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# Hmong Instructions to the Dead

## What the Mouth Organ *Qeej* Says (Part One)

### Abstract

During the Hmong funeral ceremony, detailed instructions for the journey to the world of the ancestors are sung and played to the soul of the deceased. The free-reed mouth organ, or *qeej*, encrypts lengthy sung poems in its seven musical notes, creating a disguised language that can only be understood by the dead. This paper presents a first and complete version of the funeral poems of the *qeej*, performed by Mr. Xeem Thoj, a White Hmong ritual expert and *qeej* player from Laos who resettled in Australia in 1991. The text is presented in White Hmong with English translation. An introduction and annotations to the translation describe the *qeej*'s role in the funeral, compare accounts of the Hmong funeral from different times and places, and situate the language, imagery, and metaphor used in the text within the Hmong worldview.

**Keywords:** Hmong—Miao—funeral texts—ethnopoetry—instrumental speech surrogacy—*qeej*—*lusheng*—*khaen*

THE EPIC HMONG song of creation and death, “Showing the Way” (*Qhuab Kev*), is sung to the soul of the deceased very soon after death. There are various published versions of this orally transmitted sung poem that have been recorded over a wide geographic area during the last one hundred years, and that show significant similarities in content and structure (FALK 1996).<sup>1</sup> Not so thoroughly documented, however, is another essential text performed during the lengthy Hmong funeral in which the soul of the deceased receives detailed instructions about its journey to the world of the ancestors. The burden of this aspect of communication with the dead falls to a musical instrument that acts as a speech surrogate, the six-piped free reed Hmong aerophone, the *qeej*, or “mouth organ” (FIGURE 1). Its directive to the dead is called “The Song of Expiring Life,” or *Qeej Tu Siav*—literally, “The Song of Cut-off Breath.” These instructions to the soul have a silent existence as sung poems in the mind and memory of the *qeej* player that become manifest as sound in the seven<sup>2</sup> notes of the *qeej*’s language for the dead. Few living people other than *qeej* players understand this encoded language, which addresses an invisible audience of the dead soul, household spirits, ancestors, and the souls of sacrificed animals. Only this unseen audience possesses the protocols for unlocking the musical and linguistic code, thereby comprehending the meaning of the *qeej*’s sounds.<sup>3</sup>

The lack of attention in the literature to the *qeej*’s text can be attributed firstly to its disguised nature and tacit essence, and secondly to its dangerous power and the reluctance of Hmong people to speak about death. The hidden text played by the instrument is capable of sending living souls to the otherworld. Nevertheless, Hmong and non-Hmong alike agree that the *qeej*’s funeral texts are fundamental expressions of Hmong identity. “If you want to know the true history and culture of the Hmong, then you should take it from the *qeej*,” according to *qeej* player Nhia Dang Kue (MORRISON 1997). TAPP also refers to the “famous Hmong reed-pipe instrument...played particularly on occasions of death, in whose mournful yet appealing tones the

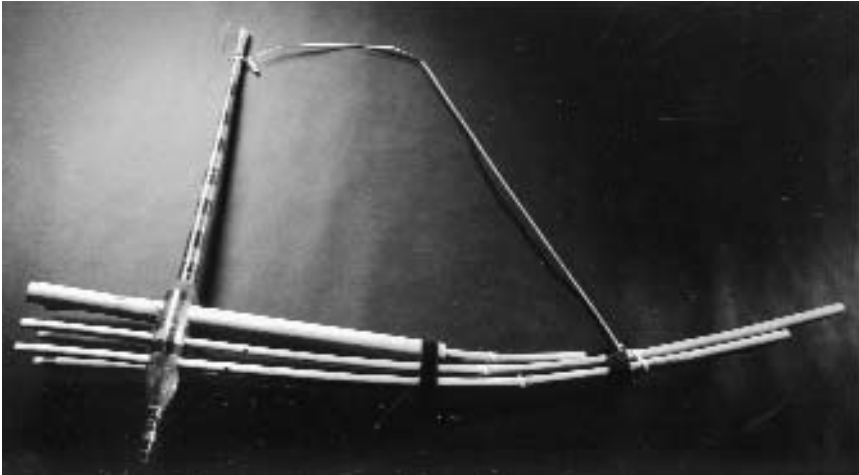


FIGURE 1: The Hmong *qeej*. Photo by David Ellis.

entire repository of Hmong culture and folk-wisdom is said to be contained” (1989a, 111).

Part Two of this paper presents one complete Laotian White Hmong version of the text of the *qeej*'s message to the dead.<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, this information has not previously appeared in any of the literature about Hmong verbal art forms.

#### THE HMONG

Hmong songs, stories, and legends tell the history of a marginalized, migratory and minority people,<sup>5</sup> united by oral traditions, a “Hmong way” of doing things, and their distinctive dress and language, but geographically scattered as a result of forced and voluntary migration, persecution and war. The Hmong are called “Miao” in China, the site of their original homelands. However, not all Miao people are Hmong. Chinese sources, and the nineteenth century accounts of Christian missionaries, use this ethnonym to designate all southern minority peoples in China, including the Hmu, Mong, Gho Xiong, Ge/Gelao, and A Hmo peoples (TAPP 2001, 109). Both Hmong legends and Chinese sources recount, from different perspectives, the initial expulsion and subsequent flight of Hmong people at least five thousand years ago from their original estates to the remote mountainous regions of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Guanxi, and Guangzhou.

During the early nineteenth century, many Hmong people fled Chinese persecution and oppression to settle, once more, in remote and difficult mountainous terrain in northern Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand, where Hmong-speaking groups are classified by distinguishing characteristics of

their dress and dialect as *Hmong Dawb* (White Hmong) and *Hmong Ntsuab* or *Hmong Leeg* (Blue or Green Hmong).

In a third diaspora, the Hmong fled the aftermath of the conflict in Indochina after 1975. Many spent over a decade in refugee camps of “temporary” asylum in northern Thailand before resettlement in the USA, Canada, France, French Guyana, Argentina, and Australia.

Although study of the Hmong has provided fertile ground for many scholars in diverse disciplines,<sup>6</sup> scholarly accounts of Hmong musical practice are limited. MARESCHAL’s (1976) definitive treatise, the result of his work among both Green and White Hmong in Laos during the 1970s, deals with both secular and ritual musical forms.<sup>7</sup> SCHWÖRER-KOHL investigated Green Hmong funeral music in Thailand in the 1980s (1981, 1982). Both CATLIN (1985, 1987, 1992, 1997) and MCNAMER (1986a, 1986b) concentrated on secular song among Hmong in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s. FALK (1994b, 1996) has investigated White Hmong funeral music in Australia. Hmong verbal art forms fare better than Hmong music in the literature.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE PROCESS OF DOCUMENTATION

The process of documenting the *qeej*’s words required the extrapolation of the performance from its context for several reasons. First, it is inconceivable that the *qeej*’s imagined verbal text would be made manifest during a funeral. The words are encrypted in the *qeej*’s notes precisely to avoid and prevent their enunciation as speech or song in either the private or public domain. Second, as mentioned above, the *qeej*’s instructions are powerful and dangerous, capable of inadvertently causing death. Even discussing death is hazardous, especially in private homes where living souls reside. Western-educated Hmong told me that the subject of my research was “creepy” (Pat Virathone, personal communication, 12 October 1999).<sup>9</sup> Finally, a Hmong funeral is a very noisy event indeed. It is difficult to hear the sung *Qhuab Kev* in the turmoil of other funeral business. In addition, the sounds of the *qeej* are not easy to record during a funeral both because of the ambient noise and because the *qeej* player is in constant motion.

