

**The Meeting with Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy  
A Case Study of Syncretism in the Hmong System of Beliefs**

**By**

**Kao-Ly Yang, Ph.D.**

*Institut de Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-est, Marseille (France)*

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This study is dedicated to my mother, great soul and shaman  
who has taught me the respect and the love of my culture  
as a source of spiritual comfort and enriching knowledge



“Lady Kaying Flying Everywhere and Hearing any Child’s Pains”, 2006  
Courtesy of Kao-Ly Yang

**Abstract**

The purpose of this case study is to shed light on the identity of the spirit of fertility called Lady Kaying –Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb—, its religious origin and the general processes of borrowing her from other cultures within the Hmong culture. Hmong popular beliefs pertaining to Kaying reveal that Kaying is in fact the Chinese Goddess of Mercy Guanyin. She was imported from Mahayana Buddhism by the Hmong people of China who had retained her roles of the “Bestower of Children”, the “Guardian Angel” or the “Conductor of the Dead Children”. An analysis of the process of borrowing of the Chinese deity into the Hmong pantheon shows that Lady Kaying overlaps with an ancient spirit, the “Ancestor Spirit of Fertility” or Niam Poj Dab Pog. This case study demonstrates that the processes of borrowing are selective, integrative and comprehensive: some traits or fragments were taken from Buddhism and incorporated into the Hmong beliefs through a superimposing of a Hmong pre-existing system of beliefs.

## Cosmology, the Nature of the Spiritual Entities and Name Spellings<sup>1</sup>

The analyses of the shamanistic liturgy, the myths of creation, the funeral chants *txiv xaiv*, the wedding chants, *zaj tshoob*<sup>2</sup>, and the folktales (*dab neeg*) show that Hmong cosmology is composed of three worlds connected by the central pillar of the house, or axis mundi in the Hmong culture. The shaman would be the only live being capable of traveling back and forth, crossing a symbolic bridge, in a state of temporary disembodiment (Moréchand, 1968: 177-200; Lemoine, 1972, Mottin, 1980):

1. The World of the Above is situated in the sky where reside the supernatural beings such as Shao (*Saub*) “The One Who Knows Everything”, Chee Yee (*Siv Yis*), the first shaman, the couple Gaodjoua<sup>3</sup> (*Nkauj Ntsuab*) and SheeNah (*Sis Nab*), celestial beings such as Lady Kaying (*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*), and God (*Ntuj*) the creator. The celestial world is the reflection of the human world with the same types of places, people, needs, etc.
2. The World of the Middle, e.g. the Earth, is where human beings (*neeg*), and good and bad spirits or genii (*dab*) and ghosts (*dab*<sup>4</sup>) co-live. Among the good/domesticated genii (*dab nyeg*), there are the shamanistic genii, domestic genii or tutelary spirit protectors of the house. Outside the house, there are supernatural genii who are not always bad in intent (*dab qus*), guardians and inhabitants of the surroundings such as the spirits of the river (*dab dej*), of the forest (*dab hav zoov*) and of the mountain and valley (*dab roob dab hav*).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been presented under the title of “The Meeting with the Compassionate Bodhisattva Guanyin: An example of Syncretism in the Hmong Culture” at the 26th Annual Central California Research Symposium at California State University of Fresno, April 21, 2005. It has been taught and discussed during the author’s course on Hmong culture, ASAMER10, at Fresno City College, Summer and Fall 2005. This work is generously accredited to the “Institut de Recherche sur l’Asie du Sud-Est” in France that has been supporting the author’s research in the United States as one of their corresponding members and to all people who have been instrumental in many kind ways in the achievement of this study, especially Father Yves Bertrais for his generous gift of all Father Jean Mottin’s books and many other rare documents that have been an undeniable source for this study.

<sup>2</sup> Lemoine J., 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Lemoine J. 1987: Gaodjoua and SheeNah are known respectively as Nuwa and Fuxi in the Chinese myth.

<sup>4</sup> The ghosts live in the World of the Middle where they could appear with a human body and have supernatural power.

3. The World of the Bottom, appears as an underground (*hauv av*) realm of dwarfs or a sea (*Hiav [txwv]*) kingdom of the dragons. (Moréchand, 1968: 185-186; Yim Bim, 1981: chapter 5: 289-377)

In the Hmong way of life, there are constant interactions with and/or intervention from supernatural beings, ancestor spirits, vital forces or souls in human beings' lives. The principle of a duality found in Taoism is also known by the Hmong people who called "Yang" (*Yaj*) the world of the human beings and "Yin" (*Yeeb*), the world of the spirits.



**Picture #1: The Central Pillar, Axis Mundi.**

The pillar next to the little boy --standing up in the picture-- is the central pillar of the house, axis mundi between the three worlds in the Hmong cosmology: the World of the Above, the World of the Middle and the World of the Bottom. This picture was taken during a rite of Souls Calling in Laos in 1996. It was late afternoon when this rite took place in the kitchen, at the main door. All children seemed to be paying vivid attention to the domestic rite, showing the extraordinary feature of such a rite in children's life in the rural areas. The natural lighting in the traditional houses gave a profound and quiet atmosphere to the event, enhancing and enchanting the feeling of long waiting.

For this present study, in order not to confuse the readers with the different names and natures of the spiritual entities, let us first clearly specify the choices of designation and spelling. For practical reasons, the Hmong spirit is spelled as "Kaying" (*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*<sup>5</sup>) and the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, "Guanyin"<sup>6</sup>. In Hmong popular language, Kaying is also named "*Dab Pog*"<sup>7</sup>, literally translated

<sup>5</sup> The spelling of Hmong words use the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) based on the Latin alphabet invented in the 1950's in Laos. Hmong language is monosyllabic; the spelling of words is composed of a consonant, a vowel and a tone placed at the end. There are seven tones and a variable: b, m, j, v, (-), s, g, d (variable).

<sup>6</sup> For the Goddess of Mercy, there are mainly three orthographical ways to spell her name in the Latin alphabet: "Guanyin", "Kuan-Yin" or Kwan-yin. In recent academic works, the use of "Kuan-Yin" became more common (Chun-Fang Yü, 2001), but to avoid confusion between the two entities, the author retained "Guanyin" with the letter "G" instead of "K".

<sup>7</sup> Yang, K-L, 1999, see chapter 6, pages 225-226: In practice, she is designated by several vernacular expressions: "*Ob Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*" (Couple Kaying), "*Niam Kab Yeeb*" (Lady Kaying) or "*Nkawm Kab Yeeb*" (Pair Kaying) and "*Ob niam txiv Poj Dag Pog*" ("Couple *Dag Pog*") or "*Nkawm Poj Dab Pog*" (Pair *Dab Pog*). ["Dans l'usage, elle est désignée par

as “Grand-mother Spirit” (*dab*: spirit; *Pog*: grand-mother”), otherwise “Female Ancestor Spirit” or “Ancestor Spirit of Fertility” because this entity implies the fertility at stake. The idea of “Ancestor Spirit” to “Mother Spirit” is more appropriate because the idea of “ancestor” reflects the way Hmong people perceive the origins of children better, who come from the reincarnation of a stock of ancestors’ souls inside the ethnic group<sup>8</sup>.

For now, the following designations are considered equivalent because they refer to one spiritual entity, Kaying, in the mind of the Hmong people: “Couple Kaying” (*Nkawm Niam Txiv Kab Yeeb*), “Lady Kaying” (*Niam Nkauj<sup>9</sup> Kab Yeeb*), “Spirit Couple *Dab Pog*” (Cha: 2003), “Couple Ancestor Spirit” (*Nkawm Niam Txiv Dab Pog*), “Mother *Dab Pog*” (*Poj Dab Pog*), “Ancestor Spirit of Fertility”, or “Venerable Mother *Dab Pog*”. In the text, the vernacular expressions have been added – in italics— next to the English translations so that the concepts in both languages enhance the accuracy of the definition of the concepts. By using this approach, there is a better understanding of the content.

The author has made use of the expressions “tutelary spirit”, “genius of the house” (*dab qhuas*) (Moréchand, 1968) and guardian-spirits to designate the spirits that rule the lineage and its households. For the classification of the spirits not attached to the house, either “genius” or “spirit” is used to specify the entity.

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plusieurs expressions vernaculaires telles “ *Ob niam nkauj Kab Yeeb* ” (“deux mère aimante *Kab Yeeb* ”), ou “ *Niam Kab Yeeb* ” d’une part (Mère *Kab Yeeb*) ou encore “ *Nkawm Kab Yeeb* ” (couple *Kab Yeeb*), ou “*Ob niam txiv Poj Dag Pog*” (“Les Epoux Esprit ”) et d’autre part “ *Nkawm Poj Dab Pog* ” (Couple Esprit)].

<sup>8</sup> According to native explanation, wearing traditional clothes will permit the soul of the dead to be identified as Hmong and thus to reincarnate again in the Hmong ethnic group.

<sup>9</sup> The classifiers for first names “*nkauj*” (for female entity) and “*nraug*” (for male entity) are only used in myths and folktales to designate heroines, heroes or immanent entities. It was in the 1950’s in Laos that the use of “*nkauj*” prefixed another monosyllabic name appeared: the most common names are *Nkauj Hnub* (Lady Sun), *Nkauj Hli* (Lady Moon).

