

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 ('Magpe Miao') by the Chinese, and sometimes Han Miao ('Sinicised Miao') because they were very sinicised. They were part of the same group whom Davy Crockett 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 batiked 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 transliteration 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	txa? ¹				
You	die	really,	or	die	false?				
Ka	ta	ta!	Na	tse,					
You	die	really!	Now,						
ko	ya	kheu	kle	ko	tau	ka	yo ²	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	ntci	ke	nto
Now,		I	will	lead ⁴	you	go	travel ⁵	road	heaven

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 ntcau
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 ntc ke nto.
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 ntc
You not will happy! I will lead you go travel
laughing

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

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 *ntsuaq* 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 tsu tse¹⁰ tca nro; khu tshai¹¹ 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 *yaaj*) 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 ri hneng ci ka mo ntxi
Master will take sword carry¹⁴ cross- lead you go along
-bow

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 of¹⁵ a bit roots¹⁶ voice,¹⁷ speak earth a bit roots old.

Rhau 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 still²⁰ 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 Ruy 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

 yeu 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 happy²¹, 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.
 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 yeu²² le mo nong
 ? come fall. Seedling FM and seedling FF just go ask

 po Sau yeu Sau:
 FM Saub²³ FF Saub:²⁴

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 Ruy 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 transcriber just did not hear the final nasalisation but this is strange since Ruy usually uses the term ‘Hmong’ (with final nasalisation) for these people.

“Nong “Seeds	xong ²⁵ bamboo	tseu come	qha which	tu ²⁶ where	nong seeds	ntong trees	tseu come	qha which	tu where	ta?” come?”
Po FM	Sau Saub	tha and	yeu FF	Sau Saub	le	ha say	ta: that:	“Nong “Seed	xong bamboo	tseu come
te earth	qau carry ²⁷	nto, heaven,	nong seeds	ntong tree	tseu come	ntsu heaven	te earth	qau carry	pi.” high up”.	
Hmo Seedling	po FM	tha and	hmo seedling	yeu FF	tsa still	ya will	nong ask			
“Ya “Get	la what	tsw ²⁸	le just ³⁰	ma ²⁹ take	tau to	ntsu heaven	nong seed	xong? bamboo		
Ya Will	la what	tsw	le just	ma take	tau to	ntsu heaven	nong seed	ntong?” tree?”		
Po FM	Sau Saub	yeu FF	Sau Saub	ha say	ta: that:	“Nong “Bird	rhe name	le just		
ma take	tau to	ntsu heaven	nong seed	xong, bamboo,	nong woodpecker	ko	le just	ma take		
tau to	ntsu heaven	nong seed	ntong”. tree”.							
Hmo Seedling	po FM	tha and	hmo seedling	yeu FF	le just	rau return	lo ³¹ back	tso. to.		
Hmo Seedling	po FM	le just	tcau take	mo ³² news	nyang carefully	fe ³³ ask	tau to	nong bird	rhe name ³⁴	
nqe ³⁵ up	swa hurriedly	ta come	tso, to,	hmo seedling	yeu FF	le just	tcau take	mo news ³⁷	nyang ³⁶ 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 *lawm*, 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. ³⁸				
ask	to	bird	name	up	hurried ³⁹		come	fall.			
Nong	rhe	le	yang ⁴⁰	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	ntsu	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 ⁴¹	tsa, ⁴²	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; ⁴³	to	sky	new,		
nong	ntong	ta	i	zong. ⁴⁴	A	ne	na,	le	tau		
seed	tree	grow	one	forest.	Do	that	this,	just	get		
ntsu	nong	xong	txau	lo	a	tsu	yang	kwa	tshi	nteu, ⁴⁵	
sky	seed	bamboo	bring	come	do	pair	yang	trigram	bamboo	divine,	
									-piece		
tsai	ka	i	lo	lo.	A	ne	na,	le	tau		
respond	you	one	sentence. ⁴⁶	Do	that	this,	just	get			
ntsu	nong	ntong	tcau	lo	a	vang ⁴⁷	si	tse, ⁴⁸	tsai	tau	
sky	seed	tree	make	do	do	garden	some	house,	get	give	

³⁸ *Poob* in RPA.