In order to learn what the *qeej* says, I asked Mr. Xeem Thoj (Seng Thao), a Laotian White Hmong *qeej* player,<sup>10</sup> to make a studio recording of the sung version of the *qeej*’s funeral songs. He then played the *qeej* rendition of each verse. He also sang the *Qhuab Kev*.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Vangmar Virathone and I transcribed the text into a written form of the Hmong language<sup>12</sup> and translated it into English. Thao checked the transliteration with his recording. He made some amendments, declaring some parts of his sung version to be incorrect and replacing them with corrected text. Thus the revised text is not heard on the recording and does not appear in the musical transcriptions that I made of the

entire sung and played corpus. Virathone and Dr. Pao Saykao separately edited the Hmong transliterations and English translations. Thao added the *qeej* pipe numbers used for each word of the text. The results of this work along with some explanatory and contextual annotations are presented in Part Two.

I solicited these recording sessions initially in order to investigate the mechanisms used in the transferal of vocal tones to musical pitches in Hmong *qeej* music. Elsewhere I discuss the musical and structural mechanisms used in this transformation of sung poetry to instrumental speech surrogacy, and the reasons for the disguise and camouflage of meaning by a musical instrument (FALK 2003). The Australian Hmong community, predominantly White Hmong from Laos, supported this act of converting an oral poetic and musical tradition into a static written language and musically notated form, as they are anxious about the disappearance of their funeral texts. Young Hmong men in the West are often more interested in participating in rock and popular music bands than in learning the *qeej*, and Hmong parents encourage their children to learn Western instruments, such as the piano and the violin, as proficiency in Western art music can earn entrance scholarships to prestigious secondary schools in Australia.<sup>13</sup> For Hmong born in the West, many of the material and spiritual metaphors encapsulated in the ritual text can only be imagined as a reflection of past times in Hmong history.

#### THE *QEEJ*

Often called a “mouth organ,” the *qeej* (pronounced “geng,” with a high-falling tone) is a six-piped free-reed aerophone. It belongs to the large family of instruments of similar construction, but dissimilar use,<sup>14</sup> found throughout North and Mainland Southeast Asia under various names, such as the *sheng* in China, the *shō* in Japan, and the *khaen* or *khène* in Thailand and Laos. Unlike some of these instruments, the body of the Hmong *qeej* is made of wood rather than from a gourd, and the primary organizing musical force in the *qeej* ritual repertoire is speech surrogacy. In Chinese sources the Hmong (Miao) *qeej* is often referred to as the *lu sheng* (“reed mouth organ”) or the *liusheng* (“six pipes mouth organ”). MILLER notes that the *qeej* “differs significantly from [similar instruments] of other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia... [It is] the most advanced and highly finished free reed on the subcontinent” (1981, 83). MARESCHAL (1976, 165–74) and SCHWÖRER-KOHL (1982) have described the manner of construction of the instrument in some detail. The *qeej*’s component parts have anthropomorphic names, and there is a small terminology to describe performance praxis and repertoire.

The *qeej*’s most important role in Hmong life occurs during the funeral ritual. “The Lady *Qeej*” (*Nkauj Qeej*), as the instrument is called, is accompanied during funerals by its partner “Sir Drum” (*Nraug Nruas*), which is

constructed especially for the occasion and is destroyed when the ceremony is finished. The drum hangs on a post inside the house of the deceased. It is suspended from the main house post so that the *qeej* player can move in circles beneath it. During funerals, the *qeej* communicates with the spirit world and provides a bridge or a path between the physical and spiritual realms. The movement of the *qeej* three times clockwise and three times counter-clockwise around the drum post at the start and end of each song (*qeej ua xub*) transports the essence of the instrument from the material to the spiritual world. In this way, the message of the *qeej* is delivered in its appropriate context, the invisible world of spirits. It is not the *qeej player* but the *qeej itself* that is thus transported: “It is not so much a journey...of he who turns, but of the object that he carries”<sup>15</sup> (MARESCHAL 1976, 261).

Anthropomorphic attributions to the *qeej* are further exemplified by the understanding that it is the *qeej* itself which “speaks,” not its player (see FALK 2003/2004). By applying his own breath, mouth, and fingers to the *qeej*’s “mouth” (*ncauj*, or mouthpiece) and “fingers” (*ntiv*, or pipes) the player brings the instrument to life. GRAHAM noted that “The *liu sheng* [*qeej*] is alive, and when played it is regarded as speaking” (1954, 9). MARESCHAL also observed that the *qeej* has a proactive role in the ritual genuflections made to the corpse by both player and instrument during a funeral: “the *qeej* prostrates itself, and not the *qeej for* prostration” (1976, 188, emphasis in the original).<sup>16</sup> The *qeej* refers to itself in its own text, for example in Verse 1, where it says to the deceased:

If you are truly dead you must turn to face me. Now I can recite the song of death for you to listen to so that it will help you to find your way to your grandparents’ world. (S. THAO, 1992b, *Qeej Tu Siav* 1992, Verse 1)

At the end of the *Qeej Tu Siav* the *qeej* engages in a rhetorical, riddling exchange with the ancestors in order to confuse them about its real identity. In this way, through the power of words, both the Lady *Qeej* and Sir Drum, and by association the souls of their players, extricate themselves from the journey of death and return to the world of the living.<sup>17</sup>

The *qeej* also makes appearances on secular occasions. *Qeej* players dressed in colorful Hmong costume, with tinkling silver necklaces, perform feats of great acrobatic skill while playing at New Year celebrations and, in the past, at weddings, harvest celebrations, and bullfights (see BEAUCLAIR 1960). The drum does not accompany the *qeej* at these times. CATLIN describes the *qeej* in its secular aspect as a “girl-catcher” in contemporary northern America (1997, 79), as did Hudspeth, speaking of the *lusheng* among the Flowery Miao of northern Yunnan and Guizhou provinces in the early 1900s:

Tunes played on these instruments seem weird and monotonous to the Westerner but they play a dangerous part in the life of the young people. When, on moonlight nights, pipers come to the outskirts of a village the music is irresistible to the girls, who go out to the players, and after posture-like dancing and antiphonal singing spend the night in their company... Human nature can sink very low. (HUDSPETH 1937, 13)

Some accounts of the instrument among the Miao in nineteenth century China tell of large ensembles of *qeej*, or *lusheng*. In 1899 the missionary Betts, describing a “seventh moon festival” among the Heh Miao (Black Miao) in Guizhou, reported an extravaganza of *qeej*, unknown by Hmong in the West and almost unable to be contemplated in terms of musical product:

About noon the musicians assemble: there were thirty-six bands, six instruments to one band, and six sounds to one instrument. These instruments are named luh seng (six musical sounds) and constructed with bamboo pipes having brass reeds, emitting more noise than music. The largest-sized instrument is made of the trunk of a tree hollowed out, a bamboo pipe, 14 feet long... Thousands of people have arrived from all the countryside... The bands of six instruments form in line, standing shoulder to shoulder, in the circle formed by the spectators; presently six or seven damsels enter the circle and step in unison with the musicians, in a circular movement... Heard from a distance the noise of these 36 bands (or 216 instruments), each playing its own tune, is not unpleasant to the ear, but in close proximity, where it is impossible to hear even one’s own voice, the noise and confusion of sound has a decidedly depressing effect on one’s nerves. (BETTS 1899/1900, 101–102)

Elsewhere I have proposed that the *qeej* occupies a double space in Hmong life, fulfilling public (secular) and private (ritual) functions, both of which are emblematic of Hmongness: the former consumed by outsiders as well as by Hmong, and the latter specifically directed to a Hmong audience (FALK 2004). It is in this private capacity, in the fulfillment of its funeral duties, that the *qeej* has its most important role as the articulator of Hmong beliefs about life and death.

