



GRANDMOTHER'S PATH GRANDFATHER'S WAY

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NOTES TRANSCRIBING AND TRANSLATING

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

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

The Hmong transcriptions are written in White Hmong, except for the Hmong Leng¹ sung poetry, in which the rhyme pattern would disappear if the pieces were translated into White Hmong. The words are considered as monosyllabic, and are joined by a hyphen if they usually appear side by side to represent a single ‘word’ (*me-nyuam, me-ntsis, dab-tsi*).

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

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

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

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

ZAJ LUS QHIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ua tsaug ntau,

Vaaj Lwm

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you,

Lue Vang