Qha Ke (Guiding the Way) From the Hmong Ntsu of China, 1943

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Abstract

This article provides the text of Ruey Yih-Fu's 1943 collected version of the Qhuab Ke, or Song of Opening the Way, sung at a Hmong funeral in China. An English translation is provided based on the Hmong and Chinese translations given by Ruey, together with extensive notes and details about the Song. Ruey's own IPA-based transliteration is mainly kept, with some modifications in view of RPA. It appears to be one of the earliest and most original versions of the Qhuab Ke we have.
Introduction

Ruey Yih-Fu

The Qhuab Ke, or song of 'Pointing', 'Opening' or 'Guiding' the Way, is a chant sung to the soul of a deceased Hmong person just after they have died. The following version was collected and translated word for word from Hmong into Chinese by Ruey Yih-Fu in Sichuan, China, in 1943. Ruey Yih-Fu (1898-1990) was a famous Chinese ethnologist who fled from China to Taiwan with many other intellectuals and scholars just before the Chinese Revolution of 1949. He spent his life thereafter teaching and researching at the Academia Sinica (Central Research Institute) in Taipei, Taiwan. In Taiwan, as Guldin (1994) says, he helped set up the Department of Anthropology at National Taiwan University. There he influenced a whole generation of researchers, including those who were later to be my senior colleagues, Chien Chiao and Hsieh Jiann, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I used to work. It is my great regret that I was never able to meet Prof. Ruey, as I was due to visit him in Taiwan at the time he became too ill to see anyone.

Ruey had originally trained in France. Before the Second World War he had joined Cai Yuanpei and Ling Chunsheng (Ling Shun-Sheng) at the Institute of Ethnology at the Academia Sinica, which was then based in Nanjing in China. Cai (former President of Beijing University) was the founding Director of the Academia Sinica. Ling Chunsheng, with whom Ruey studied the Qho Xiong ('Miao') people of west Hunan in 1932, was the head of the Ethnology Department. The Ethnology Department came under the Academia Sinica's Institute of History and Philology, and later Ling too became Director of the Academia Sinica (Guldin 1994). Ruey's work also covered other minorities in China such as the She. But he studied in particular both the 'Xiangxi Miao' (Qho Xiong) of western Hunan and northeast Guizhou, and the Hmong, who lived at that time in parts of Sichuan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Yunnan provinces, as they do today.

Ruey researched these Hmong in Sichuan in 1943 and wrote a monograph from which the Qhuab Ke below is taken. The monograph is called Marriage and Mortuary Customs of the Magpie Miao, Southern Sichuan, China, and was published by the Institute of History and Philology at the Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, in 1962 (Monograph Series A no. 29). Kuan Tung-kuei was the co-author. The work is in Hmong and Chinese, with the Chinese translations underneath the Hmong. Ruey published another book with Ling in Chinese which is an ethnography of the Xiangxi (western Hunan) Miao, or Qho Xiong, in West Hunan. Besides articles in Chinese and other articles on 'Miao' history in general, he also published two good articles in English on the same Hmong of southern Sichuan (spelt Szechuan in those days). One was on their kinship system, with an account of all the kin terms they used for different categories of relative; tsi, na, to, ntshai, ti, ku, ma, ve, for example, were 'father', 'mother', 'son', 'daughter', 'elder brother', 'younger brother', 'younger sister', 'elder sister', respectively. That article was published in the Bulletin of the same Institute in 1958 (no. 29, pp.615-631), and it was followed by a comment by A.L. Kroeber, the famous American cultural anthropologist of that time. Another article, just called 'The Magpie Miao of Southern Szechuan', was published as Chapter 10 in a 1960 book edited by George Murdock, called Social Structure in Southeast Asia.

The Hmong Ntsû

In both these articles, and in the Sichuan book, Ruey confirms that these people called themselves at that time "Hmong Ntsu" (1960) or "Hmong Ntsû" (1958). However, he adds that they were sometimes called Yachio Miao ('Magpie Miao') by the Chinese, and sometimes Han Miao ('Sinicised Miao') because they were very sinicised. They were part of the same group whom Davy Crocket Graham, the Curator of the Museum at Sichuan University (where there are still many Hmong artefacts dating from this time), had described as the Ch'uan Miao ('Sichuan Miao') in his various writings (see Graham 1937; 1954). These Hmong Ntsû numbered about 10,000, and lived in the mountainous headlands of the Yongning River in southern Sichuan (28° to 29° N and 105° to 106° E). They lived in compact villages several thousand feet above sea level, interspersed with the villages of other peoples. They grew millet, barley, buckwheat, maize, kaoliang, cabbage, turnips and tea on the mountain slopes by 'slash and burn' cultivation, but they also had terraced rice fields supported by an elaborate system of bamboo pipes and water-powered mills.
And they also grew beans, hemp, indigo and tobacco. They kept cattle, pigs and chickens and sometimes sheep, ducks and even bees. They wove cloth from hemp and dyed it dark blue or batikied it.

The dialect Ruey transcribes, below, despite all the differences of spelling, is clearly very close to Mong Leng as we know it, and sometimes to White Hmong too (as in the word for 'father'). It is clearly Hmong and these were clearly Hmong people. When I went to work in the same places in 1989, I met Hmong there who spoke Hmong and had just the same Hmong funeral and wedding customs I had seen in Thailand. However, the Hmong dialect they spoke in 1989 seemed to me quite different both from White Hmong and Mong Leng, and from the Hmong which Ruey transcribes. All the tones were systematically different (the high tones all became mid tones, for instance) and they used many Chinese loan words rather than Thai or Lao ones. The word for 'father' for instance was 'vaiv'; they knew the (RPA) word 'txiv', which they pronounced 'txwv' like both the Mong Leng and the Hmong Ntsû Ruey describes, but they only used that word if a child were addressing his father directly. If you spoke of your father to someone else, rather than addressing him directly, you must say 'vaiv'. That is a small example, but I think the dialect I found was different from the one Ruey describes and that the one Ruey describes (see below) was much closer to the Hmong spoken in Southeast Asia. Also the Hmong I met in Sichuan did not know what sub-group of Hmong they were and had no idea that once they might have been called Hmong Ntsû, or been called 'Yachio Miao' or 'Han Miao' by the Chinese. However, the Hmong whom Ruey worked with are clearly very close to the Mong Leng and White Hmong of Southeast Asia and the world today.

In the following I have used Ruey's own system of tranliteration for Hmong based on the International Phonetic Alphabet of the time, but I have changed some parts in accordance with RPA (see ending comments). I have not translated all the words into RPA but sometimes where I thought it was not clear I have added footnotes about the RPA. There are some strong differences, the 'ua' sound almost always becoming 'a' for instance, and writing 'u' as 'o', but it is very clearly a Hmong dialect with close links to Mong Leng. Based on the Chinese translations I have mostly been able to identify what Hmong words are being spoken despite the peculiarities of Ruey's spelling. I have added a Comment on this, and on this version of the Qhuab Ke (or Qha Ke as Ruey calls it) at the end. And in the footnotes I have also added some comments and indicated equivalent words in RPA, the romanised script normally used for Mong Leng and White Hmong, where it was not clear. FF means Father's Father, FM means Father's Mother.

QHA KE

Lau e lau lau e lau e,
Old Oh Old Old Oh Old Oh,

ka ta tseng, la ta tx?1
You die really, or die false?

Ka ta ta! Na tse,
You die really! Now,

ko ya kheu kle ko tau ka yo2 ntcau
I will bring water hot give you rinse mouth

kheu kle so tau ka yo lo.
bring water warm give you rinse mouth(cl.)3

Na tse, ko ya ci ka mo ntc ci ke nto
Now, I will lead4 you go travel5 road heaven

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1 RPA tseeb (true), cuav (false), contracted here to ca as in the Chinese term jia.
2 RPA yaug.
3 'This the classifier, RPA lub, for 'mouth'.
4 The normal word for 'lead' here seems to be ci, rather than RPA coj.
na lo, lau!
like this, dead one!

(At this point, the Master lifts up a bowl of warm water to offer to the dead man’s mouth, then spills it on the ground).

That is, if you are really dead, I will use warm and hot water to wash your mouth, Dead One, I will lead you on the Heavenly Path!

Lau e! Kle so ko kheu tau ka yo ntau
O dead one! Water hot I bring to you rinse mouth

yo lo tang ta
rinse mouth finish

na tse, ko ya ci ka mo ntcie ke nteo.
now, I will lead you go travel way heaven.

Ka ya tsang6 ntse si nong tse mo lo.
You will prick up ear try listen Master words.

Na lo, lau e!
Like this, Dead One!

That is, I have rinsed out your mouth with hot and warm water, O dead one, now I will lead you on the Road to Heaven!

(Then the Master throws the divination horns. If there is no xun trigram, but a yang, he will continue to sing).

Na tse, qhwa ntswa?7
Now, open Yang trigram!

Ka tsi ti la! Ko ya ci ka mo ntcie
You not will happy! I will lead you go travel

ke nto, na lo, lau e!8
path heaven, like this, Old one!

(after this if he did not get the xun trigram, but yin, so he can sing on)9

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5 The Chinese, you, means 'wander' or 'go around', or make a tour.
6 Mong Leng tsaa.
7 I don’t understand why the Chinese glosses this as ‘yang trigram/divination’. Qhwa is to ‘open or guide or point’, RPA qhuab. But why ntswa should translate as ‘yang’ I do not know since in Hmong the term for ‘yang’ is yaj, or yang in Mong Leng (yaaj), as in RPA yeeb yaj khiab, and later in this verse we do indeed hear about the yang kwa. The notes explain that this ntswa actually refers to the bamboo shoot from which the divination horns are made - RPA ntsuag or bamboo sprout. (In this article I mostly use White Hmong RPA since that is what I am more familiar with, although the dialect is clearly much closer to Mong Leng).
8 The Master seems to be addressing the horns. If they are not happy, they disagree, the moment is not propitious to continue.
9 The notes explain that two down is yin (a negative response), two up is yang (positive), one of each is xun. In Chinese the xun (sun) trigram is the one which has two yang (male, unbroken, positive) lines at the
That is, this Yang trigram, you are not happy, don’t laugh, I will lead you on the heavenly path…..