#### THE HMONG FUNERAL AND THE *QEEJ*’S ROLE

Detailed descriptions of Hmong funeral procedures are numerous and include those of BERTRAIS (1987a) for the White Hmong in Thailand and Laos, BLIATOUT (1993, a generic description, which seems to follow CHINDARSI 1976 closely), BOUROTTE (1943) for the White Hmong of Tran Ninh,

CHINDARSI (1976) for the Green Hmong in Thailand, GRAHAM (1937 and 1954) for the Ch'uan Miao in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, LEMOINE (1972 1, 2, and 3; 1979) for the Green Hmong in Thailand, MORÉCHAND (1969) after Bertrais for the White Hmong in Thailand, RADLEY (1986) for the Green Hmong in Thailand, SYMONDS (1991) for the White Hmong in Thailand, TAPP (1989a and 1989b) for the White Hmong in Thailand, TAPP (2001) for the White Hmong in Sichuan, China, and P. N. THAO (1993), reconstructed for the Lao White Hmong in the United States. The funeral is the most significant of all Hmong ceremonies. "One cannot die as a Hmong without the *qeej* and the proper funeral" (Pao Saykao, personal communication, 22 August 1990). The death rites in which the *qeej* plays such an important role are the most complex of all Hmong ceremonies and their correct performance is essential to being Hmong. This ceremony joins past, present, and future generations, affirms clan and lineage membership, and reiterates remembered history and shared understandings about the world. The Hmong funeral remains as the single most outstanding affirmation of Hmongness wherever Hmong people are found, including in Western countries (see FALK 1994a and b). In funerals "conceptions of Hmong cultural identity as essence find their purest expression...and Hmong ritual specialists insist on a specifically Hmong identification" (TAPP 2001, 169). The *qeej*'s role in the funeral is integral and essential:

The ritual music is not just an accompaniment for the rite, and its power is indispensable to those who participate. It is this which gives the music its complicated aspect...in its structure, in its function: a complexity and an aspect which one never sees in the same concepts in the West; here, the music lives its own life, it is alive. (MARESCHAL 1976, 263–64)<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Hmong stories about the origin of the *qeej* connect the development of the instrument irrevocably with the acquisition of knowledge about the correct conduct of funeral rites (FALK 2003/2004).

The *qeej*'s role in the funeral is sandwiched in between two momentous sung poems. The first is the *Qhuab Kev*, the Song of "Opening" or "Showing" the Way to the next world. Ideally, it is sung by a ritual expert at the moment of death. The second is the *Txiv Taiu*, the "Words of the Father," a didactic panegyric sung by kinsmen on the second night of the funeral, before the corpse is taken outside the house. Both are very long in duration.<sup>19</sup> Immediately after the *Qhuab Kev* has been sung, the *qeej* commences to play the *Qeej Tu Siav*, the "Song of Expiring Life." Yang Lee, a Laotian White Hmong ritual specialist and *qeej* player who settled in Melbourne, Australia, in 1981, explained why both the *Qhuab Kev* and the *Qeej Tu Siav* are necessary:



Wedding songs (*zaj tshoob*) and funeral songs (*zaj tuag*) were all taught to the Hmong by the dragon. But the dragon said that singing the *Qhuab Kev* was not sufficient at funerals. It must be played as well, as the dead person will not necessarily hear the sung version, but will hear it when it is played on the *qeej*. That is why the *Qhuab Kev* and the *Qeej Tu Siav* are different, but only the *qeej* player knows the message. (Personal communication, Melbourne, 3 September 2000)

The semantic meaning of the songs of the *Qeej Tu Siav* is embedded in the two-, three-, or four-part polyphony of the *qeej*. The message is disguised by the compression of the seven vocal tones of the Hmong language into four musical pitches of the *qeej*, and further concealed by a surrounding frame of two upper drones and one lower drone. The message is obfuscated still more by the use of *qeej* “language,” which incorporates euphonic and onomatopoeic syllables, words borrowed from other languages and dialects, and tone change in the case of words that the *qeej* cannot “play.”<sup>20</sup> Conventions of *qeej* performance, such as the tendency not to allow two notes of the same pitch value to be heard without an intervening embellishment, and the application of rhythmic flourishes that are not governed by semantic meaning, also minimize the relationship between the original sung poem and its musical realization. Only the soul of the deceased is able to differentiate between signal and noise in the *qeej*’s funeral music (FALK 2003; see also SCHWÖRER-KOHL 1981 and 1982).

The *qeej* also plays many *qeej ua si* or *ntiv*, songs of entertainment without precise semantic meaning, during the three days and two nights of the funeral. Both audiences—the invisible and the living—very much enjoy the *qeej*’s pieces for “fun.”<sup>21</sup> Usually based on mnemonic or onomatopoeic syllables, this part of the *qeej* repertoire is a vehicle for purely musical creativity. *Ntiv* are virtuosic flourishes in which the player is liberated from the duty of delivering semantic meaning. The musical consequences include the more frequent sounding of the lower drone, a more dense polyphonic texture, and a greater range of rhythmic idiom than is employed in the sections with semantic burden. Extended *ntiv* sections of *qeej* playing also occur at the end of the songs of the *Qeej Tu Siav* to mark the formulaic *qeej* words *no su*, which terminate each verse.

The *qeej* has a further set repertoire of pieces with semantic meaning, played at mealtimes. MARESCHAL provides the words in Hmong with French translation for the *qeej tshais* (for breakfast), the *qeej su* (for the midday meal), and the *qeej hmo* (for the evening meal) (1976, 225–28, and 234, for Green and White Hmong, respectively).

When the *Qeej Tu Siav* is finished, the *qeej* must play more didactic songs to guide the soul of the deceased through other mandatory funeral

protocols, including the sacrifice of livestock, the offerings of paper money, incense, food and drink to the soul, the ascent to the bier, the departure from the house, and the arrival at the gravesite.

Simultaneously, women sing extemporized laments, *nkauj tuag* or *zaj hu nkauj tuag*, throughout the funeral. Funerals display the full spectrum of Hmong poetic and musical performance, ranging from the inherited, learned texts of the *Qhuab Kev* and the *Qeej Tu Siav* to the newly-created and temporally-specific poetry of laments and the *Txiv Taiiv*.

Seng Thao's version of the *Qeej Tu Siav* has fifteen verses. They are preceded by the playing of the *Nkauj Qeej*, "The Song of the *Qeej*," which explains to the soul why death occurs, and initiates the role of the sacrificed rooster as a guide to the soul in its journey. The content and order of the verses of Seng Thao's *Qeej Tu Siav* is as follows:

1. Oh dearly beloved, are you truly dead?
2. Oh dearly beloved, Ntxwj Nyoog [the Lord of the Otherworld] has allowed illness and death fall to earth.
3. Oh dearly beloved, it is your turn to die.
4. Oh dearly beloved, you must put on your funeral clothing.
5. Oh dearly beloved, your relatives will wash your face.
6. Oh dearly beloved, divination sticks will help to show you the way.
7. Oh dearly beloved, you must ask permission to leave from the house spirits.
8. Oh dearly beloved, you must start your journey.
9. Oh dearly beloved, you must pass through the threshold.
10. Oh dearly beloved, you must put on your shoes of hemp.
11. Oh dearly beloved, you must choose the Hmong road to the world of the ancestors.
12. Oh dearly beloved, Ntxwj Nyoog's guardians will greet you.
13. Oh dearly beloved, a rooster will crow.
14. Oh dearly beloved, a chicken will guide you to your ancestors' world.
15. Oh dearly beloved, the *Qeej* and the drum will leave you now.

