his horse, and went towards the gate. He said to the guard, "I heard that an old gentleman came here looking for me. Where is he? Tell me!"

The guard led the son directly to the scarecrow. The son pulled out his sword, made one slashing blow, and cut the scarecrow into two pieces. He yelled, "This man is very stupid. He owes me money. I went to collect the debt two times and didn't get anything. The third time he gave me only a calf. The fourth time, I tricked him, but I got only his stallion. He still owes me a lot of money." Then he left.

The guard came and said to the father, "Now, do you see? He is not your son. In a previous life you were in debt to him, and didn't repay him, so now he comes to collect the debt you owe. From now on, you don't need to cry anymore." Suddenly the father's tears stopped completely, and he returned to his home.

*This folktale tells those people who have had many children die in infancy that it is because in a previous life they were in debt too much. The children die now, because the person comes back to collect the old debt that is owed. If anyone has two or three children die at an early age, they have to sacrifice many cows and water buffalo for them at the time of the funeral ceremony. The sacrifice will pay off the debt, and the next children will live.*

Storyteller: **Shue-long Vue**



**DAB NEEG  
NRHIAV KEV TSIS PAUB TUAG**

Puag noob caj thaum ub, muaj ib tug nraug-ntsuag. Nws nrog nws tij-laug thiab niam-tij nkawd nyob. Nraug-ntsuag, nws niaj hnuv mus zov nyuj, saib nyuj noj zaub. Ua cas muaj ib hnuv nws mus saib nyuj, nws txawm pom ib tug npuj-npaim dai ib txog xov ntev-ntev los puag saum ntuj rau hauv ntiaj-teb no tuag dai vias, ces nws xav tias, "Ab....yus ua me-nyuam tsis muaj niam tsis muaj txiv, txom-txom nyem es tus nyuag npuj-npaim no ntshai zoo li yus txom-txom nyem tsis muaj niam tsis muaj txiv es nws thiaj tuaj tuag tus dai vias li no, ces cia kuv muab koj los pam ua si saib."

Nraug-ntsuag txawm koj los pam. Nraug-ntsuag txawm mus khawb ib xub niag nas tsuag xya tus, nws txawm muab ua nyuj tua rau tus nyuag npuj-npaim ntawd, ces Nraug-ntsuag rov los txog tsev. Nws txawm los piav qhia nws niam-tij tias, "Niam-tij os....hnuv no mas kuv mus zov nyuj noj zaub ces kuv pom ib tug npuj-npaim dawb dawb poob puag saum ntuj los mus tis ib txog xov dai vias, kuv xav xav kuv hlub hlub ces kuv muab koj los pam, kuv mus khawb tau xya tus nas tsuag koj los tua ua nyuj rau, kuv muab faus ua ib lub ntxa, es hnuv no kuv thiaj los lig-lig."

Niam-tij teb tias, "Nraug-ntsuag....ua twj-ywm tsam qeej hnov qeej nrov, nruas hnov nruas to qhov, suav hnov suav hlais nplais, Hmoob hnov Hmoob dua puab-tsaig."

Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Om..."

Ces aub....pa-taws hnov lauj...ces pa-taws mus qhia rau Xeev-laum qaum ntuj lauj!! Nws yog Xeev-laum ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm tuaj dai tuag rau ntiaj-teb. Xeev-laum hnov ces nws tso kws-tshiab-tuaj-tshuaj, tso kiag ib tw huab poob nthav rau ntiaj-teb, ua kiag ob tug neeg, los nkag kiag hauv Nraug-ntsuag tsev thiab hais tias, "As....niam-tij thiab tij-laug, Nraug-ntsuag lub tsev puas yog lub no?"

Niam-tij thiab tij-laug teb tias, "Awb yog ntag."

Nkawd thiaj los nug Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Wb hnov lawv hais tias koj pom Xeev-laum ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm tuaj dai tuag rau ntiaj-teb no mas...awb muaj lus ua-tsaug ntau thov koj qhia wb. Wb tuaj nrhiav Xeev-laum ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm ntag."

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Kuv tsis pom li as...kuv tsis paub li nawb Xeev-laue ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm os!!"

Nkawd thiaj tias, "Koj paub xwb-xwb, thov koj qhia xwb-xwb."

Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Kuv tsis pom tiag hos..."

Nkawd nug-nug thiab thov-thov Nraug-ntsuag.

Nraug-ntsuag hais tias, "Kuv tsis pom tiag-tiag li..."

Nkawd hais tias, "Wb hnov tias koj pom Xeev-laue ntxhais-nkauj- ntxawm es koj coj los pam, koj tua xya tus nyuj rau no nev?"

Nraug-ntsuag thiaj xav txog tias, "Ob...ntshai tsam lam yog qhov ntawd xwb os." Nraug-ntsuag thiaj hais tias, "Awb...thov txim, kuv tsis paub nev, kuv pom ib tug nyuag npuj-npaim dai ib txog xov los puag saum ntuj los tuag dai vias ces kuv muab coj los pam, kuv mus khawb tau xya tus niam tub nas tsuag los tua rau ces kuv muab faus."

Nkawd txawm tias, "Awb yog li mas muaj lus ua-tsaug lauj...koj coj wb mus xyuas lub ntxa. Wb yuav khawb coj mus rau Xeev-laue qaum ntuj, nws yog Xeev-laue tus ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm, Xeev-laue yuav coj mus cawm."

Nraug-ntsuag thiaj coj nkawd mus khawb. Nkawd khawb tau lawm ces nkawd hais rau Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Xeev-laue hais li no nws kom wb coj koj nrog wb mus lawm qaum ntuj ntag. Koj pom-yim pom Xeev-laue ntxhais-nkauj- ntxawm ces koj nrog wb mus xwb-xwb. Koj tsis mus mas tsis tau li ntag." Nraug-ntsuag thiaj teb tias, "Awb kuv yog neeg ntiaj-teb, kuv mus tsis tau nawb."

Nkawd teb tias, "Tau thiab tsis tau los wb kom mus ces mus xwb. Koj los rau wb qhov-tsos ces wb qaim koj ces peb mus xwb."

"Ua li, los ua li."

Nraug-ntsuag niam-tij hais rau Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Nraug-ntsuag, yog koj mus no mas koj tsis txhob yuav dabtsi. Huab-tais Xeev-laue yuav nug koj saib koj yuav yuav dabtsi. Dab tsis los koj txhob yuav, muab nyiaj los koj txhob yuav, muab kub los koj txhob yuav nawb. Koj yuav lub me taub- khwj-lwb thiab tsob nyuag hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas coj los cawm tib-neeg hauv ntiaj-teb no ov...?"

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Aws."

Nraug-ntsuag thiaj nrog huab mus, huab muab qaim kiag rau hauv qhov-tsos. Yaj-ntshis tib pliag, rua muag kiag cas twb txog qaum ntuj ces thiaj koj tau Xeev-laue ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm mus txog ntua Huab-tais. Huab-tais mas zoo siab tsis zoo, zoo zoo siab kawg, thiab qhuas hais tias yog tsis muaj Nraug-ntsuag ces Huab-tais tsis pom nws ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm uas mus dai tuag rau ntiaj-teb li lau. Huab-tais nrhiav tau xya hnuv xya hmo. Zaum no muab tau los lawm ces kho lauj....thiaj muab lub hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas los tsuag laws peb pas mus, peb pas los, muab rub sawv ntsees los zoo-nkauj li tus qub, zoo-nkauj dua lawm thiab.

Ces Xeev-laue thiaj tias, "Nraug-ntsuag koj pom-yim pab tau kuv ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm, ua li koj yuav yuav dabtsi? Kuv muab nyiaj rau koj."

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Nyiaj kuv tsis yuav, nyiaj yog peb ntiaj-teb nyiaj kua-muag xwb, kuv tsis yuav."

"Yog koj tsis yuav nyiaj, kuv muab nees rau koj."

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Nees los kuv tsis yuav, nees yog peb ntiaj-teb nees kuas-txaij kuas-nraug xwb, kuv tsis yuav."

"Yog li ntawd kuv muab nyuj rau koj nawb."

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Nyuj los kuv tsis yuav nawb, txiv Xeev-laue, nyuj yog peb neeg ntiaj-teb niag nyuj ncig tshuav xwb, kuv tsis yuav."

"Awb....yog li muab dabtsi los koj tsis yuav ces kuv tsis pom qab muab lawm. Yog koj nyiam yuav dab-tsi no mas koj txawm hais ntag."

Nraug-ntsuag tias, "Ab....kuv xav yuav koj ib yam dab-tsi thiab tiam sis ntshai hais los koj yuav tsis muab."

Xeev-laue hais tias, "Tsis hais li cas los mas koj hais ces muab xwb koj pom-yim pom kuv ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm, koj yuav dabtsi los kuv yeej muab, hais tsis dag koj yuav kuv ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm los kuv muab."

Nraug-ntsuag teb tias, "Txiv Xeev-laue koj ntxhais-nkauj-ntxawm mas kuv tsis yuav nawb, kuv xav yuav koj cov me hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas, kuv yuav qhov ntawd xwb yog koj kam."

Xeev-laustias, “Awb....koj yuav-yuav los muab, kuv qhov nyuag hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas, mas tsawg hwv, yog koj yuav los kuv muab ib qho rau koj.”

Xeev-lausthiaj muab ib tsob hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas thiab lub taub- khwj-lwb rau Nraug-ntsuag ces xa Nraug-ntsuag los rau ntiaj-teb.

Nraug-ntsuag yuav coj los kho neeg ntiaj-teb, nws los-los txog puag tim toj roob, nws mus tawm-rooj ces luag hlawv toj kub-hnyiab tuaj yuav ti ntawm nws ces nws txawm tsis nco-qab nqa los.

*Ces ntiaj-teb thiaj tsis tau tsob hauv-kuab-muaj-tsuas los cawm teb-neeg. Yog tsis li ntawd mas niaj hnub nim-no peb tau coj los siv ces peb tib-neeg yeej tsis paub tuag li.*

Tus hais yog **Swm-looj Vwj**

*FOLKTALE*  
**SEARCH FOR IMMORTALITY**

Long long ago, there was an orphan. He lived with his old brother and his sister-in-law. Ndrau-njua,<sup>10</sup> he went each day to watch over the cattle as they grazed. One day while he was watching the cattle, he saw a butterfly hanging by the neck from a long long thread coming from heaven, coming to earth to commit suicide by hanging. He thought, "Ah...I am a child without a mother, without a father, very miserable, and this butterfly is probably like me, miserable because she has no mother, no father, and so she commits suicide by hanging like this. I think I will take her and perform a pretend funeral ceremony for her." So Ndrau-njua took her to perform the ceremony. He dug up a family of seven mice to sacrifice for her funeral, and then he returned home.

He told his sister-in-law, " Oh, Sister-in-law, today I went to watch the cattle grazing and I saw a bright white butterfly fall from heaven, hanging from the end of a long long thread. I thought I loved her, so I took her to perform a funeral ceremony. I dug up a family of mice and sacrificed them for her ceremony, and buried her in a grave. That's why, today, I came home so late."

Sister-in-law replied, "Ndrau-njua....you have to be quiet, if the wind-pipe hears you, the wind-pipe will break in two.... if the funeral drum hears you, it will have a hole in it.... if the Chinese hear you, they will cut out your tongue....if the Hmong hear you, they will pull off your chin."

Ndrau-njua said, "Oh....."

Then the smoke from the fire heard him. The smoke went to tell Seng-lau<sup>11</sup> in heaven!!

It was Seng-lau's youngest daughter who come to commit suicide on earth. Seng-lau heard, then he sent his investigators, who happened to be a group of clouds. The clouds fell to earth, and became two men. They went into Ndrau-njua's house and said, "Ah....sister-in-law and brother, is this Ndrau-njua's house?"

Sister-in-law and brother answered, "Ah, yes indeed."

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<sup>10</sup>*nraug-ntsuag*: orphan boy

<sup>11</sup>*Xeev-laous*: king in heaven

The two of them then asked Ndrau-njua, "We heard them say that you saw Seng-lau's youngest daughter who came here to commit suicide on earth....we'd appreciate it if you'd tell us. We have come searching for Seng-lau's daughter."

Ndrau-njua answered, "I haven't seen her....I don't know Seng-lau's youngest daughter at all!"

They said, "Sure, you know her....please tell us."

Ndrau-njua said, "Really, I haven't seen her..."

The two of them insisted and pleaded with Ndrau-njua to tell them.

Ndrau-njua said, "I really haven't seen her."

The two of them said, "We heard that you saw Seng-lau's youngest daughter, and that you performed a funeral ceremony for her, killing seven cows for her.... eh?"

Ndrau-njua thought to himself, "Oh....maybe it is the butterfly..." Ndrau-njua said, "Ah, excuse me, I didn't know what you meant. I did see a butterfly hanging from a thread that came from heaven, who committed suicide by hanging, and I performed a funeral ceremony for her. I dug up a family of mice and sacrificed them for her funeral and then I buried her."

They said, "So that's it. Thank you.....you take us to see her grave. We will dig her up and take her to Seng-lau in heaven. It is Seng-lau's youngest daughter, and he will revive her."

Ndrau-njua then led them there, and they dug up the body. They said to Ndrau-njua, "Seng-lau said that you must come with us to heaven. You have seen his youngest daughter, so you must come with us. If you don't the problem will not be solved."

Ndrau-njua then answered, "Ah, but I am a human of the earth, I can't go up to heaven."

They replied, "Yes, you can. We must take you up there with us. You get into our armpit and we will hold you there and go."

"Okay."

Ndrau-njua's sister-in-law said to Ndrau-njua, "Ndrau-njua, when you get there, don't take anything. King Seng-lau will ask you what you want to have, but whatever it is, don't take it. If he offers you silver or gold, don't accept it.... if he offers you a horse, don't take it.... if he offers you a cow, don't take it. You can accept only a small gourd<sup>12</sup> and a small plant of hau-kua-mua-jua,<sup>13</sup> and bring them back to earth to help revive people who die, all right?"

Ndrau-njua answered, "All right."

Ndrau-njua then went with the clouds, the clouds held him in their armpit. An instant disappeared, and they were there in heaven. They took Seng-lau's daughter to him, and he was very very happy. With gratitude and admiration, he told Ndrau-njua, "If it wasn't for you then I would never have seen my youngest daughter, who went to earth to commit suicide, ever again. I have been looking for my daughter for seven days and seven nights."

So Seng-lau began to revive his daughter. He took the hau-kua-mua-jua and mixed it with water, then sprayed three mouthfuls back and forth over her, and then used the gourd to cover her. Seng-lau's daughter got up and was as lovely as before, in fact, she was even more beautiful.

Seng-lau said, "Ndrau-njua, you helped me rescue my daughter, what would you like to have? I'll give you silver."

Ndrau-njua said, "Silver I don't need. On earth, silver is tears, so I don't need it."<sup>14</sup>

"If you won't take silver, then I'll give my horse to you."

Ndrau-njua said, "A horse I don't need. On earth a horse is the stretcher that carries me to my grave, so I don't need it."<sup>15</sup>

"If so, then I'll give you my cow."

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<sup>12</sup>*lub taub khwj-lwb*: a gourd shaped like a chalice.

<sup>13</sup>*hauv kuab muaj tsuas*: a plant, with mythical powers to revive the dead.

<sup>14</sup>*nyiaj yog peb ntiaj-teb nyiaj kua-muag xwb*

<sup>15</sup>*nees yog peb ntiaj-teb nees kuas-txaij kuas-nraug xwb* (If one dreams of riding a horse, death will soon follow, according to superstition. This phrase says that the horse symbolizes the stretcher that is used to carry the body to the gravesite.)

Ndrau-njua said, "A cow I don't need. On earth a cow is sacrificed for a funeral ceremony, so I don't need it."<sup>16</sup>

"Ah....if you don't want to take anything, what can I give you? Whatever you want, just say it, and I'll give it to you."

Ndrau-njua said, "Ah...I do want something, but perhaps you won't give it to me."

Seng-lau said, "Don't say that, you just tell me and I'll give it to you. You rescued my daughter, if you want something, I'll do it. I'm not lying to you. If you want my daughter, I'll give her to you, too."

Ndrau-njua said, "Father Seng-lau, your daughter I don't need. I just want to have a little bit of the hau-kua-mua-jua.....that's all I want, if you are willing."

Seng-lau said, "Ah...if you want it, I'll give it to you. I have only a little bit left, but if you want it, I'll give you some of mine."

Seng-lau gave one plant of hau-kua-mua-jua and a gourd to Ndrau-njua, and sent him back to earth.

Ndrau-njua came back to earth with the means to revive the humans who die. He reached the mountain top, and stopped to relieve himself. While he was there, people were burning their fields, and the fire came closer and closer to him. In his haste to get away from the fire, he forgot to pick up the plant and the gourd.

*This is why the earth does not have the hau-kua-mua-jua plant to save people from dying. If this had not happened, people would now use the plant and the gourd and we would not know death at all.*

Storyteller: **Shue Long Vue**

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<sup>16</sup>nyuj yog peb ntiaj-teb niag nyuj ncig tshuav xwb : the cow is used for all sorts of sacrifices during the year; the most important time is the funeral.



**DAB NEEG  
TXOJ KEV HLUB-NIAM HLUB-TXIV**

LEEJ-TWG HLUB-NIAM, HLUB-TXIV MAS LEEJ-TWG LI TAU ZOO. LEEJ-TWG TSIS HLUB-NIAM HLUB-TXIV MAS LEEJ-TWG YUAV TSIS TAU ZOO.

Noob caj puag thaum ub, muaj ob niam-txiv yug tau 3 tug tub. Leej-niam hmoov tsis muaj, leej-niam tuag lawm, tshuav leej-txiv ces nws nrog 3 tug tub nyob.

Nyob-nyob ces 3 tug tub hais leej-txiv tias, "Txiv, koj txawj-txawj saib mem-toj li. Koj sim saib ib lub mem-toj tib qas zoo. Koj tsis tuag no los tseg. Yog koj tuag no ces peb coj koj mus faus<sup>17</sup> rau saib peb puas yuav zoo, mas txiv...?"

No ces leej-txiv txawm teb hais tias, "Lawv nyuag, yuav tsis tas kuv yuav saib ib lub mem-toj cia los mas! Ib tsam tsaus-ntuj nej mus zov pem-dawm ces nej tau xwb, los mas."

Ces tsaus-ntuj 3 tug kwv-tij mus zov pem-dawm li hais, cas nyob-nyob na has los loo ib tug txiv-nees-dawb. Tus kwv-ntxawg tias, "Ntaus los mas, tij-laug!"

Ob niag tij-laug hais tias, "Ab, zoo tug txiv-nees ces cia nws mus nws." Nyob-nyob ho los loo ib tug txiv-nees-txheeb. Tus kwv-ntxawg tias, "Ntaus los mas, tij-laug!"

Ob niag tij-laug hais tias, "Ab, zoo tug txiv-nees ces cia nws mus nws." Nyob-nyob ho los loo ib tug txiv-nees-liab. Tus kwv-ntxawg tias, "Ntaus los mas, tij-laug!"

Ob niag tij-laug hais tias, "Ab, zoo tug txiv-nees ces cia nws mus nws."

No ces tib pliag ntshis, los loo tus tom-qab kawg nkaus, nws yog ib tug txiv-nees-dub. Tus kwv-ntxawg hais tias, "Ntaus los mas, tij-laug!"

Ob niag tij-laug nkawd tseem hais tias, "Zoo tug txiv-nees ces cia nws mus nws." Tus kwv-ntxawg cia li xa tib qws rau ces nrov zuag tib niag roob hlau-dub xwb!!

Ces 3 tug kwv-tij rov-qab los tsev. Txog tsev, leej-txiv nug tias, "Lawv nyuag....nag hmo, nej mus zov es pom dab-tsi?"

Tus tub-ntxawg teb tias, "Awb yaws, txiv e, los tus nees-dawb, nees-txheeb, nees-liab. Kuv kom tij-laug nkawd ntaus, los nkawd tsis ntaus li. Tus nees-dub los txog ces kuv thiaj xa tib qws rau ces poob tib roob hlau-dub xwb!!"

Leej-txiv teb tias, "Awb yaws, nej mas tsis sawm tau laus, nej yuav txog siav me-ntsis ntag."

Cov tub mus muab cov hlau-dub coj los ntaus-ntaus, tau ib pawg thi-hlau-dub. Hmoov tsis muaj, leej-txiv tuag lauj. Peb tug tub mus ua tau ib hwm-txiag, muab leej-txiv coj los zwm rau hauv, muab cov thi-hlau-dub coj los thi-thi hwm-txiag tau khov qas kho. Lawv tis ib txog saw-hlau rau es yuav luag mus nrhiav chaw faus.

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<sup>17</sup>faus = los

Peb tug kwv-tij txawm luag mus. Lawv luag-luag tau ib xyooos. Ces tus tij-laug tias, “Ab, kwv-nrab thiab kwv-ntxawg, kuv txhuv<sup>18</sup> noj tag lawm, kuv rov-qab mus tuav-txhuv, tuaj peb li mam luag mus.” Tus niag tij-laug los txog tsev, nws txawm tias, “Hawb yaws, qas-ncuav-laush, nws tuag tsis tuag, nws twb tuag nws lawm, es tseem yuav mus muab qas-ncuav-laush, luag ua luaj no. Rov-qab los nrog tej poj-niam-tub-se ua noj ua haus. Cia kwv-ntxawg nkawd nquag los nkawd kav-tsj luag mus. Kuv tsis rov-qab mus lawm.” Ces niag tij-laug txawm tsis rov mus tiag.

Kwv-nrab thiab kwv-ntxawg nkawd ob tug txawm luag-luag mus tau 2 xyooos txwm-nkaus. Tus kwv-nrab hais tias, “Ab, kwv-ntxawg! Koj maj-mam luag txiv mus nawb! Kuv txhuv noj tag lawm. Kuv rov-qab mus tuav-txhuv thiab mus hais tij-laug tuaj es peb mam luag mus ntxiv.” Ces tus kwv-nrab rov-qab los lawm thiab laus.

Thaum kwv-nrab nws los txog tsev, tus niag tij-laug hais rau kwv-nrab tias, “Awb yaws, qas-ncuav-laush, nws tuag tsis tuag, nws twb tuag nws lawm, es tseem yuav mus muab qas-ncuav-laush, luag tus tsi ua luaj. Kwv-ntxawg nquag, los-sis cia kwv-ntxawg nws luag nws mus. Wb rov-qab los nrog tej poj-tub-se ua noj ua haus.”

Ces tus tij-laug thiab kwv-nrab nkawd txawm tsis rov-qab mus lawm tiag. Tshuav tib tug kwv-ntxawg xwb ces nws niaj hnuv luag nws txiv mus.

Luag-luag txhuv noj tag, nws mus nrhiav zog ua tau txhuv, nws rov-qab los luag dua. Nws luag-luag, mov noj tag ho rov-qab mus ua zog tau mov.

Nws rov-qab los luag ces luag-luag li no txwm-nkaus peb xyooos. Txoj saw-hlau mus tu rau pem ib lub zos Hmoob, pem Hmoob qaum-tsev. Tus kwv-ntxawg txawm mus qiv Hmoob tuam-txhob-hlau,<sup>19</sup> los khawb qhov faus leej-txiv. Nws khawb-khawb mus txog hauv na has cas pom ib tug nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab nyob hauv! Ces nws khaws tau tus nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab, nws muab nws txiv faus tag. Nws xav tias, “Ab, luag-luag txiv tau 3 xyooos no, tsis tau dab-tsi, tau tus nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab no xwb, ces cia kuv lam sim coj mus koom saib lauj...”

Ib hmos ntsaws 3 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 3 txiag-nyiaj. Ib hmos ntsaws 3 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 3 txiag-kub.

Tus kwv-ntxawg koom-koom ces nws nplua-nplua-nuj, ces qaib, npua, nyuj, twm, nees, puas tsav puas yam mas nroo-qas-ntws tog vaj tog tsev, hos nyiaj-kub luam taw qas lawg.

Tus kwv-nrab tuaj pom ces nws hais tias, “Awb, neb rov los lawm, neb tsis tuaj nrog kuv luag txiv, ces kuv ua siab ntuj-ntev luag. Txoj saw-hlau mus tu rau pem Hmoob zos. Kuv mus qiv Hmoob tuam-txhob-hlau los khawb qhov faus txiv. Kuv khawb-khawb mus na has kuv pom ib tug nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab nyob hauv. Kuv khaws tus Ceeb-vuaj-vuab. Kuv muab txiv faus tag, ces kuv tias lam coj nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab los koom saib puas yuav zoo li cas? Ces nim-no kuv thiaj muaj li no....”

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<sup>18</sup>txhuv = mov

<sup>19</sup>tuam-txhob-hlau = taum-txhob-hlau

Niag kwv-nrab teb tias, "Awb, yog li mas ho, muab rau kuv coj mus koom thiab saib?" Ces tus kwv-ntxawg txawm muab tus nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab rau tus kwv-nrab coj mus koom.

Ib hmos ntsaws 2 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 2 txiag-nyiaj. Ib hmos ntsaws 2 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 2 txiag-kub.

Tus kwv-nrab nyuam-qhuav pib muaj tib nyov, ces tus tij-laug ho tuaj pom tus kwv-nrab. Nws hais tias, "Kwv-nrab! Kwv-ntxawg neb mus faus kuv txiv, es ua cas neb yuav mus muaj nyiaj, muaj kub, ua luaj li?"

Kwv-nrab teb tias, "Koj, wb tsis kam nrog kwv-ntxawg luag txiv mus faus, es cia kwv-ntxawg tib leeg luag xwb. Ces txoj saw-hlau uas luag txiv mus tu rau pem Hmoob zos. Nws mus qiv Hmoob tuam-txhob-hlau los khawb qhov faus txiv. Ces kwv-ntxawg nws khawb-khawb mus, nws pom ib tug nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab. Ces nws faus txiv tag. Nws thiaj coj tus Ceeb-vuaj-vuab los koom, ces nws txawm muaj-muaj nyiaj-kub, tsiaj-txhu, nyuj, twm, nees, qaib, npua, nroo-qas ntws, thiab nyiaj-kub luam taw qas lawg. Kwv-ntxawg mas nplua-nuj kawg. Kuv mus pom ces kuv ho coj tus nyuag Ceeb-vuaj-vuab los koom es kuv nyuam-qhuav muaj li no xwb!"

Niag tij-laug hais tias, "Yog no ho, muab rau kuv coj mus koom, saib kuv puas yuav muaj thiab?"

Kwv-nrab hais tias, "Yuav coj sis coj mus mas..." Tus niag tij-laug nws coj tus Ceeb-vuaj-vuab mus koom. Ces ib hmos ntsaws 1 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 1 txiag-nyiaj. Ib hmos ntsaws 1 lub txhuv, tag-kis nws tso tau 1 txiag kub. Nws koom-koom, nws twb pib muaj tib nyov.

Nws txawm xav tias, "Ab, tam tseeb lub qhov yau hwv!! Muab hau-riam tsheb kom lub qhov loj me-ntsis, xwv thiaj li ntsaws tau ntau lub txhuv es thiaj yuav muaj sai." Nws txawm muab hau-riam tsheb-tsheb Ceeb-vuaj-vuab lub qhov-ncauj, tau ib pawg hmoov daj-qas-ntshuv rau ntawd. Nws txawm tib tshuab cov hmoov, ces tus Ceeb-vuaj-vuab ya plaws mus saum-ntuj tam-sim ntawd!!

Ces niag tij-laug tsuas tau raws<sup>20</sup> li 1 xyoo uas nws luag nws txiv mus faus.

Tus kwv-nrab tsuas tau raws li 2 xyoo uas nws luag nws txiv mus faus.

Tus kwv-ntxawg nws tau raws li 3 xyoo uas nws luag nws txiv mus faus.

*Qhov no qhia tau tias, Cov tub-ki uas tau koom niam, koom txiv los lawd. Lawv yuav tau nqi zog raws li lawv dej tes num uas lawv ua tag los!*

Tus hais yog **Khu-ntxawg Hawj**

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<sup>20</sup>raws li = tam li

FOLKTALE  
**LOVE AND CARE FOR<sup>21</sup> YOUR PARENTS:  
YOU WILL PROSPER**

Long long ago, there was a couple who raised three sons. Unfortunately, the mother died, leaving the father to live with his three sons.

One day the three sons said to their father, "Father....you know how to identify the right place for a gravesite<sup>22</sup>. You go find a very good place for your gravesite, and if you don't die, then fine. If you do die, we will take you there to bury you, and then we will see if we prosper in the future....eh, Father?"

So the father said, "Ah, you boys.....it is not necessary for me to look for one<sup>23</sup>. This evening you go over there into the high valley and watch...you will get something."<sup>24</sup>

When evening came, the three brothers went into the high valley to wait. A while later, a beautiful white stallion came galloping by. Young Brother said, "Hit him, brothers!"<sup>25</sup>

The two older brothers said, "Ah, this beautiful white stallion should be allowed to go his own way." A moment later, a gold-colored horse came galloping by. Young Brother said, "Hit that one then, old brothers!"<sup>26</sup>

They both answered, "Ah, this beautiful stallion should be allowed to go his own way." A short while later, a beautiful red stallion came galloping by. Young Brother said, "Hit this one, brothers!"<sup>27</sup>

The two of them answered, "Ah, this beautiful stallion should be allowed to go his own way." An instant later, the very last horse, a black stallion,<sup>28</sup> galloped by. Young Brother said, "Hit it, brothers!!"

The two brothers still answered the same, "This beautiful stallion should be allowed to go his own way." So Young Brother suddenly picked up a stick and hit the

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<sup>21</sup> *hlub* translates as 'love', but it is the type of love that implies taking care of and being responsible for someone: *hlub-niam hlub-txiv* means to love and care for your mother, love and care for your father. Persons who do not have obligations and responsibilities towards one another cannot *hlub* one another.

<sup>22</sup> looking for the right gravesite (*saib mem-toj*): If someone is buried in a favorable site, then good fortune and prosperity will come to his sons and daughters. If a gravesite is in a less favorable spot, then descendants can expect various kinds of misfortune (see notes).

<sup>23</sup> The sons want the father, skilled at *saib mem-toj* to take time to point out the right spot before he dies. The father means that it's not necessary for him to have the right gravesite, because the boys will receive their 'good fortune' while he's still alive, if they recognize what to do.

<sup>24</sup> They will receive their 'good fortune' if they know what to do.

<sup>25</sup> Young Brother suspects that this is a clue to their fortune. In fact, if they had hit this one (*nees dawb*), it would have turned into a pile of silver.

<sup>26</sup> *nees txheeb*: would have turned into a pile of gold

<sup>27</sup> *nees liab*: would have turned into a pile of copper

<sup>28</sup> *nees dub*: would have turned into a pile of iron

horse himself. With a 'swoosh', a sound like a mudslide, the horse turned into a great pile of black iron.

The brothers returned to their home. Their father asked, "My sons, you went to the high valley yesterday...what did you see?"

The youngest son answered, "Ah ya, Father....a white stallion, a gold-colored stallion, and then a red stallion came. I told my brothers to hit each one, but they didn't hit any of them at all. When the black stallion came, I hit it with a stick, and it fell into a great pile of black iron."

Their father said, "Ah ya, too bad...you should have taken the first three. You will have to suffer a little bit now."

The sons took the black iron and forged it into a great bale of binding wire. Unfortunately, their father died. The three sons made a coffin for him. They took their father and put him into the coffin, and wrapped the binding wire around the coffin until it was tight and secure. They connected an iron chain to the coffin in order to drag it.

The three brothers dragged and dragged the coffin, looking for the right gravesite,<sup>29</sup> for one year.

Old Brother said, "Ah, Middle Brother and Young Brother, my rice is all gone. I will go home to pound some rice, and then I will come back to help you drag the coffin." When Old Brother reached home, he said, "Hah ya, that old moldy rice-cake, dead or not, he's finished and gone, why should we still drag him around so much? I've returned to my wife and children, so I'll stay here to earn my living,<sup>30</sup> and let Middle Brother and Young Brother waste their energy dragging him around. I will not go back to help them." So Old Brother did not go back.

Middle Brother and Young Brother both dragged and dragged their father for two years. Middle Brother said, "Ah, Young Brother, you go ahead and drag our father. My rice is gone. I will return home to pound some rice, and to tell Old Brother to come help us drag our father some more." So Middle Brother returned home also. When he arrived home, Old Brother said to him, "Ah ya, that old moldy rice-cake....dead or not, he's finished and gone, and why should we continue to drag him around so much? Young Brother has energy, let him drag our father. We will both stay home with our families and earn our livings."

So neither Old Brother nor Middle Brother returned to help Young Brother drag their father to bury, leaving only Young Brother, who each day dragged his father.

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<sup>29</sup>When the iron chain breaks, that will be the right spot for burying the father, and that spot will hold the key to their 'good fortune'. Dragging the coffin this way was necessary since there was no one to *saib mem-toj*.

<sup>30</sup>*ua noj ua haus*: literally, to 'make food make drink'

Dragging and dragging him, and when his rice was all gone, he stopped and exchanged his labor for some hulled rice,<sup>31</sup> and then returned to drag again. He dragged and dragged until his rice ran out, stopped to exchange his strength for some cooked rice, and returned to drag his father some more.

He dragged and dragged his father for exactly three years. The iron chain finally broke on the uphill side of a Hmong village. Young Brother went there to borrow a Hmong digging stick<sup>32</sup> to dig a grave for his father. He dug and dug down deep, and there in the ground, what did he see but a Dyeng-vua-vua!<sup>33</sup>

He picked up the Dyeng-vua-vua, and put his father in the hole to finish burying him. He said to himself, "Ah, I've dragged and dragged my father for three years, and I got nothing. All I've got is this Dyeng-vua-vua, so I'll take it home and care for it."

One night, he fit three grains of rice<sup>34</sup> into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth, and the next morning they had become three ounces of silver. The next night, he fit three grains of rice into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth, and the next morning they had become three ounces of gold.

Young Brother kept the Dyeng-vua-vua, and after a while he became very wealthy. He had chickens, pigs, cows, buffaloes, horses, all kinds of animals, milling around his house and garden. He had silver and gold, so much that he could not walk without tripping over the piles of money.

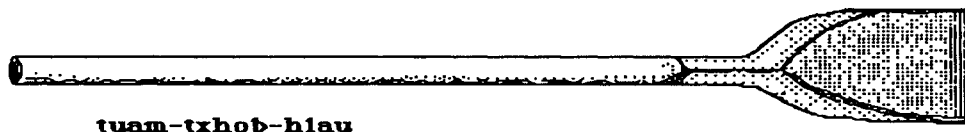
Middle Brother happened to come by and see all of this, and he said, "Young Brother! You went to bury our father, so why do you have all this silver and gold, so much that you trip over it like this, and all these animals, overflowing into the village?"

Young Brother replied, "Ah, you two returned home, and did not come back to help me drag our father to bury him. I was very patient, and dragged him on and on

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<sup>31</sup> *ua zog tau txhuv* or *ua zog tau mov*: literally, 'do strength get rice'.

<sup>32</sup> *tuam-txhob-hlau* or *taum-txhob-hlau*: tool used for digging post holes for the supporting poles of a house. It's a long wooden pole with a forged iron tip, curved and sharpened along the digging edge.



<sup>33</sup> *ceeb-vuaj-vuab*: a mythical creature, somewhat like an angel, that lives in the sky, but that can assume any size and can live in any place. It can carry out someone's wishes, in this case, the father's wishes to reward his sons who care for him properly. It has been sent to this spot to wait for the son to come, the iron chain to break, and the son to dig the grave.

<sup>34</sup> Here the Dyeng-vua-vua is very small, so that its mouth is big enough for only three grains of rice.

until the iron chain broke on the uphill side of a Hmong village. I went there and borrowed a Hmong digging stick to dig a grave for our father. I dug and dug, and I saw a Dyeng-vua-vua, then I finished burying our father, and decided to take the Dyeng-vua-vua home to care for. Now I have just about this much."

Middle Brother said, "Ah, if that's so, then give me the Dyeng-vua-vua, and I'll take it home to care for." So Young Brother gave the Dyeng-vua-vua to Middle Brother to take home to care for.

One night he fit two grains of rice<sup>35</sup> into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth, and the next morning they had turned into two ounces of silver. The next night, he fit two grains of rice into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth, and the next morning, they had become two ounces of gold.

Middle Brother was just beginning to become a little bit rich, when Old Brother happened to pass by and see Middle Brother, and he said, "Middle Brother! You and Young Brother went to drag our father to bury him, so why do you have so much silver, so much gold, like this?!"

Middle Brother replied, "You and I were not willing to go with Young Brother to drag our father to bury him. Young Brother, all alone, dragged and dragged our father until the iron chain broke on the uphill side of a Hmong village. He went there to borrow a Hmong digging stick to dig a grave to bury our father. He dug and dug, and he saw a Dyeng-vua-vua. He finished burying our father, and he took the Dyeng-vua-vua home to care for. Then he became rich, and has silver, gold, animals—cows, water buffaloes, horses, chickens, pigs—all over the house and garden, and so much silver and gold that he cannot walk without tripping over it. Young Brother is very wealthy. I went to see him, and I took the Dyeng-vua-vua home to care for, and I am just beginning to have this much."

Old Brother said, "Right! So give me the Dyeng-vua-vua to take home to care for, and I will see whether or not I become rich, too."

Middle Brother said, "If you want to, then take it."

Old Brother took the Dyeng-vua-vua home to care for, and one night he fit one grain of rice<sup>36</sup> into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth. The next morning it had turned into one ounce of silver. The next night he fit one grain of rice into the Dyeng-vua-vua's mouth, and the next morning it had become one ounce of gold. He continued to care for the Dyeng-vua-vua until he just started to become a little bit rich.