## Observations and Hypotheses

Systems of beliefs are not closed. They are the products of permanent contacts and continuous exchanges even if they are not visible within a short period of time. For stateless people like the Hmong who were immersed in Chinese society for centuries, the borrowing of cultural and religious elements was inevitable, although it is difficult to measure the degree and the trends of the impact. In addition, scholars such as the priests François Marie Savina, David Graham, Jean Mottin and Yves Bertrais, and anthropologists Guy Moréchand, Jacques Lemoine and Bong-Kil Yim, consider the Hmong systems of belief to be the result of several religious influences that formed over the centuries. For example, in folktales and ritual literature, there are three creators of the world: the One-God, the couple Shao and Mother Shao, and the couple Gaodjoua and SheeNah. All traditions are mixed together. Indeed, there are elements from Taoism, Daoism, Confucianism and certainly Mahayana and Theravada<sup>10</sup> Buddhism that coexist with Animism, the Cult of the Ancestors, in addition to a latent Monotheism<sup>11</sup>. For lack of significant religious theories<sup>12</sup>, one can only remark upon isolated fragments, such as the incontestable presence of Chinese gods or goddesses in the Hmong beliefs. Actually, the Hmong pantheon has quite a number of imported Chinese Gods and Goddesses (Moréchand, 1968; Mottin; 1981; Lemoine: 1987). The Chinese name of the guardian of the main door is Ts'ien Man Pai Chen (God of the Door of Wealth), phonetically close to the Hmong Tutelary Spirit of the Door: *Txhiaj Meej or Txhiaj Meej Pem Xeeb* (transcribed in Chia Meng Pai Xeng) (Lemoine, 1986: 37).

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<sup>10</sup> There may be borrowing from Theravada Buddhism after the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the fraction moving out of China to Southeast Asia and in the West.

<sup>11</sup> Hmong people believe in the existence of a One-God, "*Huab Tais Ntuj*". However, they perceive him as too selfish to intervene positively in their lives. He lives in the Sky, and may only appear during the New Year, where to attract his attention, Hmong people wear their most beautiful and colourful costumes.

<sup>12</sup> There are fragments of belief about the circle of reincarnation where women reincarnate as men, and vice-versa (Yang, 1999). This belief is similar to the Buddhist cycle of Samsara, characterized by the vicious circle of birth and death, but there is not information about the Enlightenment as the ultimate goal of all circles.



**Picture # 2: Miao Altar with Gods in Hunan, China.**

During the "International Miao (Hmong) Culture Symposium & Economic and Trade Cooperative Conference", in Hunan (China) in October 1994, there was a production of the myth of creation of the Miao group. An altar with different Gods was set up as scenery of the play. In Southeast Asia, such an altar does not exist; only a money paper is used to represent the altar where Hmong people honor the Spirit of Wealth or *Dab Xwm Kab* of the house.

The intent of this article is not to trace the exact historical connection with Buddhism<sup>13</sup>, but to understand the process of “hmongnization” or assimilation of the cult of Lady Kaying into the Hmong system of beliefs, by briefly highlighting the context of its encounter with Buddhism. The Miao/Hmong of long ago lived along the Silk Road crossing the current provinces of Sichuan, especially Hunan where the first Buddhist Shaolin Temple was built with the arrival of Bodhidharma<sup>14</sup>, the founder of the Chan or Zen Buddhism, in the sixth century A.D.. Hunan Province had been also the heartland of the ancestors of the Miao/Hmong people since the Zhou Dynasty in the eleventh century B.C. (Cook, 1999). During the first "International Miao (Hmong) Culture Symposium & Economic and Trade Cooperative Conference" in Hunan in October 1994, there were Shaolin priests celebrating the Miao Kuoxiong’s heritage, welcoming the Hmong overseas in the province. Not only temporary connections, but surely a long immersion in Buddhism had occurred from the sixth century or even earlier. If there is

<sup>13</sup> “From 401 until 413, the Indian Buddhist Monk, Kumarajiva, brought Buddhism in China where he went to Chang’an, the current city of X’ian in the province of Shaanxi at the request of its ruler, Yao Xing of the Later Qin.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumarajiva>.

<sup>14</sup> “Perhaps the most famous name associated with Shaolin is that of Bodhidharma or, in Mandarin Damo. He is said to have been either a Persian or South Indian monk who traveled to China in the 5th or 6th century to teach Buddhism. Bodhidharma’s ministry at Shaolin formed the basis for what would later be called the Zen or, in China, Chán (both terms derive from the Sanskrit term *Dhyana*, which means meditation) school of Buddhism. After entering Shaolin, legend states that Bodhidharma found the monks out of shape from lives spent meditating and they often fell asleep during meditation. The story relates that Bodhidharma meditated facing a wall in a nearby cave for nine years. After that time, he introduced a regimen of exercises sometimes thought to have been the 18 hands of lohan or the damo muscle changing classic.” in <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ShaoLin> & website: <http://www.shaolin.cn.com/> .



no visible trace of Buddhist practices in the Hmong beliefs of the Hmong groups who migrated to Southeast Asia in the Middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it may be explained by the loss of many cultural practices due to long social isolations of the sub-ethnic groups, and economic struggles for their survival in the hostile mountains of Southeast Asia. These experiences impoverished the ethnic group and fragmented its beliefs, culture and languages while at the same time substantially varying them as they intermingled with the beliefs, cultures and languages of other ethnic groups or societies encountered in their migration.



**Picture # 3: Presence of Buddhist Shaolin Monks in Miao Kuoxiong rituals.**

The province of Hunan, heartland of Miao people, was the home of the first Shaolin temple: the Chinese Emperor Tuoba Hong 拓跋宏 had enacted an edict to establish the Shaolin Temple for the Great Buddhist Monk of the West, Bodhidharma, founder of the Zen Buddhism in the 6th century A.D.. Seeking Buddhist monks help for illness, sterility, should have been the procedures for Miao of long ago. Lady Kaying, Buddhist divinity, might have been incorporated in the Hmong system of belief at that time. Photo taken during the "International Miao (Hmong) Culture Symposium & Economic and Trade Cooperative Conference", Hunan (China), October 1994.

In 1996 while doing fieldwork<sup>15</sup> in Laos, collecting data for a thesis on the socialization of the child<sup>16</sup> in traditional settings, the author came to realize the importance of the rite of Souls Calling (*Hu Plig*) for newborns. In this rite emerges the cult of Lady Kaying. This cult is disguised as a simple sequence integrated into the rite of Souls Calling (see TABLE#1 for the structure of the rite) with, however, a clear appellation: its name is “Thanking the Couple Kaying or Ancestor Spirit of Fertility” (for giving a new child) (*Fij tom fij yoom nkawm niam txiv Kab Yeeb los sis Dab Pog*). The simplified

<sup>15</sup> This fieldwork was made possible by the Foundation “Salavin-Fournier”, Fondation de France.

<sup>16</sup> Yang K-L, 1999 [Birth and Growth Development: the Processes of Socialization of the Child in Hmong Milieu (France and Laos)]

term is *fij* (to thank, to repay, to acquit) and the compound expression *fij tom fij yoom*. In fact, this sequence is the only one that happened outside the house, next to the main door (*rooj tag*), whereas the rest of the souls calling rite unfolded inside the house.<sup>17</sup>



**Picture #4: Cult of Lady Kaying in Laos**

A table-altar was set outside the house with a handful of grilled paddy, three small glasses of water, gold and silver money paper, and incense sticks planted in their bowl. The pair of horn, instrument of dialog between human beings and spirits, was on the border of the table. The young uncle was helping the mistress of ceremony to kill a female Chicken to honor the couple Kaying. This ceremony usually takes place on the 3rd day after the birth of a newborn.



**Picture #5: Surrounding a rite of Souls Calling**

Break time: the assortments were cooked before the second step of the ceremony. The rite of Souls Calling and the Cult of Thanking Lady Kaying are composed of two parts, characterized by the nature (uncooked and cooked) of the assortments. Near the door, was the table, temporary altar to invoke Lady Kaying.

<sup>17</sup> The author has previously observed the rite of Souls Calling for newborns in France before starting the second fieldwork in Laos, but she did not seize the importance of the location where unfolds this sequence. The physical separation between the inside and the outside of the apartments in France was not obvious: the majority of the informants live in apartments inside buildings of more than four floors. They only use the outside of the balcony or the main entrance of their apartment to accomplish this ritual sequence, which did not explicitly emphasize its importance. Direct observation in traditional settings in Laos revealed to be very relevant of the cutting of inside/outside. In addition, the rite of Souls Calling appeared less important, so less visible, belonging to private activities. The masters of Souls Calling that she has met on-site generally occupy low social positions: they are widowed, divorced, wives in polygamist couples, or single.



Indeed, the location where this sequence took place raises an intriguing question on the status of Lady Kaying. Is she a tutelary spirit belonging to the domestic group of genii or a supernatural being of the World of the Above? My first intuition was that her origin might be foreign. Jacques Lemoine's comparison of Hmong shamanistic spirits with Chinese Gods identified Lady Kaying as Guanyin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy (Lemoine, 1987: 36-37). To know more about her cult, it was necessary to search for her within Mahayana Buddhism in the North of Asia where Guanyin, one of the main Bodhisattvas, attendant of the Lord Buddha, is worshipped throughout China. She has her own birthday, celebrated on the nineteenth of the second month of the lunar calendar. Believers devote numerous temples to her; the biggest temple is certainly on Hainan Island.

Both names, Guanyin and Kaying, are phonetically close, and both respectively play in each culture the role of bestower of children. The conclusion is that Lady Kaying is derived from the Buddhist Guanyin. In the Hmong-Chinese dictionary written by the Miao people in Hunan (Feng, 1991), the ideogram for Kaying and Guanyin includes the same characters, under the name of Guanyin 观音 (simplified Chinese) 觀音 (traditional Chinese) or Kuan Shi Yin 观世音 or 觀世音. It is difficult to determine exactly when or how this transpired. The only hypothesis is that Kaying has been assimilated in the Hmong spiritual pantheon and nobody really remembers her as a foreign spirit. Over time, the author's curiosity has been aroused with additional questions: "What did the Hmong people of long ago retain as features, roles, and powers from the Chinese Guanyin? How did they assimilate her cult into the Hmong system of beliefs?" Such a study is not insignificant. Lady Kaying remains a symbol of love, of fertility, and of protection for children, women and sick people in the Hmong contemporary society where having numerous children is still associated with the promise of success and of prosperity.