Lau e! Khu tse tca nro; khu tshai tse
O dead one! Yin trigram then wait vein; xun trigram then

tca hmau
wait evening

ko ya ci ka mo ntc i ke nto, na lo
I will lead you go travel way heaven, this way

lau e!
dead one!

That is, Oh! divining the Yin trigram, one will wait for a long time, divining the xun trigram, needs to wait till evening. I will bring you to Heaven, travelling, like this, O dead one!

(Then he throws the Yang trigram again)

Ntshai ka tsi ti lu ko i zwang. Ko ya
Fear you not will wager I one verse. I will

top, followed by a yin (broken, negative) line at the bottom, and it is associated with 'Wind', rather than with the 'Heaven' of the yang or the 'Earth' of the yin. See extended footnote below.

10 Probably ces, ‘and, then’, a connector.
11 According to the Chinese footnotes, it seems that khu refers to a ‘couple’ or ‘pair’, while tsu means both divination horns are down, so it should be a yin trigram, and tshai refers to one of them being up, one down, or the xun trigram. The khu may however (I suppose) derive from RPA khuj, or ‘fortune’. Chindasri (1976) and others note that at Hmong funerals it is necessary to throw the divination horns so that one is up, one is down, for the rites to continue. This is of course because yin (RPA yeeb) refers to the spiritual world, yang (RPA yaj) to the mortal/human world, while one of each, a yin plus a yang, signifies that the way between the two worlds is open, and communication between spirits and men can take place. The Hmong oral system, however, is much simpler and more original than the Chinese written one, being based on pairs of opposites only. It results in a total system of three, given the possibility of a combination of positive with negative (i.e. positive, negative, or mixed), rather than the Chinese system of four. The third Hmong possibility is bifurcated in Chinese according to whether the yang is placed above, or below, the yin - resulting in the eight basic trigrams of Chinese folklore, which are derived from adding either a positive or a negative to each of these four pair of basic opposites. The Hmong system has no hierarchy in it, no yang being placed above or below a yin as it must be in writing. Thus there can only be three combinations - positive, negative, or a combination of both. Temporal sequence could also of course lead to such Chinese-style combinations, with a yang preceding a yin or vice versa, but this does not seem to occur in the Hmong rituals. Now, why the Chinese translation of the Hmong term for the combination of yang and yin (that magic third combination, which permits intercourse between the living and the dead) should only refer to the Chinese xun trigram (which has two yang lines above, a yin line below them), rather than any one of the other five of the eight basic trigrams (bagua) which are defined by (three-line) combinations of yang with yin lines (arranged vertically), I have no idea. – One possibility could be that it was this very xun trigram which was indeed the origin of the derivation of the whole bagua eight-trigram system (which may be seen as the basis of Chinese medicine, astrology, architecture and martial arts) out of a simple combination of positives and negatives. That is, after the combination of yang-yang with yin-yin to produce either yang-yin or yin-yang (making 4 Chinese combinations, rather than the third Hmong alternative in which it does not matter if it is either yang-yin or yin-yang), adding a further yin or yang to each gives eight total sequent combinations. Within these, the xun (two positives above a negative) is only one out of five possible other combinations of trigrams which include both yin and yang. Why should not the third Hmong alternative, a combination of yin with yang, be represented for instance by tui (lake), a negative above two positives?
lu ka tsha pa zwang! Na lo, lau e
wager you thousand hundred verses! This way, dead one

(He throws again and gets yin again)

That is, I fear you do not agree with my section. I may sing you a hundred, a thousand sections. Like this, Oh!12

lau e, ka ya tsang ntse si nong tse mo lo,
Dead one, you will prick up ear try listen Master words,
tse mo ya mpang ntang13 ri14 hneng ci ka mo ntxi
Master will take sword carry lead you go along
ke nto, na lo, lau e!
road heaven, like this, dead one!

(Then he divines; if he throws a yang or a yin trigram, he must repeat the relevant above verses. If he throws a xun trigram, he may continue).

That is, you listen to the Master’s words, Master will carry knife and crossbow [for you] and bring you to the road of heaven, like this, O dead one!

rhau nto ntsi tcang vong, ha te ntsi tcang lau.
telling of a bit roots voice, speak earth a bit roots old.
Rhua tau ntsu nong xong18 ke kang tsong ha tau
Telling of heaven seeds bamboo cause kinds speak
ntsu nong ntong na ke ta kang nyau.19 So ta yo
heaven seeds tree this way come road at.

(If divination does not yield a xun, but a yin, he may continue).

That is, speaking of the origins of Heaven and Earth, where were the beginnings, what were the origins and [many kinds of] causes, of trees and bamboos?

Lau e! na tse, ko ha tsw ka qhwa ka ke.
Dead One! Now, I still not can guide your way.

Ko ha qhua nong xong nong ntong ke na lo, lau e!
I still point seeds bamboo seeds trees road this way, Dead one!

12 The Chinese footnote confesses this translation does not seem to make sense. It sounds as if one verse is being bet against many.
13 RPA ntaaj (ntaj).
14 To carry as on one's back.
15 The Chinese, lao tien, means to talk widely of many things.
16 So this would be cag for ‘roots’ in White Hmong.
17 This is what the Chinese says, onomatopoeically, but I cannot find a Hmong equivalent, except for voob which means to cover something, usually with earth.
18 Ruey actually uses the symbol I have transcribed as RPA c here, but clearly ‘bamboo’ is meant.
19 Obviously nyob, ‘to live, to be, to stay’.
20 RPA haj (‘still’ or ‘yet’), like Chinese hai.
(If divination does not yield a *xun*, but *yang*, he may continue).

That is, now I will not yet point your way, now I will [first] explain about the origins of trees and bamboos.

Lau e! Qhwa ntswa! Ka tsw ti la! Po kang
Dead One! Yang trigram! You not happy/laugh. FM way

eyeu ke a na lo. Lau e!
FF way do like this. O dead one!

That is, O dead one, the Yang trigram! You will not be happy\(^{21}\), Grandmother’s and Grandfather’s Way is like this, O dead one!

(After throwing the *xun* trigram) -

Ntsu to ta e! tang i ntsu tang ta ka,
Heaven those die Oh! finish one section finish end,

ma i ntsu tsa ta ta ta.
have one section again come end.

Thau nto nyau nto klau te tca,
Past heaven in heaven desolate earth desolate,

te nyau te klau nrang nto tseng le nti.
earth in earth desolate place quietly darkly.

nong xong tsa tsw tseu ma,
seeds bamboo still not appear have,

nong ntong tsa tsw tseu
seeds trees still not appear

pu lo pong. Hmo po tha hmo yeu\(^{22}\) le mo nong
? come fall. Seedling FM and seedling FF just go ask

po Sau yeu Sau:
FM Saub\(^{23}\) FF Saub\(^{24}\)

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\(^{21}\) The Chinese free translation translates this as agreeing – that is, ‘you will not agree’, presumably addressed to the otherworld with reference to the absence of the correct ‘trigram’.

\(^{22}\) *Hmo po* and *hmo yeu* are extremely suggestive phrases, as the Chinese translation for *hmo* is given as ‘Miao’. This is the same term which is used for the Hmong and some other groups in China, which literally means seedling. So although I have translated this in English as ‘seedling’, in Chinese it is ‘Miao’; any Chinese reader reading this would understand the grandfather and grandmother of the Hmong (‘Miao’) to be meant here. If that Chinese translation is correct (and it probably is, otherwise the ‘ancestors of the seedlings’ would be meant here, which is unlikely), then it implies that these Hmong called themselves Hmo, and that the Chinese translator assumed that *hmo* meant ‘seedling’ (*miao*). The tone value given to this word by Ruey is a 53, but other words in the high tone of White Hmong (a 55) are given in this song with the same tone (like *sa* for liver). Lyman’s Green Meo Dictionary also notes that this tone can be realised either as 55 or 54 (that is, slightly falling) in Green Hmong. So in RPA it should probably be written *hmob*. It is possible the Chinese transcription just did not hear the final nasalisation but this is strange since Ruey usually uses the term ‘Hmong’ (with final nasalisation) for these people.
“Nong xong25 teu qha tu26 nong ntong teu ntsu teu qha tu ta?”
“Seeds bamboo come which where seeds trees come which where come?”

Po FM Sau th Saub FM FF Sau th FF Saub say that: “Nong xong tseu te qau nto, nong ntong tseu ntsu te qau pi.”
“Nong bamboo come earth carry heaven, seeds tree come heaven earth carry high up”.

Hmo po th hmo yeu tsa ya nong
SeedlingFM and hmo FF Saub FF Saub still will ask
“Ya la tsw28 le ma29 tau ntsu nong xong?”
“Get what just take to heaven seed bamboo
Ya la tsw le ma tau ntsu nong ntong?”
Will what just take to heaven seed tree?”

Po FM Sau yeu Sau le ha ta: “Nong rhe le ma
FM Saub FF Saub say that: “Bird name just
ma tau ntsu nong xong, nong ko le ma
take to heaven seed bamboo, woodpecker just take
tau ntsu nong ntong”.
to heaven seed tree”.