He thought, "Ah....goodness! The hole is so small! I'll take the point of a knife and drill out a little larger hole, so it can hold more grains of rice, and I'll get rich sooner."

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<sup>35</sup>Magically, the mouth is now smaller; only two grains of rice can fit.

<sup>36</sup>Now only one grain of rice will fit.

He took the point of a knife, twisted and drilled the mouth of the Dyeng-vua-vua, producing a little bit of bright yellow dust. He blew the dust away.....causing the Dyeng-vua-vua to fly suddenly away into the sky!

The Old Brother only received as much as he deserved for the one year that he dragged his father to bury him.

The Middle Brother only received as much as he deserved for the two years that he dragged his father to bury him.

The Young Brother received as much as he deserved for the three years that he dragged his father to bury him.

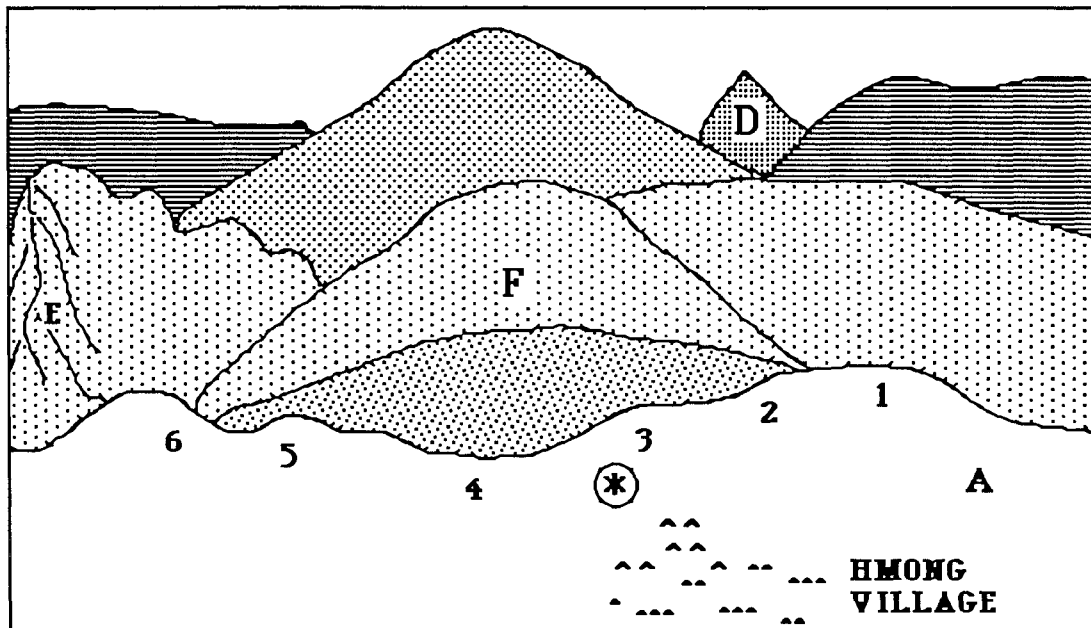
This story tells: *The children who have cared for their parents will receive a reward that is equal to the extent of their efforts.*

Storyteller: **Khou Yer Her**



## NOTES LOVE AND CARE FOR YOUR PARENTS

The information below is based on a translation of Jean Mottin's text in *CONTES ET LEGENDES HMONG BLANC*, pages 131-133. It relates only a few of the factors that one evaluates in locating the right *mem-toj*. Only an expert knows all the factors and the implications for the descendants. (The art of locating a favorable gravesite is called 'geomancy').



\* site of the grave, the body lying 'along' the mountain chain, rather than 'across' the mountain (which is the Chinese style of burial). In the story, this was perhaps where the iron chain broke, on the uphill side of a Hmong village.

- A. the ground can be visualized as a person, lying down. (1) is the head; (2) is the mouth; (3) is the chest; (4) is the hip; (5) is the knees; (6) is the feet. The most favorable spot for the grave is the chest, since this is the location of the heart and lungs, necessary for life in the next world.
- B. If there are mountains on the left of the body, and they are more numerous than those on the right of the body, then it will be the sons who have a good future. If

the mountains on the right are more numerous, then it will be the daughters who enjoy a good future.

- C. If the mountains surrounding the gravesite are determined to have the 'majesty of the dragon' (*zaj hwj chim*) , then the offspring will be intelligent, respectable, and persons of value. If it is the 'majesty of the tiger' (*tsov hwj chim*) that's seen, then the offspring will be unsuccessful and miserable.
- D. If there is within sight an isolated, sharply pointed peak (thief's peak or *lub roob ua tub-sab xauj*), then the offspring will suffer at the hands of thieves, or may even be thieves themselves.
- E. If there is a smaller chain of mountains running perpendicular to the main chain of mountains, and perpendicular to the body in the grave, then the offspring will suffer legal problems.
- F. If in the perpendicular chain of mountains, there are two branches, curving towards the grave like the jaws of pincers or pliers, then the offspring will meet a violent death.

## **KEEB-KWM NTAWM YAWM KHU-NTXAWG HAWJ**

Nwg muaj noob-nyoog le ntawm 85 xyoos. Nwg yug nyob rua lub zog hu ua As-laas. Nwg lug luj hlub nyob rua lub zog Phwv-lis, Naaj-haab, Phwv-los-taij, Phwv-xoom, 3 zag moog-moog lug-lug hab lug rua Phwv-xov, es lug yuav quas-puj rua lub zog Poos-xaas, hab lug rua Phwv-xoom. Nwg le maam tsiv lug rua Naab-npab hab lug rua Puj-koob, lub teb-chaws nplog tau hloov nom hloov tswv ces txhaj tau moos lib rog rua Naab-fien hab ntau-ntau lub zog txhaj le maaj-maam txav tuaj moog txug rua teb-chaws Thaib.

Nwg nam-txiv kws yug nwg hu ua Num-kim Hawj, nwg tug tij-lauj hu ua Vaam-nruag, nwg tug kwv hu ua Paaj-kaws, nwg yawm hu ua Khu-laum.

Has txug peb Moob tej kev lig kev cai mas nwg kuj pum zoo tas ca cov hluas muab sau tseg ca. Yog tas tsi muab sau tseg, thaum cov laug dlua taag lawm ces yuav tsi muaj leej-twg paub txug Moob, tsi taag le ntawd nwg tseem tau has rua nwg tug vauv, Xeev-nruag Xyooj, ntau zaaj has txug nwg lub neej kuas tug vauv muab sau ca lawm. Yog leej-twg xav paub los nug tau ntawm nwg tug vauv.\*

Nwg tuaj txug teb-chaws nua yog xyoo 12/1980. Taam sim nuav nwg nrug nwg tug tub yau, Txooj-tsaab, nyob ua-ke. Nwg laug heev lawm nwg tshuav 7 tug tub, 3 tug ntshais, 2 tug nyob rua teb-chaws nua, 1 tug nyob rua Faab-kis teb.

Khu-ntxawg Hawj  
Illinois

\*Xeev-nruag Xyooj

## BIOGRAPHY OF KHOU-YER HER

Khou-yer Her is Hmong Leng, and is about 85 years old. He was born in a village called Ah-Lang (*As-laas*), in northeastern Laos. He grew up in the villages of Peu-Lee (*Phwv-lis*), Nang-Hang (*Naa-j-haab*), Peu-Lo-Tai (*Phwv-los-taij*), and Peu-Song (*Phwv-xoom*), moving back and forth between them several times. He then moved to Peu-So (*Phwv-xov*), and went to marry a girl from the village of Pong-Sang (*Poos-xaas*), after which they moved back to Peu-Song.

Eventually he moved to Nang-Ba district (*Naab-mpab*), central Laos, and lived here and there, finally moving back to Pou-Kong (*Puj-koob*). The country was in turmoil in the late 1960's, so he moved to the village of Song-Lai (*Xoom-lais*). When Laos changed governments in 1975, he and his family became refugees within the country, moving to Nang-Fien, and many other villages, moving gradually towards Thailand, where they finally escaped as refugees.

Khou-yer is *Hmoob Hawj* ; Her (*Hawj*) is his clan name. Of his natural parents, his father's name was Nou-Kee (*Num-kim*), his older brother was Wang-Doua (*Vaam-nruas*), and his younger brother was Pang-Ker (*Paaj-kaws*); his grandfather was Khou-Lao (*Khu-laum*).

Talking about Hmong culture, customs and ways of life, he agrees that the young ones should write them down to preserve them. If they don't keep any of the old ways, then when the old ones are gone, there will be no one who will know about Hmong. He has told his son-in-law, Seng Doua Xiong (*Xeev-nruas Xyooj*) much of what he has in his mind, so that his son-in-law can record and preserve what he knows. If anyone wants to know, they can ask his son-in-law.

He came to this country in December, 1980. He now lives with his young son, Chong Chang (*Txooj-tsaab*) in West Chicago, Illinois. He is already very old, and has seven sons and three daughters, two in this country and one in France.

*DAB NEEG*  
**NUJ-NQIS KEV TSIM-TXOM TIB-NEEG**

Puag noob caj thaum ub, Kob-yim-tshaj nkawd ob niam-txiv txom txom nyem, pluag pluag kawg. Kob-yim-tshaj haus haus yeeb lig lig, ces nws mam mus ua teb. Kob-yim-tshaj mus txog nram kev-tshuam ua cas nws pom ob niam-txiv nab tuaj sib qaub nrad. Ib tug nab-pluaj-ce, ib tug nab-ntsuab-zag tuaj sib deev nrad. Kob-yim-tshaj xav tias, "Ua cas ob tug nab no yuav tuaj sib qaub qhov no? Kuv muab tua pov-tseg saib!"

Kob-yim-tshaj rho hlo ntaj tib ntag na has, ob tug nab nthuav sua ces. Teg tug nab-ntsuab-zag tu nrho ua ob ya. Teg tug nab-pluaj-ce ntsis tw tu nrho xwb.

Niam nab-pluaj-ce txawm mus hais rau nws tus txiv nab-pluaj-ce tias, "Koj txiv lauj! Hnub no, kuv mus de zaub-npuas txog pem kev-tshuam. Kob-yim-tshaj tus dev kob huam, nws haus haus yeeb pov khawv. Nws tuaj mus ua teb ces nws cia li tib ntag kuv taw tiab tu nrho. Yog kuv dhia tsis dim ces kuv tuag; kuv tsis pom koj las koj txiv."

Tus txiv nab tias, "Yog li mas, Kob-yim-tshaj phem hwv tiag! Cia ib tsam tsaus-ntuj tso, kuv mus nyob hauv nws qab-txag. Thaum nws los pw kuv muab nws tom kom tuag." Ces ib tsam tsaus-ntuj txiv nab-pluaj-ce tuaj nyob hauv qab-txag tos.

Kob-yim-tshaj nws noj noj hmo tag, nws yuav mus pw. Cuag li ntuj pab, nws tham rau nws poj-niam mloog tias, "Koj niam os, hnub no mas, kuv mus teb, kuv mus txog nram kev-tshuam kuv ntsib ob niam-txiv nab sib qaub nram kev. Kuv yuav muab tua kom ob tug tuag tib-si, tiam-sis kuv tib ntag rau na has nthuav sua. Tus niam dhia dhau, raug tus ntsis tw tu nrho xwb. Hos raug tus txiv nab-ntsuab-zag tu nrho ob ya tuag lawm tiag."

Ces txiv nab-pluaj-ce nyob hauv qab-txag hnov dheev lauj!

Nws txawm teb nkaus tias, "Es, tiag, tiag los?"

Kob-yim-tshaj teb tias, "Tiag tiag lauj."

Nab-pluaj-ce tias, "Kuv poj-niam yeej tsis tsheej, yeej ib txwm deev hluas-nraug. Nws los dag rau kuv tias nws dua nws kev koj cia li tua nws. Yog li koj tua nab-ntsuab-zag tuag lawm, tiag tiag los?"

Kob-yim-tshaj teb tias, "Kuv tua tuag lawm."

Txiv nab-pluaj-ce tias, "Nws loj kuv me, nws yeej deev kuv poj-niam nawb, kuv muab tsis tau. Koj pab tau kuv lawm mas zoo heev, kuv sim mus xyuas saib."

Kob-yim-tshaj teb tias, "Mus koj sim mus xyuas." Nab-pluaj-ce ntaug lees mus txog nram kev-tshuam cas tuag tug chev cees nrad tiag.

Nws rov-qab los txog, nws hais rau Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Koj pab tau kuv lawm, kuv poj-niam deev hluas-nraug tiag, kuv muab tsis tau. Zaum no koj tua nws tus hluas-nraug tuag lawm, kuv muaj lus zoo siab ntau, kuv tsis muaj dab-tsi rau koj. Tag-kis koj sawv ntxov ntxov mus tim koj thaj-teb-qos. Koj pom dab-tsi los koj yuav dab-tsi."

Tag-kis, Kob-yim-tshaj sawv ntxov tsees, nws mus txog ntua tim thaj-teb-qos. Ntuj qhua teb nkig tsis muaj dab-tsi, nws ntsia qab-teb quam-teb tsis pom dab-tsi. Nws saib saum daim nplooj-qos muaj ib lub me lwg-dej dawb dawb nyob saud. Muab de yuav nqa los, nqa qhov qaij qhov, ntog lam rau sab. Nws xav xav ntshai yuav nchuav ces cia muab haus kiag lauj.

Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj muab haus kiag na has pob-ntseg to qhov ntshua lauj....hnov me lus kab, lus ntsaum, lus me nas, me noog.....

Kob-yim-tshaj mus ua teb. Tuag ib tug yaj pem roob. Uab-lag txawm los hu Kob-yim-tshaj hais tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj, tuag ib tug yaj pem roob no es koj tuaj hlais, koj noj nqaij, kuv noj hnyuv."

Kob-yim-tshaj txawm mus hlais, coj poj-niam me-nyuam mus hlais. Kob-yim-tshaj siab txawm phem, nqa tag nrho me plab me hnyuv huv tib-si tsis pub Uab-lag noj.

Uab-lag chim chim, mob mob siab. Tau ob peb hnuv tom-qab, tuag ib tug niag qhev suav tuaj txiav zaub-nees pem roob. Uab-lag rov-qab los hu dua, "Kob-yim-tshaj!! Tuag ib tug yaj pem roob no es koj tuaj hlais, koj noj nqaij, kuv noj hnyuv."

Kob-yim-tshaj coj poj-niam me-nyuam mus txog pem ntug teb. "Ua cas tuag ib

tug niag qhev suav tuaj txiav zaub-nees xwb?! Ua li mas tuag ze yus ntug teb, yog luag tuaj nrhiav tau, ntshai yus yuav txhaum plaub pau??"

"Ces cia muab luag pov-tseg xav...."

Kob-yim-tshaj nyuam-qhuav nthos nkaus ko-taw yuav luag....hnov suav tuaj nrhiav, suav tuaj ti nkaus lauj, suav pom kiag. Suav hais tias, "Ua cas koj yuav tua neeg? Tua peb tus qhev?" Muab Kob-yim-tshaj ntaus, muab khi, cab mus rau suav Huab-tais.

Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj mus hais rau suav Huab-tais tias, "Thov koj lauj, vim li cas kuv ho yuav tuaj pom tus suav no? Tsis yog kuv tua. Kuv mas paub lus kab, lus ntsaum, lus nas, lus noog. Vim Uab-lag los hu tias tuag ib tug yaj pem roob kom kuv mus hlais, kuv noj nqaij, nws noj hnyuv. No ces kuv tuaj mus hlais. Thawj thawj zaug, kuv txawm muab me nqaij me hnyuv nqa los noj tag, tsis pub rau Uab-lag.

"Zaum tom-qab Uab-lag thiaj los dag kuv; kuv tsis paub, kuv tuaj cas yog tuag tus qhev suav no. Kuv thiaj li xav hais tias tsis luag los tuaj txog lawm, tuag ze ntug vaj ntug teb. Kuv thiaj li yuav muab luag pov-tseg no, ces lawv thiaj tuaj pom lawm. Thov nej txhob tua kuv."

Suav Huab-tais thiaj hais tias, "Yog koj paub lus kab, lus ntsaum tiag, no tsheev tsawm tua, tub-mab-tub-qhe. Kob-yim-tshaj tus neeg loj leeb no, tsis lam paub. Hauv kuv lub tsev no, hauv qab-txag ntsaum coob coob mas nkag ib txog kev luaj nkaus li daim nplooj-ntse, tau peb xyoos no lawm nawb. Kom koj mus mloog cov ntsaum saib. Yog koj paub no mas muab koj tso. Yog koj tsis paub no mas muab koj tua."

Kob-yim-tshaj teb tias, "Ua li los, ua li ntawd los mas," thiaj coj Kob-yim-tshaj mus mloog thiab mloog.

Ntsaum thiaj hais li no rau Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Hauv Huab-tais lub qab-txag no mas muaj 9 hub zib-nyiaj zib-kub. Peb noj tau 3 xyoos no, mas peb noj tag lawm 3 hub mas tseem tshuav 6 hub, mas peb tseem yuav noj 6 xyoo ntxiv. Peb thiaj mam li noj tag."

Kob-yim-tshaj hais rau Huab-tais. Huab-tais thiaj tias, "Ua li no tiag los dag? Kuv sim txhij tub-mab-tub-qhe mus khawb hauv. Yog muaj 6 hub zib-nyiaj zib-kub no mas muab koj tso. Yog koj dag xwb, muab tsis tau, muab koj tua tam-sim no."

Kob-yim-tshaj teb tias, "Ua li los mas khawb los khawb."

Ces thiaj txhij tub-mab-tub-qhe tuaj khawb. Cas tau 6 hub zib-nyiaj zib-kub tiag! Qab ...tsis ...qab...os... qab-zib nplaum tib ntxiag. Huab-tais noj nyooj noj nyooj, noj yaim ntiv-tes, noj yaim ntiv-tes.

Ces Huab-tais hais no, 'Kob-yim-tshaj, tus dev dag loj leeb no, ua cas yuav mus dag ua luaj li? Hauv kuv lub qab-txag no yeej muaj zib naj!! Koj dag xwb, kuv yeej faus rau hauv.

"Yog koj paub diam, ntawm kuv tog tsev no muaj ib tug ntoo loj loj. Nyob ntawd muaj ob niam-txiv noog quaj tag hnuv tag hmo li. Koj mus mloog, hos yog koj paub tias ob niam-txiv noog ua cas yuav quaj ua luaj no. Yog koj paub tiag no mas muab koj tso. Yog koj tsis paub, muab koj tua pov-tseg."

Kob-yim-tshaj hais tias, "Mloog los mloog thiab tiag," thiaj mus mloog ob niam-txiv noog quaj...quaj...quaj tag. Ces Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj los hais rau Huab-tais tias, "Txiv Huab-tais, ob niam-txiv noog no mus muab tau nkauj-zag ib txog plaub-hau puag nram Plhob-yaj-kum-hiav los ntev 9 dag. Tus txiv hais tias, 'Yuav kom muab thi lub ncauj-zes, cua hlob thiaj tsis poob thiaj ruaj.' Tus niam hais tias, 'Yuav kom muab pua lub qab zeg thiaj sov.' Ob niam-txiv hais tsis hum thiaj sib-ceg sib-ceg tag hnuv, tag hmo. Vim yog txoj plaub-hau ntawd xwb."

Huab-tais tias, "Tam tseeb, yog li no mas txhij tub-mab-tub-qhe mus ntov xyuas lub zes noog ntawd. Yog muaj ib txog plaub-hau raws li koj hais, muab koj tso, hos yog tsis muaj, koj dag, muab koj tua."

Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Ua li los ua li, kuv yeem thiab tiag." Tub-mab-tub-qhe mus ntov tus ntoo vau, mus xyuas. Ua cas lub zes noog muaj ib txog plaub-hau ntev 9 dag tiag las.

Huab-tais suav txawm tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj, tus neeg ntawm kod dag hwm thiab!

"Yog koj mus muab tau nkauj-zag los rau kuv ua poj-niam no ces tso koj. Yog koj muab tsis tau no ces muab koj tua."

Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Yuav muab los muab thiab tiag."

Kob-yim-tshaj mus muab nkauj-zag rau Huab-tais ua poj-niam.



Kob-yim-tshaj mus ces teb-chaws hais nchuav-qas-nthwv, ntiaj-teb hais nroo nreb tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj yuav mus muab nkauj-zag!"

Kob-yim-tshaj mus 3 hnuv mus txog rau lub zos suav. Suav paub tias Kob-yim-tshaj tuaj mus muab nkauj-zag. Kob-yim-tshaj mus pw hauv ob niam-txiv suav tsev.

Ob niam-txiv suav sab-laj tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj no nws tuaj hauv Huab-tais xub-ntiaj tuaj, yuav tuaj mus muab nyab rau Huab-tais. No mas tsis muaj dab-tsi, ces tag-kis muab wb ob niam-txiv os ntawd, ib tug tua rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj lauj."

Ob niam-txiv os nyob hauv qab-lawj, ob niam-txiv os hnov. Nkawd txawm sab-laj tias, "Koj txiv!! Lawv yuav muab wb tua rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj. No mas yog muab kuv tua lawd, los yuav tseg koj ua yawg-ntsuag. Yog muab koj tua lawd, los yuav tseg kuv ua poj-ntsuam, yuav ua li cas? Kheev Kob-yim-tshaj txhob noj wb mas, wb thiaj dim. Yog noj mas, kawg koj tsis tuag, los kuv tuag."

Kob-yim-tshaj hnov lawm lauj, ces nws txawm tsis noj. Tag-kis ces suav txawm ntes tus poj-os los, yuav tua rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj. Kob-yim-tshaj tsis noj (tsis kam kom tua). Kob-yim-tshaj hais tias, "Kuv tsis noj....ua cas los kuv tsis noj."

Ob niam-txiv suav tias, "Noj xwb!! Koj pom-yim tuaj nom-tswv Huab-tais kam diam, mas noj xwb xwb. Noj los tua, tsis noj los tua."

Sib-yig, sib-yig. Kob-yim-tshaj hais tias, "Yog neb siab tsis kheev tiag, los cia muab rau kuv nqa mus, es kuv nqhis thaum twg, kuv mam tua noj." Ob niam-txiv suav thiaj muab niag poj-os rau Kob-yim-tshaj nqa.

Kob-yim-tshaj nqa nqa mus tau 3 hnuv. Poj-os nteg tau 3 lub qe. Kob-yim-tshaj muab niag poj-os tso rov los. Nws nqa 3 lub qe ntawd mus.

Kob-yim-tshaj mus mus txog rau ib lub zos suav dua; nws mus pw suav zos. Hauv ob niam-txiv suav muaj ob niam-txiv twm thiab ib tug me-nyuam-twm. Thaum mus pw ob niam-txiv suav txawm sab-laj tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj tuaj mus muab nyab rau Huab-tais, ces tsis muaj dab-tsi tua ua zaub rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj. Tag-kis ntshai yuav muab ib tug twm tua rau Kob-yim-tshaj ua zaub nawb, koj txiv?"

Txiv suav tias, "Yuav tua los, tua li thiab tiag."

Ob niam-txiv twm thiab tus me-nyuam-twm hnov lauj!! Ib tsam cov niam-tub twm

txawm sab-laj, "Koj txiv las!! Wb tus tswv hais tias, 'Kob-yim-tshaj tuaj lawm mas tsis muaj dab-tsi. Yuav muab peb ib tug tua rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj!' Muab koj tua, los yuav tseg kuv ua poj-ntsuam. Muab kuv tua los yuav tseg koj ua yawg-ntsuag. Muab wb tus me-nyuam tua, los ntshai wb tsis muaj me-nyuam lawm. Wb yug tau tib leeg tub xwb, yuav ua li cas??"

Ces txawm hnov tus me-nyuam-twm hais no, "Yog Kob-yim-tshaj noj neb thiab noj kuv lawm, mas Kob-yim-tshaj yeej mus muab tsis tau nkauj-zag, huab-tais zaj tus ntshais plaub-hau ntev 9 dag. Yog tsis noj, no mas Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj mus muab tau."

Kob-yim-tshaj hnov dheev lauj!! Tag-kis sawv ntxov tsees, suav sawv los yuav tua twm. Kob-yim-tshaj tsis pub tua. Sib-yig...sib-yig. Suav yuav tua twm rau Kob-yim-tshaj noj xwb xwb li. Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Kuv tsis noj. Yog neb siab tsis kheev li, los muab neb tus twm rau kuv cab mus. Kuv nqhis thaum twg, los kuv mam li tua noj."

Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj cab tus me-nyuam-twm mus. Cab cab, mus txog ntua Pihob-yaj-kum-hiav, tib lub pas-dej ntas ntoov ntas ntua.

Me-nyuam-twm hais li no, "Kob-yim-tshaj nawb, wb mus muab nkauj-zag rau Huab-tais, mas thaum txav mus txog ntua. Kuv 3 yom kub pas-dej ntas ntua, 3 yom kub 3 ceg kaum ntuj. Toj pob liab pes vog. Yog tawm plaws 3 tug hluas-zaj tuaj, nqa lub yeeb-yaj-tsom. Tsom qhov twg mas yeej kub-hnyiab xwb nawb. Yog tsom kiag rau wb, mas wb yeej tuag. Wb muab tsis tau. Tsis tsom rau wb, es tsom rau tej roob, tej hav xwb. No mas koj muab koj 3 lub qe os no, pov kiag rau 3 ceg kaum dej. Mas 3 tug hluas-zaj ntawd ya-ntxiag mus txeeb 3 lub qe ntawd, muab lub yeeb-yaj-tsom tso plhuav tseg. Mas koj ya-ntxiag mus nthos nkaus ov!! Mas wb thiaj txeeb tau nkauj-zag."

Mus txog ntua ntawm lub pas-dej Pihob-yaj-kum-hiav, tib lub ntas ntwb ntoov ntsuab xiab. Me-nyuam-twm mus txog ntua. Nws kes av kwb kaws...3 yom kub rau pas-dej ntas ntua, peb yom kub 3 ceg kaum ntuj. Toj pob liab pes vog, toj nphau liab vog, rau qhov txhia chaw.

Yawg zaj laug hnov dheev, ntsaj laws. Nws tias, "3 tug hluas, sim tawm mus xyuas saib, muaj sim zeej dab-tsi, yuav heev ua luaj, ua cas yuav ua kuv tiaj teb deeg daws li no."

3 tug hluas-zaj tawm-plaws tuaj txog ntua. Nqa lub yeeb-yaj-tsom, tsom zoj lub roob kub-hnyiab liab yaj ntshis. Tsom zoj lub ha kub-hnyiab yaj ntshis. Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj muab kiag 3 lub qe os pov kiag rau 3 ceg kaum dej. Ces 3 tug hluas-zaj ntawd tso

plhuav lub yeeb-yaj-tsom ntawd ua lias pov-tseg ntawm ntug dej. Tib tsaug mus fuas kiag 3 lub qe. Ces Kob-yim-tshaj ya-ntxiag mus nthos nkaus tau lub yeeb-yaj-tsom. Kob-yim-tshaj 3 yom 3 ceg kaum ntuj. Ua cas kub-hnyiab yaj pes ntshis tag. 3 yom rau 3 tug hluas-zaj, lawv kub-hnyiab yaj pes ntshis tuag tag.

Tsom kiag rau pas-dej. Pas-dej nqhuab tib lua. Nkauj-zag ua ntos nthawv nthav hauv. Ces Kob-yim-tshaj nrawm nroos mus txog ntua, nthos nkaus nkauj-zag caj npab niug cab. Ces nkauj-zag quaj tib les tawm plaws rau saum yaj ceeb no. Nkauj-zag mas zoo zoo zoo nkauj kawg nkaus. Plaub-hau ua ntxhee tib yees, ntev 9 dag, mas zoo nkauj tag tag.

*Tsuas tias ci ntsa qas iab,  
zoo tag los zoo thiab,  
zoo cuag Ntxwg Nyoog lub qub ntshiab;  
zoo tag los zoo hu  
zoo cuag Ntxwg Nyoog lub qub txhu.*

Coj los, los hla luag tej zos, los tsis tau txog. Mas ntiaj tog qaum pes, teb-chaws neeg zej-zog qhuas, cav ua zog kwb koog. Los los txog ntua Huab-tais tsev. Huab-tais zoo zoo siab kawg. Huab-tais tawm plaws tuaj. Neeg zej-zog saib ua nchuav-qas-nthwv.

Huab-tais nyiam thiab txaus siab, zoo siab heev. Nws hais tias, "Kob-yim-tshaj, cas nkauj-zag yuav zoo nkauj tag npaum li no? Txiv Huab-tais mas yuav tau nkauj-zag yuav tiag tiag. Zaum no yuav tau nrog nkauj-zag pw. Koj qhia kuv soj! Koj ua li cas ho yuav tau nkauj-zag tiag lauj??"

Kob-yim-tshaj hais tias, "Txiv Huab-tais, kuv mus txog ces kuv muab lub yeeb-yaj-tsom, tsom tsawg tsuag pas-dej nqhuab. Tsom qhov twg los kub-hnyiab tag. Ces kuv cia li mus muab xwb tiag."

Huab-tais txawm hais tias, "Koj muab tsom kuv saib soj!" Kob-yim-tshaj muab tsom kiag lub roob yaj ntshis, tsom kiag lub ha kub-hnyiab yaj tib ntshis thiab!!"

Huab-tais hais li no, "Kob-yim-tshaj!! Koj muab tsom kiag rau kuv saib."

Kob-yim-tshaj tias, "Tsom tsis tau nawb, txiv Huab-tais. Yog tsom koj ces koj yeej kub-hnyiab xwb!!"

Huab-tais tias, "Tsi nas...kuv twb kam yog ib tug huab-tais diam. Yog tsom, es tseem kub-hnyiab thiab, ces koj kuj ua kuv tus huab-tais!"

Kob-yim-tshaj thiaj tias, "Yuav tsom los tsom tiag." Tib tsom rau Huab-tais, Huab-tais kub-hnyiab yaj ntshis tag tiag.

Kob-yim-tshaj tau ua Huab-tais thiab tau nkauj-zag los yuav ua poj-niam. Ces nws muab Huab-tais suav xya tus poj-niam ua qhev tuav txhuv.

Zaj dab-neeg no qhia txog tias, *Txhob tsim lwm tus, thaum kawg yus yuav tau txais lub txim ntawd yam tsis poob ib lo lus...*

Tus hais yog **Swm-looj Vwj**

*FOLKTALE*  
**PRICE OF TORMENT**

Long long ago, there lived a man, Kaw-yee-cha,<sup>37</sup> and his wife, who were destitute, very very poor. Kaw-yee-cha and his wife farmed the field on the other side of the mountain. As usual, Kaw-yee-cha smoked opium until very late, and went slowly to work in the fields. Kaw-yee-cha walked downhill and at the crossroads, what did he see but a pair of snakes, coiled together, right there in the road.

One snake was a small white, very poisonous snake, Na-plua-dyay,<sup>38</sup> and the other, Na-njua-za,<sup>39</sup> was much larger and had green stripes around his body. They did not belong together, but there they were in the road! Kaw-yee-cha thought to himself, "Why have these two snakes come here to mate? I'll kill them and get rid of them!"

Kaw-yee-cha pulled out his sword and slashed at the snakes with a single blow. As the sword came towards the ground, the two snakes uncoiled and fell apart. Na-njua-za was cut completely in two. Na-plua-dyay lost only the tip of her tail.

Na-plua-dyay then slithered to her husband and said, "Oh husband! Today, I went to pick vegetables at the crossroads. Kaw-yee-cha, that poor dog, had been smoking opium and had smoked enough. He was on his way to the fields when he suddenly pulled out his sword and whacked at me, cutting off the tip of my tail. If I hadn't jumped quickly away, I'd now be dead, and I'd never see you again, dear husband."

Her husband, Dzee-na-plua-dyay,<sup>40</sup> replied, "It is true then that Kaw-yee-cha is a very bad man. In a little while, when it gets dark, I'll go hide under his bed. When he goes to sleep, I'll bite him, and he will die." So, when evening came, Dzee-na-plua-dyay slithered to wait under Kaw-yee-cha's bed.

Kaw-yee-cha finished his dinner, and then was ready for bed. As if heaven helped him, he said to his wife, "Wife dear, today, I was on the way to the fields, and when I reached the crossroads, I came upon two snakes coiled together in the road. I tried to kill them both, but as I struck with my sword, they uncoiled. The female, a small white snake, escaped, losing only the tip of her tail. The male, a green-striped snake, was chopped in two, and died at once."

So it was that Dzee-na-plua-dyay, under the bed, heard the whole story!! Dzee-na-plua-dyay then said, "What?! Is that really really true?!"

Kaw-yee-cha answered, "Really, really true, indeed!"

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<sup>37</sup> *Kob-yim-tshaj*

<sup>38</sup> *nab-pluaj-ce*

<sup>39</sup> *nab-ntsuab-zag*

<sup>40</sup> *txiv nab-pluaj-ce*

Dzee-na-plua-dyay said, "My wife has been unfaithful, and is always with Na-njua-za. She lied to me and said that she was going her own way, and that you tried to kill her. Is it really true that you killed Na-njua-za?"

Kaw-yee-cha answered, "I did indeed kill him."

Dzee-na-plua-dyay said, "He's big and I'm small, and he's always with my wife, you see, but I've never caught him. It is very good that you've been able to help me in this way. I'm going to see him with my own eyes."

Kaw-yee-cha answered, "Go, and see with your own eyes."

Dzee-na-plua-dyay slithered to the crossroads, and there, coiled up in two piles, lay Na-njua-za.

He went back, and said to Kaw-yee-cha, "You have been able to help me; my wife has been playing with this other fellow, and I have never caught him. Now you have killed him, and I appreciate it very much, but I have nothing to give to you. Tomorrow, you get up very very early and go to your tuber<sup>41</sup> field. Whatever you see, you can have."

The next day, Kaw-yee-cha got up very very early and went to his tuber field. It was as he expected; nothing unusual there. He looked north and south, everywhere, but there was nothing unusual to be seen. Then he spotted a single tuber leaf, and on it, one drop of clear dew. He picked the leaf to carry home, but it tilted back and forth, the drop of dew rolling from one side to the other. He was afraid he'd spill the drop, so he quickly drank it.

When Kaw-yee-cha swallowed the drop of dew, his ears popped and cleared....he could hear the words of the insects, the ants, the small furry animals, and the birds....

Kaw-yee-cha went to the fields. There was a dead sheep up on the mountain. The crow, Ua-la,<sup>42</sup> called to Kaw-yee-cha, "Kaw-yee-cha, there's a dead sheep up here on the mountain. You come butcher it, you take the meat, and I'll eat the innards." So Kaw-yee-cha went to butcher the sheep; he led his wife and children there to help butcher it. Kaw-yee-cha's heart turned bad, so he took the stomach, the intestines, and all the innards without giving any to Ua-la to eat.

Ua-la was very very angry, offended and sick at heart. Two or three days later, there was a dead Chinese servant up on the mountain, who had come there to cut hay for the horses. Ua-la returned and called, "Kaw-yee-cha! There's a dead sheep up here on the mountain, and you come butcher it. You take the meat, and I'll take the innards."

Kaw-yee-cha led his wife and children to the field. "What?! Why is there a dead Chinese servant here? The man died close to my field! What if someone comes to

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<sup>41</sup> *thaj-teb-qos*: field where tuber crops of all kinds are grown (tapioca, sweet potatoes, potatoes....)

<sup>42</sup> *uab-lag*: large black crow

search for him? Maybe I will be blamed for killing him! It would be a good idea to drag him away, and get rid of him...."

Kaw-yee-cha was just about to grab one foot to drag the man away, when he heard some Chinese coming to look. The Chinese were right next to him already! They saw, with their own eyes. The Chinese said, "Why did you kill our man? Kill our servant?"

They hit Kaw-yee-cha, tied him up, and led him away to the Chinese King.

Kaw-yee-cha said to the Chinese King, "Please, please, it is because I came to the field, I saw the dead Chinese there. It is not me that killed him. I can understand the words of the insects, the ants, the small furry animals, and the birds. It is because Ua-la called to me that there was a dead sheep on the mountain, that I went there to butcher it (I could have the meat, and he would have the innards). I went there to butcher the sheep. The very first time, I took all the meat and all the innards, and carried them away to eat, without giving any to Ua-la.

"The next time Ua-la came and lied to me. I didn't know, so I went up to the mountain, but it was a dead Chinese servant there, not a dead sheep. So I thought, 'No one has come here yet, to see this dead man so close to my fields. I will drag him away and get rid of him, so no one will come and see him.' Please, don't kill me."

The Chinese King then said, "If he can understand the words of the insects, the ants, really, then let's not kill him yet, servants. Kaw-yee-cha, this wandering no-good outcast, doesn't really know anything. In my house, under my bed, there have been many many ants, crawling in a path as wide as an 'njay'<sup>43</sup> leaf, for three years now, understand? You go listen to the ants, right? If you know why they're under my bed, then I'll let you go. If you don't know why, then I'll kill you."

Kaw-yee-cha answered, "It is all right with me," and he went to listen.

The ants told him this: "Under the King's bed there are nine jars of silver-honey, gold-honey. We have been eating it for three years now; we've finished three jars, but there are still six jars left, and we will eat those for the next six years. We will eat them all."

Kaw-yee-cha told the King. The King said, "Is this the truth, or is it a lie? I will send my servants to go dig under my bed. If there are six jars of silver-honey, gold-honey, then I will let you go. If you are lying, and there's nothing there, then I will kill you right away."