³⁹ Not very like various Hmong words for 'quickly' or 'hurry' (*sai sai?*).

⁴⁰ RPA *ya, yaa*.

⁴¹ I use 'sky' and 'heaven' interchangeably.

⁴² RPA *tshiab*, 'new'.

⁴³ A *col* is a mountain pass, a hollow in the mountains.

⁴⁴ RPA *zoov*, forest, as in *hav zoov*; the preceding *ha* may be part of this compound phrase.

⁴⁵ RPA *txhib ntawg*, the divining horns.

⁴⁶ *Ib los lus*, a word, a phrase.

⁴⁷ RPA *vaj, vaaj*, garden.

⁴⁸ RPA *tsev*, house.

ka nyau. na lo, ntsu to⁴⁹ ta e!
 you live. This, sky person die Oh!

(Divination until the *xun* 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 bamboos, 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 yeu⁵¹ ka ta nta nqeu ta,
 Past your mother sent you come in wear skirt⁵²

ka tsi yeu ka ta nta nqeu tshau.
 your father⁵³ sent you come inside wear clothes.⁵⁴

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 *tus*, 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 *yug*, 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 *tsho* or ‘jacket’, since it is followed by *ri* for ‘trousers’ which must be RPA *ris*, which two words often occur in combination compounds (*ris tsho*).

⁵⁵ That is, RPA *ncej qab*, *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 ⁵⁸	tang	ka	na	na
some	place.	You	will	eat	up ⁵⁹	your	mother	cl. ⁶⁰
i	tcau ⁶¹	i	leu	qang,	ka	ya	hnan 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!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 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 ⁶⁵	always	do	some	liver	not	good,	

⁵⁸ Or RPA *noj*, again like White Hmong.

⁵⁹ Eat fully, to the finish, eat up.

⁶⁰ A number word, or classifier.

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*).

⁶² Here is the more normal Hmong word for 'to wear', RPA *hnav*.

⁶³ Hmong has considerable poetic licence regarding tenses. Although the verb forms throughout this stanza are all clearly in the future (*ya*, or RPA *yuav*, 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....'.

⁶⁴ The *ia* sound in RPA also often becomes elided as *a*; this is RPA *siab*, liver or (metaphorically) *heart*.

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* (*Nyoog*); later in this text it is spelt *Nyong*. That would imply that the first half of *Ntxwg Nyug*'s name means something like 'Heaven'.

lau a te sa tsw zong. Ne ya tsau tso sang
 always do some liver not good. He will release a root(?) thread

mau ngqai la te. La te te neng kheu tsw tau,
 disease down world. World some people pick up not to,

i nrau tceng te neng kheu tsw tso;
 all the world some people pick up not to;

ka i leng kheu tau.
 you one person pick up to.

Ka i leng kheu tso.
 You one person pick up to.

Ka ya a mau⁶⁶ ta y ta nta tce⁶⁷,
 You will get ill secretly in inside body,

a tceu⁶⁸ ta y ta nta ho.⁶⁹
 do alcohol secretly in inside earthenware jar.

Tca⁷⁰ hau⁷¹ tshwa⁷² lo kho⁷³ tsw zong,
 Nine drink medicine cure not well,

yi hau neng⁷⁴ lo kho tsw fe.
 eight drink shamans cure not -.

To pang lo la to⁷⁵ ntai ntcau,
 Cut off breath cut off in mouth,

to sa lo la to ntai ntau.
 cut off heart cut off in chest.⁷⁶

Ka tca⁷⁷ neng tsw tau, ntse yi⁷⁸ tsw nyau.
 You alive person not get, upright home not get.

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

⁶⁶ RPA *mob*, ill.

⁶⁷ RPA *cev*.

⁶⁸ RPA *cawv*. The pronunciation must be very similar (in Chinese it is *jiu*).

⁶⁹ RPA *hub*.

⁷⁰ RPA *cuj*. 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!