Hmo po th hmo yeu le rau lo31 tso.
SeedlingFM and hmo FF Saub FF Saub just return back to.
Hmo po le tcau mo32 nyang fe33 tau nong rhe
SeedlingFM just take news carefully ask to bird name34
nqes35 swa ta tso, hmo yeu le tcau mo nyang36
up hurriedly come to, seedling FF just take news37 careful

23 The name of a Hmong divinity. See Concluding remarks.
24 FM means ‘Father’s Mother’ (paternal grandmother) and FF means ‘Father’s Father’ (paternal grandfather).
25 Either the pronunciation is really like this or Ruey did not hear it as xy.
26 Qhov twg
27 Probably a better translation would be ‘behind’; cf. RPA qaum, ‘back’). Later in the text the same word is translated as ‘behind’ or ‘back’.
28 latswv is the Chinese Hmong pronunciation of White Hmong dab tsi I often heard in Sichuan.
29 muaj, ‘have’ or ‘take’.
30 This may sometimes be RPA lauw, which would mean ‘already’ or act as a general post-verbal indicating an action completed if immediately following a verb.
31 This must be rov hlos, return back, in RPA.
32 Mong (moo) in RPA; either the final nasalisation is missing in Sichuan, or was not heard.
33 This word must be fiv in RPA, as in compounds like fiv dab to ‘make a promise to the spirits’.
34 RPA noog tsev would be a ‘sparrow’, but it is likely this is in compound with noog kos, ‘woodpecker’.
35 If this is supposed to be nqes, then it is used quite differently from in Western Hmong, where the translation should be ‘down’.
36 But this is not like the RPA ceev faj or be careful.
37 Or message.
fe tau nong ko nqe swa ta pong.  
ask to bird name up hurried come fall.

Nong rhe le yang mo pong ntsu te qau nto,  
Bird name just fly to/go fall heaven earth carry heaven,

Nong ko yang mo pong ntsu te qau pi,  
Bird name fly go fall sky earth carry high place.

Nong rhe le ma tau ntsu nong xong,  
Bird name just take to heaven seeds bamboo,

nong ko ma tau ntsu nong ntong.  
woodpecker take to heaven seeds tree.

Nong rhe le ma tau ntsu nong xong tau lo tso,  
Bird name just take to heaven seeds bamboo return to,

nong ko le ma tau ntsuj nong ntong tau lo pong.  
bird name just take to heaven seed tree return fall.

Hmo po le ma nong xong ha heu ta nta rong;  
SeedlingsFM just take seeds bamboo seedlings plant on in mountain;

tau nto tsar, nong xong ta i tsong. Hmo yeu le  
wait sky new, seeds bamboo grow one bunch. SeedlingsFF just

ma nong ntong ha heu ta nta kleu; tso nto tsha,  
Take seeds tree seedlings(?) on within col; to sky new,

nong ntong ta i zong. A ne na, le tau  
seed tree grow one forest. Do that this, just get

nts u nong xong txau lo a tsu yang kwa tshi nteu,  
sky seed bamboo bring come do pair trigram bamboo divine, -piece

tsai ka i lo lo. A ne na, le tau  
respond you one sentence. Do that this, just get

nts u nong ntong tcau lo a vang si tse, tsai tau  
sky seed tree make do garden some house, get give
ka nyau. na lo, ntsu to⁴⁹ ta e!
you live. This, sky person die Oh!

(Divination until the sun trigram)

That is, O dead One, now one section is finished, and one still remains! Now I will teach you about the origins of bamboo and of wood. In ancient times, nothing grew on earth, the sky was dark and the earth desolate. There were no seeds of bamboo, no seeds of trees, so ask Grandfather Saub, Grandmother Saub, “Where do the seeds of bamboo and the trees come from?” And Grandfather, Grandmother Saub answer, saying “The seeds of bamboo and of the trees come from Heaven”. So ask them (him) how to get (find) the seeds of bamboo, and the seeds of trees, and they will answer “The ko bird, the re bird (prob. woodpecker), can find the seeds of bamboo and of the trees (wood)”. So Grandfather and Grandmother invited a bird to come, to fly to Heaven and got the seeds and came back, and the seedlings of bamboo and trees Grandfather and Grandmother sowed on the mountain. Until spring (dawn?), the bamboo seeds grew up into a clump of bamboos, the tree seeds grew up into a (mighty) forest, so they got the seeds of bamboo from Heaven which can make the pair of trigrams (divining horns) used for conversation (communication), and they got the seeds of trees (wood) which can make your house (the coffin), O dead One!⁵⁰

So ta yo! Na tse, tang i ntsu, tang ta ka
Words… Now, finish one section, finish
ma i ntsu tsa ta ta.
have one section again come.

Thau ka na you⁵¹ ka ta nta nqeu ta,
Past your mother sent you come in wear skirt
ka tsi yeu ka ta nta nqeu tshau.
your father sent you come inside wear clothes.

Ka tce qang⁵⁵ lo tsw⁵⁶ po teu ri,
Your leg upper - not full feet trousers,
mpang⁵⁷ lo tsw po te tshau.
arm not full hand cloth.

Ka na ka tsi ya yeu nyau ka tau Hong Nya Ntang
Your mother your father will send live you to PLACE NAME

⁴⁹ RPA tuu, classifier of a person.
⁵⁰ The reference to falling is reminiscent of the version I collected in Sichuan (Tapp 2001) where the bird flies to heaven and pecks at the seeds, which fall to earth one by one.
⁵¹ The word might simply be RPA tug, or ‘born’.
⁵² This must be RPA tiab, so it is ‘skirt’, oddly. This may be a reference to the return of the soul to collect its placenta, sometimes referred to in these songs as a satin coat, from the place where it is buried in the house after birth.
⁵³ Note this pronunciation of the word for ‘father’ is consistently more like White Hmong than Mong Leng, although in most cases the dialect seems closer to Mong Leng.
⁵⁴ Almost certainly RPA tsu or ‘jacket’, since it is followed by ri for ‘trousers’ which must be RPA ris, which two words often occur in combination compounds (ris tsu).
⁵⁵ That is, RPA ngej gab, qaab or ‘thigh’.
⁵⁶ Note the negative is pronounced sometimes like White Hmong tsis, sometimes like Mong Leng which sounds more like tsw, and was the way I heard it in Sichuan with another Hmong sub-group (Hmoob Puas).
⁵⁷ RPA npab, npaab.
te te. Ka ya nau\textsuperscript{58} tang ka na na
some place. You will eat up\textsuperscript{59} your mother cl.\textsuperscript{60}
i tcau\textsuperscript{61} i leu qang, ka ya hnaang\textsuperscript{62} tang
one ten one cl. grain, you will wear finish
ka tsi na i tcau i leu tsong ta.
your father cl. one ten one cl. clothes.

Na lo, ntsu to ta e!
Like this, heaven person die Oh!

That is, Now one section is finished, there is still one section left (another one begins). Long ago, your mother asked you to come inside and wear a skirt, your father asked you to come inside wearing a cloth (jacket). Your leg was shorter than the trousers (too short for the trousers), your arm was shorter than the sleeves (too short for the sleeves) (the skirt was longer than the legs, the sleeves longer than the arms). Your mother and your father ask(ed) you to come to Hong Ganba (a place, of birth?). You will eat up eleven times the grain of your mother, you will wear out your father’s suits of cloth eleven times. Like this, O dead one!\textsuperscript{63}

(Divination until xun - )

So ta yo! Na tse, tang i ntsu, tang ta ka
Words.. Now, finish one section, finish
ma i ntsu tsa ta ta.
have one section again come.

Thau le la tsw a te sa\textsuperscript{64} tsw zong?
Past that what do some liver not good?

Qau nto ntsu Nong lau a te sa tsw zong,
Behind sky sky Nong\textsuperscript{65} always do some liver not good,

\textsuperscript{58} Or RPA noon, again like White Hmong.
\textsuperscript{59} Eat fully, to the finish, eat up.
\textsuperscript{60} A number word, or classifier.
\textsuperscript{61} If this is the number ten, rather than the normal RPA kaum or ‘ten’, the word normally used only for compounds of ten (as in ‘thirty’, ‘forty’, fifty’, etc.) is used here (RPA caug).
\textsuperscript{62} Here is the more normal Hmong word for ‘to wear’, RPA hnav.
\textsuperscript{63} Hmong has considerable poetic licence regarding tenses. Although the verb forms throughout this stanza are all clearly in the future (ya, or RPA yaw, meaning ‘will’), it is prefaced by Thaum which in all contexts in this text is translated as ‘Before’ or ‘time past’ and so I assume functions much as Thaum ub or Thaum ib would in RPA today, so that means the verse is referring to events in the past, at the birth of the deceased. It is also common to refer to the way the deceased has used up goods during his life on earth in these songs of death, the sense being one of immeasurable indebtedness and gratitude to one’s parents whom one can never repay. That is the sense here, I think, so in correct English a conditional tense should be used in the last sentence, i.e, ‘in Hong Ganba you were to eat up so much grain, you would use up so much clothing….’.

\textsuperscript{64} The ia sound in RPA also often becomes elided as a; this is RPA siab, liver or (metaphorically) heart.
\textsuperscript{65} The Chinese translation just mentions that this is the name of a god, but given that he has a bad heart and the preposition of the strange word Ntsu for Heaven, I think this should probably be read as a compound. So the name should be Ntsu Nong, or in RPA Ntxwg Nyug (Nyog); later in this text it is spelt Nyong. That would imply that the first half of Ntxwg Nyug’s name means something like ‘Heaven’. 
always do some liver not good. He will release a root(?) thread

disease down world. World some people pick up not to,

all the world some people pick up not to;

you one person pick up to.

You one person pick up to.

You will get ill secretly in inside body,

do alcohol secretly in inside earthenware jar.

Nine drink medicine cure not well,

eight drink shamans cure not.

Cut off breath cut off in mouth,

cut off heart cut off in chest.

You alive person not get, upright home not get.

Like this, heaven person die!

