

TRADITIONAL NEEDLEWORK

The traditional pieces of hand-sewn textiles in Laos were pieces of clothing (skirts, shirt trims, sashes and belts, coin purses, head-dress, and decorative collar pieces), baby-carriers, or squares of embroidered and appliqued cloth used as part of an exchange custom between the married girl, her husband, and the parents of the girl.

The pieces in evidence today—decorative squares, dresses, aprons, pillow covers, bedspreads, checkbook covers, and scenic panels—are all recent variations designed to sell to outsiders. The commercial pieces incorporate design elements and techniques from the traditional pieces, but in new combinations, contexts, and color patterns.

There are dialect-group differences in costume, as well as regional differences. One can look at a girl in traditional dress and can immediately tell whether she is White Hmong, Hmong Leng, or Striped Hmong, and can also tell if she comes from the center of Laos, the north-east, the west, or the northwest. As women from different parts of Laos began to mingle together in lowland villages during the 1960's and 1970's, and in Thai refugee camps and U.S. neighborhoods, the differences have become less distinct. White Hmong will borrow elements of Hmong Leng design, and vice-versa. Traditional black fabric is replaced with black French fabrics woven with silver threads and shimmery patterns, and the costumes are becoming more and more ornate with silvery decoration.

Generally speaking, the cut-and-reverse applique and embroidery is the specialty of the White Hmong, and the batik, cross-stitch, and layered applique is the specialty of the Hmong Leng. The colorful pleated skirts are Hmong Leng, crafted from batik, cross-stitch, and appliqued strips, squares, and triangles. The batik and applique baby-carrier is Hmong Leng, as well as the traditional needlework squares. The embroidered sashes, coin belts, aprons and belts are White Hmong. Both groups have a decorated collar piece; those with cut-and-reverse applique and embroidery, worn face up, are White Hmong, and those with layered applique, worn face down, are Hmong Leng.

As girls take up non-traditional lifestyles—going to school, getting jobs—the time spent in learning and executing the traditional skills is less and less. The ancient needlework skills are fast disappearing in the younger generations. The use of Western fabrics, dyes, sewing machines, and threads alter the traditions even further.

We began this project with the idea of verifying some of the current notions of symbolic meaning of various design elements in the Hmong needlework. What we have found, at least in this area, is that there is little known about the symbolic

meaning, and in many cases, the symbolism has been passed on to the Hmong by Westerners. For example, we were told that the designs were ways in which the Hmong in Southeast Asia sent “letters” home to relatives in China, that long ago the designs were a way of encoding and preserving their language in the face of Han Chinese pressures to wipe out the Hmong language. When we asked where that story came from, our informant said that an American church lady in San Diego told her the story.

As an example of the variation in symbolic meaning assigned to design elements, consider the appliqued triangles that often form a border in the commercial pieces. Here are three meanings assigned to the triangles, as read in different sources or heard from local people:

1. The triangles represent mountains. The mountains surround the central design much as the mountains surrounded villages in Laos, suggesting isolation from outsiders.
2. The triangles are a re-creation of the altar (*xwm kab*) decoration. During the New Year, the *paj-nyiaj-paj-kub* (flower-silver-flower-gold) that decorates the household altar is replaced. The *paj-nyiaj-paj-kub* is silver and gold paper cut in triangle shapes.
3. The triangles represent the Dragon's Spine. The Hmong dragon (*zaj*) has triangle shaped spikes along its spine, and the dragon is brightly colored. A girl in New Year dress is *zoo cuag nkauj zaj*: ‘beautiful like a dragon's daughter’.

There is a vocabulary for naming the various design elements, that one woman might use when talking about a piece to another, but we could find no stories, legends, or symbolism that tied into the use of the different designs. In fact, women from different regions and dialect groups call the same design element by different names. Sometimes the vocabulary suggests symbolism, as in “snail” or “seeds” but often the vocabulary is simply description, as in *tswv nkhaus*, ‘crooked line’.