With its emphasis on diachronic and synchronic changes in the Hmong culture and beliefs, this case study is inscribed into a larger research framework where the focus is on cultural changes,

especially on features such as the processes of borrowing, especially the intra-incorporation of foreign elements into the Hmong culture. Based on previous findings<sup>18</sup>, this study is intended to verify the following hypothesis: the borrowing processes of Kaying in the Hmong system of beliefs are selective of fragments of belief, integrative into an existing structure of symbols, of practices, and are comprehensive accordingly to Hmong perception. In addition, they generate an overlapping over a pre-existing spiritual entity, the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility.

### **Methodology and Data**

The Hmong system of beliefs has diverse religious influences, which makes the study of the borrowing processes difficult and unfeasible if approached in a very general and global way, especially from the doctrinal perspective. This kind of study focuses on isolated segments or cultural sectors (Barth, 1969) such as a religious symbol. Here, Lady Kaying will provide more insights for the understanding of the ancient and current system of beliefs. The methodological approach of this present study uses a contrasted analysis of features between the two spiritual entities, Kaying and Guanyin, and their cults. Several sources, although unequal and incompletely used, have been analyzed within first-hand data, the oral literature and French and American scholarly works. For Guanyin, there is a use of previous works in Buddhism, especially the very rich research of professor Chün-Fang Yü, “Kuan-yin, the Chinese Transformation of Avalokites’vara” (Yü, 2001), as well as the very inspiring esoteric art work representing Guanyin in different historical periods.

As for the Hmong data, despite the existence of fragments spread all over the oral literature, it was difficult to find reference to Lady Kaying in sources of such a quality. There are some previous ethnographic works that offer fragmented or incomplete descriptions, mostly related to shamanism (Moréchand, 1955; Mottin, 1981, Lemoine, 1987), to the rite of souls calling (Symonds, 1991; Hassoun, 1997; Yang, 1999), or to folk legends (Cha, 2003). Even if the choice of the sources is based

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<sup>18</sup> Previous to this religious change, the author has been studying the renovation of Hmong rituals and celebrations in the French (Yang, 2001) and American Contexts (Yang, 2002).

on their quality from the assessment of the original text in the Hmong language, source reliability and the availability of first-hand data, these sources could hardly propose a comprehensive analysis related to the origin. The status of this spirit is either under the name of Lady Kaying or the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility *Dab Pog*, her other name. In Southeast Asia, Hmong traditional art is mainly abstract; there is no visual representation of Lady Kaying<sup>19</sup>.

The data for this present study were collected progressively from 1996 to 2006 from twelve informants (10 women and 2 men) of whom five are shamans. Most of them practice the rite of “Souls Calling” and other rituals. Four of the informants live in Laos and were interviewed in 1996. Six live in France and were interviewed from 1993 to 2005. This latter group constituted the main core for feedback and double checking until 2006. Two of the remaining informants live in the United States, and were interviewed from 2001 to 2003. Their range of age is between forty-seven and eighty years old (see TABLE of informants). Semi-directed interviews have been used to ask the three main questions: “Could you talk about Lady Spirit Kaying or the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility?” (Koj tham puas tau me ntsis txog niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb los sis nkawm niam txiv Dab Pog?) “What kind of skills/powers does this spirit have?” (Nws txawj ua dab tsi?) “Where does this spirit come from?” (Nws los qhov twg los?) Since 1993, more than thirty rites for newborns and shamanistic performances have been formally<sup>20</sup> recorded during participant observations in Laos, in France and in the United States.

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<sup>19</sup> While studying the origin of Kaying, the author has been starting to paint her using the Hmong symbolism showing the celestial being appearing only in early morning, symbolizing fecundity, existing everywhere and bringing attention to everything (See the painting “Lady Kaying Flying Everywhere and Hearing any Child’s Pains”, 2006, first page of this article)

<sup>20</sup> As a native researcher, the author has been exposed to various rituals. For her studies, she formalized methodological framework to rationalize the research.

### **Lady Kaying – Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb—in the Hmong Beliefs**

In the Hmong culture, there are three locations where Lady Kaying appears or is referred to. 1.) The stock of first names where parents choose the name of Kaying “*Kab Yeeb*”<sup>21</sup> for their newborns, boys and mostly girls. 2.) The rites and beliefs surrounding children: the rite of Souls Calling (*Hu Plig*), the rite of requesting protection over a slow-growth child or a sterile woman, within the period of infancy where Lady Kaying is the major figure of the child guardian angel. 3.) The shamanistic liturgy where she is one of the auxiliary spirits or couple spirits (*ib qhua Neeb*) of the shaman. In this section, there will be analysis of her various roles and her representation through the native and academic literature, in contrasting the two figures of Kaying, on the one hand based upon the uses of the first name and in popular representation, and on the other hand in shamanism.

Most of the informants do not have an exact idea of the physical appearance of Kaying even if they all agree to say that she would be a beautiful maiden living in the Sky, the world of all divinities. Pa, a shaman, recalled her dream where she saw Kaying. She was sick in 2005. She requested a Buddhist ceremony to protect her. The following night, she dreamt of Lady Kaying

“The sky gate is opening up (*rooj ntug qhib*); there is a gate (*rooj vaj*) [to the World of the Above]. Then somebody told me: “Look at Lady Kaying”. I saw a door opening. [Kaying] was wearing a very white dress, she was very beautiful, [...] standing in front of the gate, moving. [...] I now understood why we call in these spirits to bless. They really exist”. (Pa, shaman, June 2005, double checked in June 2006 by phone)

Of the pictures that were showed to her after our discussion, Pa chose the White-Robed Guanyin in a standing position, one of her esoteric manifestations in Buddhism, as the deity she saw in her dream. According to Tchou Yao, shaman, Lemoine’s informant, “Kaying is very knowledgeable

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<sup>21</sup> The spellings in RPA are Kaying / Ka-Ying or Kayeng/ Ka-Yeng.



and smart [...]. She is very wise and erudite<sup>22</sup>.” (Lemoine, 1987: 36-37) All the informants agreed to say that she is a female spirit capable of infinite mercy, patient love toward children, especially infants<sup>23</sup> not yet reaching the stage of language. If parents give the name of Kaying to their children, it is mainly because they would like them to become beautiful or good looking, clever, and wise like her, and essentially to attract her protection over the child, the weakest, the unceasingly sick so that the infant would grow well, healthy and faster. It is less common to give her name to male children, but when this occurs, it is to provide her protection over a small and sickly little boy.

Implicitly, Kaying is more often perceived as the guardian leading the child to the parents than the bestower of children. In the rite of Souls Calling for newborns, parents, by the intermediary of a master, formally thank Lady Kaying for leading the children toward them --*xav tub xav kiv los cuag niam cuag txiv*-- so that she won't return to demand another sacrifice. It is important to distinguish the primacy of the roles in popular beliefs, even if in shamanism, she occupies the main role as the spirit of fertility. Without a doubt, the use of her name as a first name, and her roles as guardian angel and bestower of children place her in the children's world, and she certainly has an important impact on their socialization and educational practices.

She is perceived as a benevolent, teasing but invisible spirit, that will tickle children while sleeping, making them smile, laugh or babble in their dreams according to this expression “Children laugh at Mother *Dab Pog/Kaying*” (*Menyuam luag Poj Dab Pog/Kab Yeeb*). According to all female informants, mothers of an important number of offspring, the amazing noise of babbling produced by their children would be a kind of language: children would be speaking to Kaying. All the informants granted her the power of omnipresence, hearing everything, especially any children's cries, sufferings

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<sup>22</sup> The original sentence in French is: “c'est une jeune fille très instruite et intelligente [...] elle est très sage et savante »

<sup>23</sup> The native notion of infant and child depend, not on precise age, but on stage of development associated to specific learning (Yang, K-L, 1999).

of unspoken pains or of physical abuses. She is perceived as the merciful guardian of all children until a certain age<sup>24</sup>.

Nevertheless, numerous reported stories of careless parents given by the informants describe Lady Kaying with another face, and in fact as quite a dark character. She is revealed to be fearsome, threatening and avenging toward parents when they forgot or could not afford to thank her in the rite of Souls Calling on the third day<sup>25</sup> of the birth of the child or when they badly treat their children. In the first situation, she would soon make the infant cry all days and nights long to obtain the acquitting of the debt by the sacrifice of a chicken. In cases where parents have been employing emotional, verbal and/or physical abuses to discipline infants and children, she would intervene in making the child, not only cry (*quaj*), but also sick “in bothering” (*tshiam*) parents in order to draw their attention – this is an occurrence, a sign of her intervention:

Lig, mother of two, explained: “Kaying hears whatever you do to your child. If parents beat the child, she will notice it immediately and will make him or her sick.” (Lig, France, 1997)

“When a child is crying like somebody would (invisibly) pinch his or her, it is sure that Lady Kaying has something to do with these signs”, explained N. Xue,, mother of fourteen children, of the village of Ash in the province of Xieng Khouang (Laos). [...] The best way to repent (*thov txim*) is to sacrifice a couple of chickens. Cook them well, then set down a small table with the necessary food and money paper, then to humbly bow before the table invoking Lady Kaying and promising her not to verbally threaten (*cem*) or to beat (*ntaus*) the child anymore.” (N. Xue, Laos, 1996)

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<sup>24</sup> The informants were not able to define exactly the stage of development or the age where Kaying will stop guarding the child. Some said that she would stop intervening after the age of 4 or 5 years. Some said that it is after the child starts to speak that she left, e.g. after 3 years.

<sup>25</sup> Certain informants stated that the rite of Souls Calling for a newborn could be postponed, but not the sequence of “Thanking Kaying” that should occur on the third day after the birth of the child.

The relationship between Kaying and the parents is temporary, but based on a precise line of good conduct that parents have promised to fulfil when they thanked her on the third morning of the birth of the newborn, which is:

“[...] Not to make the child cry or disturb (parents)

Not to make the child cry or complain [...]