Kaw-yee-cha answered, "Go ahead and dig, it is all right with me."

Then the servants went to dig. There were six jars of silver-honey, gold-honey, for sure! Delicious....so delicious.....sticky and delicious. The King gobbled and gobbled, licking the fingers on one hand, then licking the fingers on the other hand.

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<sup>43</sup>*ntse* (*qos ntse*): a tuber leaf that's about 6-8 inches wide

Then the King said this: "Kaw-yee-cha, you lying wandering dog, why do you go on lying so much?! Under my bed I certainly did have honey! You lie, I certainly did bury honey there.

"If you know so much, there is near my house a large, tall tree. In it there is a pair of birds who cry all day and all night. You go listen, and if you know what this pair of birds is crying about so much, then I'll let you go. If you don't know, then I'll kill you and throw you away."

Kaw-yee-cha said, "I'll go ahead and listen, it is all right with me."

He then went to listen to the pair of birds crying. Kaw-yee-cha went back to tell the King, "Father King, this pair of birds went and got a hair from the Dragon's Daughter<sup>44</sup> at the Dragon Sea.<sup>45</sup> It was as long as nine yards,<sup>46</sup> and the husband bird said, 'Let's wrap it around the mouth of the nest, so when the strong wind blows, the nest will be steady and will not fall.' The wife bird said, 'Let's spread the hair on the floor of the nest so it will be warm.' The two birds cannot agree, and argue and scold each other all day and all night. Because of that hair."

The King said, "My goodness, if it is like that, then my servants will go cut the tree and look at the bird's nest. If there is a hair like you say, I'll let you go, but if there isn't, you lie, and I will kill you."

Kaw-yee-cha said, "Go ahead, it is all right with me."

The servants went to cut down and look at the fallen tree. The bird's nest did indeed have a hair nine yards long.

The King said, "Kaw-yee-cha, you lie so much again!!

"If you are able to go and get the Dragon's Daughter and bring her here for me to marry, then I'll let you go. If you are not able to get her, then I will kill you."

Kaw-yee-cha said, "Okay, it is all right with me."

Kaw-yee-cha left to get the Dragon's Daughter for the king to marry. Kaw-yee-cha travelled and the whole country buzzed and chattered, "Kaw-yee-cha will go to get the Dragon's Daughter."

Kaw-yee-cha walked for three days, and reached a Chinese village. The Chinese knew that Kaw-yee-cha had come to get the Dragon's Daughter. Kaw-yee-cha went to stay overnight in a Chinese couple's house.

The Chinese couple talked together: "Kaw-yee-cha has come under the King's authority, to take a bride for the King. Now, we have nothing, so tomorrow we must take one of the ducks to kill for Kaw-yee-cha's breakfast."

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<sup>44</sup>*nkauj-zag*

<sup>45</sup>*plhob-yaj-kum-hiav*

<sup>46</sup>*dag*: about five feet, or the distance between the tips of the fingers, arms held chest high and outstretched.



The pair of ducks were under the floor of the house, and they heard. The two of them talked together: "Dear husband! They will take one of us to kill for Kaw-yee-cha to eat. Now, if they kill me, then you will be a widower. If they kill you, then I will be a widow; what shall we do? If Kaw-yee-cha is willing not to eat us, then we will be saved. If he plans to eat us, and if you don't die, then I will."

Kaw-yee-cha heard what they were talking about, so he decided not to eat duck. The following morning, the Chinese went to catch the female duck, to slaughter for Kaw-yee-cha's meal. Kaw-yee-cha said, "I won't eat....whatever you do, I will not eat."

The Chinese couple said, "Eat!! You come here on the authority of the King, so eat. Eat or not, the duck will be killed!"

Back and forth, back and forth, he tried to refuse. Kaw-yee-cha said, "If you two are not willing to spare the duck, then give her to me, and I will carry her. When I want to eat, then I'll kill the duck to eat." The Chinese couple then gave the female duck to Kaw-yee-cha to carry.

Kaw-yee-cha carried the duck and travelled for three days. The duck laid three eggs. Kaw-yee-cha let the female duck go back home. He carried only the three eggs and walked on.

Kaw-yee-cha walked and walked until he reached another Chinese village. He went to stay overnight in the Chinese village, in a Chinese couple's house. They had a pair of water buffalo and a young water buffalo. When they were going to sleep, the Chinese couple talked to each other, "Kaw-yee-cha has come to get a bride for the King, and we have nothing to slaughter for his breakfast. I think tomorrow we should take one of the water buffalo to kill for his meal, don't you think so, dear husband?"

The Chinese husband said, "Go ahead and kill it, it is all right with me."

The pair of water buffalo and the young water buffalo heard what they said!! The three water buffalo talked with each other for a while, "Husband! Our owner said, 'Kaw-yee-cha has come and we have nothing. We will kill one of our water buffalo for Kaw-yee-cha to eat!' If you are killed, then I will be a widow. If I am killed, then you will be a widower. If our child is killed, then I fear we will have no child. We have raised only one child, what shall we do??"

Kaw-yee-cha could hear the young water buffalo say this: "If Kaw-yee-cha eats you and eats me, then he will not be able to get the Dragon's Daughter, whose hair is nine yards long, from the Dragon King. If we are not eaten, then Kaw-yee-cha will be able to get her."

Kaw-yee-cha heard it all!! The next morning early, the Chinese got up and went to kill the water buffalo. Kaw-yee-cha could not allow them to kill it. Back and forth, back and forth, they offered and he refused. The Chinese really wanted to kill the water

buffalo for Kaw-yee-cha to eat. Kaw-yee-cha said, "I won't eat. If your hearts are not willing to agree with me, then give me your water buffalo, and I will lead it with me. When I want to eat, I will kill it."

So Kaw-yee-cha led the young water buffalo away. Leading, walking, until they reached the Dragon Sea, a lake with quiet, gently lapping waves.

The young water buffalo said this: "Kaw-yee-cha, hey, we are going to take the Dragon's Daughter for the King, and we have arrived at the place. I will swing my horns in the Sea, splash the water, and then I'll fling my horns in three directions. There will be a mudslide. If the three young dragons come out, they will carry binoculars. If someone points these binoculars at something, there will be a fire, for sure. If the binoculars point at us, we will die, and we will not be able to get the Dragon's Daughter. If they do not point at us, then they will point only at the mountains and the valleys. So you take these three duck eggs and throw them to three directions in the lake. The three young dragons will dash across the water to snatch the three eggs, and they will release the binoculars and drop them. Then you dash to grab them, OK? That way we will snatch the Dragon's Daughter."

They arrived at the Dragon Sea, with gentle waves, quiet and deep blue. The young water buffalo reached the edge of the water. He scratched at the ground...he swung his horns in the Dragon Sea three times...then flung water in three directions. There was a mudslide, the mountain slid and mud was everywhere.

The old Dragon King<sup>47</sup> heard the noise and groaned. He said, "Three young ones, go out and look to see what is happening, why my fields are shaking up and down." The three young dragons left to go out and see. They carried the binoculars, pointed them at the mountains and valleys, which burst into flame and disappeared in an instant. Gone in a flash. Kaw-yee-cha then took the three duck eggs and threw them to three directions of the Dragon Sea. The three young dragons released the binoculars at the edge of the Sea. At the same time, they grabbed for the three eggs, and Kaw-yee-cha flew across the lake and grabbed the binoculars with both hands. Kaw-yee-cha pointed the binoculars in three directions, and those spots burst into flame and disappeared in an instant. He swung three times at the young dragons, and they all burned up and were dead in a flash of fire.

He pointed them at the Dragon Sea. The Sea was suddenly dry. There at the bottom of the lakebed was the Dragon's Daughter, weaving cloth. Kaw-yee-cha hurried there, grabbed the arms of the Dragon's Daughter and pulled her away. The Dragon's Daughter cried as he led her up and into the real world. The Dragon's Daughter was very very beautiful indeed. Her hair was silky and loose, as long as nine yards and so so beautiful.

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<sup>47</sup>*yawg zaj laug*

*Bright and glittering,  
most beautiful in the world,  
as rare as a single grain of the Spirit King's<sup>48</sup>rice;  
more beautiful than words can say,  
as precious as rice from the Spirit World.*

Leading her, they crossed the land, from village to village, not yet arriving at their destination. The world shook with the news. The people of the villages of the country buzzed with wonder and admiration; the talk was everywhere. They finally arrived at the King's house. The King was very very happy. The King came out. The people of the villages watched with excitement.

The King was pleased and happy, very happy indeed. He said, "Kaw-yee-cha, she is really beautiful, more than anything. I, Father King, want this Dragon's Daughter, to marry right now. I am going to live with her. You tell me how you got her! How did you really get the Dragon's Daughter?!"

Kaw-yee-cha said, "Father King, I went to the Dragon Sea, and I took these binoculars, pointed them at the lake and the lake dried up. If you point them at something, then that spot burns up. That's how I was able to get her."

The King then said, "You point them and show me!" Kaw-yee-cha pointed them at the mountain, and it disappeared in a flash of fire, pointed them at the valley, and it was gone in an instant!

The King said this: "Kaw-yee-cha!! You point those at me!"

Kaw-yee-cha said, "I cannot point these, surely, Father King. If I point them at you, then you will burn up!!"

The King said, "Nonsense....I am King. If pointing them at me burns me up, then you will take my place as King."

Kaw-yee-cha then said, "Okay, it is all right with me." He pointed them at the King and the King burst into a flash of fire and disappeared.

Kaw-yee-cha became the King, and had the Dragon's Daughter to marry. Then he took the King's seven Chinese wives to work as servants, pounding rice.

This story tells: *"Don't torment another person, because finally you will receive that torment yourself, without dropping a word."*

Storyteller: **Shue-long Vue**

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<sup>48</sup>Ntxwg Nyoog

## **SWM-LOOJ VWJ LUB KEEB-KWM**

Kuv yug rau lub 6 hli ntuj, hnuv tim 22, xyoo 1940. Kuv yug rau lub zos npuas-caas, xeev Luang-pra-bang. Kuv los mus loj hlob nyob rau lub teb-chaws Lam-theeb, Mouang Mouang-na, xeev Luang-pra-bang. Lub teb-chaws uas nws nyob-nyob es cia li khiav tuaj kiag rau Thaib-teb ces tuaj As-mes-lis-kas kiag yog Lam-theeb. Kuv niam thiab txiv hu ua Ntxoov-khwb thaum ub mas lawv yeej ib txwm nyob rau lub zos Npoos-cas, ces yeej nyob ntawd laus thiab tau khiav los mus rau lub zos hu ua Thaj-kub-lub ces txiv thiab tau los tso ntiaj-teb tseg rau ntawd. Thaum kuv txiv tuag tseg kuv tseem me-me , kuv thiab khiav los mus raws kuv txiv ntxawm nyob rau Lam-theeb thiab nyob loj hlob laus li no.

Kuv niam kuv txiv lawv lub keeb thaum ub mas nyob raws toj-roob hauv peg ua noj ua haus yug tsiaj yug txhuv kuv yawg (lub npe hu ua Txhiaj-lwv) kuj tsis ua dab-tsi, tsuas peb yawg no tau ua ib tug nyuag xeev-meem xwb. Los mus yav tom qab no, kuv txiv los kuj tau ua ib tug(nai-ban) tswv-zos, nyob rau hauv peb lub zos.

Txij li thaum yug tau kuv los, loj hlob yuav poj-niam nyob ua teb noj txog hnuv-nyoog muaj 20 xyoo 1960 tau muaj kev rov-tsog ces kuv kuj raug mus pab lub teb lub chaws, kuv kuj tau xaab nai-muaj. Kuv ua tub-roq pab teb chaws tau 4 xyoo, kuv thiab tawm los nyob ua neeg pej xeev ua noj ua haus hauv peb lub zos tsis tas li ntawd xwb kuv kuj tseem ua ib tug nyuag (nai-ban) tswv zos xyuas peb lub zos txog thaum peb khiav tawm teb-chaws xyoo 1975. Kuv niam thiab txiv tsuas yug tau peb 4 tug xwb, cov tub ces yog kuv tib leeg, hos cov ntxhais 3 tug. Cov dab-neeg ua kuv txawj, paub hais ntawd mas yog kuv kawm ntawm kuv tus dab-laug los, nws mas txawj txawj hais dab-neeg li, kuv tsis muaj niam muaj txiv ces thaum twg lawv tuaj ua luam ces lawv coj kuv mus nrog lawv nyob ces yeej piav dab-neeg tas hmo li, ib zag twg tsuav yog lawv hais ib lwm xwb ces kuv yeej kawm tau li lawm vim tias yooj-yim.

Thaum uas kuv tuaj txog teb-chaws no mas lus los kuv kuj tsis paub, mus kawm ntawv los kuj kawm tsis tau, (tsis zoo li thaum ub kuv kawm dab-neeg lawm) es nim-no kuv thiab tsis tau ua dab-tsi li. Kuv tus kheej kiag mas xav tias peb tej(cov) txuj ci Hmoob uas poj ua kab, yawg ua cia thiab ntau-ntau yam uas zoo, tsim-tsim nyog peb cov hluas tom qab no yuav tsum ceev khaws tseg. Tam sis no kuv cov me-nyuam tseem me-me kuv tsis tau qhia kev cai Hmoob dab-tsi rau lawv li, tab sis thaum lawv loj hlob lawd kuv yuav qhia kom lawv paub thiab. Kuv kuj tsis paub kab ke, kev cai Hmoob ntau thiab tab sis yog leej twg xav kawm kom paub Hmoob meej me ntsis los kuv nyaj yuav qhia tau. Peb Hmoob thaum ub tsis muaj ntaub muaj ntawv ces yuav

tsum yog kawm khaws cia rau ntsuab siab xwb yog tsis li ntawd ces yeej tsis paub ib yam txuj-ci kev cai Hmoob.

Cov uas kuv hais tag los saum toj no mas kuv tias yam twg uas yog nej xav tias yuav zoo no los nej ho khaws, yam twg nej tias tsis zoo no los nej ho muab pov-tseg.

Ntsib nej sawv-daws lwm-zaus.

SWM-LOOJ VWJ

## BIOGRAPHY OF SHUE-LONG VUE

I was born June 22, 1940, in the village of Boua-dyang, Luang Prabang province. I grew up in villages around La-theng, Mouang-na District, Luang Prabang province. I lived there until I escaped from Laos to Thailand and then to America.

My father was named Ndzong-keu. He used to live in the village of Boua-dyang, and he grew up there, except he moved one time to the village of Tha-ku-lu, where he left this world. When my father died, I was still small, and I went to live with my father's young brother in La-theng, where I grew up.

His parents, in the old days, lived on the mountain tops, supporting themselves by raising livestock and crops. My grandfather, whose name was Tzia-leu, was assistant to the village-chief, and later on, my father became chief of the village Boua-dyang.

When I was old enough I got married. When I was 20 years old, in 1960, the communists came, and I joined to serve the country. I was a 'sang nai-mua', in charge of 25 men. I was a soldier serving the country for four years, then I left to live as a civilian, helping raise the crops and animals to support the family in my village. Not only that, but I served as a village-chief, until the country collapsed in 1975. My parents only had four children; I was the only son, the youngest, and I had three sisters.

I became talented at telling folklore. I learned them from my uncle, who knew how to tell folktales. I had no mother, no father, so whenever the traders came, they took me to stay with them, and told me folktales every night, one folktale and then another, and I learned quickly because it came easily. I also learned wedding ceremonies and funeral ceremonies. They just had to say it once and I could repeat it.

When I arrived in this country, I didn't know the language, and I went to school, but I couldn't learn (learning English was not easy like learning folktales), and right now I don't do anything at all.

In my opinion, I think and hope that since Hmong customs, culture, and way of life that was passed down from grandparents and great-grandparents, have many good things and we should keep them. It's important that the young should learn and retain these in the future. Right now, my children are still young and I haven't taught them the Hmong traditions yet, but when they are old enough, I will tell them so that

they will know what I know. I don't know very much about the Hmong traditions, but if there is someone who wants to learn so they will know Hmong ways more clearly, I will tell them what I know. Hmong have never had writing or reading, and they have had to learn by heart what they know. If it hadn't been this way, we wouldn't have any Hmong traditions, and customs, and our way of life wouldn't be Hmong.

This is all I have to say, but if there is anything here that makes sense, people can keep it, and if there is anything that is not good, people can disregard it.

Until next time,  
Shue-looj Vue

## BACKGROUND: EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

The Hmong language uses many kinds of expressive language: short, rhyming expressions that teach (like proverbs); expressions taken from ritual texts and songs; paired words or four-word expressions which are used like single words; comparisons (similar to our similes and metaphors); and old words—words from the grandfather's day or borrowed from Chinese—that many Hmong today can't really translate.

Since Hmong has only recently become a written language, description of the language has not really been done yet. Categorization and labeling of types of language structures varies from group to group, and in some cases, there is no vocabulary for a structure that has no comparable English structure.

### PROVERBS AND FLOWER WORDS

Generally, proverbs are of two kinds: literal or direct, and figurative or indirect. The literal proverbs are called *piv-txoj-lus* ('compare-way-word'). They contain rhyming words and are used frequently in day-to-day conversation. The meaning is fairly direct and obvious, especially to Hmong; those that outsiders have difficulty in understanding are ones that refer to a part of Hmong life that is unfamiliar to Westerners. Examples of *piv-txoj-lus* are:

Pos ntse tsis yuav **hliav**;  
Neeg ntse tsis yuav **piav**.

*thorn-sharp-not-will-sharpen*  
*person-sharp-not-will-explain*

**You don't have to sharpen a thorn;**  
**You don't have to explain to a smart person.**



Nyob deb txog dej txog **cawv**;  
Nyob ze cuag hluav-taws **hlawv**.

*live-far-arrive-water-arrive-whiskey*  
*live-close-equal-firewood-ignite*

**Living far apart serve water and whiskey;**  
**Living close is like firewood catching fire.**

The indirect, figurative proverbs are called 'flower words' (*paj-lus*). In flower words, the meaning is symbolic and fairly obscure; you have to know something of Hmong culture, beliefs, and rituals in order to understand the deeper meaning. Flower words do not contain rhyming words, and are not known by many people. Someone who knows the flower words is knowledgeable in the customs and rituals of the culture. Examples of flower words are:

Ntov ntoo saib ceg qhuav.

*chop-tree-watch-branch-dry*

**When you chop a tree, look out for dry branches.**  
**(Before you speak, look around for who is listening.)**

Koj qaib pw kuv cooj  
Kuv os pw koj nkuaj.

*your-chicken-sleep-my-chicken coop*  
*my-duck-sleep-your-stable*

**Your chicken sleeps in my coop**  
**My duck sleeps in your stable.**

**(Your family gives my family a daughter-in-law;**  
**My family gives your family a daughter-in-law.)**

Tsis pom dej dag, siab tsis nqig.

*not-see-water-yellow, heart-not-recede/wane*

**If you don't see the yellow water, your heart does not wane.**

**(If you have not actually experienced the difficulty, you cannot speak about it.)**

## PAIRED WORDS

Paired words are called *txwv-lus* ('pair-word'). Examples of these are:

kub tes kub taw  
*hot-hand-hot-foot*

**busy doing many things at  
once**

kev ntsoj kev ntsuag  
*way-orphan-way-orphan*

**orphanhood**

cua daj cua dub  
*wind-yellow-wind-black*

**storm**

Paired words are used like multi-syllable words; they are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. Word pairs can change form by changing the classifier (the word that makes another word specific):

kev ntsoj kev ntsuag

**orphanhood**  
(*'kev'*='way' or 'path')

tub ntsoj tub ntsuag

**orphan**  
(*'tub'*='person')

ua ntsoj ua ntsuag

**to be an orphan**  
(*'ua'*='do')

In addition, the parts of the expression can be used independently, as:

kev ntsuag  
tub ntsuag  
ua ntsuag

Often it is these expressions that are manipulated in the sung poetry. Many of the expressions come from the shaman's ritual texts, and the individual elements' meanings have been lost, or cannot be directly defined.

## SIMILES

Comparisons are used in everyday speech, as in English. They usually contain these words:

cuag	(equal; reach to)
npaum li	(as much as)
zoo li	(like)
xws li	(as)
li	(as)

Examples are:

tawv cuag zeb  
*hard-equal-rock*

**as hard as rock**

nrawm npaum li kauv  
*fast-as much as-deer*

**as fast as a deer**

qeeb li vaub-kib  
*slow-as-turtle*

**as slow as a turtle**

There are other kinds of comparisons, comparable to English metaphors, as:

qiv kauv txhais (**borrow the legs of a deer**) = fast

## PROVERBS

### ***PIV-TXOJ-LUS*** ***PAJ LUS***

1. Muaj tsis txhob khav  
Pluag tsis txhob quaj.

*have-don't-boast*  
*poor-don't-cry*

**Rich, don't boast,**  
**Poor, don't cry.**

2. Cog ib tau kaum.

*plant-one-get-ten*

**Plant one, reap ten.**

3. Ntau txhais tes ua hauj-lwm sib  
Ntau lub tswv-yim ua tau txoj kev qhib.

*many-hand-make-work-light*  
*many-idea-make-way-open*

**Many hands make light work;**  
**Many ideas open the way.**

4. Cuaj lub cub tawg sov tsis cuag ib lub hnuv  
Cuaj leej ntshais zoo tsis cuag ib leeg tub.

*nine-fireplaces-warm-not-equal-one-sun*  
*nine-daughters-good-not-equal-one-son*

**Nine fireplaces are not as warm as the sun;  
Nine daughters do not equal one son.**

5. Niam dev tsis co tw  
Txiv dev tsis raws.

*Female-dog-not-shake-tail  
Male-dog-not-follow*

**If the female dog doesn't wag her tail,  
The male dog doesn't follow.**

6. Nyob deb muab dej muab cawv  
Nyob ze cuag hluav-taws hlavv.

*live-far-give-water-give-whiskey  
live-close-equal-firewood-ignite*

**Live far apart, give water and whiskey;  
Live close together, like firewood catching fire.**

7. Nyob deb sib hlub  
Nyob ze sib ntxub

*live-far-each other-love  
live-near-each other-hate*

**Live far way, love each other  
Live close together, hate each other.**

8. Npua ua rau dev noj.

*pig-do-for-dog-eat*

**Pigs do, and dogs eat.**

9. Mov-kuam qab tsis cuag mov nplej  
Cov tom-qab zoo tsis cuag tus ua-ntej.

*cornmeal mush-delicious-not equal-cooked rice*  
*those-after-good-not equal-one-before*

**Cornmeal mush is not as delicious as cooked rice;  
Those who come after are not as good as the one who came before.**

10. Zoo nraug thiaj tau nkauj sua  
Siab ntev thiaj tau nom ua.

*handsome-then-get-girl-Chinese*  
*heart-long-then-get-chief-do*

**Handsome, then get the Chinese girl;  
Patient, then become chief.**

11. Tsis yog luag nom luag tswv, luag yeej tsis xav hawm  
Tsis yog luag kwv luag tij, luag yeej tsis xav cawm.

*not-be-their-chief-their-master, they-always-not-wish-respect*  
*not-be-their-young brother-their-old brother, they-always-not-wish-support.*

**If you are not their chief, they do not respect you;  
If you are not their clan-mate, they do not support you.**

12. Tsuas muaj tus ntses lawv tus dej  
Tsis muaj tus dej lawv tus ntses.

*only-have-fish-follow-river*  
*not-have-river-follow-fish*

**There are only fish that follow the river;  
There are no rivers that follow the fish.**

13. Taum lag taum lig ua quav ntsooj  
Tub lag tub lig ua luag puab rooj  
Taum lag taum lig ua quav nas  
Tub lag tub lig ua luag puab ntsa.

*bean-late-bean-late-make-feces-porcupine*  
*son-late-son-late-do-others-wait-door*  
*bean-late-bean-late-make-feces-rat*  
*son-late-son-late-do-others-wait-wall*

**Plant beans late, they are marked with spots;  
Man who works slowly begs at the others' door.  
Plant beans late, they are marked with blight;  
Man works who works little begs at the others' fence.**

14. Pom tsov yuav tuag  
Pom nom yuav pluag.

*see-tiger-will-die*  
*see-official-will-be poor*

**See a tiger, you will die;  
See an official, you will be poor.**

15. Yam zoo ntshai tsam tau me  
Yam phem ntshai tsam los ze.

*thing-good-fear-get-little*  
*thing-bad-fear-come-near*

**Something good, you're afraid you'll get too little;  
Something bad, you're afraid it'll come too near.**

16. Hla dej yuav hle khau  
Tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw yuav hle hau

*cross-river-will-take off-shoe*  
*flee-country-leave-place-will-take off-status*

**Cross the river, you'll take off your shoes;  
Flee from your country, you'll lose your status.**

17. Ntuj dub ntuj txig li lub qhov kub twg  
Xyov yus yuav tuag hnuv twg.

*sky-black-sky-black-as-opening-oven-any*  
*don't know-one-will-die-day-which*

**Fortune is black, like any oven door;  
No one can know on which day one will die.**

18. Thaum zoo mas nthee ib lub qe ob leeg twb noj tsis tas  
Thaum phem mas tua ib tug ntshw twb tsis txaus ob leeg noj.

*when-good-then-scramble-one-egg-two-people-already-not-finish*  
*when-bad-then-kill-one-elephant-already-not-enough-2-people-eat*

**When times are good, one scrambled egg is more than two people  
can finish;  
When times are bad, butchering one elephant is not enough for two  
people to eat.**

19. Nceb yuav tuaj tsis tim los nag heev  
Neeg yuav muaj tsis tim ua cuav-teev.

*mushroom-will-sprout-not-necessary-come-rain-much*  
*people-will-have-not-necessary-do-cheat-balance scale*

**Mushrooms will sprout, it's not necessary to have a lot of rain;  
People will be rich, it's not necessary to fix the scale.**



20. Zom zeb mob tes  
Tuav cos mob taw  
Ris dej mob nraub-qaum  
Noj mov nkaus diav maum.

*grind-stone-hurt-hand*  
*pound-rice pounder-hurt-foot*  
*carry-water-hurt-back*  
*eat-rice-get-big-spoon*

**“Grinding corn hurts my hand!”**  
**“Pounding rice hurts my foot!”**  
**“Carrying water hurts my back!”**  
**But for eating rice, you get a big spoon.**

21. Dig-muag pom kev nruab qaig-hli  
Lag-ntseg hnov lus ntshi  
Dig-muag pom kev yam hmo-ntuj  
Lag-ntseg hnov kes tawv nyuj.

*blind-eye-see-way-quarter-moon-light*  
*deaf-ear-hear-word-smile*  
*blind-eye-see-way-thing-night-sky*  
*deaf-ear-hear-scratch-skin-cow*

**The blind can see the road in the dim moonlight;**  
**The deaf can hear a whisper;**  
**The blind can see things in the road at night;**  
**The deaf can hear something scratching the skin of a cow.**

22. Tshav-ntuj qab zeb qab ca qhuav  
Los-nag qab zeb qab ca ntub.

*sunshine-under-rock-under-fallen log-dry*  
*come-rain-under-rock-under-fallen log-wet*

**When it's sunny, under the rock and log, it's dry;  
When it's rainy, under the rock and log, it's wet.**

23. Nyuj tsis pom nyuj ntab  
Neeg tsis pom hiab-xab.

*cow-not-see-cow's-skin under the chin  
person-not-see-face*

**A cow cannot see the skin under his chin;  
A person cannot see his own face.**

24. Txawj ntos tsis qeg txia  
Txawj hais tsis qeg lus.

*able-weave-not-waste-thread ('woof' or cross-threads)  
able-speak-not-waste-words*

**Able to weave, don't waste thread;  
Able to speak, don't waste words.**

25. Ncauj hub ncauj rhawv txhaws tau  
Ncauj tib-neeg txhaws tsis tau.

*mouth-jar-mouth-barrel/pipe-plug-can  
mouth-person-plug-not-can*

**The mouth of a jar or a barrel can be plugged;  
The mouth of a person cannot be plugged.**

26. Saib dej ua ntu  
Saib neeg ua plhu

*watch-river-one-section (at a time)  
watch-person-make-cheek (face)*

**Examine each stretch of the stream;  
Supervise people without favoritism.**

27. Ua nom mas tsis zam cai  
Ua cai tsis zam neeg  
Zam neeg mas swb cai  
Zam cai mas swb neeg.

*do-official-then-not-go around-law  
do-law-not-go around-people  
go around-people-then-be defeated by-law  
go around-law-then-be defeated by-people*

**When you're leader, don't manipulate the law;  
When you apply the law, don't manipulate people;  
When you manipulate people, you're defeated by the law;  
When you manipulate the law, you're defeated by people.**

28. Twv txiaj tau kev pluag  
Twv ntuj tau kev tuag  
Twv zoo tau kev phem  
Twv ntuj tau kev txom-nyem

*bet-money-get-way-poor  
bet-sky-get-way-death  
bet-good-get-way-bad  
bet-sky-get-way-misery*

**Gamble money, become poor;  
Defy fortune, get death;  
Gamble the good, get the bad;  
Defy heaven, get misery.**

29. Txiv neej yawg ib los 30 tus hniav hais lus  
Kav tsis taus 30 hhub, mas kav 28 hhub.

*man-old-one-come-thirty-teeth-speak-word*  
*control-not-able-thirty-day, then-control-twenty eight-day*

**A man who is old enough to have 30 teeth speaks words  
That last 30 days, if not, then 28 days.**

**(An adult man does what he says he'll do.)**

30. Hais txog kev lom-zem, ces xav luag.  
Hais txog kev txom-nyem, ces xav tuag.

*speak-about-way-enjoy, then-wish-laugh*  
*speak-about-way-misery, then-wish-die*

**Speak about enjoyment, you want happiness;  
Speak about misery, you want to die.**

31. Noj tsis noj kuj tuav diav  
Luag tsis luag kuj ntxi hniav

*eat-not-eat-so then-hold-spoon*  
*laugh-not-laugh-so then-smile*

**Whether you eat or not, at least hold a spoon;  
Whether you laugh or not, at least smile.**

32. Qoob lag qoob lig qoob npluag  
Tub lag tub lig tub ntsuag.

*crops-late-crops-late-crops-poor/spindly*  
*child-late-child-late-child-orphan*

**Crops planted late are poor crops;  
Children born late are orphans.**

33. Tau yaam tshab txhob hnov-qaab yaam qub  
Tau nam yau ncu ntsoov nam hlub.

*get-thing-new-don't-forget-thing-old*  
*get-wife-young-remember-well-wife-older*

**Accept the new things, but don't forget the old things;  
Take a new wife, but don't forget the first wife.**

34. Tsis ua luam ces txiv tub  
Ua luam lawm ces suav dub.

*not-do-trading-then-father-son*  
*do-trading-already-then-Chinese-black*

**When not doing business, be like father and son;  
When doing business, be like the black Chinese.**

35. Xav luaj ntuj  
Xu luaj nyuj

*wish-big as-sky*  
*miss target-big as-cow*

**Aim for the sky;  
Hit the cow.**

36. Ib ntuj hnub qub pom kev tsis cuag ib lub txhais hli  
Cuaj leeg tub tsis cuag ib leeg txiv.

*one-sky-stars-see-way-not equal-one-quarter-moon*  
*nine-son-not equal-one-father*

**A starry sky does not light your way as well as quarter-moon;  
Nine sons do not equal one father.**

37. Niam tshuab ntuag, txiv qaiv ntxaiv  
Niam mloog txiv qhuab, txiv mloog niam hais.

*wife-machine-weave, husband-hang thread on loom  
wife-listen-husband-advise, husband-listen-wife-speak*

**The wife is the loom, the husband hangs the thread;  
The wife listens to the husband's advice, the husband listens to the  
wife's opinions.**

38. Nyuj ntsuag tsis tuag, nyuj ntsuag hlob tiav pwj  
Tub ntsuag tsis tuag, tub ntsuag hlob cjaiv xeev txwj  
Qaib ntsuag tsis tuag, qaib ntsuag hlob tiav lau  
Tub ntsuag tsis tuag, tub ntsuag hlob cjaiv hau.

*cow-orphan-not-die-cow-orphan-grow up-ox  
boy-orphan-not-die-boy-orphan-grow up-war lord  
chicken-orphan-not-die-chicken-orphan-grow up-rooster  
boy-orphan-not-die-boy-orphan-grow up-village chief*

**If an orphaned calf does not die, it may become an ox;  
If an orphaned boy does not die, he may become a warlord;  
If an orphaned chick does not die, it may become a rooster;  
If an orphaned boy does not die, he may become a village chief.**

39. Tus qaib ntsuag tau ncej puab  
Tus tub ntsuag tau yeeb-ncuab.

*[raise]-the-chicken-orphan-get-thigh  
[raise]-the-boy-orphan-get-enemy*

**An orphaned chick, at least you get a thigh;  
An orphaned boy, you may get an enemy.**

40. Pos ntse tsis yuav hliav  
Neeg ntse tsis yuav piav

*thorn-sharp-not-need-sharpen*  
*person-sharp-not-need-explain*

**No need to sharpen a thorn;  
No need to explain to a smart person.**

41. Thaum luag tsaj, tsis nrog luag tsaj  
Thaum luag saj, ces yus ua dev nuam yaj.

*when-others-work, (one) not-with-others-work*  
*when-others-eat, then-one-do-dog-wait for scraps*

**When others work, I don't go to work with them;  
When they eat, I act like a dog waiting for scraps.**

42. Pluag pluag ua plhu luag  
Muaj muaj ua plhu quaj.

*poor-poor-make-cheek (face)-laugh*  
*have-have-make-cheek (face)-cry*

**The poor laugh;  
The rich cry.**

43. Rau-siab rau yam twg  
Yeej yuav tau yam ntawd

*put heart-into-something*  
*succeed-will-get-that thing*

**Put your heart into something;  
You will succeed and get that thing.**

44. Thaum nyob ces ntsim cuag kua-txob;  
Thaum ncaim lawd ho ua plhu mluas-mlob.

*when-be together-then-hot-equal-chili pepper*  
*when-separate-already-then-make-face-sad/down-turned mouth*

**When you're together, it's hot like chili peppers;  
When you're separated, your face is so sad.**

45. Plaub-hau ntshov thiaj yuav zuag los ntsis;  
Plaub ntug ntshov thiaj yuav txwj laus los lis.

*hair-tangled-then-will use-comb-to comb*  
*dispute-complicated-then-will use-elder-solve*

**Tangled hair, use a comb to unsharl it;  
Complicated dispute, use an elder to solve it.**

46. Neeg nquag ua twj-ywm;  
Neeg tub nkeeg xaiv hauj-lwm.

*person-energetic-do-quietly*  
*person-one-lazy-choose-job*

**A hard-working person does any job without complaint;  
A lazy person is picky about the job he does.**

47. Nrog cov laus dab tsis hem;  
Nrog cov nom luag tsis cem.

*go with-those-old-ghosts-not-bother/frighten*  
*go with-those-officials-others-not-scold/curse*

**Go with elders, the ghosts don't bother you;  
Go with officials, others don't curse you.**



48. Khiav nab ntsib qav;  
Khiav dab ntsib tog-cav.

*run-snake-meet-frog*  
*run-ghost-meet-fallen log*

**Run from the snake and meet a frog;  
Run from a ghost and meet a fallen log.**

49. Tub-nkeeg yuav noj zaub qab;  
Tub-nquag lam noj zaub hlab.

*one-lazy-will-eat-vegetable-delicious*  
*one-energetic-just-eat-vegetable-boiled*

**A lazy man likes to eat delicious food;  
An energetic man just eats plain vegetables.**

50. Muaj mob thiaj nrhiav tshuaj;  
Muaj tuag thiaj nyiav-quaj.

*have-sickness-then-look for-medicine*  
*have-death-then-grieve-cry*

**When there's sickness, look for medicine to put things right;  
When there's death, there's grief and crying.**

51. Thaum siav tu ces luag tias tuag;  
Thaum nyiaj tu ces luag tias pluag.

*when-life-broken-then-others-say-dead*  
*when-money-stop-then-others-say-poor*

**When your breathing has stopped then they say you're dead;  
When your money runs out then they say you're poor.**

52. Qoob tsis zoo tsuas plam nyog ib cim;  
Poj-niam tsis zoo ces plam tas ib sim.

*crop-not-good-only-lose-one-year*  
*wife-not-good-then-lose-all-one-lifetime*

**If the crops aren't good, you lose only one year;  
If your wife isn't good, you lose a whole lifetime.**

53. Nom-tswv zoo ces hlub pej-xeem;  
Nom-tswv tsis zoo ces hlub pej neem.

*officials-good-then-love-population*  
*officials-not good-then-love-to eat*

**Officials that are good love their people;  
Officials that are bad love to eat.**

54. Muaj yeej txawj pluag;  
Tsis mob yeej txawj tuag.

*rich-always-able-poor*  
*not-sick-always-able-die*

**The rich can always become poor;  
The healthy can always die.**

55. Nyuj laug nyuj kub kawb  
Nraug laug nraug suab hawb  
Ntoo laus ntoo yoog kav  
Neeg laus lawm los tseem xav xav.

*cow-old-cow-horn-crooked*  
*man-old-man-voice-creaky*  
*tree-old-tree-many twigs*  
*person-old-already-then-still-think-think*

**Old cow, crooked horns;  
Old man, creaky voice;  
Old tree, many twigs;  
Old person still has many ideas.**

56. Ntov ntoo saib ceg qhuav  
Tuav-ncuav saib qab-nthab.

*chop-tree-watch-branch-dry  
pound-sticky rice cake-watch-loft*

**When you chop the tree, look for dry branches overhead;  
When you pound rice for rice cake, look out for the loft.**

57. Xav tau mam li hais  
Txhais mam li cais.

*think-then-speak  
translate-then-explain*

**Think before you speak  
Translate before you explain.**

58. Cuaj pluag sib-nte,  
Yim pluag sib-txig.

*nine-basket reeds-each other-same length  
eight-basket reeds-each other-exactly equal*

**Nine basket reeds, all the same length  
Eight basket reeds, exactly equal.**

(Treat people fairly.)