66 RPA mob, ill.
67 RPA cew.
68 RPA cawv. The pronunciation must be very similar (in Chinese it is jiu).
69 RPA hub.
70 RPA cuaj. I am sure the consonant is the same, but the vowel has changed, so in RPA this should be written as ca.
71 RPA haus.
72 RPA tshuaj.
73 The same in RPA.
74 The Chinese leaves this blank, but going from other versions, it must mean shamans rather than shamanic spirits (neeb) although that is what it literally says. Perhaps it should be shamanic spirits.
75 RPA tu.
76 Possibly derived from RPA nraub qaum, which refers to the upper back.
77 RPA ciaj.
78 RPA yim, household or family, homestead.
That is, now one section is finished, and there is one yet to come. In the past, whose heart was not good? Ntxwg Nyug’s heart was not good. He strung a thread of illness to the world. Nobody could pick it up, but you, O dead one, you were the one who picked it up! You fell ill secretly, like an earthenware jar producing wine. Nine doses of medicine and eight doctors could not cure you, O dead one! The breath is cut off in your mouth, the heart is stilled in your breast, you could not survive, your house cannot withstand, O dead!

Words…

So ta e! na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka,
Now, finish one section finish,

ma i ntsu tsa ta tang, na tse, ka ta tang ta!
have one section again come to?, now, you die finish!

Ka ya mo leu ntshai nqe67 na tsi rong68 tsang,
You will go fear couple na mother father door threshold,

te lo lo ta rang mpleu81 tong, lo te nang ta
right hand hold a whip copper, one hand left hold

rang mpleu82 hlau. Ne ya qhau ka hau ke.
a whip iron. They will block your front way.

Ne ya nong ka ta: “Ka ke hau tse tse69 neng,
They will ask you that: “You is? within house - person,

ka ya mo a la tsi?” na tse,
you will go do what?” Now,

ka ya qhe84 ntcau lo ha, qhe lo lo ntshe,
you will open mouth to speak, open mouth to answer,

tse ka ya ha ta ke: “Thaum qau nto
(then)85 you will speak that: “Past behind sky

ntsu nyong86 tau a te sa tsw zong,
heaven always do some heart no good,

ne ya tsau tau tso sang mau ngqai la te.
he will send87 to thread silk illness down the world.

la te neng lo kheu tsw tau,
world some people - pick up not get

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79 RPA *nkawm*.
80 RPA *rooj*, door.
81 RPA *mplawm*.
82 The IPA symbol Ruey uses looks like an l with a cross through it; it clearly is like a Welsh L, or a pre-aspirated labial (?), so it is *hlau* in RPA (‘iron’).
83 The second *tse* is in a different tone from the first.
84 RPA *qheb*.
85 I assume this is RPA *ces*, a connector or ‘then’.
86 Note that this is now spelt as ‘Nyong’, not ‘Nong’, which makes it even more certain this is Ntxwg Nyug.
87 Or *‘release’*, if this is RPA *tso*.
That is, Oh, now one section is finished, and there is another still to come. Now, you have died. You will take the heavenly road. I fear that the two spirits of the door will block your way at the threshold, the Grandmother and Grandfather Spirits of the Door, in their right hand they hold a copper whip, in their left hand a whip made of iron, they will block your way and ask you, ‘O, who are you who come here, you are an earthly person, what business do you have to go out this way?’ And you must open your mouth to answer them like this, you must say, ‘Long ago it was that Ntxwg Nyug in the crook of heaven had a bad heart, and span a strand of silken illness to this world, which nobody picked up, except me, I was the one who picked up that silken thread and fell ill secretly, [like] wine secretly being made in a jar. And nine doses of medicine, eight shamans, could not cure me of my illness, the breath was cut off in my throat, the heart stilled in my breast. I could not survive, my house could not stand up, I am dead, I will go along my road beyond, O door god(s).’ You answer them like that, O dead one! And the two gods of the threshold will let you pass on your way towards heaven, O dead one!

(Divination until xun, again)

So ta yo! Ka teu²⁸ tso nrang na rong,
Words… You out to under big door,

²⁸ RPA tawm.
nqeu na tsi klang 89 rong,
couple mother father spirit door,
te lo lo ta rang mpleu tong, lo te nang hand right hold a whip copper, hand right
ta rang mpleu hla, ne ya qhau ka hau ke.
hold a whip iron, they will block your front way.
ne ya nong ka ta: “ka ke hau tse
they will ask you that: “you is inside house
tse neng, ka ya mo a la tsw?”
person, you will go do what?”
tse ka ya qhe ntcau lo ha, qhe lo lo then you will open mouth say, open (mouth)
tshe, ta ke: “thau qau nto Ntsu Ntxwg Nong lau a answer, “past behind heaven Ntxwg Nyug always do
te sa tsw zong, ne ya tsau tau tso sang mau some liver not good, he will release give thread silk illness
ngqai down la te. La te, te neng kheu tsw tau, world. World, some people pick up not get,
i nrau tceng te neng kheu tsw tso;
all world some people pick up not get,
kheu tso. A mau ta y ta nta tceng, I one person pick up get, I one person
pick get. Got ill secretly in in body,
a make tceu ta y ta nta ho. Tca hau tshwa
alcohol secretly on in jar. Nine doses medicine
lo kho tsw zong, yi hau neng lo kho tsw fe.
cure not good, eight shamans heal not well.
To Cut pang lo to nta NTCAU, to sa lo to nta
Cut breath cut in mouth, cut heart cut in
nrau. Ko tca neng tsw tau ntse yi tsw nyau. Ko
chest. I alive person not get little house not live. I

89 RPA (White Hmong) dab.
nqeu na tsi klang rong le tsau ka mo. Na lo, couple mother father spirit door just let you go. This way, ntsu to e! heaven person doe Oh!

That is, translation almost identical to above.

(Divination until xun ) –

So ta yo! Na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka ma i ntsu tsa ta tang. Words… Now, finish one section finish have one section again come end.

Ka teu tso nrang tshau pa, nqeu na tsi klang You out arrive field grass field, couple mother father spirit tshau pa, te lo lo ta rang mpleu tong, lo te nang grass field, right hand hold a whip copper, on left hand ta rang mpleu hlau. Ne ya qhau ka hau ke. They will hold a whip iron. They will block your front road.

Ne ya nong ka ta: “ka ke hau tse tse neng, They will ask you that: “you are inside house person, ka ya qhe ntcau lo Ka ya mo a la tsw?” Ka ya qhe ntcau lo You will go do what?” You will open mouth come ha, qhe lo lo ntshe ta ke: “thau qau nto speak, open mouth answer that: “Past behind sky

Ntsu Nong lau a te sa tsw zong. Ne ya tsau Ntxwg Nyug Old do some heart not good. He will throw tau give tso thread sang silk illness down the world. La te. La te te neng people kheu tsw tau. I nrau tceng te neng kheu tsw to; pick not get. All the world some people kheu tsw tso;

ko na leng lo kheu tau, ko na leng lo kheu I one person pick got, I one person pick tso. A mau ta y ta nta tce, a tceu ta y got. Get ill secretly on inside body, make whisky secretly

ta nta ho. Tca hau tshwa lo kho tsw zong, on inside jar. Nine doses medicine cure not well, yi hau neng lo kho tsw fe. To pang lo la
eight doctors heal not good. Cut breath

to in tai ntcau, to sa lo la to in tai nrau.
cut in mouth, cut heart cut in chest.

Ko tca neng tsw tau, ntse yi tsw nyau. ko ta
I alive person not get, little house not live. I die

Ko ya ha nqeu na tsi klang tshau pa. A na,
You will say couple mother father spirit grassy field. Do this,

nqeu na tsi klang tshau pa le tsau ka mo. na lo,
couple mother father spirit grass just let you go. This way,

ntsu to ta e!
heaven person die Oh!

That is, translation almost identical, except for the substitution of the Mother and Father Couple of Guardian Spirits of the Door, for the Mother and Father Spirit whoguards the grassy plains.91

(Divination until xun trigram)

So ta jo! Na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka,
Words… Now, finish one section end,

ma i ntsu tsa ta tang.
have one section still come to.

Thau ka nyau ke hong nga te te. Ka ya nau
Past you live Hong Nya place. You will eat

Pa Hong Nya te te na i tcau i leu qang.92
Hong Gan Ba place cl. one ten one cl. grain.

Ka ya hau Pa Hong Nya te te i tcau i
You will drink Hong Gan Ba place one ten one

leu kle. Ka ya rau93 Pa Hong Nya te te na
cl. water. You will burn Hong Gan Ba place cl.
i tcau i leu teu. Na tse, ka ta tang ta ka!
one ten one cl. firewood. Now, you die end!

Ka ya mo leu tau e tang ka. Ka ya mo

90 RAP pa, ‘breath’.
91 For those unfamiliar with Hmong ritual narrative, legendary and mythic personages are often doubled as male and female in this way; they are conceived of as one spirit, or mythic person, yet with the aspects of both paternal and maternal ancestors. Also, in Hmong it is common for the female to precede the male so that it is always ‘mother and father’ who are spoken of, never ‘father and mother’.
92 The normal RPA word for this would be qoob (qong).
93 rau...teu, or RPA rauv taws, to make a fire.
You will go to way that end. You will go
a Hong Nya te te klang kle, klang qang ngqe\textsuperscript{94} ho,\textsuperscript{95}
do Hong Gan place spirit water, spirit grain debt thankyou,
ka le mo. na lo, ntsu to ta e!
you just go. Like this, heaven person die Oh!

That is, in the past you lived in Hong Gan Ba, in Hong Gan Ba you ate up eleven times the grain there, you drank up eleven times the water there, you burnt up eleven times the firewood there.\textsuperscript{96} Now you are dead, you will go along your way beyond, you should (first) go to Hong Gan Ba to show your thanks and pay your debts to the Gods of Grains and Waters there, before you go, like this, O dead One!

(divination until xun trigram) –

So ta yo! Na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka,
Words… now, finish one section finish,
ma i ntsu tsa ta tang.
have one section again come to.

Ka lo nyau tau nta lang te te. Ka nau pa
You come live to inside CITY\textsuperscript{97} place. You eat -
nta inside City some place cl. one ten one cl. grains.