[...] *Tsis pub quaj tsis pub tshiam*

*Tsis pub quaj tsis pub seev* [...] (Pa, Shaman, France, 2005)

Even if there is no altar to honour Kaying in the house as in the Chinese traditions, there is a shamanistic cult of protection either over sterile women or sick children. In general, she is perceived a protector of all sentient beings. For woman desiring children, the shaman needs to perform a session to seek the reason of the sterility. If he finds out that Kaying is of any help, he will proceed to the shamanistic service accordingly. As for children who have a slow growth (*mob lib*: puny) and are constantly sick, the shaman could formally request her blessings in performing the appropriate shamanistic service. This cult consists of two parts occurring at two different times: the first part is to “Draw Kaying’s Protection” (over the woman or the child) “*Rub Kab Yeeb los Pov*” and the second part is the acquittal of the service called “Pay Kaying back” (*Pauj Kab Yeeb*) with some precise instructions.

“The specific assortments for the ceremony are a pig, five or nine chickens<sup>26</sup> --nine is better--, the money paper and incense that will be burnt in the frying pan (the set is called *cov txim*), and nine slices of soybean (*cuaj ntsia taum hwv*)[...]. Set a table as a normal lunch, then you call Lady Kaying to accept the offerings (made of food and water) so that she will extend her blessings (*pov hwj pov yawm*) over the child. The ceremony should only occur in night time, before the sun rises. You have to call in the Couple Kaying, tell her that she has brought the

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<sup>26</sup> Number is depending on each shaman’s practice.

child and protected and now healed her and him. The promise of acquittal of the debts should take place either the next three months or the next three years. You have to fulfil the rule/rite so that she will continue to protect the children.” (Pa, shaman, France, June 2005)

In the erudite literature, especially in the shamanistic liturgy, Kaying gains another role: she is one of the Shaman’s auxiliary genii --*Dab Neeb*. All informants and previous academic works (Moréchand, 1968, Mottin, 1981 & Lemoine, 1987) confirmed her shamanistic role. However, during the first stage of investigation, it was a question of whether or not the auxiliary spirit is the bestower of children Kaying. With hesitation, Shamans proclaimed that the Kaying of the rite of Souls Calling and the Kaying among the shaman’s spirits are the same.

-“Is this Kaying that you draw to protect people one of the shaman’s couples of auxiliary spirits?” The author posed the question.

- ‘Yes, it is an auxiliary couple (*yog ib qhua Neeb*), but it is a pair living in the Sky that the shaman needs to formally invite to come”. (Pa, Shaman)

In the shamanistic literature, recitals, and previous academic works, especially from Guy Moréchand and Jean Mottin who juxtapose the original texts in the Hmong language with the translated versions in French, both evocations of Kaying refer to the same entity as well. However, the portrayal of Kaying through shamanism is more sophisticated and complex. She is an important spirit that needs to be requested at the time of the cult of protection over sterile women or sick children, and at the same time she is a special pair that the shaman calls to join the troop of auxiliary spirits before the voyage for the search of the sick soul. There are in fact two roles, the auxiliary couple that serves the shaman, and the celestial genius of fecundity endowed with the power to bestow children. Are they the same? It was difficult to obtain a clear explanation from the shamans. All said that they are one, but assigned them to different hierarchies. According to Pa, a shaman since the age of three, if Kaying has several attributions, it depends on each shaman’s training or traditions even if her main healing power is to



draw protection over children and cure infertility. In addition, the shaman calls upon her for her different functions at different moments during the unfolding of the performance: when the shaman “counts in calling his or her auxiliary spirits” (*txheeb qhua Neeb*), Lady Kaying is among the first spirits to be called. This deity has many designations too. First, in the role of auxiliary, she is called “*Nkawm Kab Yeeb*” (Couple Kaying), “*Nkawm Qhua Neeb Kab Yeeb*” (Couple auxiliary spirits Kaying) and indirectly by her occupational role, “*Niam Nkauj Tsab Yeeb Tub Tsab Tshuaj*” (the Lady who offers/gets ready the grilled paddy and the bowls with its medicine water (*nqa cuaj ntig yim ntig dej tshuaj*) to the shaman’s altar” (Mottin, 1981: 83.) As one of the auxiliary spirits of the shaman, her role is:

1.) To prepare the food (grilled paddy) and the water (boiled water added by some grilled paddy) (*tsab yeeb tsab tshuaj*<sup>27</sup>), and to put the table in the two front doors of a traditional house (*rub rooj nyiaj rau tom tag rooj kub rau tom txuas*).

2.) To keep up the couple’s Spirit Fan (*ntxuam [n]txaig ntxuam nraug*) that will serve to clear/ “to sweep” (*cheb*) the way and the illness so that the ill body is lighter/healthier,

3.) To speed up the awakening of the couple of divinatory spirits “*Looj-Vaj*” (Dragon-King or “a geomancy spirit (*Looj Mem*)” and “*Los Muas*” (Vital spirit capable to reach the good place)<sup>28</sup>.

According to Chinese language, “*Long-Vaj*” means Dragon-King (Doré, 1970: 123; Moréchand, 1968:

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<sup>27</sup> In ordinary sense, “*Yeeb*” means opium, “*tshuaj*” medicine; the pairing expression “*yeeb tshuaj*” means the generic term of medicine. However, in the context of shamanism, the meaning of “*yeeb tshuaj*” is different. It is the food and the water of the spirits, concretely the popped or grilled paddy and the water contains in the three small glasses (see PICTURE #6) that an assistant prepares in boiling water then grilling the paddy according the order inherently described in the following expression “Boil the medicine and grill the paddy” (*Raug tshuaj kib paj hmoo*), task that the author has done during years since her adolescence to her mother shaman every new month and for some performances. Jean Mottin has another explanation: it would be “Opium” (*yeeb*) and “Tea” (*tshuaj*), interpretation that will need more studies in order to completely answer it because tea is not known by the Hmong in Southeast Asia as medicine.

<sup>28</sup> In Moréchand’s account of the recital (Moréchand, 1968: 149), these points are questioning because other shamans did not confirm the same interpretation. But, the variety of possible explanations may due to diversity of auxiliary spirits and of shamanistic traditions. Shamans of the fieldworks agreed that each shaman may have a different troop of auxiliary spirits with different assignments and roles. This difficulty of interpretation underlines the great need of accurate ethnography with vernacular expressions to better capture concepts at stake and to render these spirits in their context of uses because in some cultures, people may not define things by their essence or lineate characteristics, but more by their roles, occupations or functions.

149). However, Shaman Pa did not give the same interpretation: she referred to a vital force underground, closed to the ideas of a dragon-king of the World of the Bottom.



**Picture# 6: A Shaman's Altar**

**Left:** the plate of popped/grilled paddy  
**Middle (back):** 3 bowls serving as base to plant the incense sticks, the pair of horn and the pair of black fabric symbolized the bridge to the World of the Above  
**Middle (front):** the 3 medicine water bowls behind the 2 fingers bells  
**Right:** The dragon water bowl and the candle

Secondly, there is the role of the protectress, providing blessings for good health and fecundity with the names of “*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*” (Lady Kaying), “*Tus Kab Yeeb*” (the Kaying, euphemism of “*Tus Dab Kab Yeeb*”) (the spirit *Kab Yeeb*), “*Dab Kab Yeeb*” (Spirit Kaying). After calling all his or her main and subsidiary spirits (*txheeb cov qhua Neeb kom txhij*), the shaman enters into the healing journey either to look into places, and reasons that might cause the illness (*ua neeb mus saib*) or to heal (*mus kho*) the patient. During this second stage, Lady Kaying unveils additional functions: she could “forge copper and iron” (*ntau tooj ntau hlau*) to protect the ill soul from bad spirits and bad luck. More importantly, she is the pair of auxiliary spirits who bestow and protect children (*Nkawm Qhua coj tub coj kis los*) and has the healing power of enhancing by blessing (*pov hawj pov yawm*) the growth of children. Hmong people believe that she bestows children, and leads them (*coj tub coj ki*) to the parents. Lady Kaying has the roles of giver, guardian, protector of the children and conductor of the dead children.

## Guanyin, the Goddess of Compassion in the Buddhist Traditions

The existence of in-depth studies of certainly the most beloved Bodhisattva<sup>29</sup> in China, known as the Goddess of Mercy, one of the three attendants of the Lord Buddha, offers a rich range of sources for the comparative study<sup>30</sup>. However, the comparison between Kaying and Guanyin is based on the common features that exist between them<sup>31</sup>. Let us specify that the introduction of Guanyin into Hmong beliefs is mainly from the Mahayana Buddhism in North of Asia, and not from the Theravada Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia<sup>32</sup> where Hmong people did not reside until after the nineteenth century.

In the Buddhist tradition, Guanyin has many appellations. Her original name, found in the Lotus Sutra in early Buddhism, before reaching China was “Avalokites’vara”, meaning “He Who Looks Down”)(Karetzky, 2004). In China, she is called “Guanyin” or “Guan-Shih-Yin”. According to a study done by Chün-Fang Yü, an eminent scholar in Buddhism, the transformation of Guanyin in China may be described in the following way:

“The Lotus Suutra was translated into Chinese six times, and three have survived. The first is Cheng fa-hua ching (Sutra of the lotus of the true law, T. no. 263), translated by Dharmaraksa, a native of Yueh-chih (Bactria) in 286. Chapter 23 is entitled "Universal Gateway"(P'u-men) and is devoted to Avalokites'vara who is called Kuang-shih-yin (Illuminator of the World's Sounds), a savior who delivers people from seven perils, frees them from the three poisons of lust, hatred and ignorance, and grants infertile women either sons or daughters.”

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<sup>29</sup> “A Bodhisattva is a “person who follows the Mahayana path” toward Enlightenment or Buddhahood (Traleg Kyabgon, 2001:43)

<sup>30</sup> In the Mahayana tradition, the bodhisattva is Guanyin whereas in the Theravada tradition, the King represents this bodhisattva. In the Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai-Lama is the reincarnation of Guanyin.