59. Qav muag ncauj;  
Lus muag siab.

*food-soft in-mouth*  
*word-soft in-heart*

**The mouth tastes food;  
The heart tastes words.**

60. Luj tuag tu noob tshuav tug nyob qab-roob  
Tsuag tuag tu tsav tshuav tug nyob qab-ha.

*mongoose-dead-stop-ssed-leave-one-live-below-mountain*  
*rat-dead-end-relatives-leave-one-live-below-valley*

**Mongoose—dead to the last offspring, but one still lives below the  
mountain;  
Rat—every one killed, but one is left below the valley.**

61. Ib koog hav-zoov muaj ib tug ntoo ntev,  
Ib cuab kwv-tij muaj ib tug ntse  
Ib koog hav-zoov muaj ib tug ntoo loj,  
Ib cuab kwv-tij muaj ib tug coj.

*one-place-thick jungle-have-one-tree-long*  
*one-group-cousins-have-one-smart*  
*one-place-thick jungle-have-one-tree-big*  
*one-group-cousins-have-one-lead*

**In the thick jungle, there is one tree that is tallest;  
In one group of cousins, there is one person who is smartest.  
In the thick jungle, there is one tree that is bigger;  
In one group of cousins, there is one person who is leader.**

62. Mloog niam txiv qhuab qhia thaum yau,  
Loj hlob lo thiaj tau ua hau.

*listen-mother-father-advise-tell-when-young  
big-grown-then-get-do-head*

**Listen to your parents' advice when you're young  
When you're grown up, you'll be the village chief.**

63. Thaum tseem me xyaum tsim-txaj,  
Loj thiaj ua tau neeg muaj-nyiaj.

*when-still-small-learn-practical/worthwhile  
big-then-be able-person-have-silver*

**When young, learn to be practical,  
When grown, able to be a wealthy person.**

64. Tus ntse yog luag  
Tus ruam yog yus.

*one-smart-be-theirs  
one-slow-be-raised*

**The smart one belongs to them  
The slow one belongs to us.**

65. Koj qaib pw kuv cooj  
Kuv os pw koj nkuaj.

*your-chicken-sleep-my-coop  
my-duck-sleep-your-stable*

**Your chicken sleeps in my coop,  
My duck sleeps in your stable.**

66. Tuaj kev nqaim rov kev dav.

*come-way-narrow-return-way-wide*

**Come (to the bride's house) on a narrow road;  
Return home on a wide road.**

67. Kua-txob ntsim yov yuav ntsev daw,  
Poj-niam phem yov yuav ncaws taw.

*chili pepper-hot-deserve-salt  
wife-bad-deserve-kick-foot*

**Hot chili pepper calls for salt;  
A bad wife calls for a kick of the foot.**

68. Niam-txiv piv tam lub ntuj;  
Tub-ki piv tam lub teb.

*mother-father-compare-as-sky  
children-compare-as-earth*

**Parents are like the sky;  
Children are like the earth.**

69. Ua neej tsheej ib cuab vim yog mloog cov laus qhuab;  
Ua neej tsheej ib yig vim yog mloog cov laus nplig.

*life-complete-one-household-because-be-listen-those-old-advise  
life-complete-one-family-because-be-listen-those-old-counsel*

**In life your household is complete because you listened to the  
elders' advice;  
In life your family is complete because you listened to the elders'  
counsel.**

70. Nkauj laus nkauj lees;  
Hniav daj cuag hniav nees.

*girl-old-girl-knobby-veins  
teeth-yellow-equal-teeth-horse*

**A girl too old has knobby veins;  
Teeth yellow like a horse's teeth.**

71. Muaj tsis thov luag tias ua tub-sab;  
Muaj npe tsis muaj tug luag tias yog dab.

*have something-not-ask-they-say- it's being a thief  
have-name-not-have-a body-they-say that-it's a ghost.*

**If you have something you didn't ask them for, they call you a thief;  
If it has a name with no body, they call it a ghost.**

72. Thaum tshuav luag nug tias tsis noj;  
Thaum tag lawd ho ua dev yaim roj.

*when-a lot is left over-others-ask-(you) say-not-eat  
when-gone-already-then-(you)-do like-dog-lick-fat*

**When there's a lot left over, they invite you to eat, but you don't eat;  
When the food's all gone, you act like a dog licking fat.**

73. Kws ntaus phom txawj txua hneev;  
Neeg dig-muag txawj luj teev.

*one-forge-gun-know how to-build-crossbow  
person-blind-eye-know how to-weigh-using balance scale*

**A gunsmith knows how to build a crossbow;  
A blind person knows how to weigh using a balance scale.**

74. Tub pluag tau tsiaj tuag;  
Tub tshaib tau qav nchuav.

*one-poor-get-animal-dead*  
*one-hungry-get-food-spilled*

**A poor man gets a dead animal;  
A hungry man gets spilled food.**

75. Tsim tub ntsoj ces kawg ploj;  
Tsim tub ntsuag ces kawg tuag.

*torture-one-orphaned-then-finally-lost*  
*torture-one-orphaned-then-finally-die*

**Torture an orphan, he finally is lost  
Persecute an orphan, he finally dies.**

76. Npaj tswv yim yuav yuav cov laus;  
Npaj sib cav yuav-yuav cov ntse txaus.

*prepare-idea-will-need-those-elders*  
*prepare-each other-debate-will-need-those-smart-enough*

**If you want ideas, you need the elders;  
If you want a good debate, you need those who are smart enough.**

77. Tau poj-niam zoo ces npaum li tau pob nyiaj;  
Tau poj-niam phem ces npaum li tau xyob-txhiaj.

*get-wife-good-then-as much-like-get-bag-silver*  
*get-wife-bad-then-as much-like-get-forced-trouble*

**Get a good wife, it's like getting a bag of silver;  
Get a bad wife, and you're forced into trouble.**



78. Yuav zoo ces zoo tus xub muaj;  
Yuav ntsib ces ntsib tus xub tuaj.

*will-good-then-good-one-first-have*  
*will-meet-then-meet-one-first-come*

**Prosperity comes to the one who is rich first;  
Your mate is the one you meet first.**

79. Txhob tias muaj tsis txawj pluag;  
Txhob tias mob tsis txawj tuag.

*don't-say-rich-not-able-poor*  
*don't-say-sick-not-able-die*

**Don't mention wealth unless you're familiar with poverty;  
Don't mention sickness unless you're familiar with death.**

## PAIRED WORDS TXWV LUS

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.  | noj qab nyob zoo<br><i>eat-delicious-live-well</i>             | <b>to be well-off; fine</b>              |
| 2.  | cua daj cua dub<br><i>wind-yellow-wind-black</i>               | <b>high wind, storm</b>                  |
| 3.  | tas hnuv tas hmo<br><i>finish-day-finish-night</i>             | <b>all day and all night</b>             |
| 4.  | tas siab tas ntsws<br><i>end-heart-end-lungs</i>               | <b>very much</b>                         |
| 5.  | hais cuaj phab yim pheev<br><i>speak-nine-sides-eight-ways</i> | <b>speak of all kinds of things</b>      |
| 6.  | lus nyiaj lus kub<br><i>word-silver-word-gold</i>              | <b>valuable words, timely<br/>advice</b> |
| 7.  | phem dab phem tuag<br><i>bad-ghost-bad-death</i>               | <b>ugly</b>                              |
| 8.  | kev mob kev nkeeg<br><i>way-sick-way-weak</i>                  | <b>sickness</b>                          |
| 9.  | nyob dawb nyob huv<br><i>live-white-live-clean</i>             | <b>freely</b>                            |
| 10. | mob siab mob ntsws<br><i>hurt-heart-hurt-lungs</i>             | <b>broken-hearted</b>                    |
| 11. | kev ploj kev tuag<br><i>way-lost-way-dead</i>                  | <b>trouble and death</b>                 |

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 12. | kev plaub kev ntug<br><i>way-litigation-way-dispute</i>             | <b>cases of justice, trouble<br/>with litigation</b>   |
| 13. | kev quaj kev nyiav<br><i>way-cry-way-keen/mourn</i>                 | <b>sorrow, weeping, mourning</b>                       |
| 14. | kev tshaib kev nqhis<br><i>way-hunger-way-thirst</i>                | <b>hunger and thirst</b>                               |
| 15. | me nas me noog<br><i>small-mouse-small-bird</i>                     | <b>birds and small animals</b>                         |
| 16. | ntuj txias teb tsaus.<br><i>sky-cold-land-dark</i>                  | <b>place of the dead</b>                               |
| 17. | ob pog peb yawg.<br><i>two-grandmothers-three-grandfathers</i>      | <b>ancestors</b>                                       |
| 18. | zoo-nkauj zoo-nraug<br><i>beautiful handsome</i>                    | <b>attractive</b>                                      |
| 19. | quav dej quav cawv<br><i>crave-water-crave-alcohol</i>              | <b>drunk</b>   |
| 20. | kawm txuj kawm ci<br><i>study-information-study-enlighten</i>       | <b>educated; education</b>                             |
| 21. | kawm txawj kawm ntse<br><i>study-skill-study-sharp</i>              | <b>intelligent</b>                                     |
| 22. | kub teb kub taw<br><i>hot-hand-hot-foot</i>                         | <b>busy doing all sorts of<br/>things</b>              |
| 23. | ntuj dub ntuj tib txig<br><i>sky-black-sky-one-completely black</i> | <b>heaven is black</b><br>(no one can tell the future) |
| 24. | ua tuv txias tom caj qwb.<br><i>do-bedbug-bite-neck-back</i>        | <b>"stab me in the back"</b>                           |

25. neeg txwj neeg laus **elder/very old person**  
*person-has seen many years-person-old*

26. ntsej dub muag doog **furious**  
*ear-black-face-dark red*

27. muaj koob nto npe **famous**  
*have-reputation-spread-name*

28. chim laj chim xeeb **very unhappy**  
*unhappy-laj-unhappy-xeeb*

'laj-xeeb' is a martial arts weapon used in a historical betrayal in China, that resulted in the Chinese persecution of the Hmong, and caused their movement to new lands....

*as unhappy as in that terrible time, because of the 'lub laj-xeeb'*

29. lus mos lus tuaj pos **soft words with a thorny intent**  
*word-soft-word-sprout-thorn*

30. qee siab qee ntsws **willing to listen to both sides**  
*divide-heart-divide-lungs*

31. noj dlawb noj dlo **eat for free**  
*eat-white-eat-without/empty*  
 (not required to work for your food)

32. zaj sawv **rainbow**  
*dragon-standing up*

33. cev dub noj dub **eat only what is offered, no future obligation**  
 cev dawb noj dawb

*give-black-eat-black*  
*give-white-eat-white*

(this is usually said in situations where disputes are settled; there's a meal in settlement, and that's the end of the dispute)

## SIMILES

1. zoo-nkauj cuag poj sua.                    **as pretty as a Chinese girl**  
*pretty-equal-young woman-Chinese*
2. zoo-nkauj cuag nkauj-zag.                **as pretty as a dragon's**  
*pretty-equal-girl-dragon*                    **daughter**
3. zoo-nraug cuag nraug suav                **as handsome as a young**  
*handsome-equal-young man*                **Chinese man**  
*-Chinese*
4. zoo-nraug cuag nraug-zaj                **as handsome as a dragon's**  
*handsome-equal-young man*                **son**  
*-dragon*
5. loj cuag ntxhw                                **as big as an elephant**  
*big-equal-elephant*
6. me cuag dev mub                            **as small as a dog's flea**  
*small-equal-dog's-flea*
7. rog cuag las-npua                           **as fat as a castrated pig**  
*fat-equal-castrated pig*
8. nrawm cuag xob                              **as fast as lightning**  
*fast-equal-lightning*

- |     |  |                                    |
|-----|--|------------------------------------|
| 9.  | khwv cuag suav qhev<br><i>toil-equal-Chinese-slave</i>                       | <b>work like a Chinese slave</b>   |
| 10. | ntse cuag riam<br><i>sharp-equal-knife</i>                                   | <b>as sharp as a knife (smart)</b> |
| 11. | ntshiab cuag dej<br><i>clean/pure-equal-water</i>                            | <b>as pure as water</b>            |
| 12. | phem cuag liab<br><i>bad/ugly-equal-monkey</i>                               | <b>as ugly as a monkey</b>         |
| 13. | dawb cuag txhuv<br><i>white/clean-equal-hulled rice</i>                      | <b>as clean as hulled rice</b>     |
| 14. | liab ploog cuag ntshav<br><i>red-dark-equal-blood</i>                        | <b>as dark red as blood</b>        |
| 15. | daj cuag txiv-tsawb<br><i>yellow-equal-banana</i>                            | <b>as yellow as a banana</b>       |
| 16. | dub cuag qhov rooj txos<br><i>black-equal-opening-door-stove (fireplace)</i> | <b>as black as the fireplace</b>   |
| 21. | nrawm cuag kauv<br><i>fast-equal-deer</i>                                    | <b>as fast as a deer</b>           |
| 22. | nrawm cuag nkais<br><i>fast-equal-mouse</i>                                  | <b>as fast as a mouse</b>          |

- |     |  |                           |
|-----|--|---------------------------|
| 23. | nrov cuag xob quaj<br><i>loud-equal-thunder</i>    | <b>as loud as thunder</b> |
| 24. | mos cuag tsawb<br><i>soft-equal-banana</i>         | <b>as soft as banana</b>  |
| 25. | tawv cuag zeb<br><i>hard-equal-rock</i>            | <b>as hard as rock</b>    |
| 26. | txias cuag dej<br><i>cold-equal-water</i>          | <b>as cold as water</b>   |
| 27. | nrawm npaum li kauv<br><i>fast-as much as-deer</i> | <b>as fast as a deer</b>  |

## BACKGROUND: HMONG SUNG POETRY

### (HAIS KWV-TXHIAJ)

*(The information in this article is based on the work of the two people who have written the most about Hmong sung poetry, M. Jean Mottin and Dr. Amy Catlin. It is intended to give readers a sense of the complexity and structure of the oral poem, not as original research. The material in their publications has been checked out with local elders, and we've included material that agrees with their perceptions, and have included additional information and examples that they have contributed.)*

Traditional Hmong sung poetry, or songs, do not resemble Western songs at all; they sound more like chants. Hmong songs are actually poems that the singer makes up as the song is sung. There are rules that the singer must follow, and a puzzle that the singer offers to the listener to solve.<sup>49</sup> The songs are never sung in groups, because each time it's sung a song is different, and because only the singer knows what line is coming next. A good singer may memorize parts of songs that he's heard, but each singer creates his own lines, with four rhymes in each verse, and clever manipulations of words and meanings—all this without paper or pencil.

Sung poetry has been a way for the young to learn the knowledge passed down from the parents and grandparents, and some songs (especially the ritual songs) help identify which lineage group one belongs to. Songs are also a way for young people to “talk sweet” to each other without being too direct. Young girls can demonstrate their mental abilities with their courtship songs, and there are songs that are teaching songs—that tell the listener about the proper customs and ways of behaving.

Hmong are adept at hearing a song and remembering it; it takes only one or two times, and a listener can repeat the song, then vary it with his own lines and rhymes. The memorizing of songs is made easier by the structure of the songs, the repetition, and the use of common cliches and imagery. But those singers who are extremely capable and skilled at manipulating the rhymes and turns in meaning are rare. The reputation of a skilled singer is known for hundreds of miles around, and in the case of young girls, their marriages leave many disappointed young men.

The songs are passed from father to son, from mother to daughter, from friend to friend; it's easy to see the mark of the years spent in China. Even songs of those families whose ancestors left China generations ago contain Chinese words and allusions to China, that present-day Hmong may not really understand.

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<sup>49</sup>Catlin, Amy. *MUSIC OF THE HMONG: SINGING VOICES AND TALKING REEDS*. Providence: Rhode Island College Office of Publications, 1980.



## THE LANGUAGE

Spoken Hmong is a tonal language; that is, each word is pronounced with a certain pitch (high-low), length (short-long), and contour (rising, falling, level, abrupt end, breathy end). The tone is part of the word, just like in English, the consonants and vowels are characteristics of the word. For an English example of how tones convey differences in meaning, think about what an English-speaker means to communicate when he says:

<b>great</b>	(large; good)
<b>great!</b>	(terrific!)
<b>oh great</b>	(oh no, it's not what I expected—sarcastic)

In each case, the consonants and vowels remain the same; the tone of the word is all that changes. The tone is what conveys different meanings to the listener.

Hmong has eight different tones, so one combination of consonant and vowel (like 'na') can have eight different tones, making eight different words. The tone is 'spelled' with a final consonant (b, j, v, d, s, m, g, -). The following examples show how this works:

*ENGLISH: 'na' + consonant*

na + p = nap (sleep)  
na + b = nab (snatch)  
na + g = nag (keep telling)

*HMONG: 'na' + tone marker*

na + b = nab (snake)  
na + j = naj (each)\*  
na + v = nav (wear)\*  
na + - = na (sniff)\*  
na + s = nas (rat)  
na + m = nam (mother)\*  
na + d = nad (mother!)\*  
na + g = nag (rat)\*

\*Hmong Leng dialect

To understand Hmong, the listener has to hear the consonant, the vowel, and the tone. In Hmong songs, which are sung with fewer tones (notes), perhaps four or five, some of the spoken tones must "share" a tone with another.<sup>50</sup> The listener of a song must figure

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<sup>50</sup>Catlin.

One way in which spoken tones are sung on 4 musical notes:

out what musical notes represent which spoken tones; the context of familiar phrases helps.

It is possible for a song to be sung with meaning, by leaving out the vowels and consonants, and singing **only** the musical notes. Although understanding the message of such songs is difficult, it's very possible, and this is the basis of the instrumental music. A song played on an instrument, whether the *raj nplaim* or *raj pum liv* (flute), the *rab qeej* (ceremonial six-tube windpipe), the *rab ncas* (jew's harp), or even on a common leaf (*tshuab nplooj*), carries a kind of encoded message to the listener. Amy Catlin calls such instrumental sung poetry "speech surrogate".<sup>51</sup> Instrumental music follows the same poetic rules as the sung poetry.

To get an idea of how this might work, think of a very common English phrase, like "Hi, how are you?", or "See you later". Say one of the phrases with your lips together, so that no vowels or consonants are produced, only the tones of the phrase. Hum this phrase for several people and see if they can decipher the message you are trying to send.

## TYPES OF SONGS

There are various kinds of sung poetry, according to Jean Mottin,<sup>52</sup> and they are divided into two main types: ritual songs and non-ritual songs.

### RITUAL SONGS

- A. *Zaj tshoob*: wedding songs
- B. *Zaj pam tuag*: funeral songs
  - 1. *Zaj qhuab ke*
  - 2. *Zaj hu nkauj*
  - 3. *Zaj txiv xaiv*
- C. *Zaj hu nkauj neeb*: shaman's songs

The shaman's songs may be played or sung by either a man or a woman (since either can be a shaman), but all the other ritual songs are sung only by men. It is the man's

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1 (highest)	-----b-----v-----
2	-----mid-----
3	-----g-----s-----m
4 (lowest)	-----j-----

<sup>51</sup>Catlin, Amy. "Speech Surrogate Systems of the Hmong: From Singing Voices to Talking Reeds" in *THE HMONG IN THE WEST, OBSERVATIONS AND REPORTS*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, CURA, 1982.

<sup>52</sup>Mottin, Jean. *55 CHANTS D'AMOUR HMONG BLANC*. Bangkok: Siam Society, 1980, pp 1-14.

responsibility to learn the traditional songs, and to carry on the heritage of the family line. The funeral songs are often played on the *qeej* rather than sung and they may last from a few minutes to several hours; they are filled with details of a person's life, and the journey to the next life. Some of the funeral songs give advice and direction to the survivors from the deceased. These songs differ from place to place, clan to clan, from lineage group to lineage group. Much of Hmong history, as well as the lineage group's history, is passed on in this way.

### NON-RITUAL SONGS

#### A. *Kwv-txhiaj* (in Hmong Leng: *Lus-txaj* )

1. *Kwv-txhiaj plees*: love songs or songs of courtship; songs about broken relationships and impossible matches.
2. *Kwv-txhiaj ua nyab*: a bride's song; literally called a "daughter-in-law's song", it is usually a sad song about leaving the family.
3. *Kwv-txhiaj cia nyab*: groom's song; he tries to reassure the bride-to-be, and even convince her not to abandon him.
4. *Kwv-txhiaj tuag*: song for the dead; usually eulogizes someone who has died, or tells of a wish to die.
5. *Kwv-txhiaj ntsuag*: orphan's song; also sung by a widow or a forsaken girl.
6. *Kwv-txhiaj sib-ncaim*: song about separation.
7. *Kwv-txhiaj kawm-ntawv*: a special type of separation song, sung about a boy who is leaving to study in another place.
8. *Kwv-txhiaj kev deb*: song about living far apart.
9. *Kwv-txhiaj nrhiav kwv-tij*: song about searching for lost relatives.
10. *Kwv-txhiaj ua rog*: song about war.
11. *Kwv-txhiaj tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw*: song about fleeing from your homeland.
12. *Kwv-txhiaj ua tshoob-kos*: wedding song: the groom's side and the bride's side have answering parts.
13. *Kwv-txhiaj noj tsiab*: New Year's song, eating the first meal.
14. *Kwv-txhiaj haus cawv*: drinking song, sung at celebrations when whiskey is drunk.

There are other *kwv-txhiaj*, but these are the most common. The majority are sad, plaintive songs, and usually end with a line like, "I am so unhappy." Some of the songs, like the *kwv-txhiaj ua nyab* are also narrative, telling a story or explaining the details of a ritual. The *ua nyab* song often tells about the life of the bride, the marriage negotiations, the wedding, and the difficult life to come with the husband's family, especially his mother. The *kwv-txhiaj teb* ('song-answer') is a special type of courtship

song, sung during the throwing of the ball, in which the girl sings a piece, and the boy answers. The songs are sung as the ball is thrown, and often contain double meanings and cleverly manipulated words and rhymes. This type of song, and the *kwv-txhiaj plees*, are the specialty of the young marriageable girls, fourteen to seventeen years of age. Once a girl is married, she usually stops singing these songs.

Jean Mottin lists these other types of songs, which he calls “minor types”. They may be so little known, that in areas far from China’s border, they may not be known at all.

B. Minor types of songs

1. *Kwv-chab*
2. *Phiaj-fab*
3. *Hab-huam*
4. *Xab cim koob*
5. *Lus taum*

The last, *lus taum*, is a moralizing or teaching song, and seems to be fairly common in the refugee camps and in the United States. This type of song tells about the consequences of some type of behavior or choice, such as the consequences of marrying a lazy boy or of coming to the United States.

## POETIC STRUCTURE

Although the singer is creating much of the song while singing, there are certain rules that he must follow. The song has verses, consisting of two parts or sides. The singer sings two lines, each with a rhyme, and then takes a breath. The lines are of indefinite length, and may contain “fillers”, that give the singer time to formulate the word play and rhyme. The rhyme scheme is the most important feature of the song, and the listeners figure out the puzzle which the singer presents. Since the listener does not know exactly when the second rhyming word will appear, there is a sense of anticipation and suspense that builds until the word appears.<sup>53</sup> A song without four rhyming words in each verse (two in each side) is not a song. It may be that singers memorize certain core rhyme patterns, which can be added to and adapted into any of the types of songs. The extent of the additions are dependent on the singer’s ability.

The songs contain many cliches (familiar phrases heard in other songs), allusions to China, and images taken from nature. The singer never uses personal

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<sup>53</sup>Catlin, 1980.

pronouns like “I”, “you”, “us”, but standard phrases instead, like “this young Hmong girl” (me), or “your father’s son” (you).<sup>54</sup>

**INTRODUCTION** The opening line contains standard words that identify the type of song to come. The words are sung on a long high pitch. The opening words may be repeated at any time, usually at the beginning of each verse, as the singer wishes. They may also be repeated here and there, to give the singer a pause.

Nij **yai**....ntuj-teb os ib zeej txiv leej tub,  
noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais kuv nrog kuv leej-  
niam thiab leej-txiv nyob es noj los tsis tau txhij ais hnav tuaj tsis tua txhua mog.

Nij **yai**....cas leej hlob tsis txawj hlob lawm leej yaus es niam no kuv tso kuv  
leej-niam thiab  
leej-txiv ais leej-kwv leej-tig tseg rau ntuj sua los teb tom qab es niam no thiaj  
paub tuaj mus xav tau oj.

Nij **yai**...noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais nrog leej-kwv mus leej-tig nyob noj  
los tsis tau txhij ais  
hnav tuaj twb tsis tau txhua ais, leej yau tsis txawj hwm lawm leej hlob es  
zaum no tso leej-  
kwv mus leej-tig tseg, los rau rooj niag teb no thiaj tau txoj kev txhawj mus kev  
txob mog.<sup>55</sup>

‘**NI yai**’ is often heard in White Hmong *kwv-txhiaj*, and ‘**caag**’ is often heard in Hmong Leng *lus-txaj*.

**VERSES** (*ib txwg*, which means “one pair”) Each song contains three to ten verses. Each verse contains two sides (*ob fab*, or ‘two sides’). Each side is identical, or very similar, except for the manipulation of the key words and rhymes. The verse contains as many words as the singer wishes. Soon after the last rhyme, the verse ends. In the following example, the rhymes are in boldface.

VERSE 1, SIDE 1

Nij **yai**....ntuj-teb os ib zeej txiv leej tub,  
noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais kuv nrog kuv leej-

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<sup>54</sup> Mottin, 1980.

<sup>55</sup> Lis, Txais. “Kwv-txhiaj ua ntsuag niam-txiv, kwv-tij, teb-chaws”, Ban Vinai camp, 1980.

niam thiab leej-txiv nyob es noj los tsis tau txhij ais hnav tuaj tsis tua txhua mog.

Nij yai....cas leej hlob tsis txawj hlob lawm leej **yaus** es niam no kuv tso kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv ais leej-kwv leej-tig tseg rau ntuj sua los teb tom qab es niam no thiaj paub tuaj mus xav **tau** oj.

#### VERSE 1, SIDE 2

Nij yai...noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais nrog leej-kwv mus leej-tig nyob noj los tsis tau txhij ais hnav tuaj twb tsis tau txhua ais, leej yau tsis txawj hwm lawm leej **hlob** es zaum no tso leej-kwv mus leej-tig tseg, los rau rooj niag teb no thiaj tau txoj kev txhawj mus kev **txob** mog.<sup>56</sup>

**RHYMES** (*ob lub suab sib phim*, or 'two sounds that match') The rhymes are the most important elements in a song; they give the song its value. Inappropriate rhymes make a song nonsense. Each verse has four rhymes, two in each side. Since the songs are not written, and since the breaks in the flow of words are dependent on breath, not meaning or punctuation, the rhymes are not necessarily at the ends of lines, although this is preferred by many. The side ends soon after the second rhyme appears.

Rhymes in Hmong are words that contain the same vowel and usually the same tone (**yaus** and **tau**, **hlob** and **txob**). The rhyming words in a song are sometimes old Chinese words that cannot be literally translated, but to the Hmong ear, they sound beautiful. Usually the rhyming words are part of the word play or turns in meaning.

Songs sung in Hmong Leng cannot be written in White Hmong, since the vowels differ in the two dialects; translating the words would destroy the rhyme, the value of the song. Since Hmong Leng usually speak White Hmong as well, often a White Hmong song is used, inserting Hmong Leng words that rhyme. The value of the rhymes is totally lost when translating into English; the reader should keep this in mind.

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<sup>56</sup> Lis, Txais. "Kwv-txhiaj ua ntsuag niam-txiv, kwv-tij, teb-chaws", Ban Vinai camp, 1980.

**WORD PLAY** The word play is similar to English sayings or jokes that depend on puns or on words with double meanings for their value. In sung poetry, the turns in meaning are often synonyms, antonyms, reversals of elements of common word pairs (like “ice-cream” and “creamed ice”), or parallel structures (like “below the rock” and “below the road”). The rhyming words are usually involved in the word-play.

(VERSE 5, SIDE 1)

Os caag es  
tswv-fuab tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw moog txug nam maab quas suav teb yuav moog pum taag  
nam puj-  
maab, miv puj suab tsev tsuj, tsev vuag-ci-quas-voog, los ntshai tshuav taag tswv-fuab  
tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog ntuj sua teb tom-qaab, zoo puav taam le kws puj-  
qab tseg nyuas-qab quaj ua zeeg ua zog, tub tsi xaav moog ncoo luas cooj huam...

(VERSE 5, SIDE 2)

Tswv-fuab tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw txug nam maab quas suav teb, yuav moog pum taag nam  
puj-  
maab, miv puj sua tsev tsuj, tsev vuag-ci-quas-npuag nua, os caag es tshuav tau tswv-  
fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog ntuj sua teb tom-qaab zoo puav taam le kws puj-  
qab tseg nyuas-qab quaj ua zeeg ua zog, tub tsi xaav moog ncoo luas nkuaj.<sup>57</sup>

The phrases *tsev vuag-ci-quas-voog* and *tsev vuag-ci-quas-npuag* differ only in the key word. Both describe flashing, sparkling light bouncing off the roofs of houses in the distance. The first, with *voog*, is more like flashing, reflected sunlight bouncing off of tin roofs, and the second, with *npuag* likens the image to light shimmering on the surface of soap bubbles (substitution of synonyms in parallel phrases).

The words that rhyme with *voog* and *npuag* are *cooj* and *nkuaj*; they are also synonyms, creating a parallel construction for both sets of rhymes. The first, *ncoo luas cooj* says that the refugees are like chickens who don't want to live in another's chicken coop (*cooj*). The second substitutes the word *nkuaj*, which means an animal stable; the chickens don't want to live in another's stable.

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<sup>57</sup>Hawj, Nruas. “Lus txaj tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw”, Rock Island, IL, 1984.

**CONCLUSION** The song ends with one or more lines that summarize the sentiment of the singer. For the above passage, the conclusion is:

**Ces yuav chim laam xeeb om**

so- will-unhappy -"laam-xeeb" weapon-concluding syllable

"We'll be as unhappy as the time in China, when we were betrayed by a Hmong with a "*laam-xeeb*" (*laj-xeeb* in White Hmong), and we had to leave the land we loved."



## LUS-TXAJ TSIV-TEB-TSAWS-CHAW

*(This song has been transcribed from a live recording. It is written as sung, with line breaks at the point where the singer pauses for breath, except for verse changes; three dots before the beginning of a verse indicates that there was no pause. The rhyming words are boldface. The singer is Hmong Leng, and the song is written in that dialect.)*

Yog xyoov nuav os luag leem  
tub os txiv-leej-tub

### NQES 1

...Oj caag tuam-fuab nim taum  
ntawv quas zeeg rua tswv-fuab tas, "Tswv-fuab lub teb-chaws luj tuaj ua **LUJ**,"  
es saib tswv-fuab puas zoo-sab muab tu, es tuam-fuab yuav nrug tswv-fuab kaav ib  
**NTSUJ** nawb."

...Os tuam-fuab nim taum  
ntawv quas zeeg rua tswv-fuab tas, "Tswv-fuab lub teb-chaws dlaav tuaj ua **DLAHV**,"  
es saib tswv-fuab puas zoo-sab muab tu, es  
tuam-fuab yuav nrug tswv-fuab kaav nam ib **CHAAV** nawb.

### NQES 2

...Os caag tswv-fuab nim taum  
ntawv quas zeeg rua tuam-fuab tas, "Tswv-fuab lub teb-chaws yuav caj **TAUJ**; os tub  
tsi txaus tswv-fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm sawv ua **HAUS**.

...Es txwv-fuab nim taum ntawv quas zeeg rua tuam-fuab tas,  
"Tswv-fuab lub teb-chaws yuav tuaj **NROJ**  
es ntshai tub tsi txaus tswv-fuab tub laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm sawv ua **NOJ** nawb.

NQES 3

...Os caag tuam-fuab sab tsi zoo ces  
tuam-fuab yuav tuam taag suav ntswg lawm laj  
a teb-chaws **POB** es peb tuam txhij tuam cuab suav-dlaws txhaj tsis tau **NYOB** naw...

...Om caag es tuam-fuab sab tsi zoo ces  
tuam-fuab yuav tuam taag suav ntswg lawm laj  
a teb-chaws **LUV** es peb tuaj txhij tuam cuab suav-dlaws txhaj tsis tau **ZUV** nua.....

NQES 4

...Os caag es tswv-fuab le  
nqeg nroog rua lub nkoj txeeg ces nrug lawm nkoj  
txeeg sib tw **NTAAB**, es laim ncua tswv-fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog rua ntuj sua teb tom-**QAAB**.

...Os caag es  
tswv-fuab le nqeg nroog rua lub nkoj txeeg ces yuav nrug lawm nkoj  
txeeg sib tw **NQEG** yuav laim ncua tswv-fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog rua ntuj sua teb tom **PEG** nua.....

NQES 5

...Os caag es  
tswv-fuab tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw moog txug nam maab quas suav teb yuav moog pum  
    taag nam puj  
maab, miv puj suab tsev tsuj, tsev vuag-ci-quas-**VOOG**, los ntshai tshuav taag tswv-  
    fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog ntuj sua teb tom-qaab, zoo puav taam le kws puj-  
qab tseg nyuas-qab quaj ua zeeg ua zog, twb tsi xaav moog ncoo luas **COOJ**  
    huam.....

Tswv-fuab tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw txug nam maab quas suav teb, yuav moog pum taag  
    nam puj  
maab, miv puj sua tsev tsuj, tsev vuag-ci-quas-**NPUAG** nua  
os caag es tshuav tau  
tswv-fuab tug laj-meej-pej-  
xeem fuab fwm quaj ua zeeg ua zog ntuj sua teb tom-qaab zoo puav  
    taam le kws puj-  
qab tseg nyuas-qab quaj ua zeeg ua zog, twb tsi xaav moog ncoo luas **NKUAJ**.

Ces yuav chim laam-xeeb om.

Tus hais yog **Nruas Hawj**

## SONG ABOUT FLEEING FROM YOUR HOMELAND

*(This translation is written as it is sung; that is, the line and verse breaks appear where the singer takes a breath. Three dots before a line means that it actually follows the preceding words with no break. The words that represent the rhymes are in boldface, and the word plays are underlined.)*

### OPENING

Oh, those were the years,  
boys and men.....

### VERSE 1

...Oh why do the Tua Fua<sup>58</sup>  
write to the Jeu Fua<sup>59</sup> to say, "Jeu Fua, your country is so large. oh so large,"  
to see if Jeu Fua agrees to divide his country  
to let each group govern its own part.

...Oh why do the Tua Fua  
write to Jeu Fua to say, "Jeu Fua, your country is wide.  
oh so wide, "to see if Jeu Fua agrees to divide his country  
to let each group govern its own side.

### VERSE 2

...Oh why does Jeu Fua reply to the Tua Fua to say,  
"My homeland will now grow only **thatch-grass;**  
there's not enough for my people  
to raise something to **drink.**"

...Oh why does Jeu Fua reply to the Tua Fua to say,  
"My homeland will now grow only **weeds;**

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<sup>58</sup> *tuam-fuab*: the leaders of the enemy in a conflict; in this case, the Communist Pathet Lao.

<sup>59</sup> *tsuv-fuab*: the leaders on one's own side in a conflict; in this case, the anti-Communist Laotian forces---including the Hmong, Mien, and others.

unfortunately there's not enough for my people  
to raise crops to feed themselves.

VERSE 3

...Oh why are the hearts of the Tua Fua not good and  
the Tua Fua will stomp our countryside;  
our lands will be demolished, and you and I, we all will not be able to exist.

...Oh why are the hearts of the Tua Fua not good?  
The Tua Fua will stomp our countryside;  
our lands will be smashed, and you and I, we all will not be able to last.

VERSE 4

...Oh why does Jeu Fua  
board the big boat and with his boat,  
float on the the water, and leave behind all his people,  
crying here, crying there, left behind in a place so remote?

...Oh why does  
Jeu Fua board the big boat, and with his boat,  
float downstream, and leave behind all his people,  
crying here, crying there, left behind in another dream?

VERSE 5

...Oh why does  
Jeu Fua flee his homeland to arrive in a foreign country, where he will go see the  
whole  
place, with buildings of all sizes, sparkling in a distant group, but without all his  
people,  
crying here, crying there, in the country so remote, just like a hen  
who leaves her chicks behind, crying here, crying there, that they don't want to live in  
the others' chicken coop.

Jeu Fua flees his homeland to arrive in a foreign country, where he will go see the whole place, with buildings of all sizes, like reflections from a mirror.  
Oh why is he able to leave all his people,  
crying here, crying there, in the land far away, just like a hen  
who leaves her chicks behind, crying here, crying there, that they don't want to live in the others' chicken enclosure.

We're so unhappy, like at the time of the *laam-xeeb*.

Singer: **Doua Her**

## **KEEB-KWM NTAWM NRUAS HAWJ**

Nruas Hawj muaj hnuv-nyoog 29 xyoos. Nws yug nyob rau lub zos hu ua Phav-lav (Phak Lak), tuaj-xeem Naab-npab (Nam Bak), Xeev-Xeev-teb. Loj hlob nyob rau lub zos Thaas-thaub (Thang-thao). Thaum teb-chaws kub ntxhov ntawd thiaj li tau khiav los mus rau lub zos Npuam-oon (Boua-ong) ze Thaj-thoo, Thaj-vieng, ces los mus nyob rau lub zos Phou-khan-hua, Xeev-teb.