So	ta	e!	na	tse,	tang	i	ntsu	tang	ta	ka,
Words...			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	nqeu ⁷⁹	na	tsi	rong ⁸⁰	tsang,	
You	will	go		fear	couple	mother	father	door	threshold,	
te	lo	lo	ta	rang	mpleu ⁸¹	tong,	lo	te	nang	ta
right	hand		hold	a	whip	copper,	one	hand	left	hold
rang	mpleu	hlau. ⁸²	Ne	ya	qhau	ka	hau	ke.		
a	whip	iron.	They	will	block	your	front	way.		
Ne	ya	nong	ka	ta:	“Ka	ke	hau	tse	tse ⁸³	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	qhe ⁸⁴	ntcau	lo	ha,	qhe	lo	lo	ntshe,	
you	will	open	mouth	to	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	nyong ⁸⁶	lau	a	te	sa	tsw	zong,			
heaven	Nyong	always	do	some	heart	no	good,			
				(things)						
ne	ya	tsau	tau	tso	sang	mau	ngqai	la	te.	
he	will	send ⁸⁷	to	thread	silk	illness	down	the	world.	
		/free								
la	te	neng	lo	kheu	tsw	tau,				
world	some	people	-	pick up	not	get				

⁷⁹ RPA *nkawm*.

⁸⁰ RPA *rooj*, door.

⁸¹ RPA *nplawm*.

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*.

ko	i	leng	lo	kheu	tau;						
I	one	person	-	pick up	get;						
i	nrau	tceng	te	neng	lo	kheu	tsw	tso,			
all the		world	some	people		pick up	not	get,			
ko	na	leng	lo	kheu	tso.	A	mau	ta	y		
I	cl.	person	cl.	pick up	get.	Get	ill	secretly			
ta	nta	tce,	a	tceu	ta	y	ta	nta	ho.		
on	inside	body,	make	wine	secretly		on	inside	jar.		
Tca	hau	tshwa	lo	kho	tsw	zong,	yi	hau	neng		
Nine	drink	medicines		cure	not	well,	eight	cl.	shamans		
lo	kho	tsw	fe.	To	pang	lo	la				
	heal	not	back.	Cut	breath						
to	ntai	ntcau	to	sa	lo	la	to	ntai	nrau.		
cut	in	mouth	cut	liver			cut	in	chest.		
Ko	tcang	neng	tsw	tau,	ntse	yi	tsw	nyau.			
I	alive	person	not	get,	modest	home	not	live.			
Ko	ta	tang!	Ko	ya	mo	leu	tau	e	tang	ta.	
I	die	finish!	I	will	go		way	that	end.		
Na	lo,	nqeu	na	tsi	rong	tsang!"		a	na	tse,	
Now,		couple	mother	father	Door	threshold!"		Do	like this,		
nqeu	na	tsi	rong	tsang	le	tsau	ka	mo,			
couple	mother	father	door	threshold	just	let	you	go,			
na	lo,	ntsu	to	ta	e!						
This way,		heaven	person	die	Oh!						

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	teu ⁸⁸	tso	nrang	na	rong,			
Words...			You	out	to	under	big	door,			

⁸⁸ RPA *tawm*.

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

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 ta 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
Words... Now, finish one section finish

ma i ntsu tsa ta tang.
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.
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 mo a la tsw?” Ka ya qhe ntsau 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 tso sang mau ngqai la te. La te te neng
give thread silk illness down the world. World some people

kheu tsw tau. I nrâu tceng te neng kheu tsw tso;
pick not get. All the world some people pick not get;

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 breath⁹⁰
to ntai ntcrau, to sa lo la to ntai 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
tang ta ka! Ko ya mo leu tau e tang ta!
end! I will go past way that end!
Ka 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 field 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 who guards 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 nya te te. Ka ya nau
Past you live Hong Gan 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 I think 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 *rau v taws*, to make a fire.

You will go to way that end. You will go
a Hong Nya te te klang kle, klang qang ngqe⁹⁴ ho,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.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 CITY⁹⁷ place. You eat -
nta lang te te na i tcau i leu qang.
inside City some place cl. one ten one cl. grains.
Ka hau pa nta lang te te na i tcau
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!