After the second night of the funeral, when the *Txiv Taiiv* has been sung, the *qeej* plays another set of songs that accompany the corpse on its journey out of the house to the gravesite. The *Qeej Tsa Nees* accompanies the raising of the corpse onto a bier, or stretcher, for its journey from the house to the outside world. The *Qeej Cob Tsiaj* is a song that accompanies the slaughter of livestock, such as pigs and oxen, or cows. The *Qeej Hlawv Ntawv Thiab Xyab* marks the

burning of incense and symbolic paper “money.” The *Qeej Sawv Kev Tshwm Tshav* is the song of departure from the family home; the *Qeej Sawv Kev Mus Tom Ntxa* is played at the gravesite for taking leave of the relatives.

The *qeej* continues to play at the gravesite as a cow (or cows, depending on the age and gender of the deceased) is slaughtered, as relatives carrying the corpse on its bier circle the grave clockwise and counterclockwise many times, and as women lament. The *qeej*’s role is still not finished, however, as it must also play songs of guidance to the deceased soul at a further ceremony of separation of the living from the dead that occurs thirteen days after the burial, and again, sometimes, one year after the funeral.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE *QEEJ* FUNERAL “CANON”: OTHER ACCOUNTS OF THE CONTENT AND ORDER OF THE SONGS

Reports of the *qeej*’s funeral repertoire in the literature show that the order and content of Seng Thao’s version is remarkably consistent with other Green and White Hmong versions from Thailand and Laos. Differences between Green and White Hmong dialects and *qeej* performance practices notwithstanding,<sup>23</sup> the funeral canon of the *qeej* has endured as stable knowledge from Sichuan in the 1920s, to Laos and Thailand in the 1970s, and to Australia in the 1990s. The fragmentary accounts are few, but the concordances are striking, indicating that the traditional conduct of the Hmong funeral ceremony has endured over both time and place. The absence or inaccessibility of recordings of the *qeej*’s sound during funerals, however, makes it difficult to compare *qeej* performance practice norms among the various Hmong groups in China and in the diasporas to Southeast Asia and the West.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE SONG TEXTS

Some brief excerpts of the *qeej*’s words occur in the literature. GRAHAM (1954, 52–53) reports on “what the liu sheng says” for the Ch’uan Miao of Guizhou who are probably White Hmong (TAPP 2001, 103–104). LEMOINE gives two verses of a Green Hmong “K’reng Tou Shia” (that is, *Qeej Tu Siav*) from Laos (1972 1, 109; 1979, 198–200). MARESCHAL provides the Hmong with French translation for the words of a Green Hmong *Qeej Tu Sav* and a White Hmong *Qeej Tu Siav* from northern Laos (1976, 215–16, 233). SCHWÖRER-KOHL (1981) provides a summary of the order and content of the *qeej*’s funeral songs for the Green Hmong in Thailand. P. N. THAO gives us some of the *qeej*’s words in English for the nine steps which the soul must take to the world of the ancestors (1993, 49–50), as well as a detailed account of the *qeej*’s text during the post-burial ceremony *Tso plig* in Hmong (1993, 87–90) and English (1993, 72–75). Those fragments of the *qeej*’s text which have

been documented by other scholars are reproduced in the annotations to Part Two of this paper for ease of comparison.

#### THE ORDER AND CONTENTS OF THE *QEEJ*'S SONGS

##### *Green Hmong Songs from Thailand*

SCHWÖRER-KOHL investigated the funeral music of the *qeej* among Green Hmong in Thailand. Fifty-year-old Vang Chao Sae Xiong provided her with details of the *qeej*'s funeral repertoire in Pa Klang village in the Nan Province on 8 January 1981 (1981, 612). According to him, there are twelve parts to the *Qeej Tu Sav*. (Note that Green Hmong orthography is used here). The first part is the *Ntiv*, which probably corresponds to Thao's *Nk̄auj Qeej*. The subsequent sections are as follows.<sup>25</sup> The *Xub Tuag* or *quas qeej* is a piece that accompanies the *qeej* player's choreographed homage to the deceased and is played in between each verse. MARESCHAL also describes this song of veneration played by the *qeej* among the Green Hmong, calling it the *qeej ua xub* (1976, 188–89). This section does not seem to be based on semantic meaning. For the most part onomatopoeic and admonitory syllables underlie the *Xub Tuag*, and only occasional words or fragments of a phrase are comprehensible, according to SCHWÖRER-KOHL (1981, 612). Next is the *Kev Mob*. This section tells how the deceased, Ab Nraug Lis Vaug, became ill and died. Then follows the *Kev Tuag*, "The Way of Death," which tells how Ab Nruag Lis Vaug is dead forever. Next the *Tu Zaam*, meaning "Life is Cut Off," describes how the kinsmen dress the deceased and comb his hair. This is followed by the *Ntxuav Muag* telling of the washing of the face and body, the *Ua Daab Quas Tsaug* for taking leave of the household spirits, and the *Xaa Moog Daab Teb* in which the dead is sent to the gates of Ntxwj Nyoog's world. The *Tsev Paaj Ntxag* means "to pick flowers for solace" and instructs Ab Nraug Lis Vaug "to climb up to the gate of Ntxij [Ntxwj] Xwb Qos Nyoog and pick flowers, to comfort those left behind" (SCHWÖRER-KOHL 1981, 612–13).

*Qeej* players who wish to ensure that they themselves do not follow the soul of the deceased into the next world add the following three sections. The *Daus Txiv Qeej Plig* describes how the *qeej* will accompany the deceased as far as the gates of Ntxwj Nyoog's realm but will then return home, to the world of the living. In the *Xob Txiv Qeej Plig* the deceased farewells the spirit of the *qeej* player. The *Zais Ruaj Zais Neev* tells how the footprints of the *qeej* and drum players are wiped away.

Pieces played later in the funeral include the *Qeej Ncig Neeg*, for when the corpse is laid on the stretcher, the *Qeej Noj Tshais*, *Qeej Noj Su* and *Qeej Noj Tshais* for breakfast, lunch, and dinner respectively, the *Qeej Hlawv*

*Ntauv*, for the burning of paper money and the *Qeej Sawv Kev* for setting off to the burial place (SCHWÖRER-KOHL 1991, 251–52).

RADLEY (1986, 335) refers briefly to the *qeej*'s role in the funeral among Green Hmong in Thailand, where Teem Xcem Xyooj explained to him that the *qeej* plays “music to deceive,” called *Qeej Tu Sab (Sav)*, which

accused the bad spirit that killed the girl, and said farewell to her. The song deceives her spirit so that it will leave the house and go to see her ancestors.

Radley mentions one other *qeej* song, the *Qeej Saw Kiv*, or “arise for the journey,” which is played when the corpse is placed on its “horse” (bier) to leave the house for the grave.