Nws niam, nws txiv uas yug nws kias mas yog Nchaiv-tuam Hawj, tab-sis tsis muaj txoj hmoo, nkawd ob tug tuag tag lawm, tseg Nruas, thiab ib tug niam-laos, ib tug niam-hluas, lawv peb tug nrog tus txiv-ntxawm Vaam-txab Hawj nyob.

Txog thaum Nruas loj hlob nws yog ib tug ntxhais uas tsis muaj tswv-yim zoo li luag-tej, hais lus los kuj hais tau tuaj qeeb tshaj cov me-nyuam sawv-daws. Yog li ntawd lawv thiaj tsis tso nws mus kawm-ntawv es cia tso lwm leej, lwm-tug mus. Qhov no ua ib qo nyob rau hauv Nruas lub siab tias yuav ua li cas yus li yuav zoo li luag-tej? Yog li ntawd Nruas thiaj maj-mam xyaum ua nws lub neej thaum hauv-paus los, xyaum ua zoo los ntawm cov neeg laus, cov paub-qab-taug-hau-xaiv lawv li luag-tej lus ntuas qhuab qhia nws.

Thaum Nruas muaj hnuv-nyoog 19 xyoos, nws thov kom nws ib tug kwv-tij qhia ntawv nplog rau nws, tiam-sis kuj tsis tau ib lub siab. Nws xav mus kawm nyob nruab moos xwv thiaj yuav pab tau nws tus kheej. Nyob-nyob muaj ib xyoos muaj kev sab-laj ntawm cov tub ntxhais hluas lawb-dab. Nws tau mus Vientiane txawm yog tias nws paub lus nplog tsis zoo los tsis ua cas. Thaum tuaj sab-laj tag lawd Nruas nws muaj phooj-ywg coob leej ntau tug sau ntawv tuaj sib nug kev noj qab nyob zoo ces, nws yuav tau teb tej ntawv ntawd qhov no thiaj kuj pab nws tsis ntau los tsawg.

Tab-sis hauv lub neej Hmoob mas yog ib tug ntxhais twg nwg hnuv-nyoog tshaj li ntawm 19-20 xyoos rov saud lawm mas Hmoob suav tias laus lawm. Tsis tshuam muaj neeg yuav thiab tsis tsim-txaj dab-tsi, kuj muaj qee tus nyiam thiab hlub thiab, tej-zaum tseem muaj neeg hais plig phem li ub li no.

### ***HAIS TXOG NRUAS COV KWV-TXHIAJ:***

Lub suab thiab cov ntsiab-lus kuj tsis phem, kuj tsis muaj leej-twg yuav hais tau li nws hais. Nws ob tug viv-ncaus kuj hais tau li nws hais thiab. Kev uas Nruas nws kawm los-puas mloog luag-tej hais kwv-txhij mas yog thaum nws paub tau zaj kwv-txhij lawm mas nws muab xaiv qhov uas nws nyiam thiab nws pom tias yuav zoo mloog thiab zoo yuav ces nws hais mus raws li ntawd, tsis tau yuav muab coj los sau

mam li hais yog hais ces cia li hais xwb, Nruas cov kwv-txhiaj kuj yog ib co uas nto npe kawg-nkaus thiab muaj neeg coob nyiam mloog heev vim tias nws hais qhov uas peb Hmoob yeej muaj tseeb li ntawd los lawm, tsis tas tej kwv-txhiaj tsiv-teb-tsaws-chaw los sis kwv-txhiaj-ntsuag, nws tseem muaj feem hais vaj-tswv txoj lus ua kwv-txhiaj thiab mas yog li ntawd txij no mus ntshai nws yuav tsis tshuam hais tej kwv-txhiaj qub li no heev lawm.

Thaum nyob rau teb-chaws nplog muaj ib zaug nws tau mus hais ib zag kwv-txhiaj uas yog hais raws vaj-lug-kub los rau ib tsoom tseeg mloog hauv tuam-tsev-teev-ntuj Ban Xon tag, kuj muaj ntau leej xav pab nws kom nws muaj dej-num ua los yug lub neej thiab, yog li ntawd lawv thiab pab nws mus kawm xaws tshuab 7 lub hlis hauv Ban Xon, thiab tseem xa nws mus kawm ntxiv rau nram Pak San, thaum uas nws tau mus deb lawd nws kuj ntxhov siab heev rau qhov tias ib leeg xwb. Vaj-tswv pab nws thiab raug txav hloov los mus nyob hauv Vientiane ces nws thiab li tau kawm ntawv nplog ntxiv lub sij-hawm ntawd thiab kawm li tej tib-neeg laus pib hauv paus mus ces thiab paub nyeem ntawv nplog, ntawv Hmoob, thiab sau tau.

Los txog rau lub sij-hawm uas teb-chaws kub ntxhov lawm nws thiab li tau hla mus sab Thaib-teb, ces tseg niam-txiv nyob rau tom-qab. Lawv tseem nyob hauv lub zos Phou-khan-hua. Lawv nyob ib xyoos ntxiv ces lawv txav mus nyob rau Phou-san-phieng 2 xyoos ces lawm maj tsav tuaj nim-no lawv tuaj txog rau Thaib-teb tag lawm.

Nim-no Nruas nws thiab nws niam tus niam-laas nkawd nyob ua-ke hauv lub zos Rock Island, Illinois. Nws tuaj txog teb-chaws no, nws tau mus kawm ntawv As-mes-lis-kas tau ntau xyoo thiab nws tau ua hauj-lwm nyob rau hauv Health Department pab cov neeg thoj-nam-tawg-rog uas nyuam-qhuav tuaj txog tsis tau ntev. Nws hais tau lus Hmoob, lus nplog, lus as-kiv, nyeem thiab sau tau.

COV LUS SIB NUG: Yog li cas koj cov kwv-txhiaj yuav muaj lub ntsiab-lus raug siab rau peb cov neeg Hmoob heev?

NRUAS TEB TIAS: Rau-qhov tias, lub sij-hawm uas peb nyuam-qhuav tuaj txog mas tsis muaj peb tej neeg coob thiab muaj ntau-ntau yam txawv-txav, thiab ua rau sawv-daws kho siab heev, ces kuv xav ces thiab hais tau zoo li no.

NUG: Koj xav tias 30-50 xyoo tom-ntej no peb tej me-nyuam cia li ua As-mes-lis-kas no, puas yuav zoo los tsis zoo thiab?

TEB: Peb Hmoob kuj yog muaj feem ua ib haiv-neeg los nyob rau hauv qab-ntuj no lawm mas tsim-nyog kawg peb yuav-tsum tuav/ceev peb cov lus, peb haiv-neeg kom peb no yog Hmob tiag. Tab-sis kuv tus kheej mas nyob ntawm yawm-saub pom zoo xwb!



NUG: Yog li cas, koj tias tsim-nyog peb Hmoob yuav-tsum ceev peb tej lus, nim-no tej luag twb pib tso peb cov lus zuj-zus lawm?

TEB: Qhov uas tsim-nyog no mas piv-xam pim-txwv tias yog koj qhia rau koj ib tug phooj-ywg tias, koj cov me-nyuam mas paub hais lus As-mes-lis-kas xwb no mas, tus phooj-ywg ntawd yuav ua ntsej-muag txawv zog rau koj? Yog koj tias kuv cov me-nyuam mas lawv paub hais lub Hmoob zoo thiab lus As-mes-lis-kas no mas tej-zaum phooj-ywg ntawd yuav qhuas koj tias koj mas thiaj yog niam-txiv ntse, muaj tswv-yim zoo.

NUG: Peb Hmoob tej kev lig kev cai uas zoo ne puas tsim-nyog peb muab tso tseg, thiab los tseem yuav khaws ntxiv?

TEB: Qhov no kuv ib tug teb mas yuav tsis tau, thiab yuav tsis raws li sawv-daws siab nyiam, tiam-sis kuv xav tias yam uas zoo es pog-yawg, niam-txiv tau coj los ntau niaj, ntau xyoo lawd mas yuav tau khaws cia, tab-sis yog peb tsis khaws hnuv twg ces Hmoob ploj hnuv ntawd!!

***TIB-NEEG LUB NEEJ MAS HLOOV MUS-MUS LOS-LOS, LI NTAWD THIAJ MUAJ  
YAV-TAG LOS, TAM-SIM NO, THIAB YAV-TOM-NTEJ.***

## BIOGRAPHY OF DOUA HER

Doua Her is 29 years old. She was born in a village named Phak Lak (*Phav-lav*), in the district of Nam Bak (*Naab-npab*), in the province of Xieng Khouang (*Xeev-xeev-teb*), in the central part of Laos. She is Hmong Leng. She spent her childhood in the villages of Thang Thao (*Thaas-thaub*). In the late 1950's, when the Laotian government was unstable and changing in leadership, she moved to the village of Bo Oun (*Npaum-oon*), near the towns of Tha Thong (*Thaj-thoo*) and Tha Vieng (*Thaj-vieng*), and from there she moved to the village of Phou Khan Hua, in Xieng Khouang Province.

The mother and father to whom she was born were Nchai-toua Her and his wife, but unfortunately, both of them died, leaving Doua, and her older sister and younger sister. The three of them went to live with the younger brother of their father, their uncle, Va-dza Her. When Doua grew older, she was the daughter who was not quite as smart as everyone else. She spoke later than all the other children. Her father did not let her go to school, but he allowed his other children to go. There was something in Doua's heart that said, "What should I do? How can I be good like everyone else?"

Doua decided to gradually learn what she needed to know from the beginning, practicing like the older women, and those elders who knew the ways of Hmong life advised and taught her. When she was 19 years old, she really wanted her cousin to teach her to read Lao script, but things did not turn out the way she wanted. She wanted to go to school in the city so that she would be able to help herself. One year later there was a conference for the young Christians. She went to Vientiane, even though she didn't know how to read Lao very well. When the conference was over, Doua had many friends who wrote to her to ask how she was doing. Since Doua didn't really know how to write Lao, she answered by carefully copying each character of each word. This helped her answer her friends' letters, but it also taught her to write Lao a little better.

In the Hmong community, when girls reach 19 or 20 years of age, people think that they are too old, and should have been married. As for Doua, there were some who liked her, and wanted to love and care for her, but there were still others who said unflattering things about her.

### *DOUA's TRADITIONAL SUNG POETRY (KWV-TXHIAJ):*

Her voice and the meaning of her songs were not bad. In fact, there was no one who could sing like her. Her two sisters sang very well, but after they married, they stopped singing. The way that Doua learned to sing was to listen to others' songs.

When she knew a few of the beautiful phrases and rhymes, she would choose the parts she liked, and would try them to see if they made a song that was good to listen to. If so, she sang her songs just that way. She didn't need to write anything on paper, she just sang from memory and her talent for putting words together. Doua's songs were ones that earned a great reputation, and many Hmong like to listen to her sing, because she can describe the way that life was for Hmong in the past. She sang songs not only about fleeing from your homeland, and orphan's songs, but she also created gospel songs from ideas in the Bible, and turned them into the traditional *kwv-txhiaj*. Because she likes the gospel themes so much, she may not sing the traditional songs from now on.

When she lived in Laos, one time she sang one song about the Bible for all the people in a church in Ban Xon to hear. There were many people in the church who wanted to help her find a way to work to support herself (since she had no husband). So some of them helped her go to study sewing on sewing machines; she studied for about seven months in Ban Xon, and then they sent her to Paksane to study some more. Paksane was very far away, and she became lonely since she was there by herself. God helped her, and she was transferred to Vientiane, where she was able to enter adult school, and began to learn to read Lao script, Hmong script, and to write them both.

The time came when Laos changed hands (the Communists took over in 1975), and she crossed the Mekong River to Thailand, leaving her parents (her uncle and his wife) behind. They still lived in the village of Phou-khan-hua. They stayed there for another year, before moving to another village, Phou-san-phieng, where they stayed for two more years. Eventually they escaped to Thailand, where they remain today.

Now Doua lives with the older sister of her mother in Rock Island, Illinois. When she arrived in this country, she went to school to study English. She studied for several years, and she has a job with the Health Department, helping the newly arriving refugees. She speaks Hmong, Lao, and English, and can read and write them all.

#### *INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:*

QUESTION: Why is it that your songs have such meaning for every Hmong?

DOUA's ANSWER: It's because at that time we had just arrived and there were not very many Hmong, and because there were so many different things here. People felt very lonely, and I thought about it and sang about how people felt.

QUESTION: In 30 to 50 years from now, our children will become Americanized; do you think this is good or not?

ANSWER: We Hmong are a group of people who live in the world and it's very worthwhile for people like us with our own language to hold onto it, so that we will still be Hmong. But as for me, it is God's plan!

QUESTION: You say that Hmong should hold onto our identity, but now there are people who have already begun to let go of the Hmong language and customs.

ANSWER: Here is an example. If you tell your friends that your children know only how to speak American, your friends will make a face (will look at you as strange). If you say that your children know how to speak Hmong well, as well as American, then your friends will say that you are smart parents, that you have good ideas about raising your children.

QUESTION: Our Hmong beliefs, customs and attitudes—the ones that are good, like respecting elders—should we let those go, or should we try to keep them?

ANSWER: As for this, this is a person who cannot really answer that in a way that reflects what everyone likes, but I think that the good ways of our life, the ways that our grandparents and parents have retained for years and years, we should keep. If we don't keep some of our ways, someday the Hmong will disappear completely!

*A person's life changes back and forth, that's why we have past tense, present tense, and future tense.*

## KWV-TXHIAJ UA NTSUAG NIAM-TXIV KWV-TIJ TEB-CHAWS

*(This song was recorded in the camp, Ban Vinai. It's written here in an arbitrary format, with line and verse breaks made according to context, rather than breathing pauses. This is White Hmong, and the rhyming words are in boldface.)*

### NQES 1

Nij yai....ntuj-teb os ib zeej txiv leej tub,  
noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais  
kuv nrog kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv nyob es  
noj los tsis tau txhij ais,  
hnav tuaj tsis tau txhua mog.  
Nij yai...cas leej hlob tsis txawj hlub lawm leej **YAUS** es  
niam no kuv tso kuv leej-niam thaib leej-txiv ais  
leej-kwv leej-tig tseg rau ntuj sau los teb tom qab es  
niam no thiaj paub tuaj mus xav **TAU** oj.

Nij yai...noob txheej-tshoj los thaum i ais  
nrog leej-kwv leej-tig nyob  
noj los tsis tau txhij ais,  
hnav tuaj twb tsis tau txhua ais.  
Leej yau tsis txawj hwm lawm leej **HLOB** es  
zaum no tso leej-kwv mus leej-tig tseg,  
los rau rooj niag teb no  
thiaj tau txoj kev txhawj mus kev **TXOB** mog.

### NQES 2

Nij yai...ntuj-teb os kwv-tij Hmoob,  
leej-niam thiab leej-txiv es  
lub teb-chaws tsis thaj-yeeb ais.  
Ntshai yuav ua tsov tuaj mus ua rog **LOJ** es  
ntshai yuav tso kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv  
rau ntuj sua los teb tom qab  
twb tsis sib **POM** nis kwv-tij Hmoob.

Cas lub teb yam lub chaw tsis thaj-yeeb ais.  
Ntshai yuav ua tsov tuaj ua rog **NCHAV** ais,  
tso plhuav kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv es  
rau ntuj sua loj teb tom qab es  
ntshai yuav tseg neej mus tseg **TSA** mog.

### NQES 3

Nij yai...ntuj-teb os kwv-tij Hmoob,  
lub teb-chaws tsis thaj-yeeb,  
yuav tshoj mus yuav **NTXEEV** ais.  
Niam no kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv  
thiaj poob roj los plam **HNEEV**.

Lub teb-chaws tsis thaj-yeeb es  
ntshai yuav ntxeev mus yuav **TSHOJ**.  
Ces kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv  
thiaj poob hneev los plam **ROJ** mog.

### NQES 4

Nij yai....cas leej-niam thiab leej-txiv es  
poob hneev lis zoj rau qab zaj-**ZEB**, es  
niam tseg tau txiv leej tub tuaj niam  
ib tib tug los ua lub neej,  
kho-siab li khuav rau niag mab los niam Thaib-**TEB**.

Cas leej-kwv mus leej-tig  
poob hneev lis zoj rau qab zaj-**CAS**, es  
niam tseg ntua txiv leej tub tuaj niam  
ib tib tug es los ua lub neej,  
tsis muaj kwv tsis muaj tig,  
rau niag mab los As-mes-liv-kas **NRAS** os kwv-tij Hmoob oj.

NQES 5

Nij yai....chim lub siab tsis txawj tag es  
tawm rooj sib lis plaws es rov zoj  
los txog tej niag qab-**CUB**, es  
ntshai yuav tu nrho kuv leej-niam thiab leej-txiv  
lub suab lus tuaj tsis hnov **QHUB** mog.  
Kho-siab ua luaj no, es  
tawm rooj sib lis plaws rov zoj  
los txog tej niag qab-**CAIS**.  
Niam no tseg ncua kuv leej-kwv mus leej-tig tuaj  
lub suab **HAIS** es mog.

NQES 6

Kwv-tij Hmoob luag muaj kwv mus muaj tig ais  
noj ib pluag tag luag sib-tham yaj-yaum li yeev  
txoj kev tuaj sib **HLUB**, ais  
ais txiv leej tub tsis muaj kwv tsis muaj tig ais  
noj ib pluag tag tsis tau lub chaw tuaj  
tham laug **HNUB** os kwv-tij Hmoob.

Luag muaj kwv mus muaj tig noj ib pluag tag;  
luag sib-tham yaj-yaum li yeev  
txoj kev tuaj mus sib-**NCO**  
ais txiv leej tub tsis muaj niam thiab muaj txiv es  
leej-kwv leej-tig tsis los rooj niag teb no,  
noj ib pluag tag ces twb tsis tau lub chaw  
coj tej niam tub ceb-muag tuaj  
tham laug **HMO** os kwv-tij Hmoob oj.

NQES 7

Nij yai....ntoj lis nuag los txog rooj niag teb no, es  
leej-kwv leej-tig twb tsis los es  
haus cawv tuaj cawv twb tsis puag **KHOB** ais.  
Lub ncauj tsis hais los nplooj-siab xav ywb-ywm tias:  
“Nyob tsam muaj plaub muaj ntug,  
tsis muaj chaw vam  
tsis tau lub chaw mus **NYOB**,” os kwv-tij Hmoob.

Los txog rooj niag teb no, es  
tsis muaj kwv tsis muaj tig, es  
noj mov los mov tuaj tsis puag **CAJ**.  
Ces tu-siab twj ywb-ywm tias:  
“Tsis muaj kwv muaj tig,  
nyob tsam muaj txiab mus muaj nkees  
tsis muaj chaw nyob  
tsis tau lub mus chaw **VAM**,” mog.

NQES 8

Nij yai...ntoj lis nuag los txog rooj niag teb no ais  
ntshai yuav noj tus nqaij ci mus ntxuag lawm nqaij **TXHIAB**  
los zoo tsis npaum thaum kuv nrog kuv leej-kwv mus leej-tig nyob  
niam-txiv tuaj yam yug nruab-**THIAB**.

Los txog rooj niag teb no, es  
noj tus nqaij txhiab ntsuag lawm tus nqaij **CI**  
los niam zoo tsis npaum kuv nrog kuv leej-kwv mus leej-tig nyob  
niam-txiv yug tuaj ib **TXHIS** mog kwv-tij Hmoob oj.



NQES 9

Nlj yai....chim lub siab ua luaj no es  
txiv leej tub xav zoj tias  
kheev lam yog lub teb-chaws thaj-yeeb es  
kuv yuav ntim su zuj-zias tuaj tej niag qab-**TSHOB** es  
mus nrhiav kuv leej-kwv mus leej-tig niam-txiv  
tuaj yam yug ib plab noj ib lub mis **HLOB**.

Kho siab ua luaj no es  
kheev lam yog lub teb-chaws thaj-yeeb  
ces ntshai kuv yuav ntim su zuj-zias tuaj tej niag qab-**HNAB** es  
mus nrhiav kuv leej-kwv mus leej-tig  
niam-txiv tuaj yam yug ua ib **PLAB** os kwv-tij Hmoob.

NQES KAWG

Chim laj los tsis chim **XEEB** es  
los txog rooj niag teb no tsis muaj kwv mus muaj tig,  
ces tam ntua dev vwm dev mus loj-**LEEB** mog.

Chim xeeb los tsis chim **LAJ** es  
los txog rooj niag teb no  
tsis muaj kwv mus muaj tig  
ces luag noj ces yus ua dev mus nuam-**YAJ** mog.

Tus hais yog **Lis Txais**, Camp Ban Vinai, Thailand, 1980

## SONG ABOUT BEING AN ORPHAN NO PARENTS, NO COUSINS, NO HOMELAND

*(This has been written in an arbitrary format, with lines and verses broken according to context, rather than breathing pauses. The rhymes have been lost in translation, but a word with nearly equivalent meaning is in boldface to show where the rhymes appear. The underlined phrases involve some sort of word play in the original Hmong version.)*

### VERSE 1

Ni-yai<sup>60</sup>—oh heaven and earth, all people, men and boys.  
Once long ago,  
I am with my mother and father, living together;  
I have finished eating only a little, and  
I have worn only a few of the clothes.<sup>61</sup>  
Ni-yai—why didn't the old know how to love and care for the young?  
Now I leave my mother and father,  
young brothers and old brothers,<sup>62</sup>  
abandoned in Indochina, far behind;  
now all I can do is to think over what has happened.

Ni-yai—once long ago,  
I live with young brothers and old brothers, all together;  
I have finished eating only a little,  
I have worn only a few of the clothes.  
The young did not know how to love and respect the old;  
now I abandon my young brothers and old brothers.  
I come to this foreign country,  
now all I know is worry and trouble.

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<sup>60</sup>*nij yai* are the opening words; they identify the type of song to come, in this case a *kwv-txhiaj ua ntsuag*. The words are often repeated at the beginnings of verses, each side, or whenever the singer needs a pause to collect his thoughts.

<sup>61</sup>“...*noj los tsis tau txhij es hnav tuaj tsis tau txhua*...” (eat-not -able-all-and-wear-not-able-all): This is an allusion to a proverb or a greeting to an elder: “You ate at the breast before me, and you wore clothes before me.” (*Hauv mis koj xub noj, hauv tsoos koj xub hnav*). The singer laments that he will never eat or wear all that he could have; that he will not have the chance to grow up in the land of his birth.

<sup>62</sup>*leej kwv leej tig* (person-young brother-person-old brother): Hmong “brothers” are usually first cousins in Western terms. They are sons of brothers or cousins who all share a common ancestor. Sometimes, *kwv-tij* is used in a general sense to mean all those of the same clan name.

VERSE 2

Ni-yai—oh heaven and earth, Hmong cousins.  
The homeland of our mother and father is not at peace.  
I fear that the fighting will come, there will be a great war, and  
I fear that I will leave my mother and father in Indochina, far behind.  
Surely we will not **see** each other again, Hmong clan-mates.

Why is our country, our homeland, not at peace?  
I fear the war will come, and the fighting will shake us, and  
I fear that I will abandon my mother and father in Indochina, far behind.  
Surely I will leave all my maternal relatives and in-laws.<sup>63</sup>

VERSE 3

Ni-yai—oh heaven and earth, Hmong cousins,  
the land is not at peace;  
it will turn around and be upside down,  
and my father and mother will  
lose my tracks, will be separated from my footprints.<sup>64</sup>

The land is not at peace;  
it will be upside down and will turn around.  
So my father and mother  
will lose my footprints, will be separated from my tracks.

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<sup>63</sup>*neej...tsa*: all of those who are related to a man by marriage, either the mother's family or the wife's family. Since Hmong must marry outside the clan, the *neej-tsa* always have a different clan name than the man. *Kwv-tij neej-tsa* is sometimes used as a general term to mean 'all those related to me, either by blood or by marriage'.

<sup>64</sup>*"poob roj los plam hneev"* and *"poob hneev los plam roj"*: This implies that the singer, the son, left for Thailand first, and his mother, father, and other relatives were to follow after, but somehow "lost my footprints". Perhaps they took the wrong road, or were too late, and the trail was too cold to follow. Or, perhaps they were stopped by enemy patrols, killed by sickness, starvation, bombing, or simply lost their way in the jungle.

VERSE 4

Ni-yai—why do my mother and father lose my footprints,  
and go on the downhill side of the rock?<sup>65</sup>  
Now they leave this young son<sup>66</sup> to come all alone to live his life,  
lonely in this foreign land called Thailand.

Why do my young brothers and old brothers lose my footprints,  
and go on the downhill side of the fallen log?  
Now they abandon this young man to come all alone to make his way,  
in this foreign land, on American soil, oh Hmong cousins....

VERSE 5

Ni-yai—the anger in my heart I don't know how to end.  
Going out the door and coming in again,<sup>67</sup>  
I find myself standing next to the fireplace.<sup>68</sup>  
I fear that I am cut off from my mother and father,  
their voices no longer speak to me.

Loneliness is so great here,  
going out and coming in again,  
I find myself standing in that hallway.  
Now my young brothers and old brothers,  
their voices no longer talk to me.

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<sup>65</sup>“*poob hneev lis zoj rau qab zaj-zeb*” and “*poob hneev lis zoj rau qab zaj-cas*”: Since the trail is along a mountain side, one could take the path “above” (uphill) the rock, or “below” (downhill) the rock. The singer implies that his relatives went the wrong way, first “below the rock”, then “below the fallen log”.

<sup>66</sup>*txiv leej tub*: singers never use personal pronouns in songs; instead of referring to himself as “I”, he calls himself “this young son” and “this young man”.

<sup>67</sup>“*tawm rooj lis sib plaws es rov zoj*”: this implies that he comes and goes, with no particular destination, as when one wanders in and out of an empty house.

<sup>68</sup>*qab cub* means “below the fireplace”. Hmong houses are always situated in the same direction on the hillside. “Downhill” from the fireplace would be between the fireplace and the wall with the front door (see floor plan). *Qab cais* means “below/next to the hallway”. What the singer should see when he enters the house and stands next to the fireplace are the faces of his family on the other side of the fireplace, but no one is there.

VERSE 6

Hmong cousins, the others have young brothers and old brothers.  
They finish a meal and talk together about caring for each other.  
This young man has no young brothers, no old brothers, to finish a meal,  
has no place to come and talk for a day, oh Hmong cousins.

The others have young brothers and old brothers.  
They finish a meal and talk together about remembering each other.  
This young man has no mother, no father, and  
the young brothers and the old brothers did not come to this country, to finish a meal,  
and there's no place to bring a wife and children, with sweat-streaked faces,  
to come and talk for a night, oh Hmong cousins.

VERSE 7

Ni-yai—I arrive in this foreign land,  
but my young brothers and old brothers do not come.  
I drink wine, but the wine does not fill the cup.  
My mouth does not speak, but my heart quietly thinks that  
if it could be that there are disputes and disagreements,  
then there's nothing to hope for, no place to stay, oh Hmong cousins.

I arrive in this foreign land, but  
I have no young brothers, no old brothers,  
I eat rice, but the rice does not fill my throat.  
I quietly feel sad that I have no young brothers, no old brothers.  
If it could be that there is sickness and disease,  
then there is no place to stay, nothing to hope for.

VERSE 8

Ni-yai—I come here to this foreign land.  
Even when I eat grilled meat with roasted meat<sup>69</sup>,  
it's not as good as when I was with my young brothers, my old brothers,  
those who come from the same womb.

I come here to this foreign land.  
Even when I eat roasted meat with grilled meat,  
it's not as good as when I was with my young brothers, my old brothers,  
those who used to be raised together, oh Hmong cousins.

VERSE 9

Ni-yai—the anger in my heart is so great,  
and this young man thinks that if only the land were at peace;  
“I would prepare a lunch, half-filling the water dipper<sup>70</sup>, and  
go search for my young brothers and old brothers,  
who were raised from the same womb and who grew at the same breast.”

Loneliness is so great here, and  
if only the land were at peace;  
“I would prepare a lunch, half-filling my shoulder-bag,  
and go search for my young brothers and my old brothers,  
who were born of the same womb, oh Hmong cousins.”

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<sup>69</sup>“*nqaij ci...nqaij txhiab*”: *ci* and *txhiab* are almost synonyms, and there is no real way to translate the shades of meaning. *Ci* is to cook meat as it is suspended over the fire or coals; *txhiab* is to cook the meat as it is propped up next to the fire or coals. In Laos, a person who eats meat cooked two ways at the same meal is very wealthy.

<sup>70</sup>*lub tshob*

## CLOSING

Unhappy and yet not broken-hearted.<sup>71</sup>

I come to this foreign land,  
without young brothers, without old brothers,  
like a crazed dog wandering from here to there.<sup>72</sup>

Broken-hearted and yet not unhappy.

I come to this foreign land,  
without young brothers, without old brothers,  
and the others eat, while I watch like a dog waiting for scraps.<sup>73</sup>

Sung by Lee Txai, Ban Vinai refugee camp, 1980.

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<sup>71</sup> *laj-xeeb*: this term has come from the old Chinese days. It is a variation of *leej xeeb*, a weapon that was used in a Hmong legend of betrayal. The weapon was small and deadly (somewhat like the Chinese "star" in kung-fu movies), but was carried hidden inside one's roomy sleeve. The weapon could be directed towards an enemy, but would return to the sender after doing its damage. In the legend, the Chinese come to a mountain Hmong village, wanting to defeat the Hmong. The Chinese bribe, coerce, or trick the Hmong guard into killing the village chief. The guard uses the *leej xeeb* to accomplish the assassination. The legend tells that because the Hmong went against their own people, they lost their homeland in China, and have been without a home ever since. Many songs use this reference to *laj xeeb* or *leej xeeb* to remind Hmong of the lessons of history.

*Chim* means angry, offended, unhappy; *chim laj, chim xeeb* is a "paired word" expression, that means as unhappy as we were at the time of our betrayal and losing of our home.

<sup>72</sup> *dev loj-leeb* is a wandering dog who has no master. This is a terrible fate in Laos, because one could not survive alone, without relatives. It was sometimes used to refer to an outcast, someone who refused to do his part for the family, and so was ignored by the group.

<sup>73</sup> *dev mus nuam yaj* is a dog watching and waiting for scraps while someone eats. This refers to a person who must totally depend on someone else for survival. Whether in Thai refugee camps or in the U.S., a Hmong has no way to '*ua noj ua haus*', and so he has to depend on the charity of others. There is a proverb:

*"Thaum luag tsaj, tsis nrog luag tsaj;  
Thaum luag noj, ua dev nuam yaj."*

"When they work, (you) don't work with them  
When they eat, be like a dog waiting for scraps."

## TRADITIONAL NEEDLEWORK

The traditional pieces of hand-sewn textiles in Laos were pieces of clothing (skirts, shirt trims, sashes and belts, coin purses, head-dress, and decorative collar pieces), baby-carriers, or squares of embroidered and appliqued cloth used as part of an exchange custom between the married girl, her husband, and the parents of the girl.

The pieces in evidence today—decorative squares, dresses, aprons, pillow covers, bedspreads, checkbook covers, and scenic panels—are all recent variations designed to sell to outsiders. The commercial pieces incorporate design elements and techniques from the traditional pieces, but in new combinations, contexts, and color patterns.

There are dialect-group differences in costume, as well as regional differences. One can look at a girl in traditional dress and can immediately tell whether she is White Hmong, Hmong Leng, or Striped Hmong, and can also tell if she comes from the center of Laos, the north-east, the west, or the northwest. As women from different parts of Laos began to mingle together in lowland villages during the 1960's and 1970's, and in Thai refugee camps and U.S. neighborhoods, the differences have become less distinct. White Hmong will borrow elements of Hmong Leng design, and vice-versa. Traditional black fabric is replaced with black French fabrics woven with silver threads and shimmery patterns, and the costumes are becoming more and more ornate with silvery decoration.

Generally speaking, the cut-and-reverse applique and embroidery is the specialty of the White Hmong, and the batik, cross-stitch, and layered applique is the specialty of the Hmong Leng. The colorful pleated skirts are Hmong Leng, crafted from batik, cross-stitch, and appliqued strips, squares, and triangles. The batik and applique baby-carrier is Hmong Leng, as well as the traditional needlework squares. The embroidered sashes, coin belts, aprons and belts are White Hmong. Both groups have a decorated collar piece; those with cut-and-reverse applique and embroidery, worn face up, are White Hmong, and those with layered applique, worn face down, are Hmong Leng.

As girls take up non-traditional lifestyles—going to school, getting jobs—the time spent in learning and executing the traditional skills is less and less. The ancient needlework skills are fast disappearing in the younger generations. The use of Western fabrics, dyes, sewing machines, and threads alter the traditions even further.

We began this project with the idea of verifying some of the current notions of symbolic meaning of various design elements in the Hmong needlework. What we have found, at least in this area, is that there is little known about the symbolic



meaning, and in many cases, the symbolism has been passed on to the Hmong by Westerners. For example, we were told that the designs were ways in which the Hmong in Southeast Asia sent “letters” home to relatives in China, that long ago the designs were a way of encoding and preserving their language in the face of Han Chinese pressures to wipe out the Hmong language. When we asked where that story came from, our informant said that an American church lady in San Diego told her the story.

As an example of the variation in symbolic meaning assigned to design elements, consider the appliqued triangles that often form a border in the commercial pieces. Here are three meanings assigned to the triangles, as read in different sources or heard from local people:

1. The triangles represent mountains. The mountains surround the central design much as the mountains surrounded villages in Laos, suggesting isolation from outsiders.
2. The triangles are a re-creation of the altar (*xwm kab*) decoration. During the New Year, the *paj-nyiaj-paj-kub* (flower-silver-flower-gold) that decorates the household altar is replaced. The *paj-nyiaj-paj-kub* is silver and gold paper cut in triangle shapes.
3. The triangles represent the Dragon's Spine. The Hmong dragon (*zaj*) has triangle shaped spikes along its spine, and the dragon is brightly colored. A girl in New Year dress is *zoo cuag nkauj zaj*: ‘beautiful like a dragon's daughter’.

There is a vocabulary for naming the various design elements, that one woman might use when talking about a piece to another, but we could find no stories, legends, or symbolism that tied into the use of the different designs. In fact, women from different regions and dialect groups call the same design element by different names. Sometimes the vocabulary suggests symbolism, as in “snail” or “seeds” but often the vocabulary is simply description, as in *tswv nkhaus*, ‘crooked line’.

Where possible, we list the vocabulary name for elements in the designs of the baby-carrier, needlework squares, and Hmong Leng skirt. However, we leave the investigation of symbolism to another time.

## **HAS TXUG DLAIM HLAAB-NYAS**

Zaaj nuav mas yog ho yuav has txug peb Moob (Moob leeg los puas Hmoob ntsuab) txuj nam hlaab-nyas, kws nwg kuj ua muaj kaab muaj ke hab. Nws yog zoo moos le nuav, thaum muaj ib tug ntshais tawm rooj moos yuav quas yawg lawd ces tsis ntev nwg yeej yuav xeeb tub ki xwb ces tug ntshais leej-nam yeej cuab npaaj ib dlaim nyuas hlaab-nyas tseg ca rau thaum kws tug ntshais tau miv-nyuas. Nyob-nyob txug nub kws tug ntshais hab tug vauv tau kag ob tug miv-nyuas ces nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug xaa dlaim hlaab-nyas tuaj rau tug ntshais hab tug vauv tau aub ob tug miv-nyuas mog (txawm yog tub/ntshais los peb hmoob yeej suav has tas yog muaj txuj moo, txuj-moov saws tau, los tas yog ntuj paab txhaj muaj).

Thaum tug ntshais hab vauv tau dlaim hlaab-nyas lug aub miv-nyuas lawm ob tug yeej paub tas, muaj ib nub yaav tom ntej yuav tau tam-hlaab-nyas. Ces ntshais hab vauv yuav tau npaaj kuas tau le ib tug npua 6-7 tau. Muaj caij-nyoog, zoo sij-hawm, los yog thaum tsab peb-caug ces moos hu nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tuaj tam-hlaab-nyas.

Thaum moos hu mas yuav has le yawm-txiv tuaj tam-hlaab-nyas. Thaum moos hu mas yuav has le nuav (tug vauv los yog tug tuab-neeg) kws moos hu, "Nub nua kuv tuaj hu nam hab txiv meb moos nrug kuv nyob ib nub, haus ib khob nyuas tshuaj taag es meb maam rov lug tsev." Yog has le nuav ces nam-tais hab yawm-txiv yeej paub tas yog tuaj hu moos tuaj ces tua npua ua nqaaj ua no sav-sav rau tau tav log, hu nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lug tuaj peg hauv rooj nrug cov kev txwj zej-zog ces ib saab khob-cawv rau yawm-txiv. Tug vauv tuaj nraas qaab rooj ua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tsaug ntaub tsaug xuv ntawm dlaim hlaab-nyas taag ces yawm-txiv ho lug ua tsaug-nqaaj tsaug-no tam ces yog tas yuav tis-npe laug los yawm-txiv kuj tis tau rua hab.