⁹⁴ Presumably RPA *nqe*, a ‘price’ or ‘cost’, more than a ‘debt’; perhaps best would be a ‘due’.

⁹⁵ This might be RPA *haum*, or ‘pay respects’ (?), rather than ‘thank’.

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.

⁹⁷ I can find no Hmong word in the dictionaries corresponding to this word for ‘city’, unless it is *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 Words...	ta	yo!	Na now,	tse,	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	ta	ka,		
ma have	i one	ntsu section	tse again	ta come.	tang.						
Thau Past	to cl.	po female	qa ⁹⁸ chicken	tse ⁹⁹ still	tseu will?	n ¹⁰⁰ lay,	lau male	qa chicken	tse still	tsu not	
tseu will	kheu. ¹⁰¹ couple.	Po Female	qa chicken	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	mo go	na cl.	i one	hno, day,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	
na cl.	i one	lo. cl.	N ¹⁰⁰ lay	mo go	na cl.	au two	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	
au two	lo. cl.	N ¹⁰⁰ lay	mo go	na cl.	pe three	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	pe three	
lo. cl.	N ¹⁰⁰ lay	mo go	na cl.	plau four	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	plau four	lo. cl.	
n ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	tswe five	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	tswe five	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	rau six	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	rau six	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	cang seven	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	cang seven	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	yi eight	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	yi eight	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	tca nine	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	tca nine	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	kau ten	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	kau ten	lo. cl.		
N ¹⁰⁰ Lay	mo go	na cl.	kau ten	i one	hno, days,	n ¹⁰⁰ lay	tau get	na cl.	kau ten	i one	lo. cl.

⁹⁸ *Qaib* in White Hmong RPA.

⁹⁹ The same word translated above as 'again'.

¹⁰⁰ RPA *n¹⁰⁰*.

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'!

Nte Lay	mo go	na cl.	kau ten	au two	hno, days,	n te lay	tau get	na cl.	kau ten	au two	lo. cl.
To Pair	po female	qa chicken	tsa still	pa born	tseu come	ta out	nta in	ze, ¹⁰² nest,			
pa hatch	po full	i one	hli month	pe three	tcau ten	nyong, date,	tsa still	ma have	au two	lo cl?	
a change into	qai eggs	qau, bad,	ma have	pe three	lo cl.	tsa still	a become	qai eggs	tau, yellow ¹⁰⁴ ,	tso ¹⁰³ ,only	
klau hatch	tau get	na	cang seven.	to.	Ma Have	i one	to	zwa ¹⁰⁵ fox	tau get	leu, go,	
tso only	su left	na	rau six.	to.	Ma Have	i one	to	pli wildcat	tau get	leu, go,	
tso only	sa left	na	tswe five.	to.	Ma Have	i one	to	klang eagle	tau get	leu, go,	
tso only	sa left	na	plau four.	to.	Ma Have	i one	to	la kite/sparrowhaw	tau get	leu, go,	
tso only	sa left	na	pe three.	to.	kheu Get	i one	nqeu couple	tca leave to	ka your	to sons	
ka your	ki grandsons	tcau take	lo come	yo nourish	tce body	rau turn back	tau side	qang, behind,	tso only	sa left	
mo have	na	i one.	to.	tse	mo Master	kheu bring	tau give	ka you	tcau take	mo. go.	
Ka Your	te hand	lo	ya will	ntha hold	qa chicken	ti, ¹⁰⁶ wing,	teu ¹⁰⁷ feet	lo	ya will	ntha hold	
qa chicken	tu. ¹⁰⁸ tail.	Lau Male	qa chicken	ya will	tcau lead	ka your	ke, road,	ka you	mo. go.	na lo, This way,	
Ntsu Heaven	to die	ta person	e! Oh!								

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

¹⁰² RPA *zes*.

¹⁰³ Probably a mis-hearing of a word more similar to RPA *tshuav*, 'only' or 'left'.

¹⁰⁴ The Chinese says yellow (RPA *daj*) or green but these are not the exact words used. I think the sense must be bad eggs (as in RPA *qe qauj*, 'eggs which do not hatch'), so *tau* would be as elsewhere, or a mishearing for *daj*, unless it is a mishearing for *daug* (as in *qe daug*) which would mean the eggs were hatched.