<sup>31</sup> See Chün-Fang Yü, 2001, Blofield, 1988 for their major contributions to studying of Guanyin.

<sup>32</sup> The most intense experience with Buddhism happened during the years in the Thai Wat Tham Krabok --*Temple of the Bamboo Cave*-- otherwise called by Hmong people “*Qhov Tsuas*” where Missionary Buddhism has been recruiting minorities since 1965 (Tapp: 1986). In 1975, the first Hmong Lao refugees went for its heroin and opium drug rehabilitation program, then when the refugees camps started to close, an important number remained at the temple as their last refuge in Thailand until 2004 where they were officially authorized to migrate to the United States.

According to Yü, the Lotus explained the name Kuan-shih-yin this way: "Kuan is the wisdom which can perceive and shih- yin is the realm which is perceived" (Yü, 1997: 418).

The meaning of Guanyin is "Looking at the sounds" [of living beings], Guan-Shih-Yin "Listening to the World's Sounds" (Paul, 1984: 249) where "[Guanyin] delivers by perceiving the sounds of the world" (Yü, 2001: 39) or "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" (Yü, 1997: 416). This Bodhisattva is also called "Kuan-shih-nien", the "Perceiver of the World's Thoughts", or Kuan-tzu-tsai, the "Perceiving Lord" (Yü, 1997: 417). In India, it was a male deity that had been slowly feminized in China<sup>33</sup> after the Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.) (Yü 2001: 10). Her attributes are the lotus or the willow branch, and the pure water or ambrosia represented by a bottle of water either held in one her hand or posed next her in the esoteric paintings or sculptures (Yü, 2001: 79). The cult of Guanyin is based on the practices of chanting her sutras which are composed of different types of scriptures, either the original translations from India or the indigenous scriptures invented by Chinese Monks. Yü especially emphasized the place of the miracles that had been officially recorded, spread and made sacred to show her sinization during centuries. The miracles go from simple cure to the accomplishment of wishes for children, for example, in the proclamation of reincarnation such as in the reported stories of the Princess Miao-Shan<sup>34</sup> who is considered as one of the reincarnations of the Goddess, the "Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Guanyin" or the Fish Basket Girl. She became a major devoted figure worshiped by many believers as the "Fish Basket Guanyin" and appeared in the sixteenth century. As the Goddess of Compassion could hear and see everything, believers must chant the appropriate sutras depending on their need in invoking her name and in accomplishing their

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<sup>33</sup> Scholars supposed that Guanyin might be an error of interpretation when translating Indian Buddhist scriptures: she might have been confused with Tara the White, wife of Avalokites'vara (Paul, 1985), or the first Chinese monks might borrow the Indian deity of fertility, Hatiri, and transform her into Guanyin, which would explain the transformation of the gender of this deity, from male to female.

<sup>34</sup> Even if in the name of Miao-Shan (妙善), there is the Romanized term of "Miao" (苗) that has nothing to do the ethnic term used in China to designate the Hmong group, the Miao Nationality.



promise of gifts accordingly to their promises in order to see the wish accomplished. The notion of miracle or efficiency of the sutra resides in the Confucianist principle of *kan-ying* defined as:

“a theory of ‘stimulus and response’ [where] everything is interrelated and interdependent. [...] The prayer and calling of [Guanyin]’s name aloud is the initiating stimulus or trigger that, when it is sincere and desperate enough, is answered by [Guanyin]’s response. [Guanyin] does not act gratuitously” (Yü 2001: 153).

In Chinese Buddhism, Guanyin has many manifestations that emerged at different centuries. The most popular form, although it is considered as a minor form – and is of interest to this case study - - is certainly the “Songzi/Sung tzu Guanyin” otherwise called the “Child-giving Guanyin” or the “Giver of Sons”, a “variant” of the better well-known manifestation, the White-robed Guanyin whose cult appeared around the tenth century (Yü, 2001: 127, 130). Other manifestations exist such as the “Royal Ease Guanyin” where one sees a male Bodhisattva waiting for any call to intervene, the “Te-Huan Blanc de Chine Guanyin”, the “Water-Moon Guanyin” during the Song Dynasty, and the “Southern Sea Guanyin”, who helps sailors at peril. According to recorded miracles, after chanting religiously – meticulously—alone or with another, the scriptures, people received a sign – mostly in dream form—of the Goddess that bestows a child. Her compassion extends especially to children, prisoners and sailors, or people in great danger. Nowadays, Guanyin is still held in great devotion, and inspires art, painting, writing, and even movies. Esoteric art work is an expression of faith in Guanyin (Yü, 2001: 153-184). Guanyin is perceived as a democratic Goddess to whom social class, economic status, gender status or ethnic origin could not be a barrier. She answers to anyone who calls her for help (Yu, 2001)



### Pictures #7: Guanyin

1. Contemporary White-Robed Guanyin in porcelain, purchased in Chinatown, San Francisco, 2002, one of the most well-known manifestations in the Asian markets.
2. The Royal Ease Guanyin in polychromed wood, 17 inches (43.2 cm), China, 900's A.D., Walter C. Mead Collection by exchange, 1946.4, Courtesy of the Asian Art Department, Denver Art Museum.

### Comparison between Lady Kaying and the Bodhisattva Guanyin

Among the numerous manifestations of the Bodhisattva in China, the Child-giving Guanyin is revealed to be the unique manifestation imported into the Hmong popular beliefs and in shamanism. Her name was kept even if the transliteration of the diphthong had been adopted to ease its pronunciation, the Hmong system of vowels being poorer than the Chinese vocalic system. “Guanyin” /kwã yẽ/ <sup>35</sup> thus became “Kaying” /ka yẽŋ/. As for her <sup>36</sup> gender, the Hmong people of long ago might know the original gender <sup>37</sup>, but they might have borrowed her as a feminine entity by the intermediary of the Chinese society which had associated the Songzi Guanyin with a female manifestation. She is currently called “Lady Kaying” (*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*) or “Couple Kaying” (*Nkawm Kab Yeeb*) – this latter name is a schema of representation that is specific to the Hmong view of the spiritual world where immanent entities are perceived as embodying the male or yang (*yaj*) and female or ying (*yeeb*) according to a dualistic principle. The most salient feature retained in the borrowing process is her power to perceive the sounds wherever they come from people in need and at peril.

<sup>35</sup> Use of International Phonetic Alphabet

<sup>36</sup> In this paper, the author made the choice to refer to Kaying as a female deity.

<sup>37</sup> According to Yu (2001), transformation of divinity’s genders was not an issue.

A comparison based on the Hmong shamanistic literature and the analyses of the scriptures showed some interesting borrowings<sup>38</sup>. The Chinese Guanyin has a pair of attendants, a boy and a girl, at her service: “The boy is usually taken to be Sudhana, the pilgrim, and the girl, the Dragon Princess “Lung Nü” (Yü 2001: 83). It happened that the shaman’s auxiliary Kaying has two spirits, “*Looj-Vaj*” and “*Los-Muas*”, at her disposal that she needs to awaken for the shaman (Moréchand, 1968: 149). Their genders were not clear even if the pairs were usually composed of a male and female entities; “*Looj-Vaj*” is the vital spirit capable of finding the good place and “*Los Muas*”, the vital spirit capable of reaching the good place according to the interpretation of the shaman Pa, of this fragmented text (Pa, 2006). In the Western scholarly interpretation, “*Looj-Vaj*” would be a dragon-king according to its semantic closeness with the Chinese language where “*Looj*” and “*Vaj*” respectively mean “dragon” and “King”. Kaying is also in charge of the water contained in the three bowls on the shaman’s altar; water is also an attribute of the Goddess of Mercy who has a bottle of purified water. As for the willow branch (in Buddhism), it is difficult to associate with the Hmong shaman’s accessories. There might be some relationship with the fan (in Hmong shamanism) that the shaman uses to clean illnesses, but this is not certain. In fact, it may be asked if the fan actually belongs to traditional Hmong accessories. The Hmong of Southeast Asia do not use it in their liturgical rituals.

The concordance of the Hmong Kaying with the Chinese Guanyin principally is associated with the power both have to bestow children, especially sons. In the Hmong popular beliefs, Lady Kaying is depicted with more precise roles: she is the bestower of children (*muab tub muab ki*) and is emphasized more as the conductor of the newborn (*xa tub xa kiv*) and the guardian of the child (*saib xyuas tub ki*). In case the child dies, she would take him or her back. In the shamanistic traditions, there is a special cult where she is fully recognized as the giver of children. But this image of her as the spirit of fertility is not common, because it is mostly known by the shamans who are the holders of the “Shamanistic

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<sup>38</sup> This is a new field in the Hmong studies that will need more in-depth research in the coming years.

Ritual to Request a Child in Exchange of Gifts” (*Fij Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*), which consists of invoking Kaying during a trance, and promising her a special sacrifice in exchange for a child. In comparison to the Buddhist Goddess, there was less information about her role as guardian of children until a certain age. Yü reported that she found this particular role, not in the main Buddhist scriptures, but in sectarian religions in Late Imperial China where it was question of a spiritual entity named “Venerable Mother” or “Mother Kaying” who had the role of safeguarding of children, which is closer to the role of the Hmong Kaying.

“It is truly hard for the Mother to send a child to you. For after two, three, or five years, the child will forget the Mother. Who appreciates the Mother’s sacrifice in giving up her own children who are as dead to her as her bone marrow to become the child of another” (Yü, 2001: 469)

The cult of Guanyin engages sincerity, repentance and salvation by chanting according to scriptures, which is totally different in the Hmong belief traditions. There are no proclaimed and consecrated oral texts specific to Lady Kaying. Each shaman and each master of souls calling for newborns are free to adopt any appropriate chants and vary the content according to their knowledge and understanding. The idea of repentance emerges in the context of child abuse in the Hmong culture with its humble ritual where parents need to repent sincerely of their mistakes in order to obtain healing for the Child and/or repentance not from the divinity but the child himself or herself. But such a practice doesn’t have the significance of the Ritual of the Great Compassion Repentance which is to repent the sins of all sentient beings’ six senses (Yü 2001: 275) in the Mahayana Buddhism.