Tej-zag yawm-txiv kuj nug vauv hab cov kwv-tij saib puab nyam lub hu le caag? Muaj tej paab kwv-tij mas puab nyam hu lawv le puab tej yawm-suab, yawm-koob, yawm, kws nto-nto npe thau u. Thaum nrhav tau lub npe lawd ces yawm-txiv ib saab khob-cawv foom koob-moov rau vauv lub npe laug kuas tsuas muaj kev noj qaab nyob zoo NYOB UA LUAS TXWJ, SAWV UA LUAS LAUG, NYOB NOJ LUAS HAUV NQAAJ, HAS LUAS HAUV LUG, NYOB KUAM KUAS DLAWB TXOOB DLAWB HAU QUAS PAUG."

Tug npua kws tua ntawd mas yeej muab txav kag ib ceg nrug tug kua-twv rau nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug aub moos tsev le hab.

## TRADITIONAL BABY-CARRIER

This article tells about the Hmong Leng baby-carrier (*hlaab-nyas*)<sup>74</sup>, and the traditions and customs that go with it. When a daughter leaves home to marry someone, sooner or later, she will become pregnant. Her mother will prepare a baby-carrier to give to her daughter to carry her baby. Sometime after the daughter delivers the baby, the in-laws will bring the baby-carrier to the new parents. (It doesn't matter whether it is a boy or a girl; Hmong say that it is your fortune, your luck, or your blessing from the sky.)

When the daughter and son-in-law receive the baby-carrier, they know that one day in the future they will give a 'baby-carrier-reward' (*tam hlaab-nyas*) feast. The daughter and son-in-law will raise a pig of about 150-200 pounds. Then they look for a good time, perhaps during the New Year celebration, and call the mother-in-law and father-in-law to come to the baby-carrier-reward feast. When a messenger goes to invite the in-laws, he says this: *"Today I come to invite you, mother and father, to come visit us for one day, drink one glass of 'medicine', and after that, you can return home."* If the father-in-law hears an invitation like this, he already knows that they will go to a feast for the baby-carrier, and to give the son-in-law his honorary, or added, name.

When the in-laws arrive, the pig is killed and when the meat is ready, the son-in-law invites the parents-in-law to sit at the table, with his cousins, and pours a glass of corn liquor for his father-in-law. The son-in-law stands on the other side of the table and thanks his parents-in-law for the cloth and the thread with which the baby-carrier was made. The father-in-law then thanks them for the feast, and if the son-in-law already knows what new name he would like to have, the father-in-law officially names him at this time. However, if the son-in-law is not sure, the father-in-law will ask the son-in-law and his cousins what name they like. There are some groups that like to call themselves like their grandfathers or great-grandfathers, or some name that has been somewhat famous. When they decide on a name, the father-in-law pours two glasses of corn liquor, and blesses his son-in-law with his new, added, honorary name, saying to him, *"May you have good health, wealth, life long enough to be an elder and advisor to the others, to sit at their table and eat good meat and resolve their disputes, and to live until your hair is completely white."* The pig that was slaughtered for the feast has been split, and the father-in-law receives one hindquarter, with the tail, to carry home.

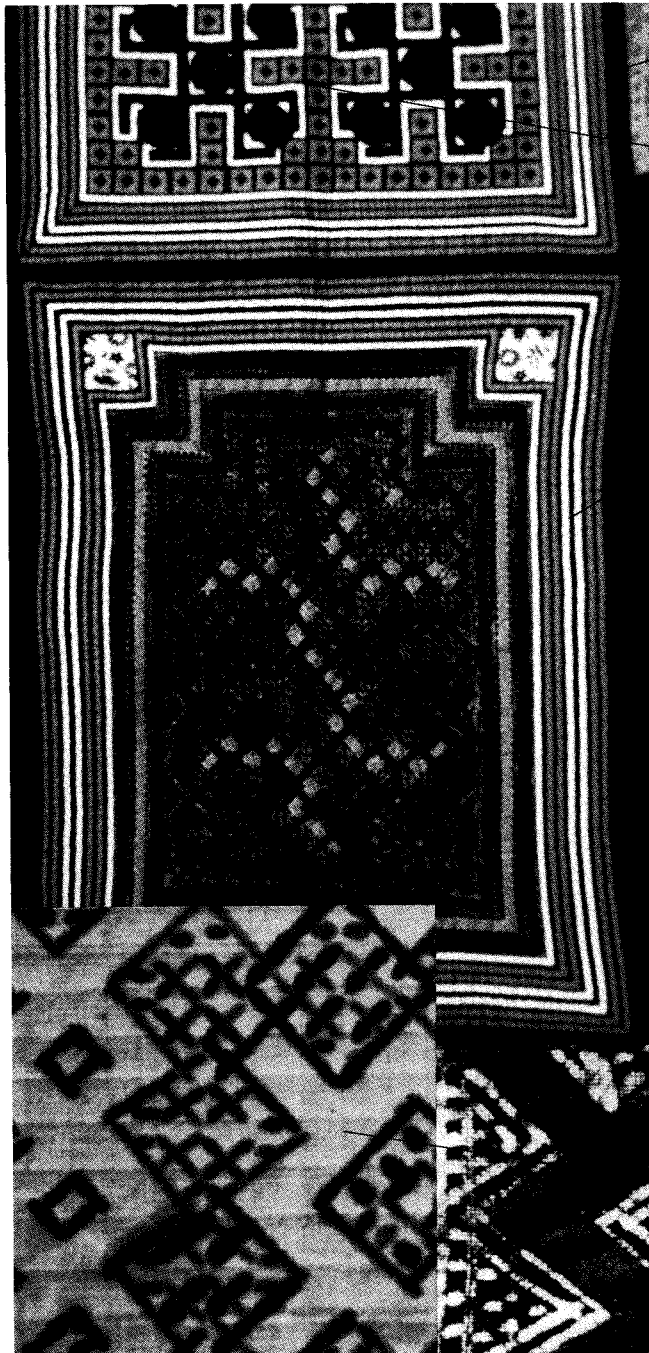
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<sup>74</sup> *hlab-nyias* in White Hmong

NOTE: The honorary name, which is added in front of the childhood name, is called “*npe laug*” (old name), and the process of receiving the adult name is called ‘*tis npe laug*’. Usually the honorary name and the childhood name are said as a compound name, like:

Lwm (childhood name)+	Nyiaj ( <i>npe laug</i> )=	Nyiaj-lwm (Nyia Lue)
Tswb+	Nom=	Nom-tswb (Nao Chue)
Xab+	Txiaj=	Txiaj-xab (Xia Sa)

DLAIM HLAAB-NYAS  
BABY-CARRIER  
VOCABULARY



*ncauj nyas*

"mouth-baby-carrier"; the top section of the baby-carrier.

*plawv ncauj nyas*

"heart-mouth-baby-carrier"; the center section of the *ncauj-nyas*. This part is usually covered with tiny appliqued squares, and sometimes yarn pom-poms.

*plooj ncauj nyas*

bands of fabric sewn one on top of another around the edge.

*cev nyas*

"body-baby-carrier"; the main section of the baby-carrier.

*plawv cev nyas*

"heart-body-baby-carrier"; the center of the main section. The batik foundation is indigo/ white or indigo/light blue with red and yellow applique sewn in the spaces left in the batik pattern.

*ntaub tswv nkhaus*

"cloth-line-crooked"; the zig-zag line of applied fabric. The fabric is applied into spaces left in the batik pattern.

*caab cab*

"wax" ('*ciab*' in White Hmong); the batik design that is the foundation for the main part of the baby-carrier. Green Hmong women are the batik artists.

## HAS TXUG LUB NOOB-NCOOS

Zaaj nuav mas kuv yuav has txug peb Moob<sup>75</sup> cov noob-ncoos. Raws le kws puj tau rhawv kaab, yawm tau rhawv kev tseg ca, hab tau ua lug lawm ntau-ntau tam tuab neeg, los naj nub nwg nuav peb tseem ua quas qees hab. Noob-ncoos mas nwg muaj 2 yaam; xws le noob-ncoos-tsha hab noob-ncoos-lab.

Kev ua noob-ncoos nuas mas yog tug ntxhais hab tug vauv ua rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv los-puas tub/nyaab ua rua nam-txiv. Yog tas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug ob leeg tseem muaj txuj-sa nyob, nua mas yuav tau ua ob lub noob-ncoos-tsha huv si. Hos yog tas ob tug ib tug tsis muaj txuj-sa lawm es tshuav ib leeg xwb nuas ces ua ib lub noob-ncoos-tsha rua tug tseem muaj txuj-sa, ua lub noob-ncoos-lab rua tug tuag lawd.

Has txug kev-lig kev-cai kws yuav coj noob-ncoos moos rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv los yuav tau coj moos muaj kaab muaj ke; tsis yog yuav laam tau laam coj moos. Thaum ntxhais hab vauv yuav tau npaaj ib laam-fwj-cawv hab ib nkawm nyuas qab muab vum sav-sav lawm nqaa moos. Sij-hawm moos txug tom nam-tais, yawm-txiv tsev lawd muab ob nyuas qab coj lug tsuav tsawg-tsuag ua ob phaaj-ntxuag tso rua sau rooj ces laub 2 khob-cawv rua sau taag ces hu nam-tais, yawm-txiv lug nyob rooj (hauv paug rooj). Tug vauv tuaj nraa qaab rooj muab ob lub noob-ncoos tso rua sau rooj ces tug vauv has tas, “Awb....nam hab txiv ib...ua meb ib lom ntxhais hab vauv los ib tsis muaj dlaab-tsi yuav tuaj pov-fwm meb ob tug laug le kuas xyoo nuab ib ua ntxhais hab ua vauv tsuas coj ib kaum-nyuas ntaub tuaj pov-fwm meb ob tug laug, kuam kuas meb ob tug ua nam hab ua txiv tsuas yuav tau txais kev noj-qaab nyob-zoo, muaj txuj-sa txuj-zug nyob ntev dlhawv moos *“Ib txhab tsis muaj nkeej, ib txhis tsis muaj mob, meb nyob ua luas txwj, sawv ua luas laug, nyob kuam kuas dlawb txoob dlawb hau quas paug.”*

Ces tug vauv txhus caug pe, pe yawm-txiv hab pe nam-tais taag mas yawm-vauv yeej tsis sawv le. Yawm-txiv ob tug haus ob tug khob-cawv meej ces yawm-txiv le maam laub ib saab khob-cawv moos tsaa tug vauv, vauv haus saab khob-cawv ntawd meej ces vauv maam le sawv.

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<sup>75</sup> *Moob-leeg or Moob-ntsuab.*

Noob-ncoos yog muab taag le nuav rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lawm mas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv yuav tau tug hab yuav npaaj tam. Kev tug noob-ncoos mas yog tas lub noob-ncoos-tsha nua mas yog tug 1 kis nyaj-npib. Hos yog tas lub noob-ncoos-lab mas yog tug 5 npib-nyaj.

Kev tam noob-ncoos mas yog thaum nam-tais hab yawm-txiv npaaj tau lawd ces ob tug tso tuab-neeg tuaj hu tug ntXHais hab tug vauv moos tam mas luas moos hu has le nuav, *"Meb nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tso kuv tuaj hu meb moos nrug ob tug nyob ib nub, haus ib khob nyuas tshuaj taag es meb maam rov-qaab lug."* Yog thaum luas tuaj hu has le nuav ces yeej yog tam noob-ncoos. Thaum moos txug mas nam-tais, yawm-txiv tua ib tug npua kwv-laam le 6-7 tau. Muab ua tau sav-sav taag rau tau rua ntawd, mas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lug ua tsaug txug kaum ntaub kaum xuv kws tug ntXHais hab vauv ob tug tau xaa tuaj taag ces ntXHais hab vauv ho lug ua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tsaug qhov kws ua tau rooj-nqas rooj-no tam ob tug taag ces haus 3-4 lwm cawv lawv rooj ces noj mov. Tug npua kws rua ntawd mas yeej muab txav ib ceg nrug tug kua-twv rau ntXHais hab vauv ob tug aub moos tsev le.

## TRADITIONAL NEEDLEWORK SQUARES

This article tells about our Hmong<sup>76</sup> traditional needlework squares, called *noob-ncoos*, pronounced “nong-dyong”.<sup>77</sup> According to ways of our great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers, and continuing down through many generations, today we still perform the traditions related to the needlework squares. There are two kinds of *noob-ncoos*. One is called *nong-dyong-cha*,<sup>78</sup> and the other is *nong-dyong-la*.<sup>79</sup> The first, *needlework squares with more cloth applique*, has a red background bordered with many overlapped bands of color, the red center area covered with many small appliqued squares, with contrasting diamonds sewn on top of each, interspersed with long criss-crossed bands. The other, *red needlework square*, is identical except that the red center area has no appliqued designs on it.

The *noob-ncoos* tradition is for the daughter and son-in-law to give the *noob-ncoos* to the girl's parents (in-laws), or for the son and daughter-in-law to give the *noob-ncoos* to the boy's parents. If both the mother-in-law and father-in-law are still alive, then they make two *noob-ncoos-tsha*, and give one to each parent. If one of the parents-in-law has already died, then they make the appliqued *noob-ncoos tsha* for the living parent and the *noob-ncoos-lab* for the deceased parent.

It is the true custom to give the *noob-ncoos* to the parents-in-law according to the traditions; one cannot just casually give the pieces to the parents. When the daughter and son-in-law give the *noob-ncoos*, the son-in-law has to prepare one bottle of corn liquor and a pair of boiled chickens. When they reach the home of the in-laws, the two chickens are chopped up and put on two plates on the table, and two glasses are filled with corn liquor and placed on the table. When all is ready, the parents-in-law are called to sit on one side of the table. The son-in-law stands on the other side of the table, and puts the two pieces of *noob-ncoos* on the table, and says, “*Ah...mother and father...we, your daughter and son-in-law, have not given you anything to bless you. But this year, your daughter and son-in-law bring these small pieces of cloth as a sign of blessing for you. May you two receive good health and wealth, have long lives, and remain strong forever. One thousand years without weakness, forever without sickness, you will be our advisors, you will be our elders, you will live until your hair is completely*

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<sup>76</sup> *Moob-leeg*, Hmong Leng, or *Hmoob-ntsuab*, Green Hmong

<sup>77</sup> Vowel is approximately like the English long ‘o’, as in ‘boat’; *nong* is on a high tone, *dyong* on a low tone.

<sup>78</sup> *noob-ncoos-tsha*. *Noob* means ‘seed’, as when English-speakers refer to blood-lines; *ncoos* means ‘pillow’.

<sup>79</sup> *noob-ncoos-lab*. *Lab* means ‘red’.



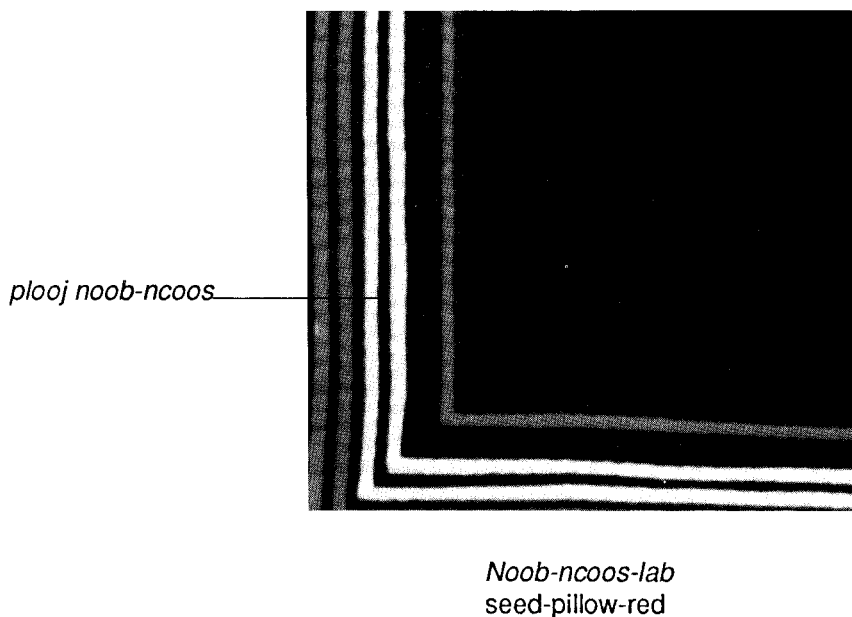
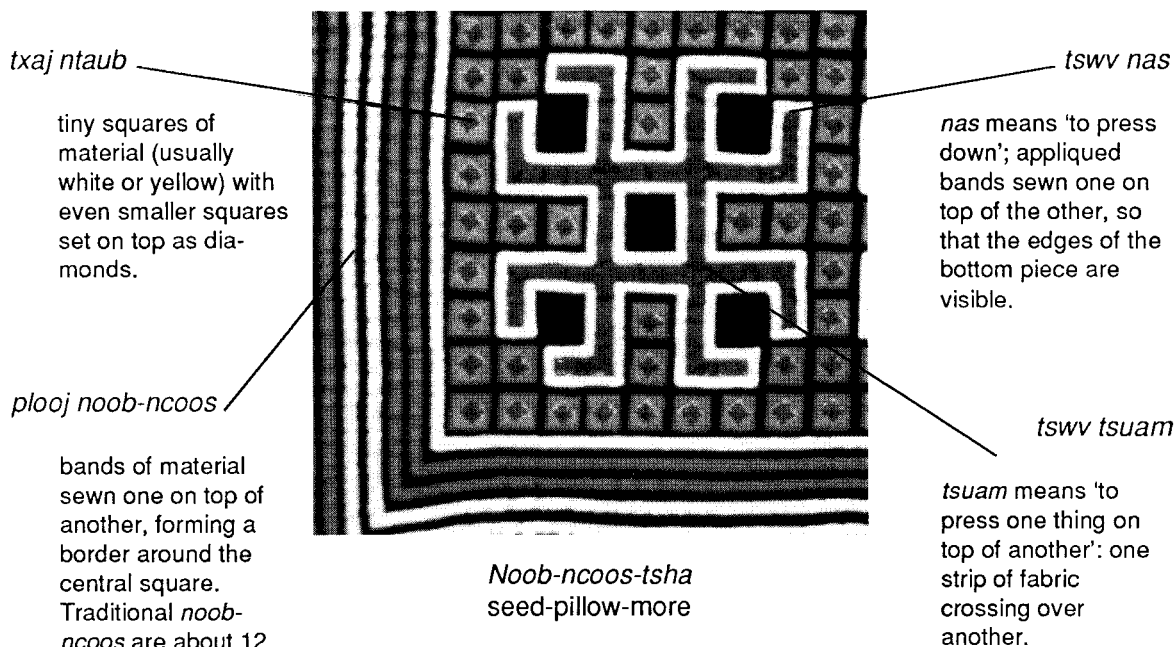
white”.<sup>80</sup> The son-in-law kneels down for the father-in-law, gets up, and kneels down for the mother-in-law; he doesn't get up. The father-in-law and mother-in-law drink the two glasses of corn liquor and then the father-in-law pours two more glasses of corn liquor. He takes them to the son-in-law, who drinks them, and then gets up.

After the *noob-ncoos* have been presented this way to the in-laws, they will pay a price to the son-in-law, and will prepare a reward, a feast. The *noob-ncoos* price is ten silver coins for the *noob-ncoos-tsha*, and five silver coins for the *noob-ncoos-lab*. Tradition says that when the in-laws have prepared the feast they send someone to invite the daughter and son-in-law to come to the house for the *noob-ncoos* reward feast. That person says, “*Your mother-in-law and father-in-law invite you to visit with them for one day, to drink one cup of ‘medicine’, and then when that’s done you can return home.*” When someone says these words to you, you know that it is for the *noob-ncoos* feast. When the daughter and son-in-law arrive, the in-laws kill a pig, about 150-200 pounds. When the meat is ready and put on the table, the parents-in-law say thank you for the pieces of cloth and the thread that the daughter and son-in-law have given to them. The daughter and son-in-law say thank you for the feast and drink three or four rounds of corn liquor, then eat the meal. The pig has been split, and one leg with the tail is given to the son-in-law to carry home.

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<sup>80</sup> This blessing, along with the *noob-ncoos*, provides an extension to the ‘visa’ with which each person enters this life; each *noob-ncoos* therefore extends the person’s life. The *noob-ncoos*, sometimes many pieces, are placed in the coffin with the person after death.

# NOOB NCOOS NEEDLEWORK SQUARES VOCABULARY



(These words are Hmong Leng dialect—this type of stitchery is a *Moob Leeg* specialty.)

## HMONG LENG SKIRT

The skirt made by the Hmong Leng women has been a Hmong trademark throughout the centuries. In photos of the Ch'uan Miao<sup>81</sup> in China in the late 1920's, the skirts are remarkably similar to the Laotian Hmong skirts of the 1970's, and the Chinese accounts of the Hmong living in China 30 centuries ago speak of the intricately patterned skirts.

The skirt is made of three long strips of cloth, once hand-woven, then purchased from itinerant merchants, and now purchased at discount fabric stores. The top piece, the *tu-shee*,<sup>82</sup> is hidden under the sash when the skirt is worn, and so it is not decorated. It has the waist band sewn on, over the anchored pleats. The pleats, which are about a half-inch deep, reduce a length of skirt from five or six yards to about a yard and a half. The anchoring stitches are of at least two sorts, one named the centipede and the other is the millipede. Running stitches are sewn through the center of each pleat, at about 5 inch intervals down the length of the skirt, and pulled up tight, accordian-style, to crease the pleats in place. Each time the skirt is worn, the running stitches are pulled out, and replaced before the skirt is stored away.

The middle section, *tu-ntu*,<sup>83</sup> is white or light blue fabric which has been batiked with dark blue or indigo dye. The skirts shown in photos from Thailand and Laos have the batik section without any further needlework, and from this comes the name, "Blue" Hmong. On today's skirts, the batiked designs are almost hidden by applique strips and triangles. There are several patterns to the batik, simply called 'skirt marks', with names like, "water buffalo horn", "snail", "cross", "crooked wax line", "wax scales".<sup>84</sup> The design of the batik determines the placement of applique which will be sewn on later.

The batik spoon is made of zinc or copper, with a bamboo handle; artists here have to send to Thai refugee camps to buy the tools, if they did not bring one with them. The wax, beeswax with an orangey color, is melted in a pan, the batik spoon dipped in, and the spoon held in the air until the wax is cooled to the right temperature. The batik spoon is held so the tip is towards artist's body, and the wax lines are drawn in smooth pulling motions towards the body. There are batik spoons for wider lines, and ones for finer lines. The designs are very symmetrical, but are drawn without pencil, ruler, or picture.

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<sup>81</sup> in David Crockett Graham's *SONGS AND STORIES OF THE CH'UAN MIAO*, 1954.

<sup>82</sup> *tug si*

<sup>83</sup> *tug nthu*

<sup>84</sup> *txaj tab: txaj kub-twm, txaj qaab qwj, txaj khaub-lig, cab tswv nkhaus, nplai cab...*

After the entire length of fabric is designed with wax, the dye bath is prepared. The dyes are purchased from Thailand, red, black, and purple, along with a fixative<sup>85</sup>. In the old days, dye was prepared from the indigo plant. The dyes are dissolved in water, and boiled down, then mixed with boiling water which has been poured through wood ashes.

The waxed fabric is loosely folded, wet with cool water, then soaked in the dye bath,<sup>86</sup> and the excess dye drained off into the dye pan. The fabric is spread out to dry, out of the direct sun, which might melt the wax; this dying-and-drying process is repeated three times. After the third time, the fabric is placed in a pan and boiling water is poured over it, to melt out the wax, which may be recovered for later use. The fabric is rinsed in warm water, and then hung up to dry. Where the wax has melted out, the white or light blue color of the original fabric forms the design, surrounded by dark indigo blue.

Later, the batiked design forms the base for applique. Long strips of satiny fabric, in white, bright pink, yellow, and lime green, are sewn on, sometimes one strip laid on top of another. The 'wax scales' form triangular spaces for cloth triangles that are sewn on. The finished design sometimes has a name, like "meat hook".<sup>87</sup>

The bottom section of the skirt, the *tu-tang*,<sup>88</sup> is applique and cross-stitch done on a loosely woven fabric, usually black or white. The needlework so completely covers the base fabric that none of the original color shows through. Often the design of the bottom section repeats or complements the design of the middle section. The bottom edge is bound with a strip of fabric, and is called the "foot" of the skirt.<sup>89</sup>

The skirt is worn with the opening in the front, with the waist band tied as one might tie an apron string. The opening is covered with the long black apron, and a length of black fabric are wound around the girl's midsection, from ribs to hips. Over the black sash goes a bright pink shiny cloth sash, embroidered sashes, or coin belts. Traditionally, the girl's legs are wrapped in black leggings from the ankle to the knee.

Girls in the United States are going to school, and not learning the traditional needlework and batik skills. Without the time necessary for sewing a skirt for the New Year, which may take the full year to complete, girls now buy the skirts from women here who have the skill, or from Thai refugee camps, where the women have much time to sew. In the old days, a girl's skirt, and other embroidered articles of clothing,

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<sup>85</sup> A lab analysis of the dyes could not identify them specifically (there are over 3,500 dyes listed in the *Society of Dyers and Colorists' Manual*, 2nd edition, 1956), but a reasonable guess is: purple—methyl violet or crystal violet; red—chromoxane cyanine or mordant brown; black—naphthyl blue black; fixative—sodium hydrosulfide hydrate.

<sup>86</sup> *tsaus*

<sup>87</sup> *tswv nqaij lauj*

<sup>88</sup> *tug taab*

<sup>89</sup> *tswv taab taw*

were a public testimony to her skills, creativity, and willingness to work hard—all desirable attributes for marriageable girls.

## DLAIM TAB MOOB HMONG SKIRT: VOCABULARY



### *khaws ntse-tab*

'gather-pleat-skirt'; the pleats are anchored in the top section with special stitches; the pleats are held in place with long threads, that are pulled out each time the skirt is worn.

### *lub nplai nplai*

can mean 'scale (fish, turtle, reptile)', or 'kernel of corn'. Whether or not that is the same meaning as the applied triangle is unclear. *Lub nplai* is the name given to the triangle; *nplai ntaub* is a triangle of fabric; *nplai cab* is a batik triangle.

### *tswv xyaab*

'line-straight'. Applied bands of *tswv yas* fabric running the length of the skirt piece. They are often done by machine now, but before, they were always sewn by hand, as is everything else on the skirt.

### *cab tswv nkhaus*

'wax-line-crooked'; a zig-zag line in the batik, where fabric will later be sewn.

### *tswv nqaij lauj*

means 'hanging hook'; refers to this pattern of bands, more difficult because of the many cut ends, rather than one long piece folded back and forth.

### *xuv tswv nkhaus*

'thread-line-crooked'; zig-zag line made of cross-stitch.

### *nthu tab*

middle section of the skirt. The base fabric is the *cab* or batik (*ciab* in White Hmong). It is indigo<sup>1</sup> on white, or indigo on light blue. There are several designs for the batik patterns, and very few of the women in the U.S. remember all of them. Most of the designs are called *txaj tab* or 'skirt mark'.

### *taab tab*

bottom section of the skirt. Often the cross-stitched and applied design of this section repeats or complements the batik and applied section above. The bottom bound edge is the *taab taw*, or foot of the skirt.



## LUB NEEJ HMOOB

Yuav hais txog ib tsev neeg Hmoob nyob rau teb-chaws nplog, ntuj qub-qab tias yuav khwv npaum li cas thiaj tau txaus noj, txaus haus, thiab zoo li luag tej.<sup>90</sup>

Kuv yuav hais txog cov dej-num hauv ib hnuv ntawm ib yim neeg Hmoob, nws tsev-neeg muaj 7 leej tib neeg. Nws, leej-txiv muaj hnuv-nyoog 35 xyoos. Leej-niam muaj hnuv-nyoog 29 xyoos. Tus tub-hlob muaj hnuv-nyoog 14 xyoos. Tus ntshais-hlob muaj hnuv-nyoog 13 xyoos. Tus ntshais-yau muaj hnuv-nyoog 11 xyoos. Tus tub-nrab muaj hnuv-nyoog 9 xyoos. Tus tub-ntxawg muaj hnuv-nyoog 7 xyoos.

Lawv yim neeg no lub neej dej-num hauv ib hnuv, nws yog zoo li cas? Kuv hais mus raws li nram no:

Thaum qaib qua thawj thawj tseg, tus ntshais-hlob sawv los rauv-taws, rau dej rau hauv qhov-cub,<sup>91</sup> pib yuav ua mov. Thaum dej tseem tsis tau npau ntawd nws mus muab cov kav-tsawb los-puas cov nroj zaub-npuas los tsuav tas tau ib hauv plag. Ces lauj-kaub dej npau, nws los ua mov; ua mov vom<sup>92</sup> muab coj los rau hauv tsu cub. Sij-hawm mov tseem cub nyob-rau hauv qhov-cub nws muab cov zaub-npuas (kav-tsawb thiab cov nroj) uas twb tsuav tau lawd coj los hlab dej kuj thiab muab xyaw rau cov qhauv<sup>93</sup> tov kom ua-kua nyeem tsawv, coj los mus pub cov las-npua li ntawm 2-3 tug, thiab cov niag maum-npua li ntawm 1-2 tug, nrog cov me-nyuam npua li ntawm 7-8 tug.

Tus tub-hlob kuj sawv tib lub sij-hawm ntawd thiab. Nws los tsuav zaub-nees, zaub-nyuj, coj mus pub nees, pub nyuj, tsis tag li ntawd xwb. Yog tias tsis muaj qhauv pub qaib, nws yuav tau los mus muab tej pob-kws uas twb rhwb ib cov pob-kws thiab nrhiav ib qho nplej thiab txhuv cia tau pub qaib thaum tag-kis ntawd.

Tus ntshais-hlob ua nws cov hauj-lwm<sup>94</sup> tiav, nws los ua tshais<sup>95</sup>, thiab ntim su cia yuav coj mus noj lawm tom teb.

<sup>90</sup> zoo xws li tus Hmoob tiag-tiag.

<sup>91</sup> qhov-txos (chaw rauv-taws ua mov noj)

<sup>92</sup> vom-mov=npo-mov (ua mov cub [cub mov])

<sup>93</sup> cov qhauv = pob-kws zom hau

<sup>94</sup> dej-num

<sup>95</sup> ua zaub mov thaum sawv-ntxov



Thaum kaj-ntug pom kev txoog, tus tub-hlob mus tso qaib, tso os. Nws pub qaib, pub os. Cov poj-qaib uas loj noj taus muab pob-kws pub rau, cov me-nyuam qaib noj tsis taus muab nplej pub rau, txhuv pub rau.

Niam thiab txiv cov yau sawv los ntxuav tes, ntxuav muag ces rau mov noj, sawv-daws noj tshais. Lawv noj tshais tag nrho pib sawv kev mus ua teb, sib nug zoj tias, "Hnub-no yuav mus ua daim teb dab-tsi? Qhov twg?"

Peb Hmoob muaj ntau ntau daim teb, xws li: teb npleg muaj nplej-caug,<sup>96</sup> nplej-tag,<sup>97</sup> nplej-ntshav;<sup>98</sup> teb pob-kws muaj pob-kws-cauj,<sup>99</sup> pob-kws-taj,<sup>100</sup> pob-kws-ntshav,<sup>101</sup> pob-kws-txaij; teb-qos; teb-taub; teb-dib; teb-zaub; teb-hav-kab-tsib; teb-tsawb...

Thaum uas lawv mus ua teb, lawv tso ob tus me-nyuam yaus zov tsev, saib nyob tsam muaj qaib, npua, nees, nyuj, twm los tsev. Yog li ntawd yim neeg no thiaj li tso tus muaj hnub-nyoog 9 xyos thiab tus muaj 7 xyoo nyob zov tsev. Nkawd kuj loj paub dej-num hauv tsev lawm thiab.

Ces lawv tsib tug<sup>102</sup> mus ua teb. Lawv mus ntxov tsawv, thaum txog tom teb hnub twb tsis tau tshwm,<sup>103</sup> tshav-ntuj twb tsis tau tuaj, es twb ua ua teb ib me chim lawm tshav-ntuj mam li tuaj sov-so.<sup>104</sup> Sawv-daws yeej rau rau siab ua teb (koj tuaj ib kab; kuv tuaj ib kab; kuv tuaj ib ntsuj; koj tuaj ib ntsuj). Tsis hais kev nthua los-puas cog, yog tias ua li no mas sawv-daws lub luag teb sib-txig zos mus ces thiaj tuaj-zog ntws, ua teb mas yeej tsis tshuam muaj sij-hawm so, tsuas yog tias haus dej, haus luam-yeeb, mus tawm-rooj li no xwb. Ces yeej ua ua txog kiag thaum lub hnub ntseg, ces yog lub caij noj sus. Hmoob ib txwm hais tias, "*Ua teb tsis txhob pom pom nab ntsuab,*" los sis tias, "*Ua teb txhob ua zoo li tus nab ntsuab tuag tsis tu siav,*" thiab tias, "*Thaum sij-hawm ua teb tsis txhob nuam nuam yaj mus ntsia tim-tej,*" thiab, "*Tsis txhob ntsia lub hnub heev heev.*" Yog leej twg ua zoo li hais tag los no mas yeej tsis tshuad muaj noj, muaj haus li luag tej tiag thiab.

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<sup>96</sup> *nplej nplaum*

<sup>97</sup> *nplej-txua*

<sup>98</sup> *nplej nplaum/nplej-caug*

<sup>99</sup> *pob-kws-nplaum*

<sup>100</sup> *pob-kws-txua*

<sup>101</sup> *pob-kws-cauj/pob-kws-nplaum*

<sup>102</sup> *leeg*

<sup>103</sup> *tawm-tuaj*

<sup>104</sup> *kub hluas (tsis kub-kub heev, tsis txias-txias heev)*

Lawv los noj sus tag mas cov txiv-neej hov taus, txuas, riam, hlau, hmuov kom ntse zuag plias rau cov poj-niam, ces sawv-daws rov-qab mus ua teb dua. Lawv ua ua hnuv yuav luag poob-qho, ces leej-txiv nqee suab laws hais rau leej-niam thiab cov me-nyuam hais tias, "Tav caij yuav mus muab nra thiab yuav mus tsev es zoo li tom tsev tsis muaj taws, tsis muaj zaub-nees, zaub-nyuj, tsis muaj zaub-npuas,<sup>105</sup> tsis muaj pob-kws. Mas koj niam ev pob-kws; kuv txiav taws; tub mus txiav zaub-nees, zaub-nyuj rau nees thauj; hos me maum nej mus txiav kav-tsawb, de zaub-npuas, de zaub noj coj mus tom tsev."

Thaum nkawd ob niam-txiv laus xub los txog tsev ces, ob tug me-nyuam uas nyob tom tsev twb rauv-taws ua hmo tiav, txhuam pob-kws cia yuav tau coj mus zom los ua qhauv pub npua. Nkawd mus lawv nyuj nkag nkuaj, lawv nees nkag nkuaj tas. Leej-txiv los txog ces ris kiag ib kawg pob-kws uas twb txhuam tau lawd thiab coj tus tub-nrab mus rau zeb rau leej-txiv zom. Leej-niam los txog ces nws mus yawm kiag ib kawg nplej hauv txhab coj los yuav tuav-txhuv.<sup>106</sup> Cov tub-ntxhais hlob los txog thiab leej-txi zom-zeb los txog ces rau hmo sawv-daws noj. Thaum lawv noj hmo tag, cov me-nyuam mus suaj-kaum tej dej-num uas tseem tsis tau tiav kom tag. Lawv mus ris dej los cia tau siv, mus tuav txhuv, tsoov-txhuv, khawg ntxhib txhuv. Cov xua nplej kuj tseem-ceeb thiab tau hauj-lwm, xua nplej laus cia xyaw zaub pub nees, cov xua nplej-mos cia xyaw qhauv pub npua, cov ntxhib-nplej<sup>107</sup> cia pub qaib. Cov me-nyuam ib tug los mus rauv-taws hauv qhov-txos, rau dej rau yuav hau cov pob-kws uas zom lawm kom ua npua qhauv cia es tag-kis sawv-ntxov thiaj tau npua qhauv pub npua. Tsis tas no tus ntxhais tseem yuav ua hnav<sup>108</sup> xws li nws tej paj-ntaub<sup>109</sup> ua tiab thiab lwm yam tsoos-tsho lub sij-hawm uas nws zov yias npua-qhauv siav, thiab tej-zaum kuj ua ua hnav mus txog rau ib tag hmo dua mam tau mus pw. Nws pw ib me pliag xwb ces qaib twb ho pib qua thawj tsig lawm thiab lauj!!

Tus neeg Hmoob kiag yeej ib txwm khwv khwv li no thaum niam-txiv ib txhis raug los mus. Tsev-neeg Hmoob ntau yim neeg kuj mus tsis raws li kuv tau hais, tiam-sis feem coob mas yeej yog zaj no kiag. Qhov uas peb Hmoob sij-pheej yuav yuav me-nyuam coob<sup>110</sup> tug kuj yog ib feem qhov no ntag. Nws tsis tas lis no xwb; Hmoob lub neej mas yeej npaj txhua-txhia lub caij-nyoog. Hmoob pheej ntshai ntshai nyob tsam ces lub neej tsis zoo li luag tej, neeg zej-zog teb-chaws. Muaj tus dab, tus qhua tuaj

<sup>105</sup> kav-tsawb

<sup>106</sup> tuav-cos

<sup>107</sup> tsig-txhuv

<sup>108</sup> Nws tsis tas no thiab; thaum taug kev mus ua teb los tseem ua hnav, thaum sij-hawm so los khaws tab tiab coj los ua thiab mas thiaj yuav tau hnav.