#### *Green and White Hmong in Laos*

MARESCHAL (1976) provides a short text for both the Green Hmong *Qeej Tu Sav* and the White Hmong *Qeej Tu Siav*, which he investigated among Hmong in Laos and Thailand in the early 1970s. His description of the *Qeej Tu Siav* does not contain discrete verses. The provenance for his information was the Green Hmong village of Nong Xang village in Laos and, later, Khek Noy village in Thailand. According to Mareschal, the *Qeej Tu Sav* is played on the first day followed by the *Qeej Nce Neeg* (song of mounting the bier) and the *Qeej Cob Tsag*. Mealtime songs are the *Qeej Tshais* for breakfast, the *Qeej Sus* for the midday meal, and the *Qeej Mo* for the evening meal. The *Qeej Cob Tsag*, played for the slaughter of a pig, precedes each of these songs. The mealtime songs and the *Qeej Cob Tsag* are played on the second and third days, along with the *Qeej Hlawv Nnawv* (song of offerings). On the last day, the *Qeej Cob Tsag* is played for the slaughter of a cow and the songs for leaving the house for the gravesite are played: the *Qeej Tawm Nraag* for leaving the house, the *Qeej Ua Txwm* for making offerings of slices of cow, and the *Qeej Saw Ke* for setting off to the gravesite (MARESCHAL 1976, 208–11).

A White Hmong ritual expert, Yaj Ntxhiav Tsab, gave the following information to Mareschal in Tonkin in 1975. The *Qeej Tu Siav* is played on the first day. The *Qeej Nce Nees*, *Qeej Cob Tsiaj*, and *Qeej Tsa Rog* (a song describing the struggle against illness) are also played, along with the song for the evening meal, the *Qeej Hmo*. On the second and subsequent days, the *Qeej Cob Tsiaj* is played each time an animal is sacrificed. The *Qeej Hlawv Ntauv* and the *Qeej Tawm Nras*, a song for leaving the house, are played inside the house. The *Qeej Sawv Kev* is played outdoors (MARESCHAL 1976, 231–35).

*White Hmong in Sichuan, China*

TAPP (2001) provides a description of the *qeej*'s role in White Hmong funerals in Wutong village, Sichuan, where funeral music is called *Qeej Ntsaa*. The song of "Opening the Way" (*Qhab Ki*) is chanted first. It is followed by the *kis laug* ("plaint of the old, for the Drum hung up to the main house post"), the *kis mo* ("plaint for the Founder of the *Qeej*"), the *kis ces plaag* ("plaint of hunger"), the *kis yuav ua cig* (a song of respect played for the placing of the sacrificed chicken and pig under the corpse), various *kis* for kinsmen, the *kis txij qee[j] txij nruas* (song of the *Qeej* and the Drum), the *kis fantej* for the burning of paper money, songs played before the removal of the corpse from the house (*kis laug*, *kis mo*, and *kis ces plaag*), and the *qee[j] tcho*, a song of release. Mealtime *qeej* songs are the *kis yuav tshaib* (for breakfast), the *kis yuav shu* (for lunch), and the *kis yuav hmo* (for supper). Songs at dawn are called *kis xaav ntus* and nighttime songs are called *kis tsau ntos* (TAPP 2001, 176–77).

Over half a century earlier, GRAHAM (1954, 52) also documented the funeral ceremony of the Ch'uan Miao (White Hmong) in Sichuan. In a section titled "Playing the Liu Sheng and calling the dead person to come back to life" he reports that

They played the liu sheng and made offerings to the soul of the departed ancestor. Then the soul arose and put on his shoes. They sang songs and called on him to arise and put on his puttees.

The second time they played the liu sheng and requested the soul of the dead person to arise and hear the music of the 48-tuned liu sheng and also to hear the 48-tuned drum [meaning that each instrument can play 48 tunes].

When he has heard these, then he could return to Ntzi Nion Leo's [Ntxwj Ntyoog's] land and see his own ancestors.

*Laotian White Hmong in the United States*

P. N. THAO reconstructed the White Hmong *qeej* funeral schedule from interviews with two Hmong elders, Nyiaj Txos and Ntxoov Yias in Minnesota, USA in 1993. The *Qeej Tu Siav* is the first song played by the *qeej*, and according to Thao it contains nine sections. Later in the funeral, the *qeej* plays the *Qeej Tsa Nees* and the *Qeej Cob Siav Tsiaj*. The mealtime songs are *Qeej Tshais*, *Qeej Su*, and *Qeej Hmo*, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner respectively (1993, 46–48). After the singing and duties of the *Txiv Taiiv* have been discharged, the *qeej* plays *Cev Ncej Xub Qeeg* to thank the funeral participants for their assistance; then the *Qeej Hlawv Ntawv* during the burning of paper money; and later, the *Qeej Sawv Kev*, for when the corpse is instructed

to arise and leave the house for the burial site. Thao also describes in some detail the *qeej*'s role during the *Tso Plig*, a further death ritual held thirteen days after the burial, during which the *qeej* and the funeral drum play continuously for at least a night and a day.

#### ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

Vangmar Virathone, in consultation with Seng Thao, provided the basis for the English translation of the White Hmong text of the *Qeej Tu Siav* and other *qeej* funeral pieces presented in Part Two. JOHNSON (1985, xvi–xxviii) has described the cross-cultural difficulties of rendering a Hmong way of conceptualizing reality into English. It is often problematic to find equivalents for many aspects of material culture, the spirit world, and social culture. The endnotes to the translation offer some elucidation of the metaphorical and conceptual language used to describe the journey of the soul. The *Qeej Tu Siav* contains many themes that occur in other Hmong texts. They include the dichotomies of indoors and out of doors, uphill and downhill, Hmong people and “others,” and the material and spiritual worlds. Couples, ubiquitous in other ritual texts, occur here in the pair of household spirits, the pair of divining sticks, and the pair of the *qeej* and the drum. The essential role of the rooster as the precursor of the soul, also found in Hmong shamanic practices, is established in the first verses of both the *Qhuab Kev* and the *Qeej Tu Siav*. The imagery of the “big river,” of the marketplace, of a non-Hmong bureaucracy, and of the various stages of the journey are all established in the *Qeej Tu Siav*.

Virathone's translation preserves essential meaning from a Hmong worldview:

It seems evident that the analyst, interpreter, or translator of a text must attempt to delimit that portion of society's accumulated knowledge employed by the speaker-hearer in the act of communicating. This aspect of meaning is inferential, but less so than ferreting out intentions and understandings, which are, in any case, polysemous or ambiguous. At some point or other, the interpreter is forced to pretend that he is omniscient.... Important to a theory of meaning required for the purpose of translation and discourse analysis is the assumption of a speaker's intended meanings and a hearer's understanding. To be included also is their shared world of knowledge. The translator must meet the challenge of making the right assumptions about the speaker's intentions from clues provided by the context and text-external content. He must likewise acquaint himself sufficiently with the shared world of knowledge through actual experience or scholarship. (HARTMANN 1984, 66 and 195)

The annotations to the translation provide some contextual elucidation drawing both on Virathone's "actual experience" (HARTMANN 1984, 195) and from "the shared world of knowledge through scholarship" (HARTMANN 1984, 195) in the writings on Hmong culture by anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and linguists.

FIGURE 2 shows a word-for-word translation of verse 3, following the examples of BERTRAIS's marriage texts (1978) and MORÉCHAND's shamanic texts (1969). However, neither a literal nor a literary translation does justice to Hmong poetic language and linguistic manipulation. Bertrais has described many of the poetic devices used in Hmong poetry, including assonance, hyperbole, binary rhythms in two- and four-word constructions, pairings, euphony, onomatopoeia, the use of gratuitous words, epenthesis, allegory and "syntactic" peculiarities (BERTRAIS 1978), which comprise Hmong "aesthetic language" (JOHNS and STRECKER 1982, 160–69). Linguists will be able to identify the use of strategies to provide "phonological bulk" to small monosyllabic morphemes (MATISOFF 1986, 76), secondary acoustic phenomena, such as lengthening of a phonetic tone, breathy voice, and glottal stop punctuation (MCKIBBEN 1996, 7),<sup>26</sup> instances of tone change or *sandhi*, "the change of tone in one word caused by the tone of a neighbouring word" (RATLIFF 1992, 25), and other kinds of word manipulation and word play.