Where possible, we list the vocabulary name for elements in the designs of the baby-carrier, needlework squares, and Hmong Leng skirt. However, we leave the investigation of symbolism to another time.

HAS TXUG DLAIM HLAAB-NYAS

Zaaj nuav mas yog ho yuav has txug peb Moob (Moob leeg los puas Hmoob ntsuab) txuj nam hlaab-nyas, kws nwg kuj ua muaj kaab muaj ke hab. Nws yog zoo moos le nuav, thaum muaj ib tug ntshais tawm rooj moos yuav quas yawg lawd ces tsis ntev nwg yeej yuav xeeb tub ki xwb ces tug ntshais leej-nam yeej cuab npaaj ib dlaim nyuas hlaab-nyas tseg ca rau thaum kws tug ntshais tau miv-nyuas. Nyob-nyob txug nub kws tug ntshais hab tug vauv tau kag ob tug miv-nyuas ces nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug xaa dlaim hlaab-nyas tuaj rau tug ntshais hab tug vauv tau aub ob tug miv-nyuas mog (txawm yog tub/ntshais los peb hmoob yeej suav has tas yog muaj txuj moo, txuj-moov saws tau, los tas yog ntuj paab txhaj muaj).

Thaum tug ntshais hab vauv tau dlaim hlaab-nyas lug aub miv-nyuas lawm ob tug yeej paub tas, muaj ib nub yaav tom ntej yuav tau tam-hlaab-nyas. Ces ntshais hab vauv yuav tau npaaj kuas tau le ib tug npua 6-7 tau. Muaj caij-nyoog, zoo sij-hawm, los yog thaum tsab peb-caug ces moos hu nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tuaj tam-hlaab-nyas.

Thaum moos hu mas yuav has le yawm-txiv tuaj tam-hlaab-nyas. Thaum moos hu mas yuav has le nuav (tug vauv los yog tug tuab-neeg) kws moos hu, "Nub nua kuv tuaj hu nam hab txiv meb moos nrug kuv nyob ib nub, haus ib khob nyuas tshuaj taag es meb maam rov lug tsev." Yog has le nuav ces nam-tais hab yawm-txiv yeej paub tas yog tuaj hu moos tuaj ces tua npua ua nqaaj ua no sav-sav rau tau tav log, hu nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lug tuaj peg hauv rooj nrug cov kev txwj zej-zog ces ib saab khob-cawv rau yawm-txiv. Tug vauv tuaj nraas qaab rooj ua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tsaug ntaub tsaug xuv ntawm dlaim hlaab-nyas taag ces yawm-txiv ho lug ua tsaug-nqaaj tsaug-no tam ces yog tas yuav tis-npe laug los yawm-txiv kuj tis tau rua hab.

Tej-zag yawm-txiv kuj nug vauv hab cov kwv-tij saib puab nyam lub hu le caag? Muaj tej paab kwv-tij mas puab nyam hu lawv le puab tej yawm-suab, yawm-koob, yawm, kws nto-nto npe thau u. Thaum nrhav tau lub npe lawd ces yawm-txiv ib saab khob-cawv foom koob-moov rau vauv lub npe laug kuas tsuas muaj kev noj qaab nyob zoo NYOB UA LUAS TXWJ, SAWV UA LUAS LAUG, NYOB NOJ LUAS HAUV NQAAJ, HAS LUAS HAUV LUG, NYOB KUAM KUAS DLAWB TXOOB DLAWB HAU QUAS PAUG."

Tug npua kws tua ntawd mas yeej muab txav kag ib ceg nrug tug kua-twv rau nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug aub moos tsev le hab.

TRADITIONAL BABY-CARRIER

This article tells about the Hmong Leng baby-carrier (*hlaab-nyas*)⁷⁴, and the traditions and customs that go with it. When a daughter leaves home to marry someone, sooner or later, she will become pregnant. Her mother will prepare a baby-carrier to give to her daughter to carry her baby. Sometime after the daughter delivers the baby, the in-laws will bring the baby-carrier to the new parents. (It doesn't matter whether it is a boy or a girl; Hmong say that it is your fortune, your luck, or your blessing from the sky.)