In addition, the observations in France and in Laos from 1993 to 1997 demonstrated that the practice of this cult is not homogenous and systematic. One could postpone the ritual of acquittal of

debt toward Kaying or even the whole rite of Soul Calling itself for new-borns. Parents could accomplish them whenever they are available or could afford to do so materially or financially<sup>39</sup>.



**Picture #8: Thanking Lady Kaying in France.**

The mistress of ceremony was pouring a spoon filled with meat and rice while chanting Kaying's name. The ritual discretely took place out of the apartment, but not at the main entrance of the building. The constraint of living in urban areas made impossible the burning of money paper directly on the floor for safety purpose: a metal bowl was used instead. The couple chicken were set, head turned to outside, offered to the couple Kaying, bestower of a newborn.

If the parents treated children really badly, Kaying as the bestower would take the children back, but this would only concern the children, and did not clearly extend to adults. So her role as conductor of the dead in the Buddhist traditions is limited in the Hmong beliefs where there is the indigenous chant of “Showing the Way” (*Qhuab Ke*) to lead souls back to their ancestor villages, in the World of the Above. Finally, the safeguard only applies to children, and not sailors, merchants, craftsmen, or those under criminal prosecution. There is no permanent altar in her honor in the Hmong house. The notion of a miracle that leads to the transcendence of the manifestation of Guanyin into the divinity of simple human beings or of the chanting in invoking the Goddess is not apprehended in the same way by the Hmong people.

Actually, the gift of children is perceived not as a miracle, but as a natural due that requires repayment – the exchange is equal for both sides. The efficacy of the request upon Kaying (according

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<sup>39</sup> The postponement of this sequence was mainly due to poverty in Laos or lack of available chickens in the market in France.

to the Hmong perspective) comes from the art of soliciting in following/respecting very strictly the exact order of the ritual on behalf of the shaman who negotiates with and promises retribution to Kaying. On the contrary, in the Buddhist tradition, there is an emphasis on the faith, on the sincerity, and of course on the promise of a gift as a sacrifice in order to obtain fulfillment of the wish.

In conclusion, Kaying as adopted by the Hmong people lost her status of divinity: she had become the main figure surrounding the physical, emotional and spiritual world of a child, and then an auxiliary spirit with its many traces of her transcendent role of a Goddess in Chinese Buddhism. She has been incorporated in order to fit specific needs (the need for children and certainly sons to perpetuate a patrilinear society) and to reinforce shaman's spirits according to the integrative function of Hmong shamanism that incorporates all powerful and useful spirits in its pantheon of auxiliaries, including the Chinese emperors, empresses, generals, etc. and of course Lady Kaying as an auxiliary spirit at the same time, as a celestial being according to the long tradition of borrowing from the Chinese pantheon<sup>40</sup> that had certainly preceded the arrival of the Guanyin in the Orient.

### **Comparison between Kaying and the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility “Dab Pog”**

The coexistence of two names, *Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb* and *Niam Poj Dab Pog* to designate one spiritual entity raises a question because there may be no other spirit that has two names phonetically so different and with undifferentiated functions, e.g. bestowing children. Indeed, the Hmong spiritual world is governed mostly by couples of spirits where each has a different name or is classified with a gender marker (*niam/nkauj*: mother/girl (female), *txiv/tub/nraug*: father/boy/male) and is assigned a complementary function. Otherwise, in the Hmong spiritual world, spirits are perceived either as single entities with one concrete name preceded by the classifier “*niam txiv*” (*niam* = mother; *txiv* = father), which specifies the embodying of both genders in one spirit, or paired entities with two different names, one male being, one female being, playing complementary roles. This is not the case with

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<sup>40</sup> There are many auxiliary spirits in Hmong shamanism that had been borrowed from Chinese pantheon (see Moréchand, 1968; Mottin, 1987 & Lemoine, 1987 for more details)

Kaying. In this following section, the hypothesis which holds that *Niam Poj Dab Pog* –referring to the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility—was a pre-existing entity before the arrival of Lady Kaying will be discussed. The analysis of the position of both divinities in rituals and popular usage will unveil the overlapping of Kaying with the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility.

First of all, the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility emerges through the popular culture and cults whereas the collective memory doesn't retain Kaying in any other part of the popular literature, but only in the shamanistic liturgy. The Spirit *Dab Pog* is a well-known folktale character although she has an ambiguous folk image. She is at times kind and caring but also appears as a threatening grandmother coming at night time, taking children away<sup>41</sup>.

Through the following verbal expressions with some very precise description of her postures, or actions, the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility is undeniably better known and occupies an important place in Hmong imagery, in providing sexual education and implementing solutions to sterility issues.

“*Niam Poj Dab Pog nqa paj liab*” (Venerable *Dab Pog* brings the red blanket – the red blanket means the monthly periods for girls), as explained by mothers to their daughters when they get their periods for the first time.

“*Niam Poj Dab Pog ev menyuam tuaj*” (Venerable *Dab Pog* brings in the sense of physically “carrying the child in her back” to parents): another verbal expression that reflects better Hmong lifestyles where children are carried day long on the mother's back, and tacitly explains the cultural representation of the origin of the children.

“*Dab Pog hlawv teb*” (Venerable *Dab Pog* burns the field) is an expression describing the incandescent air near the soil in hot days, which relates this spirit not only to fire (Moréchand, 1968:

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<sup>41</sup> In Hmong folktale, there is a figure of “Old Woman” named “*Niam tais poj liab hlaub*” or “*Niam tais poj Dab*” (Lady Witch), who interferes with the “*Niam Poj Dab Pog*”. The Old Woman is anthropophagous of young children according to tales where she comes at the night time, and steals children. Parents used this “Old Lady” to frighten children in order to discipline them.

160, Bertrais, 1964: 306)), but certainly to the idea of Earth, a constant symbol of fertility in many cultures.

Guy Moréchand recorded an existence of *Dag Pog* that doesn't belong to the shaman's spirits (Moréchand, 1968: 160): it is to take away dust in the eyes, there is a magical chanting that Lig recited in adding the first name of Kajouaschab, one of her great great-nieces to ease the understanding<sup>42</sup>.

*Poj Dab Pog muab me nyuam rau Kab Zuag Sab ris khaws,*

*Kab Zuag Sab saws dig,*

*Muab me nyuam rau Kab Zuag Sab puag khaws,*

*Kab Zuag Sab saws muag.*

(Lig, France, 1997)

[Mother *Dab Pog* gave a child to Kajouaschab to carry (in her back), to keep,

[Remove] what you have made Kajouaschab blind,

Gave a child to Kajouaschab to nurse, to keep

[Remove] what you have put in her eyes.

When a child has difficulty sleeping, feeling agitated and crying, parents have the ritual "*Lwm Dab Pog*" where they invoke the *Dab Pog* in whirling some burning tatters over the bed to calm down the child. (Moréchand, 1968: 160)

All of the uses of expressions or rituals are not inclusively associated with the name of Kaying or attributed to her skills. She is only attributed with the power of bestower through the verbal expression "*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb coj/xa menyuam los*" (Lady Kaying lead/send children to parents).

When a ritual happens out of the house, the Hmong interpretation of such practice will imply that the spirit, receiving the offering, doesn't belong to the group of tutelary spirits (*dab qhuas*) of the household. The main door serves as the boundary between the domesticated spiritual world and the

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<sup>42</sup> All previous data has been submitted to informants in order to enhance the reliability of the sources of this article.



wild world: it is strictly watched by ‘*Txhiaj meej*’ (Chia Meng genius)<sup>43</sup>, “the special spirit which guards the lintel of the front door” (Cooper, 1998: 107). This guardian has the function to protect the members of the household and its tutelary spirits against any attacks from wild spirits and/or spells that should never enter or reach the house<sup>44</sup>. Dia Cha has collected a folk legend in Denver, Colorado, in America, that would explain this practice. Her informant said:

"At the very beginning of time, the *Dab Pog* couple (*Nkawm Niam Txiv Dab Pog*) and the *Xwm Kab* couple were sent to live with the Hmong as guardian spirits. [...] The *Dab Pog* couple, hurt and saddened by these angry words [said by the master of the house], replied, will bring children to their parents on earth, but we will no longer stay with their welfare. [...] "This is the reason why, when Hmong perform a naming or birth ceremony (*pog*) for newborn infants, they must perform the rite outside their door. (Cha 2003: 4)



**Picture #9: The Altar of the Tutelary Spirit of Wealth or *Dab Xwm Kab***

The altar is traditionally stuck to the wall of the house, facing the main door (*rooj tag*), and next the shaman's altar if there is any. It is made of paper money where some feathers of a male chicken have been stuck during the last New Year celebration where the head of the household has renewed the contract of protection and of blessings of this genius over the household.

<sup>43</sup> Guy Moréchand recorded : “Il est aussi un protecteur du troupeau et des biens de la famille. Quand sévit une épizootie, quand le tigre attaque fréquemment ou que les animaux s’égarent, on relève par précaution le Génie de la Porte » (Moréchand 1968 : 127). According to Jacques Lemoine, this Hmong tutelary spirit, Chia Meng, had been borrowed from the Chinese pantheon of Gods in addition to the God of medicine, Yao Wang (Lemoine 1987: 37)

<sup>44</sup> Hmong people believe that if a foreign spirit succeeded to enter the house, there might be serious consequences: deadly illnesses may occur to the household. Yet, in the transplanted settings such as France and the United States, there is still use of silver and golden papers stuck on the bottom of the door that would have the power to protect against the coming of bad spirits into the house.

However, this folk legend may have been reinterpreted afterwards in order to suit the new realities of the informant, a refugee in the West. Still, there is something interesting in the narrative: the informant only used the term of “*Dab Pog*” instead of “*Kab Yeeb*” while debating her domestication. Would Kaying – *Kab Yeeb*-- be different to the *Dab Pog* in the mind of the informant or in use only in some differentiated cultural sectors according to her symbolic meaning or efficiency?