FIGURE 2 demonstrates the frequent repetition that characterizes Hmong poetic construction. In its correct context, the verses of the *Qeej Tu Siav* are repeated at least three times. In particular, those verses that require an affirmative answer from the soul of the deceased through the mediation of the divining sticks are repeated until the correct answer is received. Repetition of formulaic expressions that identify the genre of song is also characteristic of Hmong secular and ritual forms. In Verse 3, the formulaic appellation, *leej tub tuag* ("oh dead one") occurs twenty-one times and occupies eighteen percent of the total word content. Repetition is also seen in the construction of stanzas (b) and (d), and stanzas (c) and (e). These pairs of stanzas are differentiated by the replacement of the White Hmong expression *quov tuag* (translated here as "chasm of death;" literally, "death hole") in the first with the Green Hmong equivalent *quov pluj* (translated here as "abyss of death") in the second. Internally, stanzas (d) and (e) negate the message of stanzas (b) and (c). The almost identical number of words in each of these stanzas reinforces the symmetry of poetic construction.

Nor can a translation capture implicit "other modes of communication" at work in ritual and described by Steiner as

a vocabulary, a grammar, possibly a semantic of colours, sounds, odours, textures, and gestures as multiple as that of language.... Though it is



FIGURE 2:

A word-by-word translation of Verse 3 of the *Qeej Tu Siav*, “Why you must now take your turn to die.” Bracketed words { } were deemed to be incorrect by Seng Thao during later revisions of the text. Underlined words were added to the text after the recording.

Duration: 2’27”  
 176 words per minute  
 Total number of words: 349  
 Range: Bb1–F

a)

Tav nov leej tub tuag koj yuav tuag daj los tuag tiag  
 Time this [polite] who dead you must be dead length or not dead really  
 tuag tseeb los tuag cuav leej tub tuag, yuav tuag tseeb lis tiag  
 dead true or not dead fake [pol.] who dead, must dead true very really  
 tuag, tu pa sis nthov tuaj ntawm ncauj, tuag tu siav si  
 dead, stop breath completely come place mouth, dead stop life weak  
 yws tuaj ntawm lo, leej tub tuag.  
 mutter come place words, [pol.] who dead. (19”)

(Number of words: 44)

b)

Txhia niaj coj txhia xyoo yuav zoo niaj coj zoo xyoo, leej tub  
 All kinds each join all kinds year must good each join good year, [pol.] who  
 tuag, nyuj dag nyuj li twm yuav tuag mus txhawm leej tub tuag  
 dead, bull cheat bull as water buffalo must die go save [pol.] who dead  
 lub qhov tuag, leej tub tuag txhooj tsis tau tuag mus txhawm  
 round hole death, [pol.] who dead not yet not must die go depart  
 leej tub tuag lub qhov tuag.  
 [pol.] who dead round hole death. (41”)

(Number of words: 44)

c)

Txhia niaj coj txhia[s] xyoo yuav zoo niaj coj zoo xyoo, leej tub  
 All kinds each join all kinds year must good each join good year, [pol.] who  
 tuag, nyuj dag nyuj li twm yuav tuag mus txhawm leej tub tuag  
 dead, bull cheat bull as water buffalo must die go save [pol.] who dead  
 lub qhov pluj, leej tub tuag txhooj tsis tau tuag mus txhawm  
 round hole death, [pol.] who dead not yet not must die go depart  
 leej tub tuag lub qhov pluj.  
 [pol.] who dead round hole death. (57”)

(Number of words: 44)

d)

Ib xyoo no yuav phem niaj coj phem xyoo, nyuj dag nyuj li  
 One year this must evil each join evil year, bull cheat bull as  
 twm yuav {tsis} tuag mus txhaws leej tub tuag lub qhov tuag,  
 water buffalo must not die go replace [pol.] who dead round hole death  
 leej tub tuag yuav tuag mus txhaws leej tub tuag lub qhov tuag.  
 [pol.] who dead must die go replace [pol.] who dead round hole death. (1'13")

(Number of words: 39)

e)

Ib xyoo no {zoo yog tau} yuav phem niaj coj tsiv xyoo, nyuj dag nyuj  
 One year this must evil each join evil year, bull cheat bull  
 li twm yuav tsis tau tuag mus txhaws leej tub tuag lub qhov  
 as water buffalo must not need die go replace [pol.] who dead round hole  
 pluj, leej tub tuag koj li yuav tuag mus txhaws leej tub tuag  
 death, [pol.] who dead you as must die go depart [pol.] who dead  
 lub qhov pluj.  
 round hole death. (1'25")

(Number of words: 43)

f)

Leej tub tuag, yuav tu leej tub tij siab li nthov tu  
 [pol.] who dead, must stop [pol.] who elder brother liver as completely stop  
 leej tub kwv siab li nrawv, leej tub tij yuav mus hu  
 [pol.] who younger brother liver as , [pol.] who elder brother must go call  
 neeb hu neeb qas law hauvpaus zeb, yuav mus hu neeb {los neeb tsis}  
 spirits call spirits quickly origins rock, must go call spirits {not}  
 qas law neeb tsis teb, {yuav mus tu tub tij siab  
 quickly spirit not answer, {must go stop who elder brother liver  
 li nthov, tus tij yuav mus hu neeb  
 completely, person elder brother must go call spirits  
 qas law hauvpaus zeb, hu neeb los neeg tsis teb}, yuav  
 completely origins rock, call spirits return person not answer}, must  
 tu leej tub tuag leej tub tij siab li nthov, leej tub tij  
 stop [pol.] who dead [pol.] who elder brother liver completely, [pol.] who elder brother  
 yuav mus hu tshuaj qas law hauvpaus ntoo, hu tshuaj los tshuaj tsis  
 must go call herbs completely origins tree, call herbs return herbs not  
 nroo, leej tub tuag yuav tuag tu pa si nthov tuaj ntawm ncauj,  
 answer, [pol.] who dead must die stop breath weak completely come place mouth,  
 tuag tu siav sis yws tuaj ntawm lo ib suv, leej tub tuag koj li  
 dead stop breath mutter come place words, [pol.] who dead you as  
 yuav los mus noj su.  
 must return go eat noon meal. (2'27")

(Number of words: 132)

polysemic, speech cannot identify, let alone paraphrase, even a fraction of the sensory data which man...can...register.... Language is only one aspect of semiology which addresses itself to every conceivable medium and system of signs—graphic, acoustic, olfactory, tactile, symbolic mechanisms of communication. (STEINER 1975, 414–15)

The translation provided in Part Two appears as a disembodied object. The sound of the sung poetry is absent. As HYMES pointed out,

Sung or spoken recordings would indeed be invaluable additions to what can be learned from transcriptions of words alone. Without music, pauses, intonations, we do not know the integration of the performance that constituted the real event. (1981, 63)

FIGURE 3 shows Verse 3 of the sung version of the *Qeej Tu Siav* in Western musical notation in order to provide an indication of the aural event. The musical features of this example typify the entire (sung) corpus. The words are delivered almost continuously as heightened speech without regard for syntax and without embellishment in vocal production. Meter is absent. The allocation of one note to each word underscores the monosyllabic character of the language. The intervals between breaths are long, an average of twenty-nine words per breath in this example. The tempo of delivery is one hundred and seventy-six words per minute in this verse. The syllabic rendition of the words is interrupted, but rarely, by the allocation of two notes to a syllable. The seven vocal tones of the Hmong language are telescoped into a musical range of four notes comprising an interval of a fifth, with the internal arrangement (low to high) of a major second, a major second, and a minor third. The melodic range varies slightly (by a minor second) at the beginning of the verse, settling at line 5. The melodic contour is alternating rather than directional, with the exception of words with the “j” or high-falling tone, which are marked by a downward slide. The syllable “aa” is added occasionally to the end of words, as indicated.