When the daughter and son-in-law receive the baby-carrier, they know that one day in the future they will give a 'baby-carrier-reward' (*tam hlaab-nyas*) feast. The daughter and son-in-law will raise a pig of about 150-200 pounds. Then they look for a good time, perhaps during the New Year celebration, and call the mother-in-law and father-in-law to come to the baby-carrier-reward feast. When a messenger goes to invite the in-laws, he says this: *"Today I come to invite you, mother and father, to come visit us for one day, drink one glass of 'medicine', and after that, you can return home."* If the father-in-law hears an invitation like this, he already knows that they will go to a feast for the baby-carrier, and to give the son-in-law his honorary, or added, name.

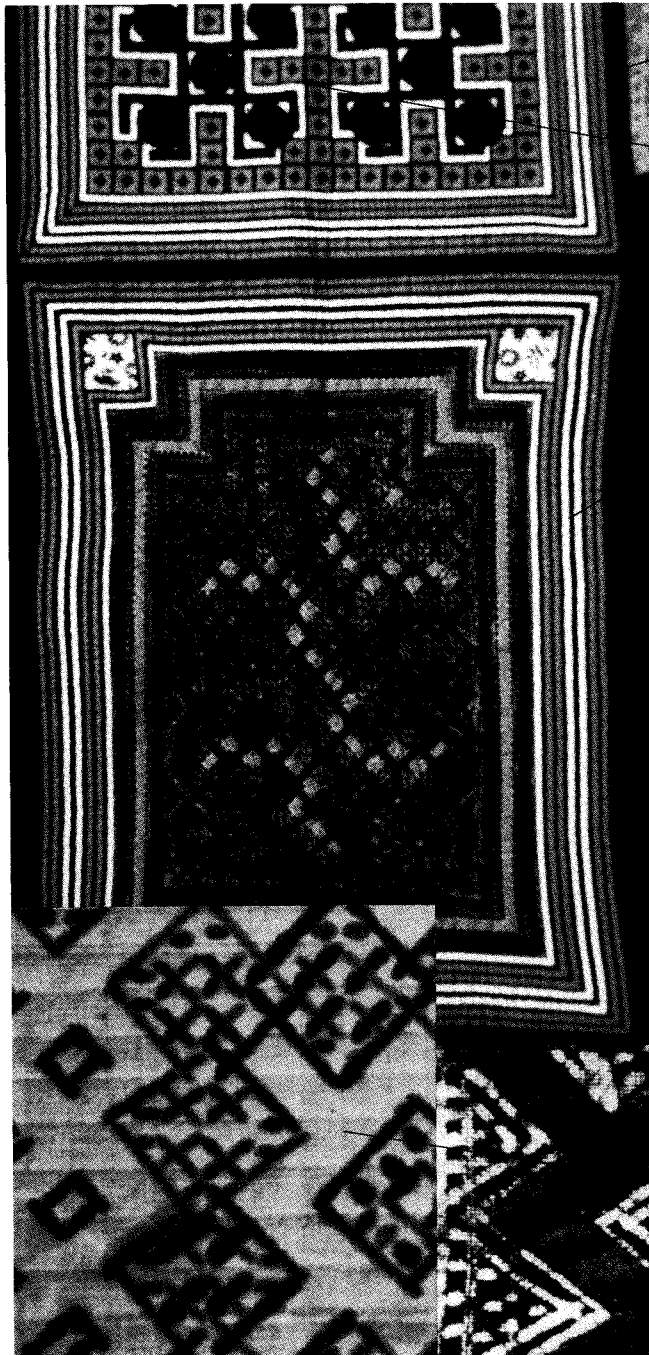
When the in-laws arrive, the pig is killed and when the meat is ready, the son-in-law invites the parents-in-law to sit at the table, with his cousins, and pours a glass of corn liquor for his father-in-law. The son-in-law stands on the other side of the table and thanks his parents-in-law for the cloth and the thread with which the baby-carrier was made. The father-in-law then thanks them for the feast, and if the son-in-law already knows what new name he would like to have, the father-in-law officially names him at this time. However, if the son-in-law is not sure, the father-in-law will ask the son-in-law and his cousins what name they like. There are some groups that like to call themselves like their grandfathers or great-grandfathers, or some name that has been somewhat famous. When they decide on a name, the father-in-law pours two glasses of corn liquor, and blesses his son-in-law with his new, added, honorary name, saying to him, *"May you have good health, wealth, life long enough to be an elder and advisor to the others, to sit at their table and eat good meat and resolve their disputes, and to live until your hair is completely white."* The pig that was slaughtered for the feast has been split, and the father-in-law receives one hindquarter, with the tail, to carry home.