¹⁰⁵ I cannot identify this word in Hmong, but the Chinese gives 'fox'.

¹⁰⁶ RPA *tis*.

¹⁰⁷ RPA *taw*.

¹⁰⁸ RPA *tw*.

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.¹⁰⁹ She laid eggs for one whole month of thirty days. And of these [twelve] 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 [descendants] 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	
Yeu!	Dead	One!	You	live		alive	person,	you	die	
tse	tca	klang	ta.	Na	tse,	tse	mo	ya	hai ¹¹⁰	so ¹¹¹
	alive	spirit.		Now,			Master	will	offer	lunch
tau	ka	nau,	tse	mo	ya	tcau	ka	mo	ntci! ¹¹²	
to	you	eat,		Master	will	lead	you	go	travel	
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	ntci	ke
eat	three	spoons.		Master	will	lead	you	go	travel	road
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	ntci

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*).

ke nto. Lau e!

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	nto	tau	nto	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	ke ¹¹⁵	la	te	tse	neng,	ka	ya	lo	nto	pe
“you	are	earthly			person,	you	will	come	with	us
yo	yang	qha ¹¹⁶	na!”	Na	tse,	ka	tsw	ti	nto	le
tend	sheep	place	this!”	Now,		you	not	go ¹¹⁷	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	nto	kle	klang	kle	la
again	come	to.	Fear	you	go	to	side	river	yellow	river	red
ka	ya	kli ¹¹⁸	to	kle	klang	kle	la.	Na	tse,	ntshai	
you	will	cross	that	river	yellow	river	red.	Like this,		fear	
ka	na ¹¹⁹	tau	nqau ¹²⁰	tsai ¹²¹	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

tcau nqau, ne ya ho ka ta: “ka ke la te
leads¹²² boat he will shout you that: “you are this-worldly

tse neng, ka lo nqe ko nqau tsai, na lo!”
person, you come board¹²³ my boat flowery, like this!”

tse ka tsw ti nqe le to. tsu¹²⁴ nqau le nqau!
You not respond board that person. Stop board that boat!

le ke mang swa le nqau. Ka ya na tau tso
that to Lolo¹²⁵ Han peoples’ boat. You will see a

ke qeng, tso ke sw teng; tso ke¹²⁶ ntshang, tso ke
road bad¹²⁷, a road stony steep; a road steep,¹²⁸ a road

sw tshwang, le yau¹²⁹ ka po ka yeu ke. Ka kli
stony toon,¹³⁰ just is your FM your FF road. You cross

leu nto kle nto ti o, ntshai ka hnau¹³¹ tau yeu
to that side river side that, fear you hear to FF

so¹³² qwa qeng, kang lau leng qwa tsho za. Ka tsw
Thunder cries pipes, insects¹³³ crying noise mixed. You not

ti ntshai. To e ke ka tse¹³⁴ ka to ka ki.
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 eB¹³⁵ turn to that side behind. They will do bring pipes

nrwa nrwu nreng, a ka i hmau la, so vang so tse.
drum roar deep, do your one evening partner, warm garden warm house.

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 *ntxhab*, *ntxhaab*.

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 *xun* trigram again)

na	tse,	tang	i	ntsu	tang	ta	ka,	ma	i	ntsu
Now,		finish	one	section	finish,			have	one	section
tse	ta	tang.	Ka	mo	tso	nto	tau	nto	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	FM	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!					