<sup>109</sup> dab-tshos

<sup>110</sup> ntau

yus koom tsis taus mas yuav txaj-muag<sup>111</sup> heev. *TSIS TAS LI NO XWB: PEB HMOOB NPAJ IB PUAS YAM TSAV THIAB CIA SIAB KAWG NKAUS RAU LUB TSIAB PEB-CAUG.*

Ib xyoo kaum-ob lub hlis tim zoj los yuav txog mas tsis hais tus laus, tus hluas, hlob-hlob, yau-yau yeej tham<sup>112</sup> seev yees txog txoj kev yuav mus dhia qaib, pov khaub-hnab, ntaus tuj-lub, ntaus tis-qaib, yos poj, yos sev, nrhiav txij nrhiav nkawm. Cov laus ces npaj siab tsoov yuav mus tham kwv tham tij, tsham neej tsham tsav, laug caij dhau ib lub zos rau ib lub zos.. Nws kuj yog ib lub sij-hawm rau cov niam cov txiv xaiv nyab xaiv vauv thiab. Hmoob lub tsiab peb-caug es Hmoob ib txwm ua mas yog tim kiag rau lub kaum-ob hlis ntuj, hli Hmoob, hnuv peb-caug kiag. Ua-ntej li hnuv 28, 29 no mas tuav ncuav, tua npua, thiab npaj tej dej-num uas yuav kub tes kub taws kom tiav. Hnuv peb-caug kiag mas muab tej vaj-tse cheb huv-si, cov laus, me-nyuam yaus yuav-tsum ntxuav cev huv-si, vim tias xyoo laus tag rau hmo no, Hmoob suav tias xyoo laus tag rau hmo thaum ib-tag hmo.

Hmo peb-caug ntawd, nws tus uas yog txiv-tsev ua, los sis mus thov ib tug neeg laus tuaj hu plig. Kev hu plig mas kuj muaj txawv qho mentsis, tiam-sis kuv yuav qhov ncag: .hu plig niam plig txiv, plig tub ki, plig tsiaj plig txhuv, plig qoob plig loo los rau hauv tsev huv-si. Tej xwm-kab<sup>113</sup> muab ntawv-nyiaj ntawv-kub los hloov, muab nyiaj, muab txiaj los teem rau, foom<sup>114</sup> rau kom xyoo tshiab tuaj mus mas kom khwv tsawg los kom tau ntau, ua lag luam los kom tau nyiaj tau txiaj. Hmoob hais li no:

*"Khwv nyiaj kom tau puv nas.*

*Ua qoob kom tau puv txhab.*

*Tu tub-ki kom tau puv tsev.*

*Tu tsiaj tu txhuv kom puv nkuaj.*

*Qav-tshiab kom tau nrog luag noj.*

*Dej-tshiab kom tau nrog laug haus.*

*Muaj noj, muaj haus, muaj hnav kom nplua-miag*

*Tsis txob, tsis txhawj, tsis ntshaw luag zej-zog teb-chaws."*

Tus txiv-tsev<sup>115</sup> ntawd kuj tseem ntuas tej kev-phem/lus tsis zoo pov tseg nrog xyoo laus. Nws ntuas tias,

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<sup>111</sup> *poob ntsej-muag*

<sup>112</sup> *piav*

<sup>113</sup> *thaj-neeb*

<sup>114</sup> *ntuas*

<sup>115</sup> *neeg-laos los tau*

*"Xyoo laus tas rau hmo no mas  
 kuv yuav cheb tej sub tawg sub ntsha,  
 uas yog kab mob kev nkees,  
 kev ploj kev tuag,  
 kev plaub kev ntug,  
 kev txob kev txhawj,  
 kev ntsuj kev tsiv,  
 kev phem kev qias,  
 kom nrog xyoo laus tag mus.  
 Nws mus poob-rau dej kom dej tshoob,  
 poob-rau hluav-taws kom hluav-taws kub,  
 poob-rau cua kom cua tshuab<sup>116</sup> huv-sis  
 mus rau zaj qho kom pob-ntseg tsis hnov  
 qhov-muag tsis pom."*

Hmo peb-caug no kiag, Hmoob muaj ib yam txuj-ci sim es paub tias xyoo tom ntej no yuav muaj ntuj nag, ntuj qhua heev. Nws yog los ntawm kev luj dej. Hmo 30 ntawd muab ob lub ntim sib-luag zos los ntim dej (cov dej hmo 30 Hmoob hu ua 'dej-qub') coj los kiv saum teev saib hnyav npaum li cas, muab cim cia. Hmo ntawd thaum ib tag hmo dua qaib qua thawj thawj tsig, neeg zej-zog sawv ntxov-ntxov mas nqa 3 tswm xyab, 3 txwm ntawv mus ua tswv teb tswv chaw tsaug tag mam ce dej nram hav dej nqa coj los cia tau haus (Hmoob tias nws yog cov 'dej-tshiab'). Coj cov dej-tshiab no los ntim rau 2 lub ntim uas ntim dej-qub mam muab teev los luj. Xyuas yog tias cov dej-tshiab hnyav heev dua cov dej-qub no mas xyoo tom ntej yuav muaj ntuj nag heev ces qoob yuav zoo thiab yuav siav taus, yuav tau noj. Hos yog tias cov dej-tshiab sib tshaj cov dej-qub no ces Hmoob yeej paub tias xyoo tom ntej no mas yuav tsis muaj nag heev pes-tsawg, qoob yuav tsis tuaj zoo,<sup>117</sup> txawm qoob tuaj los yuav tsis muaj ntuj nag los yug ces qoob tsis zoo.<sup>118</sup>

Hmoob haj tseem muaj ib yam uas yuav ceev-faj mloog zoo, saib xyoo no yog tus tsiaj dab-tsi los qhib-tshiab,<sup>119</sup> tus tsiaj ntawd nws yuav xub xub quaj. Neeg sawv-daws zej-zog sau tuaj nyob ua ib ke nyob hauv ib yim twg<sup>120</sup> mloog. Yog tias nyuj xub nqov, mas xyoo ntawd nws yog nyuj xyoo, nws kuj zoo tab-sis nws tus hwn xyeej loj thiab muaj zog dua kuj zoo thiab. Hos yog tias tus noog lig-nyug<sup>121</sup> xub xub quaj no

<sup>116</sup> *cua-nplawm*

<sup>117</sup> *yuav tau rau noob-qoob ntau rau hauv daim teb*

<sup>118</sup> *xyoo ntawd yuav muaj tshaib-plab*

<sup>119</sup> *tsa xyoo tshiab*

<sup>120</sup> *nyob zov hmo xyoo tshiab*

<sup>121</sup> *lib-nyug los-si tus tsov*

mas xyoo ntawd yuav muaj txiab muaj nkees, muaj kev ploj kev tuag, muaj kev puas kev ntsoog. Hmoob muaj kev ib yam ua<sup>122</sup> kom nws tej tuj-taug ntawd dhau mus mas yog li no...Yog mloog hos hnov tias 2 tus tsiaj li hais quaj kiag ntag mas nkaus kiag riam los txiav 3 riag rau saum tog cav-taws cim cia thiab txhob muaj taug txij li rauv yam cav-taws ntawd tag ces yeej tag li....

Hos yog tias qaib xub xub qua no mas xyoo ntawd yog qaib xyoo. Qaib xyoo mas zoo heev, vim tias qaib yog tus coj hnuv<sup>123</sup> tawm tuaj. Hmoob muaj ib zaj lus hais li no:

*"Thaum ub mas muaj 9 lub hnuv, 9 lub hli. Nws tau tsaus-ntuj los tsaus ntev heev. Nws tau kaj-ntug los kaj ntev heev ces tib neeg ntiaj-teb ua tsis tau noj. Lawv chim, lawv thiaj mus txua ib rab hneev 9 dag taub 8 dag nta, muab tua tua hnuv.*

*Hnuv thiab hli ntshai ntshai ces hnuv thiab hli tsis kam tawm tuaj. Ntiaj-teb tsaus-ntuj tau 7 xyoo haj yam ua tsis tau noj. Ntiaj-teb tib neeg thiaj tias yuav tso tus tsiaj dab-tsi mus hu es lub hnuv thiab lub hli thiaj yuav tawm tuaj!*

*Tso nyuj mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj, hnuv thiab hli kuj los tsis tawm thiab. Tso tsov mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj los tsis tawm. Tso lib-nyug mus hu saib puas tawm tuaj los tsis tawm. Thiaj li tias yog no cia tso qaib mus hu. Qaib hu hu ces lub hnuv thiaj li mam tawm tuaj, thiab lub hli mam tawm tuaj ua-qab es thiaj muaj nruab-hnuv thiab hmo ntuj los rau tib-neeg ntiaj-teb tau ua noj ua haus."*

Thiab qaib no yeej nyob ua pab<sup>124</sup> li ntau xwb. No thiaj ua ib tug yam-ntxwv rau noob-neej tias zoo, zoo li qaib mas thiaj zoo.

Kev pe tsiab no mas koj yuav tau ceeb-toom rau tus laus ntawd paub ua ntej tso koj mam mus. Thaum ub mas tseem muaj tias thaum koj mus yuav txog koj yuav-tsum tau tua 3 phom saib lawv puas tau npaj thiab. Yog tias twb npaj lawm mas lawv yeej tua 3 phom teb mas mam li mus tau. Yog koj tsis tshuam paub txoj kev pe tsiab no pes-tsawg mas coj cov uas paub cai thiab paub hais ib-ob tug nrog mus thiaj li hais tau tej lus zoo nkauj thiab zoo mloog es thiaj yuav tau koob-hmoov ntawm cov laus tiag.

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122 *ib yam ua rau=hais rau*

123 *coj hnuv=hu tau hnuv*

124 *ua pab=ua pawg*

Hmo xiab ib mas cov hluas tseem muaj kev mus pe tsiab<sup>125</sup> yuav koob yuav hmoov ntawm cov laus thiab xws li tias yog hauv yus lub zos muaj tej tus neeg laus ces cov hluas koj ib lam-hwj cawv thiab npaj ib phaj ntxuag ces mus thov tus laus ob niam-txiv nyob rooj sab pem-toj ces ib sab khob-caw rau ob tug laus es mus pe nkawd, foom koob-hmoov, pov-fwm rau nkawd kom nkawd tsuas muaj sia, muaj zog, nyob ua luag txwj, nyob ua luag laus, nyob dawb txoob dawb hau qas paug. Ces thov ob tug laus ho foom koob-hmoov rau cov hluas ces cov hluas pe txais yuav koob-hmoov ntawd nkawm ob tug laus. Nkawd mam muab lub lam-hwj cawv los hliv ib leeg ib khob kom txhua txhia tus haus yuav koob hmoov.

No mas yog qho uas tseem-ceed rau cov uas muaj cov laus kom paub meej-meej tias, peb-Hmoob lub neej nws yog zoo mus li cas tiag.

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<sup>125</sup> *Yog nej muaj pog-yawg los sis niam-txiv uas laus-laes es luag yuav pe tsiab thov koob thov hmoov mas tsim nyog nej cov uas ua tub twb xub-xub pe ua-ntej lawm mas nej mam lii tso cia tau rau lwm-leej lwm-tus pe.*

## HMONG LIFE A TYPICAL DAY

In the old days, for a family living in Laos, how much did a family have to do in order to have enough to eat, enough to drink,<sup>126</sup> and to be as good as the others?

I will talk about the chores during one day for a Hmong family, that has seven persons. The father is about 35 years old, the mother about 29 years old, the youngest son 14 years old, the oldest daughter 13 years old, the youngest daughter 11 years old, the middle son 9 years old, and the youngest son 7 years old.

During one day, what are their chores like? I say it goes something like this.

When the rooster crows the first time,<sup>127</sup> about three a.m., the eldest daughter gets up and builds the fire, puts the water on the fire<sup>128</sup> to boil. And she takes banana stem<sup>129</sup> or leafy vegetables and weeds<sup>130</sup> that were collected for pig food, and chops them up until there is a big pile of chopped greens. When the water boils, she puts in rice, boils it, drains it, and puts it in the rice-steamer.<sup>131</sup> While the rice is steaming on the fireplace, she takes the chopped greens, mixes them with hot water and the corn meal mush,<sup>132</sup> prepared from corn meal ground the night before, and cooks it until it is like a thick porridge. She takes this food to the pigs in the stable,<sup>133</sup> two or three castrated males, one or two sows, and seven or eight piglets.

The eldest son gets up about the same time, and he goes to chop the weeds, leaves, and grass that has been cut for the horses and cows<sup>134</sup>....but this is not all. If there is no feed for the chickens, he goes to get some corn to shell,<sup>135</sup> and if there is not enough, he may find a bit of hulled rice<sup>136</sup> and unhulled rice<sup>137</sup> to feed to the

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<sup>126</sup> *txaus noj txaus haus*="enough to eat, enough to drink", figurative language for "earning a living" that is sufficient.

<sup>127</sup> *qaib qua thawj thawj tsig*

<sup>128</sup> The main fireplace is the *qhov-cub*; the other fireplace is made of clay and has a large pan, similar to a wok, on top, and is called *qhov-txos*.

<sup>129</sup> *kav-tsawb*

<sup>130</sup> *nroj zaub-npuas*

<sup>131</sup> *tsu*

<sup>132</sup> *qhauv*

<sup>133</sup> *nkuaj*: enclosure for the animals, with a roof.

<sup>134</sup> *zaub-nees, zaub-nyuj*

<sup>135</sup> *rhwb*: take the kernels of corn off the cob by hand

<sup>136</sup> *nplej*

<sup>137</sup> *txhuv*

chickens. The eldest daughter, finished with her job, prepares breakfast and something to take to the fields to eat for lunch.

Before dawn, but as soon as he can see clearly,<sup>138</sup> the son lets out the chickens and the ducks. The hens are large enough to eat the corn that he gives them, but the chicks who cannot eat such big pieces are given hulled rice and unhulled rice.

Their mother and father and younger children get up and wash their hands and faces, and put out the food for them all to eat. When they are done, they begin the journey to the fields, asking each other, "Today which fields do we go to?"

We Hmong have many fields. There are rice fields<sup>139</sup> for early rice,<sup>140</sup> late rice,<sup>141</sup> purple rice;<sup>142</sup> corn fields<sup>143</sup> for early corn,<sup>144</sup> late corn,<sup>145</sup> purple corn,<sup>146</sup> Indian corn;<sup>147</sup> squash fields;<sup>148</sup> melon fields;<sup>149</sup> tuber fields;<sup>150</sup> vegetable fields;<sup>151</sup> sugar cane fields;<sup>152</sup> banana fields<sup>153</sup>.....

When they go to the field, they leave two young children to watch the house, to see that the chickens, pigs, horses, cows, and water buffaloes don't get into the house. In this family, it is the nine year old and the seven year old who stay at home. The two of them are old enough to know how to do the household chores, too.

The other five go to the field, and they leave very early; when they arrive at the field, the sun has not yet appeared, and the bright daylight has not yet come.<sup>154</sup> After they have worked for a while, the sun appears and it gets warm, but they are willing and ready to work hard.<sup>155</sup> (*You take one row, I take one row; you take one section, I*

<sup>138</sup> *kaj-ntug pom kev txoog* : not yet dawn, but light enough to see

<sup>139</sup> *teb-npleg*

<sup>140</sup> *nplej-caug = nplej-nplaum* (sticky rice)

<sup>141</sup> *nplej-tag = nplej-txua* (long-grained rice)

<sup>142</sup> *nplej-ntshav* = (blood rice): a purple rice, a type of sticky rice

<sup>143</sup> *teb-pob-kws*

<sup>144</sup> *pob-kws-cauj = pob-kws-nplaum*

<sup>145</sup> *pob-kws-taj = pob-kws-txua*

<sup>146</sup> *pob-kws-ntshav* = (blood corn): purple corn

<sup>147</sup> *pob-kws-txaij* (varigated corn): similar to Indian corn in the U.S.

<sup>148</sup> *teb-taub*

<sup>149</sup> *teb-dib*

<sup>150</sup> *teb-qos*

<sup>151</sup> *teb-zaub*

<sup>152</sup> *teb-hav-kab-tsib*

<sup>153</sup> *teb-tsawb*

<sup>154</sup> "*hnub twb tsis tau tshwm, tshav-ntuj twb tsis tau tuaj*": about 6 a.m., the sun is not up, the sky is not yet bright.

<sup>155</sup> *rau siab* : put the heart into



take one section.) Whether clearing weeds or planting, they work abreast of one another, so no one lags behind. This way they keep up each other's pace and endurance. There is no rest, except for a minute to take a drink or smoke a cigarette. They keep working this way until lunch time, when the sun is straight up overhead.<sup>156</sup>

Hmong used to say, "*When doing field work, don't look around for the green snake.*"<sup>157</sup> Or, "*When you work, don't work like a green snake that's almost dead.*"<sup>158</sup> (Keep your head down and your eyes on your work.) "*Don't bend your head backwards to watch things.*"<sup>159</sup> "*Don't watch the progress of the sun too much.*"<sup>160</sup> A person who works in the wrong way will end up without enough to eat, enough to drink like all the others in the village.

They finish lunch and the father sharpens the ax,<sup>161</sup> the brush-knife,<sup>162</sup> the knife,<sup>163</sup> the hoe,<sup>164</sup> and the dibble stick,<sup>165</sup> and as he finishes, the mother and father and the others return to work. They work until the sun is almost at the horizon.<sup>166</sup> Then the father calls to the mother and the children, "Time to go! But at the house there is no wood, no horse-feed, cow-feed, no pig-feed, no corn for the chickens. Wife, you carry the corn; I'll cut wood; son, you cut fodder for the house and cow and put it on the horse to carry; daughters, you two cut banana stem and pick vegetables for the pigs and carry it all home."

When the parents arrive at the house first, the two children who stayed home have built the fire and prepared dinner, taken the kernels off the corn-cobs for grinding into corn-meal for the pig-food. They put the cows in the corral, and the horses in the stable. The father gets a basket of corn that has been prepared, and takes the middle son with him to grind the corn into corn meal at the grist-mill.<sup>167</sup> The mother gets a basket of rice from the storehouse and goes to pound it in the rice-pounder.<sup>168</sup> The eldest son and daughter arrive, and the father finishes with the corn meal, and everyone eats dinner. When dinner is finished, the children go to finish the chores

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<sup>156</sup> *lub hnuv ntseg*

<sup>157</sup> *Ua teb tsis txhob pom pom nab ntsuab.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ua teb txhob ua zoo li tus nab ntsuab tuag tsis tu siav.*

<sup>159</sup> *Thaum sij-hawm ua teb tsis txhob nuam nuam yaj mus ntsia tim-tej.*

<sup>160</sup> *Tsis txhob ntsia lub hnuv heev heev.*

<sup>161</sup> *rab taus*

<sup>162</sup> *rab txuas* : knife with a hooked end

<sup>163</sup> *rab riam*

<sup>164</sup> *rab hlau* : the hoe has a short handle

<sup>165</sup> *rab hmuu*

<sup>166</sup> *hnoob yuav luag poob-qho*

<sup>167</sup> *zom-zeb*

<sup>168</sup> *tuav-cos*

which were left undone. They go to carry water to keep for later use, they pound rice and winnow rice,<sup>169</sup> picking out the unhulled rice from the hulled rice,<sup>170</sup> setting aside the hulls to mix with the hay for the horses,<sup>171</sup> setting aside the broken rice grains and unhulled rice grains for the chicks to eat.<sup>172</sup> One of the children builds the fire in the clay stove, and puts the water on to boil for preparing the corn meal mush that will be mixed with the pig food the next morning.

The daughter still has time to sew<sup>173</sup>—her skirt, and other things—while she waits for the corn meal to cook. Sometimes she will continue to work on her sewing after the corn meal mush is done, until midnight or later, when she goes to sleep. She sleeps only a short time, until the rooster crows for the first time!

A Hmong family used to work this way, as it has been for many generations. Many Hmong families did not work in this way exactly, but for most of them, it was just this way. Because of this kind of life, Hmong liked to have many children, but the need for many hands to help with the work was only part of the reason. It was always important for a family to be prepared, in every way. Hmong were always concerned that they had not accomplished enough, not as much as others had, whether in the village or in the country. If guests arrived, and there was not enough to feed them, the family would really lose face in the community. Not only this, but Hmong were always preparing, in hundreds of ways, and with whole hearts, for the New Year celebrations!

Only one time in a year, once in twelve months, does the New Year<sup>174</sup> come, and everyone, not only the adults, the youth, the elders, the children, but everyone, talks about the time to play chicken feather,<sup>175</sup> to throw the cloth ball,<sup>176</sup> to hit the spinning top,<sup>177</sup> to look for a mate, to search for a partner.<sup>178</sup> The adults prepare their hearts for the prospect of meeting with cousins, brothers, in-laws, and friends, from village to village. It is at this time of year that the parents choose a daughter-in-law or son-in-law. Hmong New Year has always been the day following the 30th day of the

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<sup>169</sup> *tsoov txhuv*

<sup>170</sup> *khawg ntshib* : pick out grains of rice that still have hulls

<sup>171</sup> *xua nplej laus* : pieces of hull that are larger

<sup>172</sup> *xua nplej mos* : pieces of hull that are smaller

<sup>173</sup> *ua hnab* : make clothes; *ua tiab* : make the skirt. She spends every spare minute, whether at the field, walking, resting, to complete her new clothes for the New Year. It takes about a year to make one outfit.

<sup>174</sup> *lub tsiab peb-caug* : the 30th day of the 12th month on the Hmong calendar; the last day of the old year.

<sup>175</sup> *dhia qaib* : a game similar to badminton

<sup>176</sup> *pov khaub-hnab* : this is a favorite game for the youth looking for boy/girl friends. A long line of boys faces a long line of girls, and they throw the ball back and forth for hours, while singing *kwv-tshiaj teb*.

<sup>177</sup> *ntaus tuj-lub*

<sup>178</sup> “*yos poj yos sev, nrhiav txij nrhiav nkawm*” (literally, “look-woman-look-apron, search for-spouse-search for-pair”)

12th Hmong lunar month. On the 28th and 29th days, everyone gets ready: pounding rice for rice-cakes, slaughtering the New Year's pig, and doing all the chores that usually keep hands and feet busy,<sup>179</sup> so that everything is finished. On the 30th day,<sup>180</sup> the house and yard are completely cleaned, and old and young wash their bodies all over, because the old year will finish at midnight of this day. Hmong count the new year's beginning as mid-night of the 30th day.

During the night of the 30th day, the head of the family, or some other respected elder, calls the spirits home.<sup>181</sup> Each group's method of calling spirits is different, but generally the elder calls the mother's spirit, the father's spirit, the children's spirits, the animals' spirits, and the spirits of the crops all to come back into the house. The household altar<sup>182</sup> has borders of silver and gold paper,<sup>183</sup> cut into triangle patterns, and this paper is changed for the coming year, and money is placed in front of the altar. The wish for the new year is that the family will toil little, but get a lot<sup>184</sup>....will do some trading and get some silver and money.<sup>185</sup> Hmong say it this way:

*"Khuv nyiaj kom tau puv nas  
Ua qoob kom tau puv txhab  
Tu tub-ki kom tau puv tsev  
Tu tsiaj tu txhuv puv nkuaj  
Qav-tshiab kom tau nrog luag noj  
Dej-tshiab kom tau nrog luag haus  
Muaj noj, muaj haus, muaj hnav kom npluag-miag  
tsis txob, tsis txhawj, tsis ntshaw luag zej-zog teb-chaws."*

*"Toil so that silver fills the purse  
Farm so that crops fill the storehouse  
Raise children to fill the house  
Raise animals to fill the stable  
Have new food, with others able to eat  
Have new water, with others able to drink  
Have food, have drink, have plenty of fine clothes to wear,  
Don't be troubled, don't worry, don't envy others in the village or the country."*

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<sup>179</sup> *kub tes kub taw* : "hot hand hot foot", busy with all sorts of things.

<sup>180</sup> *hnub peb-caug*

<sup>181</sup> *hu plig*

<sup>182</sup> *xwm-kab*

<sup>183</sup> *ntawv nyiaj ntawv kub*

<sup>184</sup> *khuv tsawg los kom tau ntau*

<sup>185</sup> *ua lag luam los kom tau nyiaj tau txiaj*

The elder throws away all the evil, and bad words go with the old year. He says,

*"Xyoo laus tas rau hmo no mas  
kuv yuav cheb tej sub tawg sub ntsha,  
uas yog kab mob kev nkees,  
kev ploj kev tuag,  
kev plaub kev ntug,  
kev txob kev txhawj,  
kev ntsuj kev tsiv,  
kev phem kev qias,  
kom nrog xyoo laus tag mus.*

*Nws mus poob-rau dej kom dej txhoob,  
poob-rau hluav-taws kom hluav-taws kub,  
poob-rau cua kom cua tshuab,  
huv sis mus rau zaj qho kom pob-ntsej tsis hnov  
qhov-muag tsis pom."*

*The old year ends tonight and  
I will sweep away all the evil that causes  
sickness and weakness,  
disappearance and death,  
cases of dispute and litigation,  
trouble and worry,  
evil spirits,  
bad ways,  
so that they all finish with the old year.*

*They fall into the water to be swept away,  
they fall into the fire to be burned up,  
they fall into the wind to be blown away,  
into the Dragon's hole,  
so that the ear does not hear them  
and the eye does not see them."*

When it is really the night of the 30th, Hmong have a way to predict whether the coming year will be rainy or dry. It involves weighing water. During the time before midnight (still the 30th day), they take two small teacups of water that are filled exactly

to the same spot (this is called the 'old water'<sup>186</sup>); they weigh this water using the balance scale, to see how heavy the two cups are, and mark the weight on the balance arm of the scale. Later that night, after midnight, when it is the first day of the new year, at the first rooster crow, everyone in the village gets up very early. They carry three pairs of incense sticks, and three pairs of silver paper, and go to the stream. There they give thanks to the spirit of the stream, and collect water from the stream, to keep for drinking later (this is called the 'new water'<sup>187</sup>). From this new water, they take two small teacups, filled exactly the same as the first ones, and weigh them. They compare the weights. If the new water is heavier than the old water, then the coming year will have much rain, and the crops will be good and the people will have enough to eat. If the new water is lighter than the old water, then the coming year will not have very much rain, and the crops will not sprout well, and even if the crops do sprout, then the crops will not grow very well due to a lack of rain.

Hmong have another thing that they are careful to observe. They listen to find out which animal is going to open the year.<sup>188</sup> The year is named for the animal that cries out first, such as 'cow-year', 'lee-nyu year', or 'rooster year'.....Everyone in the village gathers together in one house to listen to find out what animal makes the first sound. If it is the cow that bellows first, then the coming year will be good, but there will be hunger, since the cow eats so much, but the bull has a powerful appearance and is strong, so the year will be good. If it is the bird, the lee-nyu,<sup>189</sup> that cries out first, then the coming year will bring trouble, sickness, death, and other misfortunes. Hmong have a way to circumvent a bad prediction if the lee-nyu calls out first. Someone takes a knife or ax and makes three cuts in one of the logs pushed into the fire. An elder warns the lee-nyu not to bring misfortune. When the fire burns the entire log, the prediction of the lee-nyu is cancelled.

If it is the rooster that calls out first, then the coming year will be called the rooster-year,<sup>190</sup> and it will be a good one. A rooster year is good because the rooster is the one that leads the sun into the world each day. Hmong have a folktale that tells:

*Long ago, there were nine suns and nine moons. When it was night, it was night for a very long time. When it was day, it was daytime for a very long time. The people of the world could not work enough to have sufficient to eat,*

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<sup>186</sup> *dej-qub*

<sup>187</sup> *dej-tshiab*

<sup>188</sup> *qhib tshiab*

<sup>189</sup> *lib-nyug* : a bird, similar to a hawk

<sup>190</sup> *qaib xyoo*

*and they were angry. They made a cross-bow nine da<sup>191</sup> long and eight da wide, and went to shoot the suns. The suns and the moons were very afraid and were not willing to come out. The earth was dark for seven years and the people could do no work to get food to eat. They said, "What kind of animal can go and call the suns and the moons to come out?" They sent the bull to call, to see if the sun and the moon would come out, but they would not. They sent the tiger to call, to see if the suns and the moons would come out, but they would not. They sent the bird, the lee-nyu, to call to see if the suns and the moons would come out, but they would not. Then they sent the rooster to call, to see if the suns and the moons would come out. The rooster called and called, and the sun came out for a little while (daytime), and then the moon came out for a little while (night). Since that time there has been daylight and nighttime, so that people can work, and have enough to eat, and they have lived until now."*

In addition, chickens are animals that live in groups. This is an example for people to follow; be like chickens, and you will do well in life.

At this time of year, too, the young adults (15-45 year old men) go to visit the elders, to kneel down and exchange blessings.<sup>192</sup> This custom requires that people notify the elders ahead of time that they plan to come to visit. In the old days, the custom was that you go close to their house, and fire a gun into the air three times, to see if they are ready for your visit. If they are prepared, they respond by firing a gun three times, and then you can go. If you don't really know all the details of the custom, then you would take someone with you who knows, and who can tell you the words that are called for, and are good to hear, and then you will receive good blessings from the elders.

On the first night of the first month,<sup>193</sup> all the young adult men take time to follow this custom of visiting the elders, and kneeling to give and receive blessings.<sup>194</sup> In the village, elders are chosen for the youth to visit. The visitors take one bottle of whiskey and one plate of food,<sup>195</sup> and ask the elders for permission to come into their house. The two elders sit behind a table facing the door, and there are two cups of whiskey on the table. The visitors kneel down, and wish good fortune to the two elders, saying, "You two will have a long life and strength, and will live to be the village elders, to be

<sup>191</sup> "dag": unit of measure; the distance between the tips of the fingers of arms outstretched chest-high; about five feet.

<sup>192</sup> *pe-tsiab* (literally, "kneel-new year")

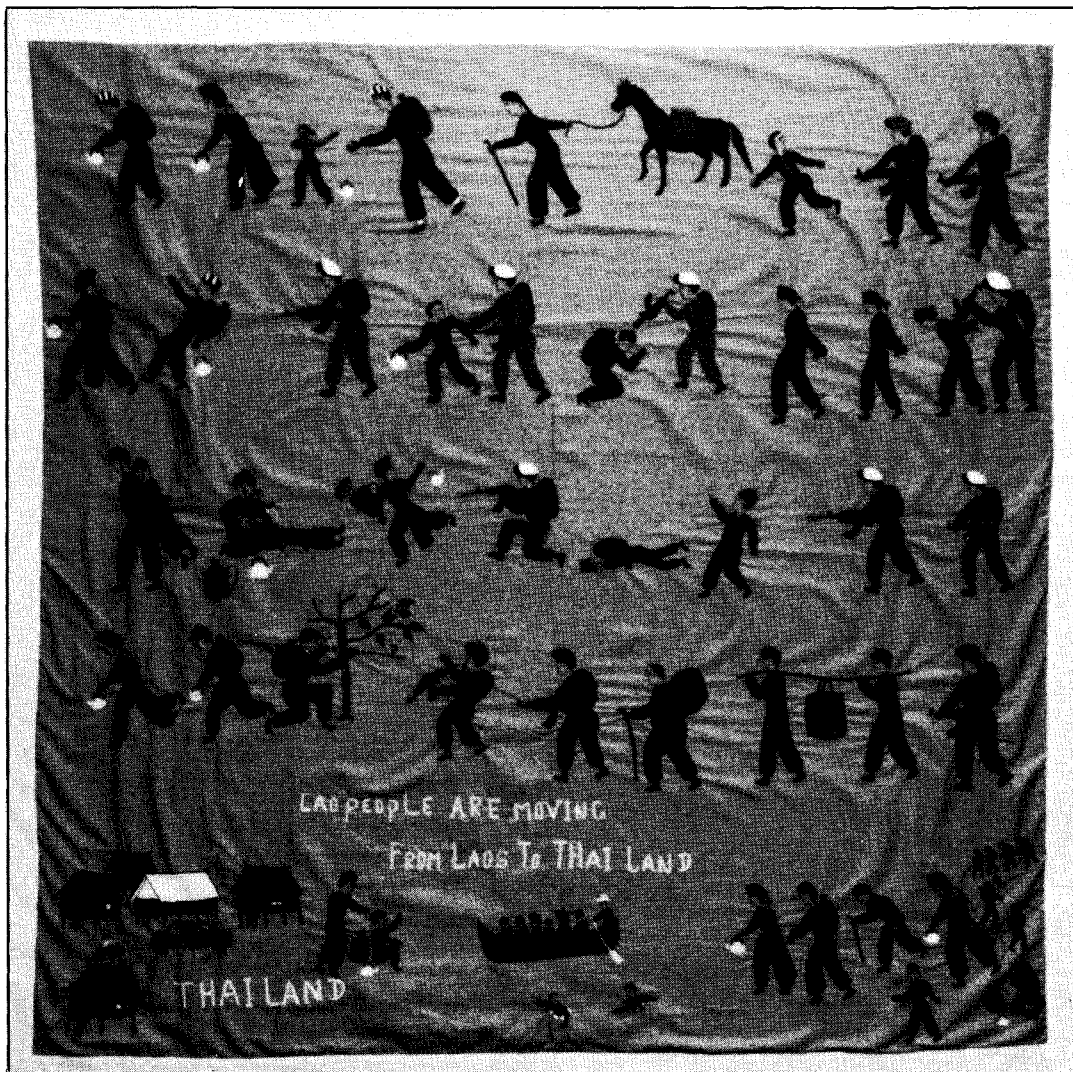
<sup>193</sup> *hmo xiab*

<sup>194</sup> If you have grandparents or parents who are very old, and that others will visit to exchange blessings, then the children or grandchildren must kneel before them before anyone else is allowed to come.

<sup>195</sup> *ntxuag* : plate of food to accompany rice or a meal, like pieces of cooked meat.

older than all the others, until your hair is white on your heads.” The words and good wishes have fallen into the two cups of whiskey, and the elders drink. Then the visitors ask the two elders to give blessings to them. They kneel down to receive the blessings, and the elders take the bottle of whiskey and pour a cup full for each visitor. They give their blessings to the young men, and the words fall into the cups and onto the plate of food on the table between them. The visitors drink the whiskey and eat a piece of meat to receive the blessings.

This tradition is a very important one for Hmong who have elders who know clearly the ways of Hmong life.





## HMOOB LUB NEEJ

### LUB I HLIS NTUJ

Mus saib teb. Saib tej plag hav zoov loj ua kauj-hmab ntseeg nab, av ua av-quav-cab rawv, los puas hav txiv-yeem laus uas kwv lam tias yuav ua tau noj. Ces mus muab ua mov phua hom rau qab-teb, qaum-teb, ntug-teb, huv si. Kom tias txawm yog leej-twg tuaj pom los paub tias muaj neeg twb xub hom lawm. Thaum mus saib tau teb thiab hom tiav tas. Ces pib mus txiav taws (ntoo qhuav, ntoo tawv, ntoo liab) coj los hlawv ua thee, kom tau cov thee li ntawm 4-5 kawg (hnab) los ntaus taus, ntaus txuas, ntaus hlau, ntaus riam, thiab tej cuab-yeeg toom-txeem ua teb kom txhij-txhua npaj yuav mus luaj teb, ntov ntoo.



## HMONG DAILY LIFE

What follows is a description of the major tasks during the different months of the year for a family family mountain fields. Of course the work would differ, depending on factors such as how much land one has, the timing of the rains, personal choices of the family, how many members in the family, etc.....

### MONTH #1 (DECEMBER)

The New Year is over, and it is time to look for new fields. We look in the thick jungles, looking especially for areas that are overgrown with vines, or we look on hill-sides that have not been planted for six or seven years and that are covered with scrub growth—young trees and weeds (*hav txiv yeem laus*). We look at the soil to see if it will be suitable for growing the crops that we want to plant; finding lots of earthworm droppings in the surface of the soil is a good sign (*av ua quav cab*).

When we find a place that we like, we claim it as ours by cutting a notch in a tree and placing a crosswise piece of wood in the notch (*ua phua hom*). We make signs like this every 20 to 30 yards on the uphill boundary, the side boundaries, and the downhill boundary. That way, if someone comes and sees the signs they will know that this piece is already claimed by someone else.

After all the fields are located and marked in this way, we begin to cut wood—a kind of hard red wood (*ntoo liab*)—to burn into charcoal. After we get two or three baskets or sacks of charcoal, we carry it home and begin to forge our tools. We will need an ax (*taus*), a brush knife (*txuas*), a hoe (*hlau*), a knife (*riam*), and many other tools to use doing our farm work.

When everything is prepared, we will go to the fields to slash or cut down (*luaj*) the growth on the land.

## LUB 2 HLIS NTUJ

Pib mus luaj teb, yog tias cov teb nyob deb mas kuj mus pw luaj. Luaj tas ces ntov, ntov cov ntoo loj ntoo me huv si, tsis tseg ib tug hlo li. Thaum luaj thiab ntov tag lawm mas thiaj tau los tsev. Cov teb uas luaj mas yog. Teb-npleg, nws muaj 2-3 yam nplej thiab xws li: nplej-nplaum/nplej-caug; nplej-txua/nplej-tag; nplej-ntshav/ nplej-nplaum xyawj nrog qhos tsob zej, hnav, soov, pias.

Teb pob-kws, nws muaj 2-3 yam pob-kws thiab xws li: pob-kws-nplaum/pob-kws-cauj; pob-kws-txua/pob-kws-taj; pob-kws-ntshav/pob-kws-nplaum los puas pob-kws-txaij/pob-kws-nplaum.

Teb-qos, nws muaj ntau ntau yam qos xws li: qos-ntoo; qos-nplooj; qos-liab; qos-taw-dais; qos-nplooj-ntse; qos-kub-nyuj; qos-xuav-pog, qos-lauj-kaub; qos-zeg tsis tas no tseem muaj teb-taub thiab teb-dib tej zaum kuj nyob ua ke, qee zaus kuj nyob sib ntsug.