⁷⁴ *hlab-nyias* in White Hmong

NOTE: The honorary name, which is added in front of the childhood name, is called “*npe laug*” (old name), and the process of receiving the adult name is called ‘*tis npe laug*’. Usually the honorary name and the childhood name are said as a compound name, like:

Lwm (childhood name)+	Nyiaj (<i>npe laug</i>)=	Nyiaj-lwm (Nyia Lue)
Tswb+	Nom=	Nom-tswb (Nao Chue)
Xab+	Txiaj=	Txiaj-xab (Xia Sa)

DLAIM HLAAB-NYAS
BABY-CARRIER
VOCABULARY



ncauj nyas

"mouth-baby-carrier"; the top section of the baby-carrier.

plawv ncauj nyas

"heart-mouth-baby-carrier"; the center section of the *ncauj-nyas*. This part is usually covered with tiny appliqued squares, and sometimes yarn pom-poms.

plooj ncauj nyas

bands of fabric sewn one on top of another around the edge.

cev nyas

"body-baby-carrier"; the main section of the baby-carrier.

plawv cev nyas

"heart-body-baby-carrier"; the center of the main section. The batik foundation is indigo/ white or indigo/light blue with red and yellow applique sewn in the spaces left in the batik pattern.

caab cab

"wax" ('*ciab*' in White Hmong); the batik design that is the foundation for the main part of the baby-carrier. Green Hmong women are the batik artists.

ntaub tswv nkhaus

"cloth-line-crooked"; the zig-zag line of appliqued fabric. The fabric is appliqued into spaces left in the batik pattern.

HAS TXUG LUB NOOB-NCOOS

Zaaj nuav mas kuv yuav has txug peb Moob⁷⁵ cov noob-ncoos. Raws le kws puj tau rhawv kaab, yawm tau rhawv kev tseg ca, hab tau ua lug lawm ntau-ntau tam tuab neeg, los naj nub nwg nuav peb tseem ua quas qees hab. Noob-ncoos mas nwg muaj 2 yaam; xws le noob-ncoos-tsha hab noob-ncoos-lab.

Kev ua noob-ncoos nuas mas yog tug ntxhais hab tug vauv ua rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv los-puas tub/nyaab ua rua nam-txiv. Yog tas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv ob tug ob leeg tseem muaj txuj-sa nyob, nua mas yuav tau ua ob lub noob-ncoos-tsha huv si. Hos yog tas ob tug ib tug tsis muaj txuj-sa lawm es tshuav ib leeg xwb nuas ces ua ib lub noob-ncoos-tsha rua tug tseem muaj txuj-sa, ua lub noob-ncoos-lab rua tug tuag lawd.