Ka hau pa nta lang te te na i tcau i leu qang.
You drink - inside City some place cl. one ten

i leu kle. Ka rau pa nta lang te te
one cl. water. You burn - inside City some place

i tcau i leu teu. Ka ta tang ta ka!
one ten one cl. firewood. You die finish!

Ka ya mo leu tau e tang ta. Ka ya
You will go to way that finish. You will
a tau nta lang te te klang kle, klang qang
do give inside City some place spirit water, spirit grain

ngqe ho, tse ka le mo. na lo, ntsu to ta e!
debt thanks, you just go. Like this, heaven person die!

\textsuperscript{94} Presumably RPA \textit{nge}, a 'price' or 'cost', more than a 'debt'; perhaps best would be a 'due'.

\textsuperscript{95} This might be RPA \textit{haum}, or 'pay respects' (?), rather than 'thank'.

\textsuperscript{96} I am sure this does not mean to imply that eleven times all the available quantity was consumed. It may be that the dead one is conceived of as having consumed eleven times more than his due. Or it may be that something is missing and it should be translated more poetically as something like 'eleven fields of grain, eleven wells of water, eleven forests of firewood', indeed this may be partially understood through the use of classifiers. The exact number is of course symbolic only; what is meant is that when we are dead, we owe a debt to the spirits of place for all that we have consumed, which is a lot, and more than our proper due.

\textsuperscript{97} I can find no Hmong word in the dictionaries corresponding to this word for 'city', unless it is \textit{loog} (courtyard).
That is, when you passed the city, you ate up eleven times of crops/grains in the city. You drank eleven times of water in the city. You burned up eleven times of firewood in the city. You die, you will go to that world. You will go to the city and show your thanks and pay debts to the water god and the crops god.

(Divination until xun) –

So ta yo! Na tse, tang i ntsu ta ka,
Words… now, finish one section
ma i ntsu tsa ta tang.
have one section again come.

Thau to po qa 98 tseu 99 tseu 100 lau qa tsa tsw
Past cl. female chicken still will? lay, male chicken still not

na i lo. Nte mo na au hno, nte tau na
cl. one cl. lay go cl. two days, lay get cl.

au lo. Nte mo na pe hno, nte tau na pe
two cl. lay go cl. three days, lay get cl. three

lo. Nte mo na plau hno, nte tau na plau lo.
cl. lay go cl. four days, lay get cl. four cl.

nte mo na tswe hno, nte tau na tswe lo.
Lay go cl. five days, lay get cl. five cl.

Nte mo na rau hno, nte tau na rau lo.
Lay go cl. six days, lay get cl. six cl.

Nte mo na cang hno, nte tau na cang lo.
Lay go cl. seven days, lay get cl. seven cl.

Nte mo na yi hno, nte tau na yi lo.
Lay go cl. eight days, lay get cl. eight cl.

Nte mo na tca hno, nte tau na tca lo.
Lay go cl. nine days, lay get cl. nine cl.

Nte mo na kau hno, nte tau na kau lo.
Lay go cl. ten days, lay get cl. ten cl.

Nte mo na kau i hno, nte tau na kau i lo.
Lay go cl. ten one days, lay get cl. ten one cl.

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98 *Qaib* in White Hmong RPA.
99 The same word translated above as ‘again’.
100 RPA *nteg*.
101 That is, the verb 'to couple', probably RPA *khawm*, which Heimbach says is an expression for 'to embrace' (in sib khawm) used by young people, and 'not very elegant'!
That is, in the past [long ago], when the hens wanted to lay eggs, the cocks knew not what to do. On one day the hen laid one egg, on the second day she laid two eggs, she laid three eggs on the third day, four
eggs on the fourth day, five eggs on the fifth day, six eggs on the sixth day, seven eggs on the seventh day, eight eggs on the eighth day, nine eggs on the ninth day, ten eggs on the tenth day, eleven on the eleventh day, and a dozen the twelfth day. She laid eggs for one whole month of thirty days. And of these eggs, two were laid dry, three were laid bad, only hatching seven brace of chickens. One was stolen by a fox, and then there were only six left. Another was stolen by the wildcat, so then there were only five. One was taken by an eagle, leaving only four; one by a sparrow-hawk, and then there were only three. Two of these are for your sons and grandsons to live on in this world. And this one, the Master takes for you to go. You will hold the chicken’s wings by hand and the chicken’s tail by foot. The cock you ride will lead you on your heavenly road…

Then he sacrifices the prepared rooster and shows that he has given it to the deceased. Then divination again, until a *xun* trigram is reached. Then the dead rooster is hung from the cross-bow, and a meal is offered to the deceased…

Heu! Lau e! Ka nyau tse tca neng, ka ta
You! Dead One! You live alive person, you die
tse tca klang ta. Na tse, tse mo ya hai110 so111
alive spirit. Now, Master will offer lunch
tau ka nau, tse mo ya tcau ka mo ntcit112
to you eat, Master will lead you go
ke nto. Na lo, lau e!
road heaven. This way, O dead one!

That is, Heu! Oh! You were a person when you were alive, you are a spirit after you die. Now the Master will serve lunch for you and lead you on your heavenly Way!

(Divination again until *xun*, then the Master scoops up a spoonful of rice and offers it to the mouth of the deceased, and then sings on) –

Heu! Lau e! Ka tsw nau tse tsw nau, nau tse
Hey! Dead one! You not eat not eat, eat
nau pe kla.113 Tse mo ya tcau ka mo ntcit ke
eat three spoons. Master will lead you go travel
nto. Na lo, lau e!
heaven. Like this, O dead one!

That is, if you don’t eat, you eat nothing; if you eat, you eat three spoonfuls, etc.
(Then he scoops up another spoon of rice, offers it to the dead man, then casts it on the ground) –

Heu! Lau e! ka tsw nau nau tse tsw nau, nau
ya nau pe kla. Tse mo ya tcau ka mo ntcit

---

109 This is the literal meaning, but since there are eventually exactly twelve days, it may be ordinals which are meant here, so that it should be understood as ‘laid the first egg on the first day, the second egg on the second day’, and so on. Or even better, ‘in two days she laid two eggs, in three days she laid three eggs’, etc. (see Patricia Symonds 2004).
110 Or ‘serve’, perhaps.
111 RPA *su*, the midday meal.
112 From other versions, it seems this word may also mean to go ‘around’, to tour, perambulate.
113 Mong Leng RPA *dlav* (*WM* *diav*).
That is, practically identical to the above.

(Then the rice is offered again. Now the Opening of the Way begins) –

Na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section
tsa ta tang. Ka te lo ya ntha qa ti, teu
again come to. Your hand will hold chicken wing, feet
lo ya ntha qa tu. Lau qa tcau ka ke.
will hold chicken tail. Male chicken leads your way.
ka mo, ntshai ka mo tso ntu tau ntu ti na,
you go, fear you go to yonder hill and? one side this,
ma i ntau to yo yang, ne ya ho ka ta:
have one group shepherd,114 they will shout you that:
“ka ke115 la te tse neng, ka ya lo ntu pe
“you are earthly person, you will come with us
yo yang qha116 na!” Na tse, ka tsw ti ntu le
tend sheep place this!” Now, you not go117 with that
to yo yang, na lo, ntsu to ta e!
person tend sheep, now, heaven person die O!

That is, take the chicken’s wing by hand, the chicken’s tail by feet…the male chicken will guide your way.

You go. I’m afraid you will go to a hillside, where there is a group of shepherds tending their flock, and they will shout at you, saying ‘Hey, you are an earthly person, [what are you doing here?] Come with us and look after these sheep!’ But do not answer them, do not go with them, go your way, O heavenly one!

Na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section
tsa ta tang. Ntshai ka mo tso ntu kle klang kle la
again come to. Fear you go to side river yellow river red
ka ya kli118 to kle klang kle la. Na tse, ntshai
you will cross that river yellow river red. Like this, fear
ka na119 tau nqau120 tsai121 nqau nrau nyau na. Le to

114 to yo yang is translated as ‘shepherd’; literally, it must be in RPA tus yug yaj, yang, or ‘one [who] raises sheep’.
115 I do not know why this word ke, with a mid level tone rather than the falling tone given to the word ke meaning ‘road’ or ‘path’ (kev in RPA), should function throughout this part of the ritual as meaning ‘is’ or ‘are’.
116 RPA qhov.
117 But I wonder if this should not be ‘answer’.
118 The normal RPA for ‘to cross’ would be hla.
119 Probably RPA nuam, to look closely down upon.
you see boat flowery boat flowery stay there. That person

leads. Or ‘lead’, so ‘row’. The boatman!

You not respond board that person. Stop board that boat!

ke mang Lolo Han peoples’ boat. You will see a

ke qeng, tso ke sw teng; tso ke ntshang, tso ke
road bad, a road stony steep; a road steep, a road

sw tshwang, toon, just is your FM your FF road. You cross

leu nto kle nto ti o, ntshai ka hnaual tau yeu

to that side river that side, fear you hear to FF

so Thunder cries pipes, insects Thunder cries pipes, insects

will fear. That is your (lost) your sons your grandsons

ka ku ka ti rau tau qang. Ne ya a tau qeng
Your yB your eB turn to that side behind. They will do bring pipes

nrwa nrau nreng, a ka i hnaul la, so vang so tse.