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 *toj*, not *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	caterpillars ¹⁴⁰		hill ¹⁴¹
kang	sa.	Ntshai	ke	kang	si	kang	sa,	sa	seu	lo
caterpillars		Fear	-	caterpillars	caterpillars	caterpillars,		hate	person	big
la	thang	yang,	kang	si	kang	sa	sa	seu	lo	la
like	newborn	sheep,	caterpillars	caterpillars	caterpillars	hate	person	big	big	like
thang	kle. ¹⁴²	Ka	tsw	ti	ntshai,	tse	mo	ya	kheu	
newborn	dog.	You	not	will	fear,		Master	will	hold	
khau	mang	khau	nta	tau	ka	rau.	Ka	ya	khwa	nteu ¹⁴³
shoe	rattan ¹⁴⁴	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	mpo ¹⁴⁵	klau	tsw	klau	mpo	hlau. ¹⁴⁶	Ka	tsw	ti	ntshai,
melt	snow	ice	break	ice	snow	big.	You	not	will	fear,
tse	mo	ya	kheu	kau	tso	kau	mpa	tau	ka	ntong,
	Master	will	take	umbrella	satin	umbrella	silk	give	you	wear,
ka	mo,	na	lo,	ntsu	to	ta	e!			
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 *ntuag* 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 xib daus npu*, for example).

¹⁴⁶ RPA *hlob*.

na now,	tse,	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	tang finish,	ta	ka,	ma have	i one	ntsu section	
tsa again	ta come.	tang.	Ntshai Fear	ka you	mo go	nqe up	tau hill	ze stone	zwang dragon	pi up	
ze stone	tso. tiger.	Tse	mo Master	ya will	kheu take	ntshwa wand ¹⁴⁷	mang straw	ntshwa wand	nta hemp	tau give	
ka Your	te. hand.	Zwang Dragon	rwa open	ntcau mouth	tso tiger	rwa open	lo, mouth,	ka you	tsw not	ti will	
ntshai, fear,	ka you	ya will	kheu take	ntshwa wand	mang straw	lo come	nta spur?	tau to	zwang dragon	ntcau, mouth,	
ka you	ya will	kheu take	ntshwa wand	nta hemp	nta spur	tau to	tso tiger	lo. mouth.	Ka You	ya will	
khwa straddle	nteu gap ¹⁴⁸	kla across	kli go	nteu gap	nto. put.	Na Like this,	lo, heaven	ntsu to	to person	ta die!	e!

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*) –

na now,	tse,	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	tang finish,	ta	ka,	ma have	i one	ntsu section	
tsa again	ta come.	tang.	Na Now,	tse,	tse	mo Master	ya will	tcau lead	ka you	mo go	
nqe up	ntsu heaven	ntai ¹⁴⁹ ladder	nto heaven	ntai ladder	tswa rock.	ta.	Na Now,	tse,			
nqe up	mo go	na	i one	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	au two	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	
na	au two	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	pe three	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	pe three	qe, step,
ha still	ma have	plau four	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	plau four	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	
tswe five	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	tswe five	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	rau six	qe. step.	

¹⁴⁷ The Chinese gives 'bamboo wand' here.

¹⁴⁸ The Chinese gives 'distance' or 'gap'.

¹⁴⁹ RPA *ntaiv*.

Nqe Up	mo go	na	rau six	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	cang seven	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	
	na	cang seven	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	yi eight	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	yi eight
qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	yi eight	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	tca nine	qe. step.	Nqe Up	
mo go	na	tca nine	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	kau ten	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	
kau ten	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	kau ten	i one	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	kau ten	
i one	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	kau ten	au two	qe. step.	Nqe Up	mo go	na	kau ten	
au two	qe, step,	po full	ntau enough.	ta.							
Na Now,	tse,	le that	to person	ke is	zo ¹⁵⁰ watch	rong door	nto, heaven,	ne he	ya will	nong ask	
ka you	ta: that:	“ka “you	ke are	la earthly	te	tse -	neng, person,	ka you	ya will	ta come	
a do	la what?”	tsw?” Na Now,	tse, ka	ya will	qhe open	ntcau mouth	lo come	ha, speak,			
qhe open	lo mouth	lo come	ntshe, answer,	ta speak:	ke: “thau “past	qau behing	nto heaven	Ntsu Ntxwg	Nong Nyug		
lau always	a do	te some	sa liver	tsw not	zong, good,	ne he	ya would	tsau release	tau give	tso thread	
sang silk	mau illness	ngqai down	la world,	te, world	la world	te	te some	neng people	kheu pick	tsw not	tau, get,
ko I	na one	leng person	kheu pick	tau; got;	la world	te	te some	neng people	kheu pick	tsw not	tso, got,
ko I	na one	leng person	kheu pick	tso. got.	A Do	mau illness	ta secretly	y	ta in	nta within	
tceng, body,	a do	tceu wine	ta secretly	y	ta in	nta within	ho. jar.	Tca Nine	hau doses	tshwa herbs	
lo	kho Cure	tsw not	zong, well,	yi eight	hau	neng shamans	lo	kho cure	tsw not	fe. back.	