Has txug kev-lig kev-cai kws yuav coj noob-ncoos moos rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv los yuav tau coj moos muaj kaab muaj ke; tsis yog yuav laam tau laam coj moos. Thaum ntxhais hab vauv yuav tau npaaj ib laam-fwj-cawv hab ib nkawm nyuas qab muab vum sav-sav lawm nqaa moos. Sij-hawm moos txug tom nam-tais, yawm-txiv tsev lawd muab ob nyuas qab coj lug tsuav tsawg-tsuag ua ob phaaj-ntxuag tso rua sau rooj ces laub 2 khob-cawv rua sau taag ces hu nam-tais, yawm-txiv lug nyob rooj (hauv paug rooj). Tug vauv tuaj nraa qaab rooj muab ob lub noob-ncoos tso rua sau rooj ces tug vauv has tas, “Awb....nam hab txiv ib...ua meb ib lom ntxhais hab vauv los ib tsis muaj dlaab-tsi yuav tuaj pov-fwm meb ob tug laug le kuas xyoo nuab ib ua ntxhais hab ua vauv tsuas coj ib kaum-nyuas ntaub tuaj pov-fwm meb ob tug laug, kuam kuas meb ob tug ua nam hab ua txiv tsuas yuav tau txais kev noj-qaab nyob-zoo, muaj txuj-sa txuj-zug nyob ntev dlhawv moos *“Ib txhab tsis muaj nkeej, ib txhis tsis muaj mob, meb nyob ua luas txwj, sawv ua luas laug, nyob kuam kuas dlawb txoob dlawb hau quas paug.”*

Ces tug vauv txhus caug pe, pe yawm-txiv hab pe nam-tais taag mas yawm-vauv yeej tsis sawv le. Yawm-txiv ob tug haus ob tug khob-cawv meej ces yawm-txiv le maam laub ib saab khob-cawv moos tsaa tug vauv, vauv haus saab khob-cawv ntawd meej ces vauv maam le sawv.

⁷⁵ *Moob-leeg or Moob-ntsuab.*

Noob-ncoos yog muab taag le nuav rua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lawm mas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv yuav tau tug hab yuav npaaj tam. Kev tug noob-ncoos mas yog tas lub noob-ncoos-tsha nua mas yog tug 1 kis nyaj-npib. Hos yog tas lub noob-ncoos-lab mas yog tug 5 npib-nyaj.

Kev tam noob-ncoos mas yog thaum nam-tais hab yawm-txiv npaaj tau lawd ces ob tug tso tuab-neeg tuaj hu tug ntXHais hab tug vauv moos tam mas luas moos hu has le nuav, *"Meb nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tso kuv tuaj hu meb moos nrug ob tug nyob ib nub, haus ib khob nyuas tshuaj taag es meb maam rov-qaab lug."* Yog thaum luas tuaj hu has le nuav ces yeej yog tam noob-ncoos. Thaum moos txug mas nam-tais, yawm-txiv tua ib tug npua kwv-laam le 6-7 tau. Muab ua tau sav-sav taag rau tau rua ntawd, mas nam-tais hab yawm-txiv lug ua tsaug txug kaum ntaub kaum xuv kws tug ntXHais hab vauv ob tug tau xaa tuaj taag ces ntXHais hab vauv ho lug ua nam-tais hab yawm-txiv tsaug qhov kws ua tau rooj-nqas rooj-no tam ob tug taag ces haus 3-4 lwm cawv lawv rooj ces noj mov. Tug npua kws rua ntawd mas yeej muab txav ib ceg nrug tug kua-twv rau ntXHais hab vauv ob tug aub moos tsev le.

TRADITIONAL NEEDLEWORK SQUARES

This article tells about our Hmong⁷⁶ traditional needlework squares, called *noob-ncoos*, pronounced “nong-dyong”.⁷⁷ According to ways of our great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers, and continuing down through many generations, today we still perform the traditions related to the needlework squares. There are two kinds of *noob-ncoos*. One is called *nong-dyong-cha*,⁷⁸ and the other is *nong-dyong-la*.⁷⁹ The first, *needlework squares with more cloth applique*, has a red background bordered with many overlapped bands of color, the red center area covered with many small appliqued squares, with contrasting diamonds sewn on top of each, interspersed with long criss-crossed bands. The other, *red needlework square*, is identical except that the red center area has no appliqued designs on it.