The *Hmong Qeej Tu Siav* presented in Part Two of this paper is a prodigious act of memory and erudition. The evidence suggests that this text has been preserved among Hmong people over a very long time, and in defiance of global dispersal. It describes in detail a world which we, the living, can only imagine—the world into which the soul passes after death.<sup>27</sup>

FIGURE 3:  
Musical transcription of the sung text of Verse 3 of the *Qeej Tu Siaw*, “Why you must now take your turn to die.” Bracketed { } and underlined words follow the explanation in Figure 2, with the addition of square brackets [ ] to indicate words which were not transliterated and which do not have semantic meaning. Notes with a cross head (x) were spoken rather than sung. Downward slurs indicate descending slides.

♩ = 176

Tav nov loej tub tuag koj yuav tuag daj los tung tiag tuag tsoch

los tuag cuav loej tub tuag, yuav tuag tsoch lis tiag, (breath) tuag tu

na tsis nrov tuaj ntawv ncauj, tuag tu siav si yws tuaj ntawv lo

loej tub tuag, Txhais niaj coj txhais xyoo aa yuav zoo niaj coj zoo

xyoo, loej tub tuag, (breath) nyuj dag nyuj li twm yuav tuag mus

txhawv loej tub tuag lub qhov tuag aa loej tub tuag txhoj tsis tau tuag mus

txhawv loej tub tuag lub qhov tuag, (breath) Txhais niaj coj txhais xyoo yuav zoo niaj coj

zoo xyoo aa. ? tuag nyuj dag nyuj li twm tuag mus txhawv loej tub tuag

lub qhov pluj, (breath) leej tub tuag txhoj tsis tau tuag mus txhawm leej tub tuag lub qhov pluj, (breath) leej tub tuag lub qhov pluj. Ib xyoo no aa (yog) yuav phau niaj coj phau xyoo, aa (breath) nyuj dag nyuj li twm yuav (tsis) tuag mus txaws leej tub tuag lub qhov tuag, leej tub tuag yuav tuag mus txaws leej tub tuag lub qhov tuag, (breath) Ib xyoo no zoo (yog tau) yuav phau niaj coj tsiv xyoo, aa nyuj dag nyuj li twm yuav tsis tau tuag mus txaws leej tub tuag lub qhov pluj, (breath) leej tub tuag koj li yuav tuag mus txaws leej tub tuag lub qhov pluj. Leej tub tuag, yuav tu leej tub tij siab li nro (breath) tu leej tub kev siab li nrawv leej tub tij yuav mus hu neeb hu neeb qas lawg huv pus.

zeb, yuav mus hu noeb (los noeb) tsis teb au, (yuav mus tu  
 tub tij siab li nro (breath) tus tij yuav mus hu noeb qas lawg hauv  
*Becoming faster*  
 paus zeb hu noeb los noeb tsis teb), yuav tu loej tub tuag loej tub tij siab  
 li nro, loej tub tij yuav mus hu tshuaj qas lawg hauv paus nroo, (breath)  
 hu tshuaj los tshuaj tsis nroos au, loej tub tuag tis yuav  
 yuav loej tub tuag yuav tuag tu pa si nro (breath) tuaj nawn nauj. tuag tu  
 siav sis yws tuaj nawn to ib suv, loej tub tuag koj li  
 yuav los mus ooj su.

## NOTES

1. Complete versions of the *Qhuab Kev* have been published by BERTRAI (1986b; see also MORÉCHAND (1969, 102–108) for part of Bertrais’s version in Hmong and French), GRAHAM (1954), LEMOINE (1983), RADLEY (1986), SYMONDS (1991), and TAPP (2001). Lemoine’s version established the reputation of this text as an intricately crafted poetic exposition of a cosmology. He also published an earlier, comprehensive exegesis of this “ethnopoem” (LEMOINE 1972, 1, 2, and 3).

2. The six pipes of the *qeej* produce seven musical pitches, as the shortest, fattest, and loudest pipe, called *ntiv luav*, can play two pitches. It has two or three reeds and produces two notes a tone apart depending on whether the finger hole is stopped, for the lower of the two notes, or unstopped, for the higher. Both of these notes are used as a drone.

3. This spiritual audience for the *qeej*’s text communicates to the physical, living participants in the funeral that it has understood the *qeej*’s message through the agency of divination sticks.

4. I am indebted to Hmong in Melbourne, Australia, especially to Dr. Pao Saykao, (a leader of the Australian Hmong community who studied Medicine at Monash University, Melbourne, in the 1970s and is a general practitioner), Mr. Vangmar Virathone, Mr. Seng Thao and Mr. Yang Hue Lee, for their assistance with my research. This work has received funding from the Australian Research Council (1992 to 1994, and 1996). I thank Stuart Greenbaum, and also Patrick Lawrence for his assistance with the musical transcriptions and the use of the Finale music notation program.

5. Hassoun’s elegant literary analysis of Hmong oral arts describes a language that is redolent of the imagery of migration, separation, and an “ideology of alterity” defined by a series of contrasting oppositions between “us,” “we Hmong,” a small minority population without a leader, territories, or a written heritage, and “them,” “those others” (the Han), who are a large majority population with leaders, estates, and a written tradition (HASSOUN 1997, 56–57). TAPP (1989a) provides a definitive, ethnographically grounded account of these oppositions.

6. The Hmong Cultural Center Inc. provides a comprehensive bibliography of Hmong-related publications at <http://www.hmongcenter.org/hmongculvalcu.html> (accessed 16 August 2002). TAPP (1989a) and LEWIS (1993) give useful summaries of scholarship and other sources in Hmong studies.

7. I am indebted to Trần Quang Hai for providing me with access to his copy of MARESCAL (1976), which apparently is not held by any library in the world.

8. Major collections of Hmong and Miao song texts and stories are found in BERTRAI (1986a and b, 1987b), BESSAC (1988), GRAHAM (1954), JOHNSON (1985), MARESCAL (1976), and PARSONS (2000). Hmong marriage negotiation texts are documented in BERTRAI (1978, 1985). MORÉCHAND (1969) and MOTTIN (1982) provide shamanic texts. Examples of love poetry and other secular song words are found in BERTRAI (1987c), CATLIN (1985, 1987, and 1992), HASSOUN (1985), McNAMER (1986a), and MOTTIN (1980).