¹⁵⁰ RPA zov.

To Cut	pang breath	lo	la	to cut	ntai in	ntcau, mouth,	to cut	sa heart	lo	la	
to cut	ntai in	nrau. chest.	Ko I	tca alive	neng person	tsw not	tau get	ntse modest	yi home	tsw not	nyau. live.
ko I	ya will	mo go	leu	tau side	e that	tang finish.”	ta	ka”.	Na Now,	tse,	
le that	to person	zo guard	rong door	nto heaven	ne he	le just	tsau let	ka your	ke, road,	tse	
ka you	mo. go.	Na Like this,	lo,	ntsu heaven	to person	ta die	e! 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 illness, 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 Now,	tse,	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	tang finish,	ta	ka,	ma have	i one	ntsu section
tsa again	ta come.	tang.	Ka You	mo go	po see	ma have	pe three	lo	pang well	kle; ¹⁵¹ water;
lo one	pang well	lo one	tshai side	tau, down,	nto muddy	nto quietly,	tseng	na,	tse	
ka you	tsw not	ti will	hau, drink,	lo one	o that	ke is	nyo cattle	neng horses	pang well	kle; water;
lo one	pang well	tshai side	pe, up,	tse	ka you	tsw not	ti will	hau, drink,	lo one	o that
ke is	mang Lolo	swa Hab	pang well	kle; water;	lo one	pang well	nta inside	ntang middle	ke is	
mplong leaf	xong bamboo	mplong leaf	ntong, tree,	sang silk	kang insect	zwa spider	swa full.	na.	Lo One	o 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 ntcaw
 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, 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, 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 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 ¹⁶⁰	come
ntshe,	ta	ke:	“la	te	ma	i	tsang	neng	la	tsw,
answer,	that:		“world		has	one	kind of	people	what,	
ntse	la	ntsa	ma ¹⁶¹	la	khau,	ne	ci	ko	ta.”	Na
ears	like	snacks ¹⁶²	eyes	like	tumblers, 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 ¹⁶⁴	ngqau	pang	ngqau	nrwa.	Lau	qa	tcau	ka	ke,	ka
place	play ¹⁶⁵	spend!	Play	drum.	Male	chicken	lead	your	road,	you
lo	ko	nyau	nrâu	rong	nto	tau	ka.	Na	tse,	
come	I	live	outside	door	heaven	wait	you.	Now,		
ka	lo	tso	rong	nto	ta.	Ya	ngqai	ntsu	ntai	nto.
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.

¹⁵⁷ *Tco* and *tso* are clearly the same term here, heard differently by the transcriber, or *cub* in RPA.

¹⁵⁸ 'Guestroom', in Chinese; probably from RPA *plag*, or the uphill part of the house..

¹⁵⁹ RPA *leejtwg*, 'who' (perhaps the final nasalisation was not heard).

¹⁶⁰ The classifier, RPA *lub*, here indicates the 'mouth' already referred to.

¹⁶¹ RPA *muag*.

¹⁶² From the Chinese, those things you eat to accompany a drink.

¹⁶³ From the Chinese, a very small glass, of the kind sometimes used for alcohol in Japan and China.

¹⁶⁴ RPA *chaw*.

¹⁶⁵ *Shua*, in Chinese.

Ngqai Down	plau four	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	tswe five	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	tswe five	qeb, step,	ha still
ma have	rau six	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	rau six	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	cang seven	qe. step.	Ngqai Down
cang seven	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	yi eight	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	yi eight	qe, step,	ha still	ma have
tca nine	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	tca nine	qe, step,	ha still	ma have	kau ten	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	kau ten
qe, step,	ha still	ma have	kau ten	i one	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	kau ten	i one	qe, step,	
ha still	ma have	kau ten	au two	qe. step.	Ngqai Down	kau ten	au two	qe, step,	po full	ntau enough.
ta. Down	Ngqai Down	pong fall	la world	te	na this.	ta.	Na Thus,	lo,	ntsu heaven	to person

ta e!
died!