The *noob-ncoos* tradition is for the daughter and son-in-law to give the *noob-ncoos* to the girl's parents (in-laws), or for the son and daughter-in-law to give the *noob-ncoos* to the boy's parents. If both the mother-in-law and father-in-law are still alive, then they make two *noob-ncoos-tsha*, and give one to each parent. If one of the parents-in-law has already died, then they make the appliqued *noob-ncoos tsha* for the living parent and the *noob-ncoos-lab* for the deceased parent.

It is the true custom to give the *noob-ncoos* to the parents-in-law according to the traditions; one cannot just casually give the pieces to the parents. When the daughter and son-in-law give the *noob-ncoos*, the son-in-law has to prepare one bottle of corn liquor and a pair of boiled chickens. When they reach the home of the in-laws, the two chickens are chopped up and put on two plates on the table, and two glasses are filled with corn liquor and placed on the table. When all is ready, the parents-in-law are called to sit on one side of the table. The son-in-law stands on the other side of the table, and puts the two pieces of *noob-ncoos* on the table, and says, “*Ah...mother and father...we, your daughter and son-in-law, have not given you anything to bless you. But this year, your daughter and son-in-law bring these small pieces of cloth as a sign of blessing for you. May you two receive good health and wealth, have long lives, and remain strong forever. One thousand years without weakness, forever without sickness, you will be our advisors, you will be our elders, you will live until your hair is completely*

⁷⁶ *Moob-leeg*, Hmong Leng, or *Hmoob-ntsuab*, Green Hmong

⁷⁷ Vowel is approximately like the English long ‘o’, as in ‘boat’; *nong* is on a high tone, *dyong* on a low tone.

⁷⁸ *noob-ncoos-tsha*. *Noob* means ‘seed’, as when English-speakers refer to blood-lines; *ncoos* means ‘pillow’.