9. TAPP noted that “the phrase ‘when I am 120 years old’ is a synonym for death, since death is not usually discussed, and even geomancy had to be discussed outside the house, and preferably after dark, for this reason” among White Hmong in Thailand (1989a, 166). SCHWÖRER-KOHL, similarly, commented that it was difficult for her to conduct research into the death texts among Green Hmong, also in Thailand:

I had been living with the Hmong for some time before they allowed me to hear them. Even then they could only be induced to perform the songs outside the village, in order not to entice the evil spirits, once summoned, into their own homes. During the burial

festival not one syllable of text can be examined. (1981, 614, translated from the German by Susan Falk)

10. Seng Thao is a Laotian White Hmong *qeej* expert who arrived in Australia in 1991 after spending eleven years in the Ban Vinai refugee camp in northern Thailand. He recorded an hour-long version of the *Qhuab Kev*, as well as the *Qeej Tu Siav* and other *qeej* funeral songs for me on 19 and 26 June 1992. His home was near Muangkasy in Laos, where he learned to play the *qeej* while walking to and from the rice fields between the ages of about nine and fifteen—an age, he says, when one has a good memory. He first learned the words of the funeral songs, and then their *qeej* rendition. Reciting the song words proves that a *qeej* player knows what he is doing, as pipe players only understand one another’s playing if they had the same teacher (personal communication, 19 June 1992).

11. The studio recordings were made in the Department of Music, Institute of Education, University of Melbourne—ironically, this academic department no longer exists—using a TEAC DA-P20, an Ampex one hundred twenty minute DAT tape, and two Neumann U87 microphones. Back-up recordings were made on sixty minute audio cassette tapes using a TEAC C-3X, and a VHS video recorder.

12. Hmong was an unwritten language until the development of various scripts by missionaries commenced in the early twentieth century. For accounts of some fourteen Hmong scripts which then emerged, often in the context of messianic movements, see ENWALL (1994), RATLIFF (1996), and SMALLEY, VANG and YANG (1990). The orthography used for White Hmong in this paper was developed by the missionaries Barney and Smalley in 1953 and has been adopted for popular and scholarly use over the last half century. Hmong is a monosyllabic language. Each word consists of an initial consonant, a vowel, and a vocal tone. There is no final consonant but nasalization can occur as a final. There are fifty-seven consonant sounds and fourteen vowel sounds. The seven vocal tones of Hmong are indicated by a final, silent, consonant. Thus, for example, when five is high in tone and one is low, the following combinations of final consonant for the same initial consonant/vowel configuration provide lexical discrimination: *Tob* (55)—“deep”; *toj* (52)—“hill”; *tov* (24)—“to add water”; *tos* (22)—“to wait”; *to* (33)—“to pierce”; *tog* (42)—“to sink”; and *tom* (21)—“there” (RATLIFF 1992, 1). For the word *qeej* the “ee” indicates a nasalized vowel and the final consonant “j” marks a high falling tone. HEIMBACH (1980) is the standard reference for this orthography.

13. Consequently, many young Hmong can now read Western music notation. I could not foresee that one of the consequences of transcribing the *qeej*’s music was speculation among Hmong in Melbourne that the accordion could eventually replace the *qeej*. As far as I know, this has not happened yet.

14. See MILLER (1981, 62–99) for a concise organological and historical account of Southeast Asian and Chinese free-reed instruments.

15. In the original French: “n’est donc pas un voyage...de celui qui tourne, mais de l’objet qu’il porte” (MARESCHAL 1976, 261).

16. The original says: “le qeej se prosterne, et non pas le qeej *pour* se prosterner.”

17. See Verse 15 in Part Two; also endnote 85 in Part Two for other versions of these riddles. Similar lies and obfuscations, uttered for the same reason by the singer of the *Qhuab Kev* at the end of his recitation, are present in most of its various versions: for a comparison, see FALK (1996).

18. In the original:

La musique rituelle n’est que l’accompagnement du rite et de sa puissance, à laquelle elle participe, et à laquelle elle est indispensable. C’est ce qui en fait le caractère compliqué...dans sa structure, dans sa fonction; d’une complication et d’un intérêt qui



n'ont rien à voir avec les mêmes concepts en occident: ici, la musique se vit, elle est la vie.

19. LEMOINE (1979) gives a description of the *Txiv Taiiv*. RADLEY provides a full Green Hmong *Txiv Taiiv* text (1986, 485–92), as does P. N. THAO whose description of the stages of the *Txiv Taiiv* includes an example of the text in English (1993, 52–60) and White Hmong (1993, 82–85).

20. The *qeej* cannot replicate vowel or consonant sounds. “Hmong music codes do not seek to reproduce or come close to these spoken tones. Instead, notes and chords represent the eight vocal tones. For the most spiritually dangerous of songs, a type of ‘double encoding’ is used. The words are learnt in song code and then relearnt in *qeej* code” (COOPER 1998, 83).

21. *Qeej ua si* are also played during funerals at mealtimes, to “fill in time,” and as an opportunity for young men to learn the repertoire (Pao Saykao, personal communication, 22 August 1990). TAPP reports that at a funeral he attended in Sichuan, “Whenever relatives arrive there are...welcomes and presentations with playing of the *qeej*—and sometimes, if as they say ‘the house has been too long without music’, the *qeej* is played anyway, just for “the sake of it (*qeej a si*)” (2001, 173).

22. See P. N. THAO (1993, 65–76 and 86–90) for a description of the post-burial rites, the *qeej*'s role in the *Tso Plig*, the ceremony held thirteen days after burial, and the words played by the *qeej* to the deceased soul during the *Tso Plig*.

23. The funeral text can differ between players with different teachers as well as between Green and White Hmong. The essence, however, remains the same, wherever Hmong people live. Changing social and environmental circumstances in the West will lead inevitably to changes in the text but the soul of the deceased must always be accompanied on the journey to the next world by the *qeej* (Virathone, personal communication, 23 April 2002). Nevertheless, ritual texts are believed to be unchanging:

The ideals of correctness and conformance to a proper procedure dominate the performance of the songs that are part of funeral and marriage ritual...the emphasis is on exact, unvarying repetition of specified words in order to fulfill the dictates of an important life and death transition. Hmong acknowledge different melodic styles of these songs mainly for White Hmong or Green Hmong...and this difference is minimized. It does not affect the meaning of the words, they say, and these words are considered to be essentially the same, and to have the same relevance, for all Hmong. (MCNAMER 1986b, 142)

Both Gary Lee (personal communication, 16 April 1992) and MARESCHAL (1976, 265–66) note that the authority for these texts lies with the Green Hmong, who are the keepers of tradition, while the White Hmong are more open, or susceptible, to change, borrowings and education. Lee commented that ritual change occurs with each generation because of the impact of migration and memory loss, the adoption of local aspects in the environment of resettlement, dependence on ritual leadership from experts of other clans in small communities, and the lack of ritual knowledge among educated Hmong. The degradation of traditional knowledge brought about by decades of war and displacement threatens the viability of ritual memory.

24. Gary Lee kindly gave me a copy of an audio recording of *qeej* funeral music from a White Hmong village, Khun Wang, in Thailand (date unknown). Both the sung and *qeej* rendition of the musical-poetic formula *leej tub tuag*, which identifies the *zaj tuag* (the *qeej*'s funeral repertoire), is identical to Seng Thao's performance.

25. This synopsis of SCHWÖRER-KOHL's work is drawn from a translation from the original German by Susan Falk.

26. MATISOFF comments that the Miao-Yao (also language group) is:

the tonal champion among the tone-prone languages of East Asia.... These languages have extremely complex phonologies, with elaborate tone systems, prenasalized obstruents, preglottalized sonorants, post-velar stops, dentally, palatally, and laterally released affricates, voiceless nasals, central and back unrounded vowels...it is as if Miao-Yao has developed [such features] to the nth degree. (1986, 74–76)

27. With love and respect, this paper is in memory of Enid Falk, a grand worker of music, words, and textiles, who died on 29 November 2000, aged 84.

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