Na lo, ntsu to ta e!
Like this, heaven person die O!

| 120 | RPA nkoj. |
| 121 | RPA txaij, or multicoloured, gay, beautiful, adorned. |
| 122 | Or ‘lead’, so ‘row’. The boatman! |
| 123 | Or ‘mount’. |
| 124 | This must be RPA txhob! a kind of exclamation forbidding one to do something, as when one tells a child not to do something. |
| 125 | Ruey unambiguously translates this as ‘Lolo’. The Lolo one of the groups classified as Yi in today’s China, particularly those who refer to themselves as No, or the Nosu. |
| 126 | RPA txoj ke. |
| 127 | Bad or difficult to walk on. |
| 128 | As in RPA ntshab, ntshaab. |
| 129 | RPA yog. |
| 130 | Chinese 'toon' tree, or 'Chinese cedar'. |
| 131 | RPA hnov. |
| 132 | RPA Xob. |
| 133 | Crickets, cicadas. |
| 134 | Or 'left behind', as in RPA tseg. |
| 135 | yB, eB, meaning younger brothers, elder brothers. |
That is, I fear that when you get to the side of the yellow and red river, you will go to cross over that yellow and red river. There, you will see a flowery boat, and the boatman shouts at you 'You are an earthly person! Come and board my boat!' But don’t answer him, don’t board that boat, that is the boat for the Yi and the Han people. If you see a steep and rocky road that is difficult to go along, that is the road your ancestors (your paternal grandmother and grandfather) have taken. You go across to the other side of the river, I fear you will hear the sounds of Thunder roaring and the noise of the cicadas crying. But do not fear, they are the voices of those who have left behind, your sons and your grandsons, descendants and brothers. They will accompany you (partner you) with the pipes and drums for you for one whole evening, warming the house and gardens for you, O dead one! \(^{136}\)

(Divine until \textit{xun} trigram again)

\begin{verbatim}
na  tse,  tang  i  ntsu  tang  ta  ka,  ma  i  ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section

tsa  ta  tang.  Ka  mo  tso  ntno  tau  ntno  ti  o,
again come. You go to side hill\(^{137}\) and? side that,

ka  na  tau  tso  ke  tshai  tau  neng  nyo  neng  neng
you see a road side down track cow track horse

lu  nto  hleu  tse,  ka  tsw  ti  mo.  tso  o  ke
messy heel kick, you not will go. A that is

nyo  neng  ke,  tsw  yau  ka  po  ka  yeu  ke.  Tso
cow horse road, not is your FM your FF road. A

ke  tshai  pi  ke  tso  ke  thai  ze,  tso  o  ke
road side up is a road - stone, a that is

mang  swa  ke,  tsw  yau  ka  po  ka  yeu  ke.
Lolo Han road, not is your FM your FF road.

Ka  tsw  ti  mo.  ka  ya  na  tau  tso  ke  ntang
You not will go. You will see a road middle

ke  mplong  xong  mplong  ntong  swa\(^{138}\) na,  sang  kang  zwa  swa
is leaf bamboo leaf tree full of, silk insect spider full of

tseu,  tso  o  ke  le  yau  ka  po  ka  yeu  ke,
everywhere, a that road just is your FM your FF road,

na  lo,  ntsu  to  ta  e!
like this, heaven person die O!
\end{verbatim}

That is, you go to that side of the hill, you will see a road kicked messy with the hoofmarks of cattle and horses on the lower level. Don’t take that road. That is the road for cattle and horses, not the road your ancestors took. On the upper level, there is a stony road which is for the Lolo and Han people, not the road which your ancestors have gone through. Don’t take that road. You will see the middle road full of

\(^{136}\) The music of the pipes and drum refers, of course, to the Hmong funeral.

\(^{137}\) If this means ‘hill’, the word should probably be \textit{toj}, not \textit{tau}.

\(^{138}\) This has a high level tone, like the word for ‘Han’.
branches and bamboo leaves covered all over with silkworms’ cobwebs. That road is the one where your ancestors went, [you take that road] like this, O dead one!139

(Divination until xun trigram)

na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
now, finish one section finish, have one section

tsa ta tang. Ka ya mo nqe tau kang si, pi
again come. You will go up hill caterpillars140 hill141

kang sa. Ntshai ke kang si kang sa, sa seu lo
caterpillars Fear - caterpillars caterpillars, hate person big

la thang yang, kang si kang sa sa seu lo la
like newborn sheep, caterpillars caterpillars hate person big like

thang kle.142 Ka tsw ti ntshai, tse mo ya kheu
newborn dog. You not will fear, Master will hold

khau mang rattan144 khau nta tau ka rau. Ka ya khwa nteu143
shoe hemp give you wear. You will stride distance

kla kli nteu nro. Na lo, ka ya mo tso tau
across distance put. This way, you will go to hill

yang mpo145 klau tsw klau mpo hlau.146 Ka tsw ti ntshai,
melt snow ice break ice snow big. You not will fear,

ka mo, kau tso kau mpa tau ka ntong,
Master will take umbrella satin umbrella silk give you wear,

you go, like this, heaven person die!

That is, now you will go to the mountain of (poisonous) caterpillars. I fear those poisonous insects will look as big as lambs, as large as puppies. Don’t fear, Master will take these shoes of hemp for you to wear. You can go through, it is only a few big strides, so, you walk on the mountain of melting snows and ices. Fear not, the Master will take this umbrella of silk and satin to cover you. You go, like this, O dead one!

(Divination until xun again) –

139 Silkworm caterpillars hatched from eggs moult several times before pupating in spun cocoons from which they emerge as moths, forming an appropriate image for transformation and rebirth.

140 I have taken kang si kang sa to refer to poisonous caterpillars here based on other translations of this song, although other versions have kab no kab ntsig. The Chinese does not specify what kind of ‘hateful bugs’ these may be.

141 The Chinese gives ‘hill’, but probably ‘up’ is the literal meaning.

142 RPA dev (White Hmong), or klev (Blue Hmong).

143 Probably RPA ntev.

144 This is the normal Hmong word for ‘hemp’. The Chinese has reversed the meaning, in a compound with RPA ntsag which is translated as ‘rattan’. Generally, though, the compound just means ‘hemp’.

145 Sometimes this word is found as RPA npu (in the compound daus sib daus npu, for example).

146 RPA hlob.
That is, I fear you ascend to the mountain of the Stone Dragon and Stone Tiger, the Master will give you a (bamboo) wand (wrapped with) straw and hemp to hold in your hand [Note; altogether 5 wands, 2 in the left hand, 3 in the right], Stone Dragon and Stone Tiger open their mouths, don’t fear. You will use the wand (wrapped with) straw and hemp to stab the mouth of the Stone Dragon, and you will use the wand (wrapped with) straw and hemp to stab the mouth of the Stone Tiger. You will straddle across with a few big steps, like this, O dead one!

(Divination until xun) –

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Na tse, le to ke zo\textsuperscript{150} rong nte, ne ya nong.

Now, that person is watch door heaven, he will ask.

ka ta: “ka ke la te tse neng, ka ya ta

you that: “you are earthly - person, you will come.

a do what?” Na tse, ka ya qhe ntcau lo ha,

qhe lo lo ntshe, ta ke: “thau qau nto Ntsu Ntxwg Nyug

open mouth come answer, speak: “past behing heaven

lau a te sa tsw zong, ne ya tsau tau tso

always do some liver not good, he would release give thread

sang silk illness ngqai la te, la te te te neng kheu tsw tau,

I one person pick; world some people pick not get,

ko na leng tau; la te te te neng kheu tsw tau,

I one person pick got; some people pick not get,

ko na leng tso. A mau ta y ta nta

I one person pick got. Do illness secretly in within

tceeng, a tceu ta y ta nta ho. Tca hau tshwa

body, do wine secretly in within jar. Nine doses herbs

lo kho tsw zong, yi hau neng lo kho tsw fe.

Cure not well, eight shamans cure not back.

\textsuperscript{150} RPA zov.
To pang lo la to ntao, to sa lo la
Cut breath cut in mouth, cut heart
to ntao nrau. Ko tca neng tsw tau ntsel yi tsw nyau.
cut in chest. I alive person not get modest home not live.
ko yamo leu tau e tang ta ka”. Na tse,
I will go side that finish.”
le to zo rong nto ne le tsau ka ke, tse
that person guard door heaven he just let your road,
ka mo. Na lo, ntsu to ta e!
you go. Like this, heaven person die O!

That is, Now, the Master will lead you up the (stone?) ladder to heaven. Mount one step, there’s the second step. Ascend the second step, there’s the third step. Up the third step, there’s the fourth. Up the fourth, there’s the fifth. Up the fifth step, then there’s the sixth. Up the sixth, and there’s the seventh. Up the seventh, there’s still the eighth step. Up the eighth, and then there’s the ninth. Up the ninth, then there’s the tenth. Up the tenth, there’s the eleventh. Up the eleventh, there’s the twelfth level, you are there, that's enough. Now the one who guards the gate of heaven will ask you, 'You earthly person, what is your business here?' And you will open your mouth to answer him, you will reply like this; “Long ago behind the heavens Ntxwg Nyug had a bad heart, and always did bad things, he span a silken thread of illness to this earth, and of all the people on this earth, nobody picked that thread up, except for me, I was the one who picked up that silken thread of illness, and I fell ill secretly, as alcohol is made secretly in a jar. And nine doses of herbal medicines and eight shamans could not cure me, could not heal me of my illnesss, the breath was stifled in my throat, the heart cut off in my breast, and I was unable to survive, unable to (support) my little home, I will go beyond!” Then, that one who watches the gates of heaven will let you pass on your heavenly road, you go, O dead one!

(Divination until xun trigram) –

na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section
tsa ta tang. Ka mo po ma pe lo pang kle;¹⁵¹
again come. You go see have three well water;
lo pang lo tshai tau, nto ntseng na, tse
one well one side down, muddy quietly,
ka tsw ti hau, lo o ke nyo neng pang kle;
you not will drink, one that is cattle horses well water;
lo pang tshai pe, tse ka tsw ti hau, lo o
one well side up, you not will drink, one that
ke mang swa pang kle; lo pang nta ntag ke
is Lolo Hab well water; one well inside middle is
mplong xong mplong ntong, sang kang zwa swa na. Lo o
leaf bamboo leaf tree, silk insect spider full. One that

¹⁵¹ lo pang kle = RPA lub pas dej (often a 'lake', but ‘a well’ is meant here).
ke le yau ka po ka yeu kle yo ntcau
is just is your FM your FF water feed mouth

yo tce. Na tse, ka le hau. Na lo, ntsu to
feed body. Thus, you just drink. Like this, heaven person
ta e!
die Oh!