## MONTH #2 (JANUARY)

During this month, we slash the fields; if the fields are more than a two-hour walk away, then we will probably sleep at the field until the work is done. When the smaller growth is completely slashed down, and we chop down the trees (*ntov ntoo*)—the big trees, small trees, young ones—then we return home.

We want to have these kinds of fields: rice fields which will have two or three kinds of rice (early or sticky rice, late or long-grained rice, and purple or 'blood' rice); corn fields which will have two or three kinds of corn (early or sweet corn, late corn, purple or 'blood' corn, and Indian corn; tuber fields which might have tapioca (*qos ntoo*), leaf-tuber (*qos-nplooj*), yam (*qos liab*), bear-foot tuber (*qos taw dais*), sharp-leaf tuber (*qos nplooj ntse*), fragrant tuber, taro (*qos tsw ha*), corn-horn tuber (*qos kub nyuj*), thorn tuber (*qos xuas paug*), egg tuber (*qos qe*), nest tuber (*qos zeg*), or clay pot tuber (*qos lauj-kaub*); squash fields which have different kinds of pumpkins and squash; melon fields which have different kinds of cucumbers and melons. In the old days, some families also had opium poppy fields; the opium was sold to traders, providing a way to buy the things that could not be grown or made—metal, needles, cloth, thread, pots, salt—and provided a means for paying the taxes that the government collected. Sometimes these fields are together and sometimes they are separate.

### **LUB 3 HLIS NTUJ**

Thaum no mas sawv-daws li tej teb mas luaj tag, ntov tag huv si ces cia rau tshav-ntuj ziab. Ziab tshav nyog li ntawm ib lub hlis ntau kom tej nplooj ntoo qhuav nkig nkuav thiab tej ceg ntoo me/loj los kuj qhuav. Lub caij no mas sov/kub heev thiab muaj cua kawg.

### **LUB 4 HLIS NTUJ**

Xam hnuv nyog saib hnuv twg zoo ces teem caij mus hlawv teb. Kww-yees tias hnuv ntawd yuav muaj cua zoo thiab tshav-tshav-ntuj zoo ces sawv-daws thooj-txhij hlawv. Yog tias hlawv tau rau liab-hnuv no mas kub ceev tiam-sis tsis zoo.

Yog tias hlawv tau rau zaj-hnuv no mas cov av noo-noo heev ces yuav kub tsis zoo hlo li.

Yog tias hlawv tau rau nyuj-hnuv no mas cov cua los tuaj muaj zog, hnuv ntawd mas thiaj yog hnuv zoo. Nyias hlawv nyias daim teb tuaj ces toj-roob hauv-peg kub hnyiab tas phab, tas phev luaj zus ib tog tuaj mus li.

Nyob teb-chaws nplog, lub caij hlawv teb no mas faj suab sawv laum ntuj heev. Vim tias nyob toj siab Hmoob thiab lwm haiv-neeg ua teb noj xwb. Tab-sis txog rau caij ntuj nag nqes ces tej faj suab ntawd yaj xam tag thiab.



## MONTH #3 (FEBRUARY)

Once the slashing and the cutting is done, we let the fallen growth sit in the sun until everything is dry. The drying takes at least a month, until the leaves are crackly and the small branches snap easily. One by one the fields are begun and finished; all has to be completed by the end of the third month. This time of year is very hot and very windy.

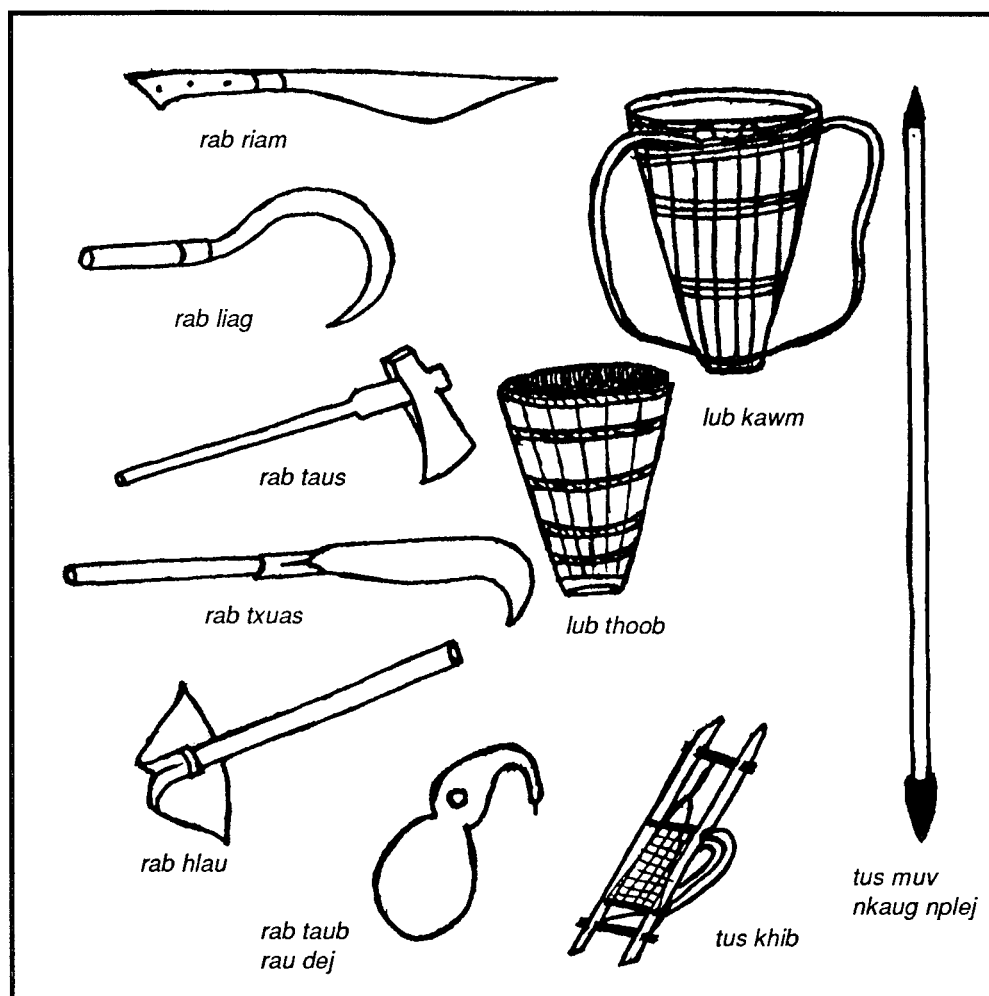
## MONTH #4 (MARCH)

During this month we watch for a day that will be a good one for burning. We Hmong count our days by using a cycle of animal days—monkey day, dragon day, rooster day, etc. Different days will bring different results in burning. If we burn on a monkey day, the fields burn very fast, but not completely. If we burn on a dragon day, then the air will be too humid and not good for burning. We could then ‘see a tiger’—patches of unburned growth, that from a distance, looks like the markings of a tiger. A good day would be a cow day; the fire burns strongly and the growth is completely burned. We hope for a day that has a good wind and is hot enough. We all burn at the same time, for instance, at noon on a set day. The mountain tops and high valleys are all on fire, covered in red like being covered with a red cloth, from one side to another.

In Laos, the time to burn means that the air is thick with smoke (*faj suab*) all over the highlands where the Hmong and other ethnic groups depend on slash-and-burn methods for farming. But it is not very long until the rains come, and the smoke disappears completely.

## LUB 5 HLIS NTUJ

Teb kub tag nrho li 4-5 hnuv, pib mus ua tsev-teb rau tom teb. Ua tau tsev-teb tiav ces yog tias teb kub tsis zoo, mus pib txhem-teb (txiav tej ceg khaub uas kub tsis tag ntawd coj los ua tej pawg ces hlawv) tag ces pib cog pob-kws rau daim teb pob-kws; mam cog lwm yam qoob rau lwm daim teb uas npaj tau rau yam qoob ntawd. Muaj qee-yam noob yuav tau muab tsau kom tuaj kaus mam coj mus cog. Qee-yam yuav tau muab tov tshauv mam coj mus cog kab-ntsaum thiaj li tsis noj, thiaj tuaj zoo.



## MONTH #5 (APRIL)

The work of the 5th and 6th months vary quite a bit, one job overlapping with another, jobs pushed forward or backward, depending on the season's first rains....

After the burning of the fields is completed, we wait for four or five days, and then begin to build the field shed (*tsev teb*). There will be field sheds in each field (*tsev teb pob-kws*, *tsev teb nplej...*). When the sheds are done, we check the fields. If the fields are not completely burned, we go there and begin to clear away all the wood that is left (*txhem teb*). We cut the unburned branches and pile them up, then set fire to the piles and let them burn. When the burning is completely done, we use the hoe to plant the corn in the corn field. The corn is usually planted before the other crops in the other fields—the tuber field, the squash field, the melon field....

Some seeds have to be soaked in water or placed in a damp place for a few days to sprout before planting. Some seeds are mixed with ash to prevent the insects from devouring the sprouting seeds and young plants.





## LUB 6 HLIS NTUJ

Mus ncaws nroj teb-npleg es yuav cog nplej. Yog daim teb kub tsis zoo mas yuav tau txhem tag mam cog nplej rau (Hmoob cog nplej mas siv hmuov-ntoo hliav kom zuag plias thiab teev keem hlau nkaug mas thiaj tau lub qhov av yeej thiab tob li 2 yag ntiv-tes es mam rau nplej rau hauv lub qhov<sup>1</sup>). Npoog av plooj me-ntsis rau. Sawv-daws cog los mus suaj kaum kom tiav tag rau lub hlis no. Yog leej-twg cog lig dhau lub rau hli no lawm cov nplej yuav tsis zoo heev.

Pias thiab soov yuav muab tseb xyawj nplej los kuj tau. Hos cia tseb rau ib thaj los nws haj yam tuaj zoo xwb. Pias thiab soov mas qees ceg Hmoob tias yog plig-qoob plig-loo zov teb. Tsis tas li ntawd nws kuj siv tau lwm yam hauj-lwm.



<sup>1</sup> tej-zaum cov txiv-neej nkaug poj-niam rau tej-zaum poj-niam ho nkaug txiv-neej ho rau.

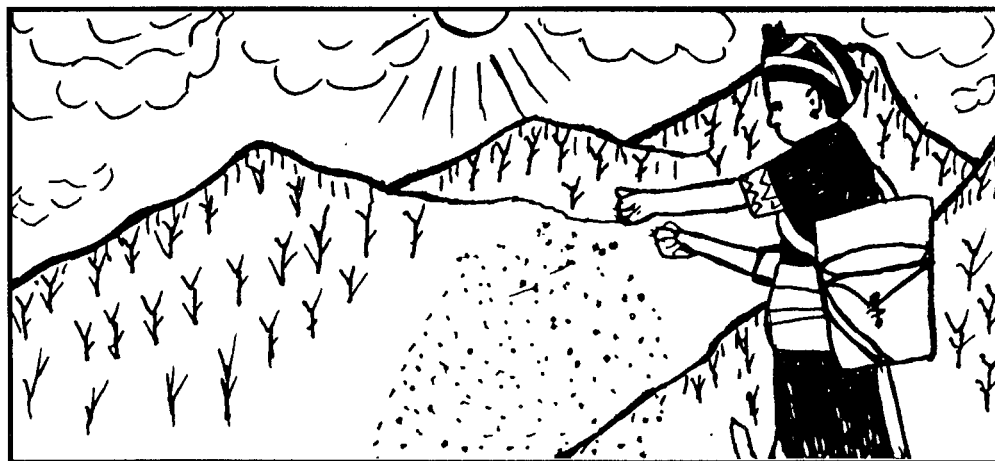
## MONTH #6 (MAY)

By the end of the sixth month we have already begun to hoe the weeds out of the rice field before planting, and we have probably already built the rice field shed, and cleared the branches left by the first burning.

To plant rice, Hmong use a dibble stick (*hmuv*), a long wooden pole, sharpened to a point on one end or both ends. The dibble stick makes holes in the ground, round and about two-finger-joints deep. The man may make the holes with the *hmuv*, and the lady follows, dropping rice grains in each hole, or perhaps they switch places, the lady making the holes and the man dropping the rice grains. About five or ten grains are placed into each hole, and covered with a little light dirt (one uses his foot to push dirt over the rice).

Everyone tries to finish planting the rice fields by the end of the sixth month. The steady rains usually begin about then. If planted very late, some crops will not be good. The corn kernels will be sparse and uneven on the cob, and the rice heads will not be filled in solidly.

Millet and another kind of grain (*soov*) are broadcast over the planted rice field, or planted in a separate field. Millet and *soov* are not eaten very often, but some Hmong consider that they are helpful spirits in the field, growing with the rice plants, and keeping the weeds out. These grains are used in many different ways, for example, the dried stalks are used for burning.



## LUB 7 HLI NTUJ

Nroj pob-kws thiab tej yam qoob uas xub-xub cog lawd twb pib zoo nthua lawm thiab. Yog tias tseem tsis tau zoo nthua no mas yog daim teb ntawd kub zoo es tsis muaj nroj. Cov poj-niam xyeej siab ces lawv los mus ua hnav thiab ua tej hauj-lwm uas tseem tsis tau tiav. Cov txiv-neej ces lawv nyiam mus plob hav zoov, qee tus nws nyiam mus ua luam thiab hauj-lwm lwm yam xws li npaj hiab kawm, hiab vab, hiab vab tshaus, sab cib, hiab phawv tseg yuav coj mus sau qoob rau.



## MONTH #7 (JUNE)

By the seventh month, the weeds have already grown well in the first-planted fields. We use the hoe to scrape away the weeds (*nthua nroj*). If the fields were burned really well, there are not many weeds, and the women have little field work to do. They probably use this time to sew or to do other jobs that were not finished. The men like to go to hunt in the jungles, and some men like to conduct business (trading) and to do other kinds of jobs. Some weave baskets: the back carrier basket (*lub kawm*), the flat baskets or trays (*lub vab*), baskets to sift or sieve (*lub tshaus*), rice baskets (*lub phawv*), and baskets to strain liquids away from solids (*lub sab cib*).

This month is usually very rainy.



## LUB 8 HLI NTUJ

Nplej ho pib yuav zoo nthua tuaj lawm thiab lauj....tsis hais nplej dab-tsi li yeej zoo mos nywb-nyoos nroj tsuag sib tw hlob tuaj mus, tiam-sis yog daim teb-twg fab tshaj ces yuav xub-xub mus nthua daim ntawd ua ntej tso. Thaum tib lub sij-hawm no pob-kws nplaum pib siav qee-qhov kuj pib zoo hau noj (Hmoob hais tias noj pob-kws tshiab). Thiab pib mus luaj nroj pob-kws tsis hais pob-kws nplaum los puas txua, kom tej pob-kws kaj taws nrig es lub pob thiaj puv zoo thiab ntom kab.

Nplej-nplaum/nplej-caug, pob-kws-nplaum/pob-kws-cauj ob yam no mas yeej xub-xub siav tshaj. Peb Hmoob yeej ib txwm noj mov nplej-tshiab thiab pob-kws-tshiab. Txhua-txhia yam twg uas thaum siav es yuav coj los noj tshiab ntawd mas yuav tau coj los laig dab. Dab-vaj dab-tsev dab niam, dab txiv, pog yawg, tswv koob ua ntej tso mam li noj vim dab pab thiaj tau noj tau haus.



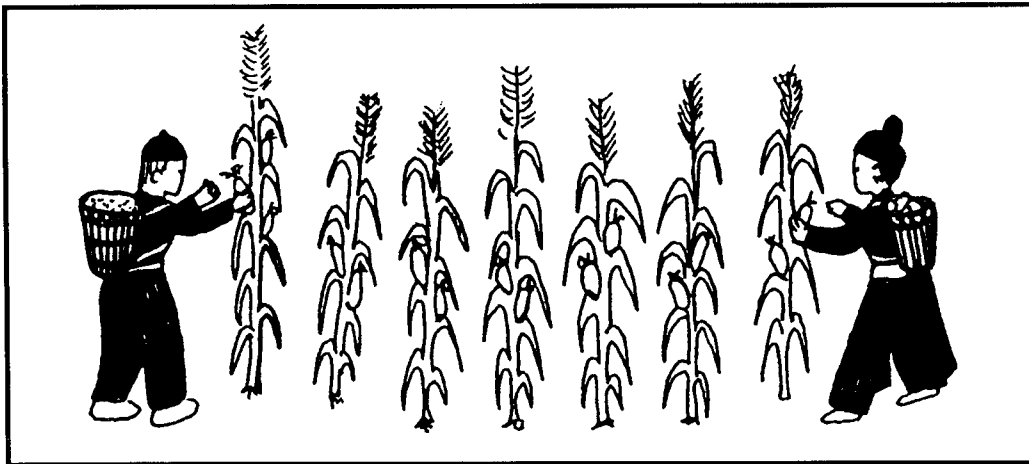
## MONTH #8 (JULY)

The rice fields are beginning to be green—with weeds. It is time to hoe the weeds out of from the rice (*nthua nroj teb npleg*). The first fields to be hoed are those with the most weeds, probably those that were planted first.

During this month, the early or sweet corn is ready to eat; we boil it and eat it. The first corn is special and this is called 'eating the new corn'<sup>2</sup>.

We begin to slash the weeds from the rest of the corn fields, so that it is clear from the ground to the leaves of the cornstalks.

Each crop has its own needs as far as care. Taking proper care, at the proper time, will result in good produce later. Spirits of the house, field, and ancestors are "bargained" with, and if the crops are good, a reward will be paid.



<sup>2</sup> Early or sticky rice and early or sweet corn are two kinds of crops that ripen first. Hmong especially observe the 'new corn' (*pob-kws tshiab*) and the 'new rice' (*nplej tshiab*). During the New Year celebration several months ago, we asked the house spirits for protection and good fortune. Before we eat the year's first produce, we need to 'give back' some of the crop to the house spirits....then we are ready to eat some ourselves.

## LUB 9 HLIS NTUJ

Thaum no ces nplej yuav pib ua plab nab (yog lub caij yuav mus lam nplej kom tej nplej kaj taws nplej thiaj ua hnab zoo). Pob-kws siav pib daj-lauj. Qee-daim teb nplej-caug uas yog cog ntxov pib siav zoo hlais los ua noj (Hmoob hais tias caij noj mov nplej tshiab). Yuav tau mus zov kom nas, noog tsis txhob los noj es thiaj li ntsu qoob. Muaj qee-xyoo tseem tau mus zov tej tsiaj loj xws li liab, npua-teb, kauv, muas-lwj. Yog tias xyoo twg muaj kab txo tej qoob-loo heev mas yuav tau fiv yeem pov<sup>3</sup> xws li ib tug qaib los-sis ib tug npua es thiaj tau qoob sau, thaum tag xyoo (sau qoob tag) lawm yuav tau pauj.



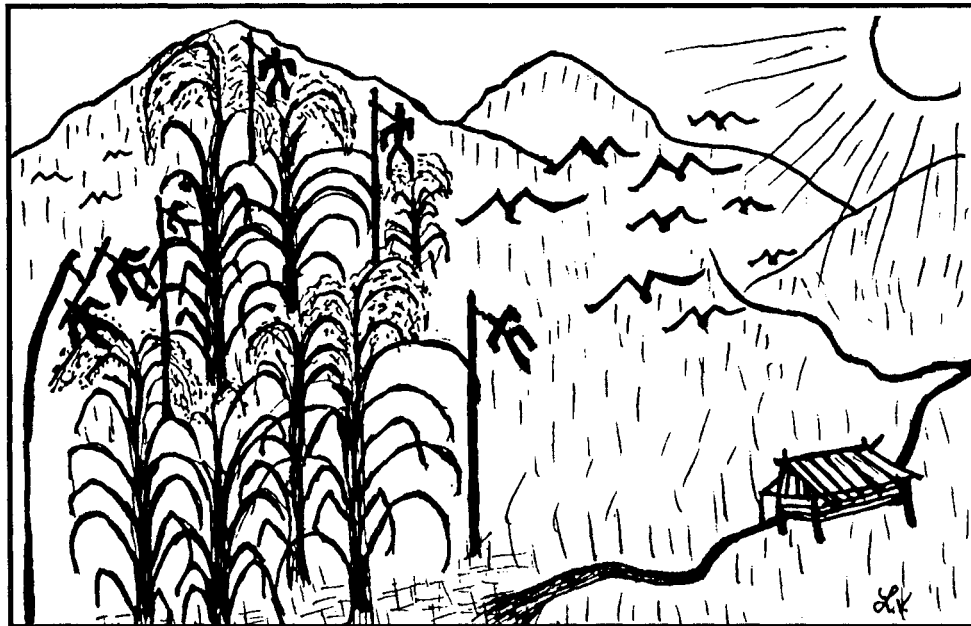
<sup>3</sup>Fiv rau ntawm ib lub pob zeb los yog ib tsob ntoos. Thaum pauj los yuav tau mus ua ib lub me-nyuam sam thiaj me-me; muab tus tsiaj coj mus tua. Hau siav-saiv li coj mus ntuas hais ua nws tsaug thiab ua dab xeeb-teb xeeb-chaws tsaug.

## MONTH #9 (AUGUST)

The rice is beginning to ripen—to 'make a snake's stomach'—the heads of the rice are filling out. During this month we may need to clear more weeds out of the rice fields. The rice which is yellow and almost ripe may attract flocks of hungry birds. Pieces of cloth on sticks wave in the wind, or bells rigged up with strings to pull are types of 'scarecrows' that we might use. If the animals are particularly bad, we have to *fiv dab teb*<sup>4</sup>—ask the spirits to help with the problem, and later we will make good on our promise by repaying the spirits with a sacrifice of a chicken or a pig.

The rice planted early will probably be ready to eat this month; we will observe the eating of the new rice.

The rainy season is almost over.



<sup>4</sup> The bargaining with the spirits is usually done at a big rock or a big tree. When making payment to the spirits, a small altar is constructed near the rock or tree, and an animal is taken there for sacrifice to the spirits. The spirits of the field are thanked for producing good crops, and the sacrificed chicken or pig becomes a meal for the family.



## LUB 10 HLIS NTUJ

Pob-kws-nplaum, pob-kws-txua pib daj-lauj yuav qhuav. Nplej-tag, nplej-caug siav daj thoob teb puv rau txhua txhia daim teb. Tshav-ntuj tuaj kaj qas nrig. Nag kuj tsis muaj pes-tsawg lawm. Cov teb uas yog cog ntxov mas twb pib hlais lawm.

Txij li uas kuv loj hlob los mus kuv tsis pom kuv niam kuv txiv ua teb yeeb li. Yog li ntawd kuv thiaj tsis tshuam paub hais txog kev ua yaj-yeeb! Tab-sis raws li cov paub piav me-ntsis mas lub hlis no yog lub hlis uas pib mus faus teb yeeb! Ces lub sij-hawm sau yeeb yog lub ib hlis ntuj mus txog lub ob hlis ntuj Hmoob.



## **MONTH #10 (SEPTEMBER)**

The corn, early and late, is yellow, dry, and ready to harvest. The late and early rice is all ripe, and the fields are yellow everywhere. The weather is sunny and dry, and there is not much rain. The first-planted rice fields have already been harvested.

This is the time to clear the corn-fields and plant opium, which will be harvested in January.



## LUB 11 HLIS NTUJ

Mus hlais nplej thiab ntais pob-kws los rau hauv txhab (ua txhab cia rau pob-kws thiab txhab rau nplej) txhab-pob-kws, txhab-nplej. Nplej li mas thaum hlais ua tej twb-tes cia rau tshav ziab li 3-4 hnuv ces muab sau coj mus tib/pawv ua phawg cia, ntshai nyob tsam ntuj ho los nag ntub rau lawm. Ntais pob-kws rau hauv txhab tas ces los mus pib ntaus nplej, ua txaj ntaus nplej los-puas muab lev los yog nplooj tsawb (ntses) los puas ntaus nplej, ib ke ntaus thiab ua choj cia yaj nplej los-puas tsoov-nplej.

Qhov uas tsoov-nplej, ntxuaj nplej yaj-nplej ntawd mas yog ua kom cov npluag ya tawm pov-tseg yauv tib co uas tseem tseem nplej es puv-puv xwb. Tib-lub sij-hawm no kuj pib ev nplej pob-kws los mus cia rau tom tsev. Cov muaj nees ces siv nees thauj yog tsis muaj ces xuas yus lub nruab-qaum ev xwb thiab kuj muaj kam sib pauv zog sawv-daws ev ib tag-kis rau ib tug ho ev ib tag-kis rau lwm tus li no mus thiaj tag sai.



## MONTH #11 (OCTOBER)

This month we harvest the rice (*hlais nplej*) and pick the corn (*ntais pob-kws*) and store it in the storehouses. There is usually a field storehouse for each, as well as a permanent storehouse at home for each (*txhab nplej*, *txhab pob-kws*).

The rice is cut in bunches and is laid out to dry for three or four days. Then it is collected and piled into great piles, since we are afraid it might rain again, and we can easily cover the piles with banana leaves.

After all the corn has been picked and put into the storehouses, then we begin to beat the rice (*ntaus nplej*). For this we make a bed for the threshing (*ua txaj ntaus nplej*): we find an area of flat ground and cover it with huge woven split-bamboo mats. Some of us beat the rice with sticks, while others begin the first winnowing.

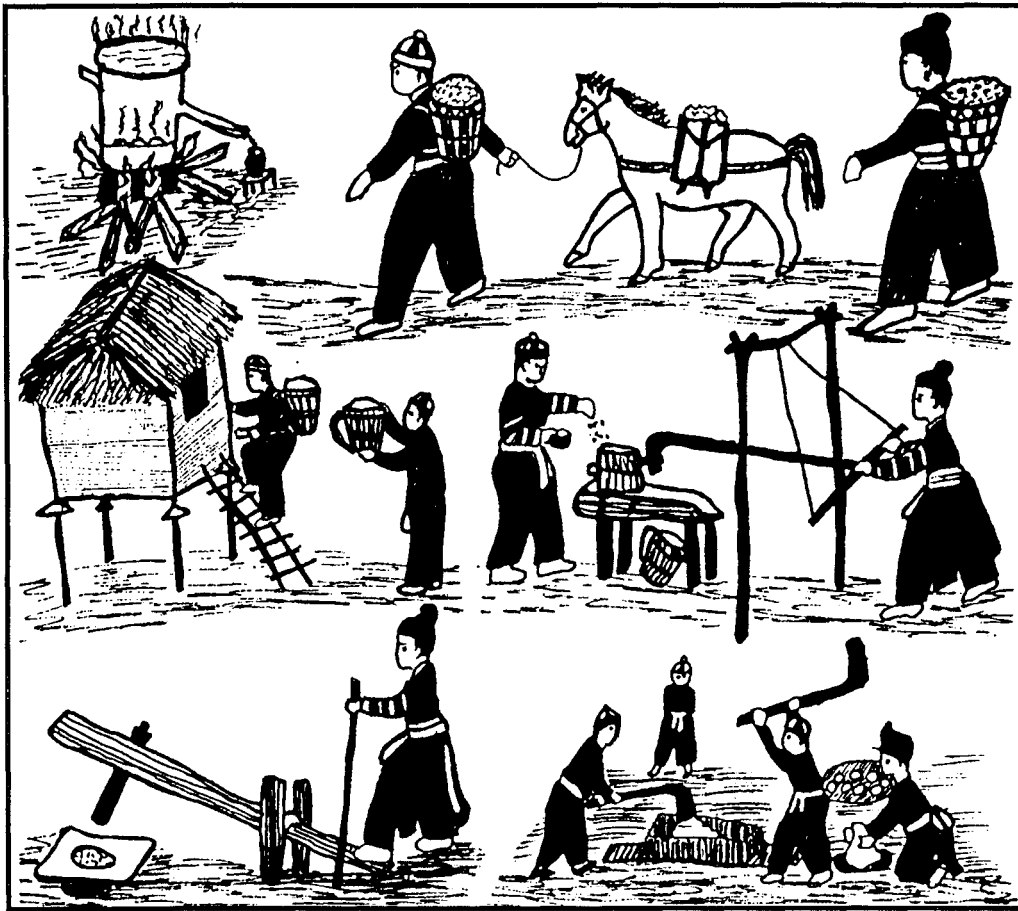
There are three ways to winnow rice. The best way, if there is a breeze, is *tuam choj yaj nplej*, or make a bridge to wind-winnow the rice. We build a ramp, and someone takes a basket full of rice up to the top of the ramp. That person slowly pours the beaten rice out onto the mat below, and the wind carries away the chaff and bits of stem. The second way is to *tsoov nplej*, and it is done by bouncing beaten rice up and down in a large flat basket (*lub vab*). The chaff bounces away. The third way involves creating a little wind with a fan; this is called *ntxuav nplej*. One person waves a huge flat basket like a fan, while another *tsoov nplej*, bounces the rice in a basket. The breeze speeds up the winnowing.

No matter which method is used, the winnowing causes the empty rice hulls and bits of stem to fly away, leaving only the rice grains that are full and solid.

At the same time, we have to begin carrying home all the harvested crops. Those who have horses use them to carry the heavy baskets. Those without horses have to use their own backs. There is also a way to exchange labor: everyone carries Mr. A's crops home one day, and then Mr. B's the next, until everyone's crops are safely stored at home.

## LUB 12 HLIS NTUJ

Lub caij no yog lub caij uas npaj yuav txog peb Hmoob lub tsiab-peb-caug tiag, tej paj-hmab, paj-ntoos tawg ua liab-daj-dawb pes vog rau txhua-txhia lub roob, yuav tau los mus txiav taws cia, tuav txhuv cia, zom-zeb zom npua-qhauv (zom pob-kws cia tau hau npua-qhauv) xaws tsoos tsho rau tej me-nyuam cia tau hnav thaum tsiab-peb-caug uas yog 7 hnuv. Sawv-daws mas npaj heev kawg nkaus rau tsiab-peb-caug, tag nrho zej-zog sib pauv zog qas ntws ua tej dej-num uas tseem tsis tau tiav kom tiav tsawg tsuag thiaj li yuav tau mus ua-si thaum lub caij dhia-qaib.



## MONTH #12 (NOVEMBER)

This is the time to prepare for the Hmong New Year (*Hmoob lub tsiab peb caug*), and the flowers are blooming all over, red, white, yellow, everywhere on the mountains.

We do our chores in advance so that everyone can rest during the seven to ten day celebration. We cut firewood to set aside, pound plenty of rice to save, grind corn for the pig food, finish sewing clothes for the children to keep to wear for the New Year. Everyone prepares everything that will be needed, and everyone has new clothes to wear. Everyone in the village exchanges labor so that all the field work and chores are completed before the 30th day of the 12th month. On that day, everyone will begin to play, relax, and enjoy themselves.



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*BEST PLACE TO LIVE.* Ralph Rugoff and Peter O'Neill, Best Place Video, 1982, 55 minutes, color, video. Interlock Media Associates, 221 Massachusetts Avenue, PO Box 603, Boston, MA. A look at life in the United States for Hmong refugees, and the conflicts encountered in adjusting.

*BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: THE HMONG SHAMAN IN AMERICA.* Taggart Siegel and Kati Johnston, Siegel Productions, 1985, color, video, 28 minutes. PO Box 6123, Evanston, IL 60202. Documentary video about the ancient traditions and rituals which the Hmong have brought with them to America. Shows beliefs and practices of people caught between two worlds: rural Laos and downtown Chicago.

*BITTERSWEET SURVIVAL.* Third World Newsreel. 16 mm or 3/4" video. 335 West 38th Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10018, (212)947-9277.

*CHILDREN OF CHANGE.* University of Washington, 1983, color, video, 26 minutes/52 minutes.

*THE COMMON THREAD.* 28 minutes, color, video, 1981, Toledo Public Television, WGTE-TV.

*THE CUTTING EDGE.* Video, color, 29 minutes. Southeast Asian adolescents during the acculturation process: Hmong shaman's son, Lao classical musician, and a Vietnamese Buddhist monk.

*END OF THE ROAD.* U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, 1979, 20 minutes. Video available from UNHCR Headquarters, Public Information Service. Hmong in refugee camps, especially Ban Vinai.

*FAREWELL TO FREEDOM: THE MOORE REPORT.* WCCO-TV, 1981, 60 minutes, color, video. Opens with scenery much like Laos, with Hmong playing the qeej; contains original CIA footage from Laos. Contrasts Hmong family in the U.S. with family still in the camp.

*GREAT BRANCHES, NEW ROOTS: THE HMONG FAMILY.* Rita LeDoux, Kathleen Laughlin, Nancy Haley, 1983, 42 minutes, color, 16 mm and video. Opens with an animation of the "Flood" folktale; explains and documents the Hmong concept of "family", and how the family is faring in the U.S.

*GUNS, DRUGS, AND THE CIA* ("Frontline with Judy Woodruff", PBS). 60 minutes. Traces the involvement of the CIA with drug movement in Laos and later in Central America.

*HMONG NEW YEAR.* Dick Terry, Lao Family Community, Sacramento, and Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, 1985. Color, VHS, 25 minutes. Order from Lue Vang, PO Box 423, Rancho Cordova, CA 95741. Contains footage of traditional home ceremonies during the New Year, scenes from Sacramento New Year, 1985.

*THE HMONG: HILL TRIBE PEOPLE OF LAOS.* 58 min. Insight Multi-Cultural Communication, Inc., 122 Princeton, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. VHS. Filmed at Ban Vinai in 1985; would have greater credibility if the Hmong terms were pronounced with the assistance of a Hmong tutor!

*THE HMONG: TRADITIONAL TEXTILES AND MUSIC OF THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE OF LAOS.*

Nancy Haley et al., 1981, 7 minutes, color, 16 mm.

*JOURNEY FROM PHA DONG.* CIA footage from 1967, filmed in Laos, shows the "secret army's" training and organization. VHS, color, 60 minutes. Available from University Film and Video, U of MN, 1313 Fifth St. SE Suite 109, Mnpls, MN 55414, phone (612) 627-4270.

*JOURNEY TO LAOS.* 45 minutes, VHS, filmed by Jacqui Chagnon and Roger Rumpf, American Friends Service Committee, Jan 86, (Asia Resource Center, PO Box 15275, Washington, DC, 20003, phone (202) 547-1114).

*MIAO YEAR.* CRM McGraw Hill Films, 1971, 61 minutes, color, 16 mm. Producer: William Geddes. This is the film from which footage is clipped for use in other films and videos. It's the only full-length film that shows village life as it would have been before the war (Thai Hmong village).

*NEWCOMERS TO AMERICA.* 18-program, video-based educational package, in 15 languages. Pacific Standard Television, 1610 SW Jefferson, Portland, OR 97201, 503-224-9821.

*NO MORE MOUNTAINS.* WBGH-TV Novacom, 1981, 60 minutes, color, video.

*NOVA: THE MYSTERY OF YELLOW RAIN.* 1985, 60 minutes, color, video. Evidence for and against yellow rain; presents issues involved in the controversy.

*OUR SECRET ARMY.* 60 Minutes, CBS News, 1980, 25 minutes, color, video.

*PAIN AND PROMISE & FITTING IN.* Two videos, booklet. Video, free loan. Wisconsin Dept of Public Instruction, Bilingual Ed., PO Box 7841, Madison WI 53707. (608)267-9234.

*PEACE HAS NOT YET BEEN MADE: A CASE HISTORY OF A HMONG FAMILY'S ENCOUNTER WITH A HOSPITAL.* John Finck and Doua Yang, 1983, 25 minutes, color, video.

Rental/purchase: Rhode Island Office of Refugee Resettlement, 600 New London Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920. A young Hmong boy requires emergency treatment for a cut wrist; the medical treatment and ensuing problems are examined from both points of view, the family's and the hospital's. Useful for any non-Hmong who hope to work cooperatively with parents of Hmong children via interpreters.

*SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE LAND, THE PEOPLE, AND THE CULTURES.* Video, from Southeast Asia Genetics Educ Program, KW Dumars, Dept of Pediatrics, Bldg 27, Univ of CA Irvine, 101 The City Drive South, Orange, CA 92668. Make check to UC Regents.)



## CENTERS OF STUDY & RESOURCE CENTERS

Center for Refugee Ethnography, Division of Graduate & Continuing Studies, Hamline University,  
1536 Hewitt Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104, (612) 641-2900.

Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 104 Lane Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor,  
MI 48106.

Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 260 Stephens Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA  
94720.

Council on Southeast Asia Studies, Yale Center for International & Area Studies, Box 13A Yale  
Station, New Haven, CT 06520.

The Cellar Bookshop, 18090 Wyoming, Detroit, MI 48221.

Dalley Book Service, 90 Kimball Lane, Christianburg, VA 24073. 703-382-8949. Specializes in  
Southeast Asia, particularly Laos; does reprints of out-of-print monographs, etc.

John M. Echols Collection on Southeast Asia, Olin Graduate Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY  
14853.

John Randall, 47 Moreton St., London, SW1V2NY, England. Fine and rare books of and from  
SEAsia, especially those authored, gathered during the French colonial period.

Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project (SARS), Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA),  
330 Hubert H. Humphrey Ctr, University of Minnesota, 301 19th Avenue S.E., Minneapolis,  
MN 55455.

Southeast Asia Community Resource Center, Folsom Cordova Unified SD, 2460 Cordova Lane,  
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670, (916) 635-6815.

Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 120 Uris Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853.

University Film and Video, University of Minnesota, 1313 Fifth Street, S.E., Suite 108,  
Minneapolis, MN 55455, 1-800-847-8251.



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PO Box 423  
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