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

(Divination until *xun*-)

Na Now,	tse, finish	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	tang finish,	ta	ka,	ma have	i one	ntsu section
tca again	ta come.	tang.	Ko I	ci lead	ka you	mo go	ntci around ¹⁶⁷	ke road	nto heaven	tang finish.

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 Fear	ka you	nong hear	tau get	nong bird	yang goose	qeu ¹⁶⁸ wild	qwa cry	tsho chirp?	za, mix, ¹⁶⁹
nang rain	ci lead	nang rain	tca wind	hlo change	a again ¹⁷⁰	hlo change.	tse.	Ka You	tsw not	
ti will	ntshai, fear,	te some	e that	ke is	ka you	tse leave	ka your	to sons	ka your	ki SS ¹⁷¹
ka your	ve eZ	ka your	ntcau ¹⁷² yZ	rau return	tau side	qang behind	e. that.	ne They	hlau love	ha and?
hmau love	ka, you,	ne they	ya will	qeng give	tau give	tse money	tong, copper,	kwa tears ¹⁷³	ma	hlo love ¹⁷⁴
ha and?	hmau love	ka. you.	Na So,	lo, heaven	ntsu heaven	to person	ta die	e! 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 Now,	tse, finish	tang finish	i one	ntsu section	tang finish,	ta	ka, have	ma one	i one	ntsu section
tse again	ta come.	tang.	Na Now,	tse, heaven	ntsu heaven	to person	ta die	e! O!		
tse	mo Master	tcau lead	ka you	mo go	ntci travel	ke road	nto heaven	tang finish.	ta.	Tse
mo Master	ya will	tcau lead	ka you	mo go	tsong crowd	te place	tsong crowd	tcheu ¹⁷⁵ place	tau 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*.

grave	flow	sand	crag	place.	You	wear	shoe	hemp,	you	go
tso	ke	ta;	tse	mo	rau	khau	le,	tse	mo	tseu ¹⁷⁸
a	road	death;	then	master	wears	shoes	straw?, ¹⁷⁹	Master	out	
rau ¹⁸⁰	tse.	Ka	rau	khau	tso,	ka	mo	tso	ke	plo;
return	home.	You	wear	shoes	satinsilk,	you	go	a	road	disappear;
tse	mo	rau	khau	nyang,	tse	mo	tseu	rau	kang. ¹⁸¹	
	Master	wear	shoes	reed? ¹⁸² ,	Master	out	turn	back	road.	
Ka	ho	tse	mo,	tse	mo	tsw	te.	Tse	mo	ya
You	shout		Master,	Master	not	respond.		Master	will	
a	tau	lu ¹⁸³	yang	nto	ntsha	rau	nrau	mplong	mple.	
make/do		dew	melt	and ¹⁸⁴	spread ¹⁸⁵	turn	back	outside	leaf	rice. ¹⁸⁶
Ka	ya	mo	kleu	swa ¹⁸⁷	yo	ntcau.	Kleu	song	yo	tce.
You	will	go	dig ¹⁸⁸	fern	feed	mouth.	Dig	vine	Feed/	body
									Raise/succour	
Na	lo,	ntsu	to	ta	e!					
Thus,		heaven	person	die	O!					

That is, now the 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*)

ntsu		to	ta	e!	ntsu	to	ta	e!	nrau	nthang
heaven		person	die!		heaven	person	die!		voice	stop
tse		pong	qhau ¹⁸⁹	tcang, ¹⁹⁰	nrau	ntsa	tse	pong	qhau	tsa!

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 *rov*, 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 Ntsu, 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 seem 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 Hmong 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 *qhwa*). 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

¹⁹⁰ Understood as the coffin.

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 Nyooq 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 *ntuj* does, and so it may be that Ruey's *Ntsu* should be spelt in RPA as *Ntsw*. 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 Ntxwg 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 *qeej* 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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