That is, you will see three wells along the way; down below, that well with unclear water, don’t drink from that one, that is the well for the cattle and horses; up above, don’t drink from that well, that is the well for the Lolo and the Chinese. In the middle place, that well full of the leaves of trees and bamboos and the cobwebs of silkworms is the well your ancestors (paternal grandmother and grandfather) drank from. So, drink water from this well, [and go on your way], O dead one!

(Divination until xun-)

na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section

tsa ta tang. Ka mo tsu qau nto te te,
again come. You go to behind heaven some earth,
te neng nyau tcong152 a tcong, ka nong tau ke
some people living plenty do plenty, you listen to

ka qa qwa leu, ne qa tsw te; ne qa qwa leu153,
your chicken cries, their chicken not reply; their chicken cries,

ka qa tsw te; te e ke tsw yau ka po
your chicken not reply; some that not is your FM

ka yeu. Ka ya nong tau ka qa qwa leu, ne
Your FF. You will hear to your chicken cry, their

qa te, ne qa qwa leu, ka qa te; le yau
chicken respond, their chicken cries, your chicken reply; just is

ka po ka yeu. Ka mo tso ma to ta
your FM your FF. You go to have person is

tau tso, ne154 ma lo phlau ro; ma to ta nta
side hearth, he has a face smile; have people at inside

tang, ne ma lo phlau la,155 te e ke tsw yau
room,156 he has a face happy, some that not is

---

152 Coob in RPA, with the meaning of ‘plenteous’ or ‘crowded’.
153 The Chinese translates these leu as ‘voice’, but I am fairly sure it is just an indicator of past tense, or lawm in RPA.
154 This could as easily be translated as ‘they’, given that soon male and female ancestors are referred to. Understandings of plural and singular often depend on context alone, although White and Green Hmong do have a separate term for ‘they’.
155 RPA luag, smiling, laughing.
156 This the main room of a house; the Chinese term tang is used.
ka po ka yeu. Ka ya na tau ma to ta
you FM you FF. You will see at have people in

tau tco,\textsuperscript{157} ne ma lo phlau klo a klo; ma
side hearth, he has a face black do black, have
to ta nta plang, ne ma lo phlau ntswa a ntswa,
people in inside room, \textsuperscript{158} he has a face green do green,
le yau ka po ka yeu. Na tse, ntshai ne nong
just is your FM your FF. Now, fear they ask
ka ta: “ka ke le tu\textsuperscript{159} ci ka ta le?”
you that: “you are who lead you come?”
Na tse, ka ya qhe ntcau lo ha, qhe lo lo
Thus, you will open mouth come speak, open mouth come
ntshe, ta ke: “la te ma i tsang neng la tsw,
answer, that: “world has one kind of people what,
ntsae la ntsa ma\textsuperscript{161} la khau, ne ci ko ta.” Na
ears like snacks\textsuperscript{162} eyes like tumblers,\textsuperscript{163} he lead me come.” Thus,
tse, ka ya ha ne a na. Tse ka po
you will tell them do this. Your FM
ka yeu le ci ka mo na ka po ka yeu
Your FF (will) lead you go see your FM your FF
tcheu\textsuperscript{164} pangtacau nrwa. Lau qa tcau ka ke, ka
place play spend! Play drum. Male chicken lead your road, you
lo ko nyau nrau rong ntau ka. Na tse,
come I live outside door heaven wait you. Now,
ka lo tso rong nta. Ya ngqai ntsu ntai ntao.
you come to door heaven. Will descend heaven ladder heaven.
Ngqai i qe, ha ma au qe. Ngqai au qe,
Down one step, still have two step. Down two step,
ha ma pe qe. Ngqai pe qe, ha ma plau qe.
still have three step. Down three step, still have four step.

\textsuperscript{157} Tco and tso are clearly the same term here, heard differently by the transcriber, or \textit{cub} in RPA.
\textsuperscript{158} ‘Guestroom’, in Chinese; probably from RPA \textit{plag}, or the uphill part of the house..
\textsuperscript{159} RPA \textit{leejtwg}, ‘who’ (perhaps the final nasalisation was not heard).
\textsuperscript{160} The classifier, RPA \textit{lub}, here indicates the ‘mouth’ already referred to.
\textsuperscript{161} RPA \textit{muag}.
\textsuperscript{162} From the Chinese, those things you eat to accompany a drink.
\textsuperscript{163} From the Chinese, a very small glass, of the kind sometimes used for alcohol in Japan and China.
\textsuperscript{164} RPA \textit{chaw}.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Shua}, in Chinese.
Down four step, still have five step. Down five step, still have six step. Down six step, still have seven step. Down seven step, still have eight step. Down eight step, still have nine step. Down nine step, still have ten step. Down ten step, still have ten one step. Down ten one step, still have ten two step. Down ten two step, full enough.

That is, you go the heavenly place which is thronged with people, heavenly hosts. (If) you hear your chicken crowing, but theirs does not reply, (or) their chicken crows and your chicken does not respond – the people in that place are not your heavenly grandmother and grandfather (not your ancestors). (If) you hear your chicken crowing, and their chicken responds, their chicken crows and yours responds – the people in that place are your ancestors. You walk into the room, where there is a person with a smiling face by the side of the fire, a person with a happy face by the hearthside – those are not your (real) ancestors. You will see a person with a black (angry) face by the hearth, a person with a green (ferocious) face by the fire – those are your (real) ancestors! Now, I’m afraid they will ask you, ‘Who led you here?’ Then you will answer them like this : ‘There is a kind of person in the world whose ears look (as big as?) like snacks, whose eyes look like (as big as?) tumblers. It is he who brought me here’. Now, you will tell them like this. Thus, your ancestors will bring you to see your ancestors’ place where there is a throng of people all playing and beating the drums with flowers….(?).

The cock leads your way. I wait for you outside the heavenly gate. Now you come to the heavenly gate and will descend again. Descend one step, there’s the second. Down the second, there’s the third. Down the third and there’s the fourth. Down the fourth, there’s the fifth still. Down the fifth and then there’s the sixth. Down the sixth, there’s still the seventh. Down the seventh, and then there’s the eighth. Down the eighth and there’s the ninth and down the ninth and there’s the tenth. Down the tenth, there’s still the eleventh step. And down the eleventh step, there’s still the twelfth. Down the twelfth, that’s all there is, tumbling (falling) into this world.\(^{166}\)

\(^{166}\) This return of the soul to earth (and it does not seem to be the return of the Master which is spoken of) is a constant in most versions, but Lemoine's does not seem to have it.

\(^{167}\) Or ‘travel’.

166 This return of the soul to earth (and it does not seem to be the return of the Master which is spoken of) is a constant in most versions, but Lemoine's does not seem to have it.

167 Or ‘travel’.
ta. Ntshai ka nong tau nong yang qeu^168 qwa tsho za,  
Fear you hear get bird goose wild cry chirp? mix,^169

nang ci nang tca hlo a hlo tse. Ka tsw
rain lead rain wind change again^170 change. You not

ti ntshai, te e ke ka tse ka to ka ki
will fear, some that is you leave your sons your SS^171

ka ve ka ntcau^172 rau tau qang e. ne hlau ha
your eZ your yZ return side behind that. They love and?

hmau ka, ne ya qeng tau tsa tong, kwa ma hlo
love you, they will give give money copper, tears^173 love^174

ha hmau ka. Na lo, ntsu to ta e!
and? love you. So, heaven person die O!

That is, now I will bring you on the way to heaven. I fear you will hear the chirping of wild geese and encounter wind and rain. Fear not, these (noises) are (the voices of) your sons and sons’ sons and your sisters left behind (in the world). They mourn for you, they will give you copper money. They cry because they mourn for you. Like this, O dead one!

(Divination until xun-)

na tse, tang i ntsu tang ta ka, ma i ntsu
Now, finish one section finish, have one section

tsa ta tang. Na tse, ntsu to ta e!
again come. Now, heaven person die O!

tse mo tcau ka mo ntc i ke nto tang ta. Tse
Master lead you go travel road heaven finish.

mo ya tcau ka mo tsong te tsong tcheu^175 tau
Master will lead you go crowd place crowd place to

ntsang^176 lyeu^177 sa nya te. Ka rau khau nta, ka mo

^168 RPA qus, ‘wild’.
^169 Possibly RPA xyaw.
^170 RPA ua, ‘do’ or ‘make’, here probably functioning as an iteration.
^171 SS=Sons’ Sons.
^172 Ve...ntxau corresponding to RPA vivncaus, elder and younger sisters. While Hmong in Thailand seem to restrict these terms to women speaking, in Sichuan I found Hmong men used these terms as the common terms for their own elder and younger sisters. Ntxau is given a mid level tone, like the word for ‘mouth’, unlike the low tone (-s) in Southeast Asian Hmong.

^173 kwa ma together is translated as ‘tears’; ma (RPA muag) means just ‘eyes’.

^174 Clearly this hlo is RPA hlub or ‘love’. It may be that the term above, hlau, also translated as ‘love’ or ‘care’, should also have been hlo, or RPA hlub.

^175 Tsong or tcong is the RPA word coob meaning ‘plenteous’ or ‘many’, as we have seen above. Te...tcheu is RPA teb chaws, which often means ‘country’ in the sense of a ‘a country’.