Yet, there is a contradiction in Cha’s informant’s interpretation about the practice of thanking Kaying outside the house. Is the Spirit of Wealth (*Xwb Kab*) paired with the Spirit of Fertility (*Dab Pog*)? Previous scholarly works did not mention *Dab Pog* as a tutelary spirit of the house or associate her with the *Dab Xwm Kab*, Spirit of Wealth (Moréchand, 1968: 129; Mottin: 1981: 135). However, Henri Maspéro, a French sinologist, described the existing association of Guanyin with the God of Wealth in Chinese domestic cults in the south regions<sup>45</sup>, which renders Dia Cha’s hypothesis plausible even if further research is needed.

In comparing the Spirit of Wealth with the Lady Kaying –*Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb*, as both would be borrowed<sup>46</sup> from the Chinese pantheon, would they be borrowed at the same time? Does the importation of the cult of Kaying interfere with this older practice in changing the location, e.g. in “taking” the cult out of the house”? Probably not, from the historical perspective. A probable explanation is that the tutelary Spirit of Wealth (*Dab Xwm Kab*) had been enlisted earlier than Lady Kaying in the Hmong pantheon, and thus it is totally incorporated -- concretely celebrated inside the House.

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<sup>45</sup> “Au Fujian, c’est une petite statuette de Guanyin qui occupe la place d’honneur, avec, à sa droite et à sa gauche, les tablettes du Dieu du Foyer et du Dieu des Richesses (qui est confondu avec le Dieu du Lieu) ; en avant et au milieu, une statuette ou une tablette de Ke Shengwong, divinité spéciale à la province de Fujian. Au Jiangsu, Guanyin occupe le plus souvent la place d’honneur, mais les paysans le remplacent assez fréquemment par le Général Féroce, afin que leurs champs soient protégés contre les insectes, et, dans cette province, il n’y a guère que les familles pauvres qui y installent aussi les tablettes des Ancêtres ; celles-ci ont à l’ordinaire un sanctuaire à part. Un petit brûle-parfum, ou un bol, rempli de cendres pour y piquer des bâtonnets d’encens, avec deux cierges rouges qu’on allume que pour des cérémonies, est placé à l’avant du Tabernacle Familial. » (Maspéro 1928 : 50)

<sup>46</sup> Hmong people of long ago might have borrowed them or they were deities existing among different populations in the Chinese Antiquity.

In comparing the Spirit of Wealth with the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility –*Poj Dab Pog*, it doesn't seem to have an obvious relationship from a historical perspective. The Ancestor of the Spirit of Fertility might pre-exist in the Hmong culture before the arrival of Lady Kaying as in other cultures. Yet, one could ask why she is not thanked inside the house. The structural analysis of the general classification of the domesticated spirits and the wild spirits and their respective location to accomplish the cults places *Dab Pog* as either a celestial being or a wild spirit being everywhere, instead of attached to an altar. This hypothesis seems promising because the symbol of fertility is related to the Mother-Earth. This is similar to the category of genii of the environment<sup>47</sup> that need to be worshipped in their places. The outside of the house represents, in fact, the World of the Above and the World of the Middle. Thus, by deduction, the spiritual status of Kaying is a non-tutelary spirit, otherwise a celestial being that could not be worshipped inside the house. As for the native explanation in Cha's folk legend collected in the United States, it may be a re-interpretation of what a history of hazardous borrowings could not implement as rational explanations for the time being.

Finally, in contrasting Lady Kaying with the Spirit *Dab Pog*, the following hypothesis emerges: the Spirit *Dab Pog* first appeared in the Hmong system of beliefs before the incorporation of Guanyin. The spirit *Dab Pog* is more ancient than the Buddhist Goddess. The Spirit *Dag Pog* possibly referred to the following figures of fecundity:

1. The Mother Shao (*Poj Saub*) paired with her husband Shao (*Saub or Yawm Saub*) “The One Who Knows Everything” has a similarity with the Immortals in Taoism. In the myth of creation, the couple gave birth to the Hmong people. (Lemoine, 1987; Mottin, 1981; Yim, 1985: 306-308)
2. Lady Nuwan in the Chinese pantheon is known as *Niam Nkauj Ntsuab* (*Lady Gaodjoua*) and is paired with *Sis Nab* (SheeNah) (or Fuxi in the Chinese myth) (Lemoine, 1987). Lady Gaodjoua is

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There is cult for the genii-tree such “*Dab Ntoo Looj Sw*” where every three years, the cult “*txi ntoo xeeb*” occurs (Moréchand 1958: 131).

considered to be the first woman, perceived as a spirit of fecundity. Wise, kind and beautiful, she created the Earth while her husband created the Sky. (Mottin, 1980:62-65)

3. The Queen Mother of the West, called Xiwangmu, of proto-Tibetan origin, that Constance Cook considered to be specific to the Chu Culture [-221 BC] has been imported to the Han culture (Cook, 1999: 143). Guardian of a peach tree that would give immortality and everlasting happiness, she is represented as the Goddess of fertility and at the same time is beautiful and frightening. This hypothesis may be genuine because the Chu State covered the areas where the Miao/Hmong ancestors had been living for centuries. According to Yu, “[The Queen Mother of the West] was clearly the most famous Chinese goddess until the appearance of the feminine [Guan-yin]” (Yu, 2001: 480)

Lady Kaying is not paired with *Dab Pog*; Kaying overlapped with the *Dab Pog* couple for domestic roles, and gained a new role in shamanism.



**Pictures #10: Contemporary representations of the Couple Gaodjoua and SheeNah, and the Queen of the West**

**Left:** Mythical couple Gaodjoua and SheeNah represented with tails. This couple is also found in the Chinese Myths as the original couple under the respective names of Nuwan and Fuxi.

**Middle:** Gaodjoua surrounded by her tail  
**Right:** the Queen of the West or Xigwangmu  
Courtesy of Lydia Ruyle

### The Integration of Guanyin in Hmong Beliefs

Without a doubt, the Hmong people of long ago imported Lady Kaying from Chinese Buddhism even if she is not known as such anymore in the Hmong traditional beliefs. Because of the lack of references to Kaying in Hmong popular literature, but not in ritual liturgy: there might have

only been some borrowing of fragments derived from the religious practices of monks, healers, and priests when there were infertility problems<sup>48</sup>.

Kaying exists in Hmong shamanism, but is absent in folktales. As for the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility *Dab Po*, she has no existence in shamanism, but occupies a central place throughout the popular literature, indoor or outdoor cults. This difference demonstrates two different spiritual entities. Thus, the Goddess of Mercy has penetrated the Hmong system of beliefs at two levels: the popular cult of fertility where she overlapped the pre-existing spirit of fertility, *Niam Daj Pog*, and the shamanistic liturgy where she was imported as a shamanistic auxiliary spirit in charge of protecting pregnant women and of giving away children. No more a Goddess, even if she still kept her function of a celestial being, with her power of bestowing children, Kaying was integrated into the core of Hmong beliefs and became one of the key auxiliaries of the shaman.

Knowing the rich background of the Goddess of Mercy in Buddhism, the comparison of Kaying and Guanyin has showed that the process of borrowing happened in selective channels where Hmong people only retained equivalent roles in comprehensive religious sectors such as the role of bestower of children for popular use.

The integration is not only of a symbol, but also of a cult indeed simplified, missing the first part of requesting before the second part (thanking in return). The analysis of the semantic uses for the term of “*fij*” enlightens this borrowing process in the Souls Calling rite. In general, the verb “*fij*” is commonly used to categorize action of “making a promise of gift (animal or money paper) in order to see a special request fulfilled”, but not the action of “carrying out the sacrifice afterwards”. When the request happens to be fulfilled, Hmong people use another term, the verb “*pauj*” to designate the action of “acquitting the debt in implementing the sacrifice”. The term “*pauj*” generally means “to exchange

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<sup>48</sup> In Southeast Asia, the processes of borrowing from Westerners went along according the geographical distributions of the different groups: for example, the valley people (the national groups) borrowed from Westerners before the Highland people such as Mien, Hmong minorities groups could borrow in their turn.

goods or services”. In the case of Lady Kaying, the two terms “*fij*” and “*pauj*” are equally and contradictorily used to only specify the second portion of the exchange: “acquitting the debts in sacrificing a couple of chickens” even if there was no previous formal request. This suggests that Kaying is naturally and tacitly assimilated to a spirit of fertility that doesn’t need to be asked of for children.

Even in shamanism, the borrowings are integrated into the shamanistic system, where Guanyin became a dual entity (*nkawm qhua Neeb*) according to the Hmong representation of the spiritual entities. She is always paired in couple of functions. Her incorporation might take place because of contingency and the Hmong notion of protection: Buddhist cults of equivalent symbolic healing efficiency are assimilated into Hmong beliefs in order to reinforce its effectiveness upon sick people or sterile mothers. Indeed, this notion of efficiency and of reliability of an act resides in its repetition in calling several spiritual entities sharing commonality to enhancing and overprotecting the person in question through Hmong beliefs and social practices. This scheme though is commonly found in social practices, such as in the processes of socialization of the child, conceptualized as an “over-socialization” (Yang, 1999) where parents use any existing healing rites, including foreign healing, to cure the children or to overprotect them in order to keep them safe and healthy. The superimposition of Guanyin upon the Ancestor-Spirit of Fertility occurred because parents borrowed whatever they found efficient, such as the cult of the Goddess of Mercy, to reinforce protection over their children in economically poor areas in China, especially infants weak and dependent from emotional and physical abuses until the age of greater autonomy. Henceforth, this assimilation of Kaying in selective sectors of ritual practices enriched the pre-existing system with additional symbols and practices, which made the Hmong system of beliefs complex without changing its religious orientation.