^176 RPA ntxa, ntxaa.
Thus, the Master has brought you on the road travelling to heaven to the end. The Master will bring you to the country of Liu Sha Yang (?), or the lands of pouring sands and rocks (?). You will wear your shoes of hemp to travel the way of death; the Master will wear these shoes of mat (?), and return home. You will wear shoes of silk and satin, and walk your road and disappear, the Master wears shoes of grass (reed?), and so will go back on his way. You call to him, but he will not answer you. The Master will make like the dew falling from the leaves of the rice and evaporating away. You will dig ferns to feed the mouth, dig grasses to succour the body. Like this, O dead one!

(Divine until xun)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tse pong qhau tsa!</td>
<td>Master will die!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nrau nthang</td>
<td>Heaven person die!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

177 Lyeu sounds like a Chinese word which means ‘leak’, but lyeu sa nya as a whole is translated into Chinese as a place name, Liu Sha Yang.
178 Probably RPA tshwm, ‘to appear’.
179 Woven straw, of the type sometimes used for sleeping mats in Asia.
180 This rau is clearly RPA rau, as in rov qab or ‘return’.
181 Kang is here used for ‘road, as in compound RPA kab ke, or (Blue Hmong) qaab ke, a synonym also for customs (“ways”).
182 The Chinese says this is a ‘kind of grass’.
183 RPA lwg.
184 This word again has a mid tone, not the falling tone for the word meaning ‘sky’ or ‘heaven’, and is thus not the same term.
185 Or ‘evaporate’.
186 RPA nplej.
187 RPA suab, fern.
188 The RPA for ‘to dig’ would be just khawb.
189 Understood as the grave.
Fall cave case, voice stop fall cave coffin!

That is, O dead one! O dead one! [together with the music of the pipes and drum] – The voice stops, and the coffin is put into the grave. [music of pipes and drum]. The voice stops, and the coffin is placed in the grave.

(Then he covers the corpse’s face with a piece of cloth). And it is ended.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Ruey Yih-Fu’s word for word translation has a Chinese translation under each Hmong word, followed by a free translation. The free translation (in Chinese) seems surprisingly accurate and true to the real meaning of each stanza, and the word-for-word translation is also fairly accurate so far as I can tell. It seems Ruey must have sat for a long time with a Hmong informant who had very good Chinese who fairly carefully explained to him the meaning of each word. Of course Ruey was well trained in linguistics and careful linguistic fieldwork was a hallmark of the work done by these Chinese researchers at this time. In my English translation I have been guided by the Chinese translation and in most cases I have been able to recognise what White Hmong word it is which is spelt. Where the Chinese translation seems wrong but I am not sure of the correct translation I have followed the Chinese translation but added a query mark. The dialect here, which no longer exists so far as I could find out from my own research in Sichuan in 1989 not very far from the place Ruey records the Hmong Ntsû, is clearly very close to Mong Leng. However sometimes there are obvious errors in the word-for-word translation. For example, the word Ruey writes as tau and mostly translates as ‘give’ or ‘to’, should I think sometimes in Hmong be rau as in ‘give’ or ‘to’ but sometimes tau which, as a pre-verbal or post-verbal indicator, indicates the past tense or an action accomplished. Ruey used the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) current at that time, and uses some symbols which I have tried to find the Hmong equivalents for. So in some cases I have transliterated them into the Romanised Phonetic Alphabet (RPA) symbols normally used for Hmong. Thus I have converted his sibilant s (an s with a tail) into an RPA s, his sibilant s’ into sh, his k’ into kh, his t’ into th, his p’ into a ph, his j into a y, and his curly-tailed (retroflexive) C into a x since he spells the word for ‘bamboo’ (which in White Hmong would be xyong, RPA xyoob) with this character although it does not seems always to fit. Ruey’s tail zed is clearly RPS z, as in zoov for forest. But his tse I think should be RPA ces; he leaves this word untranslated but I have assumed it is ces and so put ‘then’ for it. The long curly-tailed t he uses is an r in RPA (a retroflexive) and I have changed this to r. The symbol he uses for a palatal nasal (a curly-tailed n) is a ny, as in the Hmong word for ‘to live’ so I have replaced that by ny. He uses the IPA 'engma' symbol for ng (normally indicated by doubling the vowel in RPA) which I have just replaced with ng. The belted l, where the belt is combined with a retroflexive tail, is a special IPA symbol which transcribes well as hl, as in RPA (to indicate what I believe is a retroflex voiceless alveolar lateral fricative). A phonetic c I have also transcribed as c, which has the same (retroflexive) function as the c in RPA. However, in two cases (the words for ‘seven’ and ‘bamboo’) it would correspond better to the RPA x. He indicates the tones in a strange system which is now obsolete but I have been unable to determine exactly the equivalent tone categories so I have left out his tone marks altogether. This is a pity but it is better than making possible mistakes. Also the Hmong dialect here has very likely very different tone values from those of either White Hmong or Mong Leng, so it may not matter too much that exact tone categories cannot be determined. I have left all the vowels just as he spells them, because it is not always clear whether the vowel symbols he uses represent real differences of pronunciation in the dialect he studied, or peculiarities of the transliteration system he used. In some cases I know which it is, however. The ua sound in White Hmong he has consistently transcribed as a, so that yuav becomes ya and tuag becomes ta, and ua becomes a throughout. This is very probably exactly how they spoke, much more like Mong Leng or when Hmong is spoken very quickly, since this was how the Hmong I knew in Sichuan also spoke – the ‘ua’ vowel was entirely missing, it was always 'a' (so that 'tuaj', come, would be pronounced 'ta'). When there does remain a clear ua sound in the dialect, he transcribes it as wa (so qhua becomes ghwa). But other vowels reflect more the system he used, than the way people really spoke. The u sound (as in RPA mus for ‘go’) is consistently transcribed by Ruey as o, so mus becomes mo; I do not think this particularly reflects how the dialect actually sounds since the modern romanized Chinese system for writing Hmong does exactly the same.

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thing. So that the word Ruey writes as ko for ‘I’ is almost certainly not really pronounced ko but ku, as in White/Blue Hmong (kuv). Similarly what he spells as to for ‘son’ is probably pronounced just like White Hmong as tu (RPA tub). Other peculiarities however may reflect the dialect itself so I have kept them all rather trying to change them, to be on the safe side; ka does seem to be the way ‘you’ is pronounced rather than ko (koj) as in RPA. However, I have changed what would have been a clumsy ngk into nq throughout.

One puzzlement is the translation into Chinese by Ruey of the word Hmong word Ntsu which so far as I know means spirit (ntsuj), as ‘Heaven’, although he also uses the normal Hmong word for ‘Heaven’ which he translates as ‘Heaven’; nto (ntuj). I cannot explain this but the deity who appears as Ntxwg Nyoog in the Hmong we know is spelt in just the same way here (Ntsu Nyong). So maybe the first half of the name of Ntxwg Nyug really means something like ‘Heaven’, just like ntuq does, and so it may be that Ruey’s Nisu should be spelt in RPA as Ntsu. Other oddities are indicated in the footnotes.

The version of the Song of Opening the Way is remarkable, I think, for having no account of the deluge or the incestuous couple from the prohibition of whose union (cutting up the flesh which is born) results the twelve exogamous (out-marrying) patrilineal clans of the Hmong, who of course are forbidden to inter-marry. Also there is nothing about a frog who lied to people about the size of the earth and was trampled to death, cursing humanity to die and the leaves to fall from the trees. Nor is there anything about the bird who flew across the earth to report that, contrary to what the frog had said, the earth and heavens were huge and three days were not enough to cover them all, as in the Mong Leng version collected by Lemoine (1972;1983). Lemoine notes that there may have been some ‘Biblical interference’ in the version he collected, and I think this is quite likely. Very probably what Ruey collected was a very pure, ancient version of the Qhuab Ke, to which since that time other elements have progressively been added. The story of the flood, for instance, was perhaps taken from another legend of the Hmong but placed in the Song of Opening the Way as a kind of response to Biblical teachings about the Flood and the Creation threatening traditional Hmong culture at that time. In other words, confronted by the increasing influence, both in Vietnam/Laos and southern China, of Christian missionaries through the twentieth century, who were providing detailed accounts of the origin of the world and the beginnings of death as the result of an original sin, the Hmong experts in death may have incorporated explanations from other parts of Hmong culture, into the Qhuab Ke itself. The frog or toad theme, for instance, can be found in legends Graham (1954) collected from the Sichuan Hmong at about the same time Ruey was working there (actually a bit before, in the 1930s), stories telling how the toad drank up all the waters of the world. But they were not in the Qhuab Ke which Ruey collected nor in Graham’s brief summary version (with no Hmong, just English) at that time; they were separate legends. Similarly a story about how dogs can see spirits and the scattering of ash and bran which I have heard in folk-tales also appears in Patricia Symond’s (2004) version of the song. We can see some of the end results of this process in the version Her (2005a) refers to where not only places in Milwaukee and Wisconsin are mentioned but we also have the deity Saub transformed into a kind of Creator God who grants licenses for life and death (for the full version, see Her 2005b)! Here Christian ideas have affected Hmong culture with a vengeance! In the traditional versions it is not Saub who does this, but the sinister deity Ntxuw Nyug or the companion god Nyuj Vab Tuam Teem, so far as I know (see also the versions given by Bertrais, and the abbreviated extracts and translations of geej verses given in Falk and Mareschal). However, already in Patricia Symond’s version, we find Saub seen as creating the heaven and earth, something we do not find in the earlier versions. Saub is a kind of god familiar in world mythology; he is a benevolent deity associated with the beginnings of things, who has since become disinterested in the affairs of men but can still be called upon in emergency. He is an ‘idle god’ or deus otiosus who has been replaced by younger and more active ones, as in Greek or Sumerian myth. And of course the idea that Siv Yis was his brother, which Her (2005a) reports, is clearly a very recent American Hmong invention!!! Her is absolutely right, then, to note the creativity of these versions of the Qhuab Ke. It is a song which may vary between descent sub-groups as well as geographically and over historical time. Yet here in the version recorded by Ruey Yih-Fu, I think, we probably have one of the earliest and purest versions of its original form.
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