The confusion between Lady Kaying and the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility in a Hmong mind highlights a syncretic superimposition of animist, shamanistic, pre-Buddhist and Buddhist beliefs in

their religion. The partial and unequal intra-integration in diversifying the roles of Lady Kaying (spirit of fertility, guardian of children, conductor of the dead children, and shamanistic auxiliary) at different levels in the native system of beliefs depends more on the nature of Hmong shamanism, and thus the Hmong notion of the religious than the context of borrowings. Tapp's case study of the failure of the assimilation of the Hmong Thai into Theravada Buddhism confirmed, not the lack of understanding of other religion on behalf of Hmong people, but more a genuine choice of what to borrow to match the symbolic world and the needs at the moment (Tapp, 1986).

The study of the supernatural world with its spirits, deities, and immortals helps us to better understand the nature of the relationship that Hmong people entertain with others and themselves. Through the case study of the celestial being Kaying, one could define temporarily—until more in-depth research—shamanism as a system of symbolic healing endowed with an integrative function that assimilates any alien meaningful and useful social, cultural or religious fragments of practice into Hmong beliefs. The notion of religion may be conceived as a social religious (Lee, 1994-1995) construct which reflects the social order, made up of a sum of repetitive and formal practices -- wherein dwells its reliability—and administered by intermediaries such as shamans, masters of rituals or heads of a social unit in order to establish a bilateral relationship with the spiritual world, which is a concept totally different from the notion of religion based on an individual's faith, sincerity or repentance/forgiveness where dominates a unilateral relationship with the divinity, either Guanyin in Buddhism or God in Christianity, the current alien religion that has been changing the Hmong system of beliefs in the West.

The study of the cult of Lady Kaying offers a syncretic view of the origin of the Hmong system of beliefs, which, I hope, will increase interest among scholars to seek more comparative studies analyzing both, of societies in contact and in native interpretation, to contribute to more accurate knowledge of the origin of the Hmong contemporary culture and system of beliefs. It is fortunate that

**The Meeting with Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy: A Case Study of Syncretism in the Hmong System of Beliefs by Kao-Ly Yang, Ph.D. *Hmong Studies Journal*, 7:1-42.**

Buddhism has been widely studied over of the world and in the past centuries because its connection with shamanism promises to assist in some future interesting discoveries relevant to the Hmong ancient system of beliefs.



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**Table of informants**

| Field works   | Names       | Gender | Age | Region from Laos | skills          | Types of interview | Periods of interview | Number children |
|---------------|-------------|--------|-----|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| France        | 1. Pa       | F      | 65  | X K              | shaman          | LS + SDI           | 1996-2005            | 14              |
|               | 2. Page     | F      | 80  | X K              | shaman          | LS + PO            | 1996-1999            | 1               |
|               | 3. Yeu      | F      | 70  | Sam              | -               | LS + SDI           | 1996-1997            | 8               |
|               | 4. N. Lu    | M      | 60  | Sam              | Master of rites | SDI + PO           | 1996-1997            | ?               |
|               | 5. Lig      | F      | 80  | X K              | -               | LS + SDI           | 1996-1997            | 2               |
|               | 6. S. Cha   | F      | 60  | X K              | Healer          | PO + SDI           | 1996-1997            | ?               |
| Laos          | 7. Chia     | F      | 50  | X K              | -               | LS+SDI+P<br>O      | 1996                 | 2               |
|               | 8. V. Xue   | F      | 55  | X K              | shaman          | PO                 | 1996                 | ?               |
|               | 9. N. Chue  | F      | 80  | X K              | -               | LS + SDI           | 1996                 | 10              |
|               | 10. N. Xue  | F      | 65  | X K              | -               | LS + SDI           | 1996                 | 14              |
| United States | 11. N. Toua | M      | 65  | LP               | Shaman          | SDI                | 2001-2003            | ?               |
|               | 12. N. Vang | F      | 47  | LP               | Shaman          | SDI                | 2003                 | ?               |

XK: Xieng Khouang, province of Laos; SAM: Samneua, province of Laos; LP: Luam Prabang, province of Laos; LS: life story; SDI: Semi-directed interview; PO: participant observation; □: passed away

**TABLE#1: STRUCTURE OF THE RITE “Souls Calling” (*Hu plig*) FOR NEWBORNS:**

| Sequence #      | Title of the sequence  | Location: Inside/Outside                           | Nature and state of the assortment  | Symbolic/cultural meaning <sup>49</sup>   |
|-----------------|--|--|---|---|
| <b>1</b>        | Uncooked assortments: Calling the soul of the newborn – with   | <b>Inside</b> the house: in front of the main door | Uncooked food (rice, egg, couple of male and female chickens)   | The newborn is perceived as a non-cultural human being  |
| <b>Kaying 2</b> | Uncooked assortments: Thanking Lady Kaying/the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility: <i>Fij tom fij yoom nkawm niam txiv Kab Yeeb/nkawm niam txiv Dab Pog</i><br>The assortment are uncooked | <b>Outside</b> the house: near the main door       | Uncooked food and no burnt money paper: a male chicken, a bowl of rice, 12 paper money sheets, 12 paper money bars, 1 paper money branch, plateful of grilled paddy and incense | Evoke Lady Kaying before the temporary altar in her honor   |
| <b>3</b>        | Cooked assortments: Calling the soul of the newborn  | <b>Inside</b> the house, in front of the main door | Cooked food (rice, egg, couple of male and female chickens)   | The child is transforming by “cooking process” in order to become a cultural human being and socially integrated into the lineage |
| <b>4</b>        | Going to the bedroom   | <b>Inside</b> the house: Bedroom of the child      | All the cooked food   | Assignment of the soul of the newborn to its place of the household   |
| <b>Kaying 5</b> | Cooked assortments: Thanking Lady Kaying/the Ancestor Spirit of Fertility: <i>Fij tom fij yoom nkawm niam txiv Kab Yeeb/nkawm niam txiv Dab Pog</i><br>The assortment are uncooked   | <b>Outside</b> the house: near the main door       | Cooked food: the male chicken, a bowl of rice + burn the 12 paper money sheets, 12 paper money bars, 1 paper money branch, plateful of grilled paddy, and incense               | Thank Lady Kaying for giving and bringing the child to the parents  |

<sup>49</sup> Yang, K-L, 1999: chapter 8

**TABLE#2: COMPARATIVE TABLES BETWEEN KAYING AND GUANYIN**

|                   | Similarities  |  |
|-------------------|---|--|
|                   | Hmong Kaying  | Buddhist Guanyin   |
| <b>Name</b>       | /ka yẽŋ/ with spelling: Kaying, <i>Kab Yeeb</i> (Hmong) <u>Other names:</u> <i>Poj Dab Pog</i> (Ancestor of Spirit of fertility)) | /kwã yẽ/ with spelling: Guanyin, Kuan-Yin, KwaYin<br><u>Other names:</u> Avalokitesvara, Kuanshiyin                                |
| <b>Attributes</b> | Compassionate<br>Being everywhere<br>Hearing everything   | Compassionate<br>Being everywhere<br>Hearing everything  |
| <b>Roles</b>      | Child-giver<br>Guardian-angel, protectress of children.<br>Conductor of the dead children<br>Protection of all sentient beings    | <i>Songzi Guanyin</i> or Child-giver<br>Protectress of children.<br>Conductor of the dead<br><br>Protection of all sentient beings |

IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet

|                            | Differences   |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|
|                            | Hmong Kaying  | Buddhist Guanyin  |
| <b>Identity</b>            | Only known as the bestower of Children  | Has several identities:<br>The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara.<br>The White robed Guanyin<br>The Royal ease Guanyin<br>The Thousand armed Guanyin (other variations)<br>The Water Moon Guanyin<br>The Songzi (child-giving) Guanyin |
| <b>Gender</b>              | Female deity ( <i>Niam Nkauj Kab Yeeb</i> )<br>Couple ( <i>Nkawm Niam Txiv Kab Yeeb</i> ) | Male deity in India,<br>Female deity during the Song dynasty in the 10th Century A.D.   |
| <b>Appearance</b>          | There is no concrete representation   | Rich range of esoteric representation of Guanyin (painting, sculpture, ...)   |
| <b>Additional roles</b>    | Protects only children until a certain age.   | Protects women, sailors, merchants, craftsmen, and those under criminal prosecution.<br>Safeguarding of childbirth<br>Salvation of soul<br>Repentance<br>Conductor of the dead  |
| <b>Cults</b>               | Rite of Souls Calling for Newborns<br>Healing Rituals<br>Infertility Rituals<br>Shamanism | Rich range of cults associations to the existing sutras and Chinese Buddhist scriptures and scrolls within their practices  |
| <b>Believer's behavior</b> | No miracle reported<br>Dreams   | Recorder miracles as a proves of efficiency and of way of spreading faith<br>Dreams   |

**TABLE# 3: COMPARATIVE TABLES BETWEEN KAYING AND ANCESTOR SPIRIT OF FERTILITY**

|                     | <b>Kaying</b>   | <b>Ancestor Spirit of fertility</b>  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| <b>Similarities</b> | Bestower of children<br>A female deity and also a couple of male and female entities.<br>Celebrated during the ritual «Soul Calling» for newborns | Bestower of children<br>A female deity and also as a couple of male and female entities.<br>Celebrated during the ritual «Soul Calling» for newborns |
| <b>Differences</b>  | Name: « <i>niam nkauj Kab Yeeb</i> ».<br>Cults:<br>- shamanism<br>- not associated healing rituals<br>Presence in rituals                         | name: « <i>Niam Poj Dab Pog</i> »<br>Cults<br>- not in shamanism<br>- Healing rituals<br>Presence in rituals and in popular culture                  |

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**Author Information**

Kao-Ly Yang, Ph.D. Linguistics & Anthropology  
Fresno (California), Final Revision Submitted, December 4, 2006  
E-mail to [kaoly\\_y@yahoo.com](mailto:kaoly_y@yahoo.com)  
Website: [www.hmongci.com](http://www.hmongci.com)