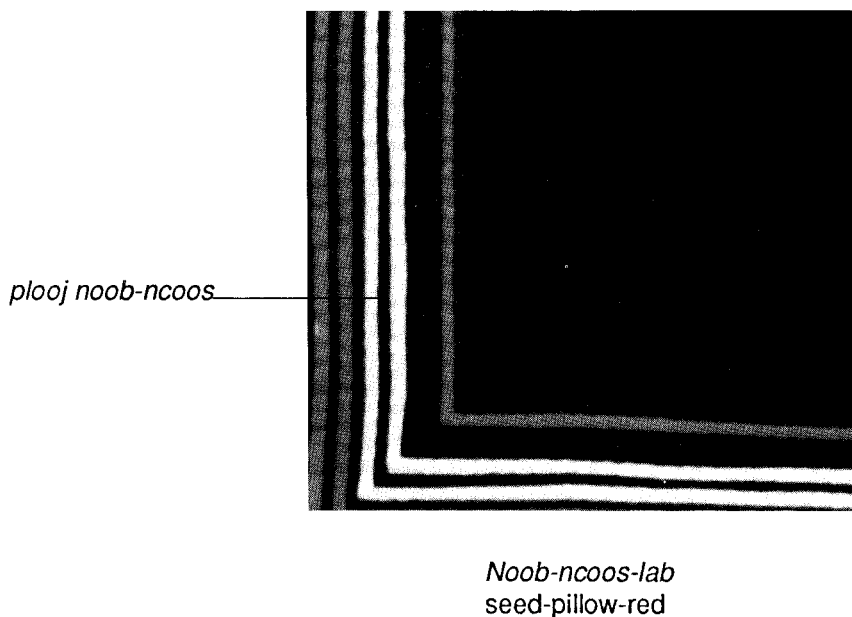
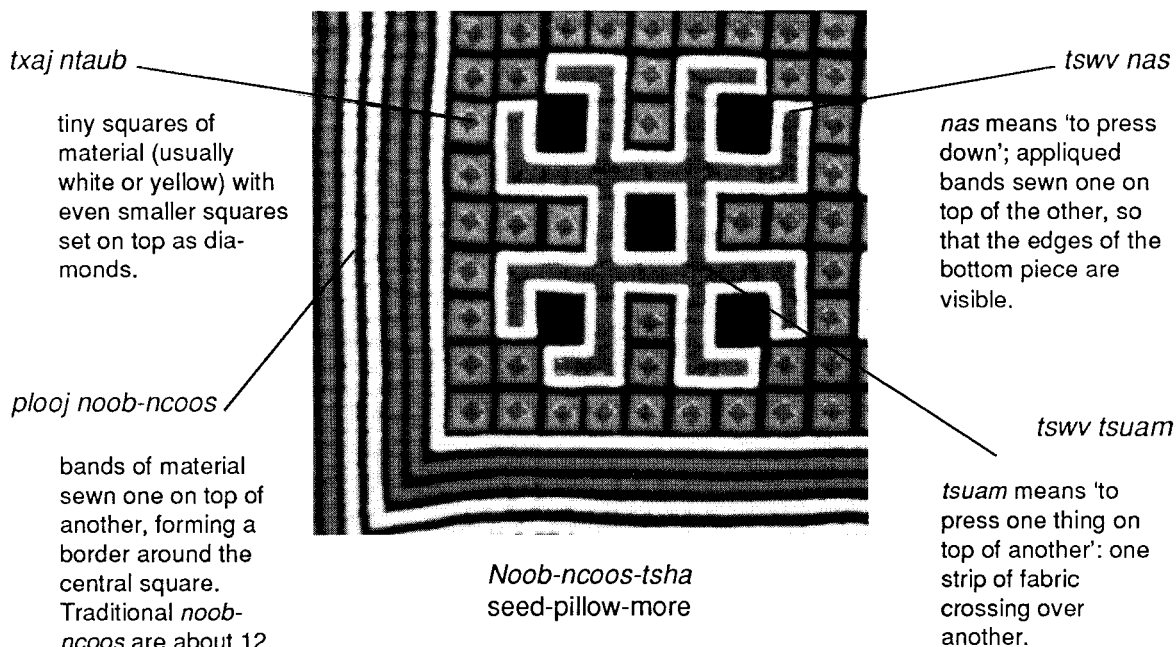
⁷⁹ *noob-ncoos-lab*. *Lab* means ‘red’.

white”.⁸⁰ The son-in-law kneels down for the father-in-law, gets up, and kneels down for the mother-in-law; he doesn't get up. The father-in-law and mother-in-law drink the two glasses of corn liquor and then the father-in-law pours two more glasses of corn liquor. He takes them to the son-in-law, who drinks them, and then gets up.

After the *noob-ncoos* have been presented this way to the in-laws, they will pay a price to the son-in-law, and will prepare a reward, a feast. The *noob-ncoos* price is ten silver coins for the *noob-ncoos-tsha*, and five silver coins for the *noob-ncoos-lab*. Tradition says that when the in-laws have prepared the feast they send someone to invite the daughter and son-in-law to come to the house for the *noob-ncoos* reward feast. That person says, “*Your mother-in-law and father-in-law invite you to visit with them for one day, to drink one cup of 'medicine', and then when that's done you can return home.*” When someone says these words to you, you know that it is for the *noob-ncoos* feast. When the daughter and son-in-law arrive, the in-laws kill a pig, about 150-200 pounds. When the meat is ready and put on the table, the parents-in-law say thank you for the pieces of cloth and the thread that the daughter and son-in-law have given to them. The daughter and son-in-law say thank you for the feast and drink three or four rounds of corn liquor, then eat the meal. The pig has been split, and one leg with the tail is given to the son-in-law to carry home.

⁸⁰ This blessing, along with the *noob-ncoos*, provides an extension to the 'visa' with which each person enters this life; each *noob-ncoos* therefore extends the person's life. The *noob-ncoos*, sometimes many pieces, are placed in the coffin with the person after death.

NOOB NCOOS NEEDLEWORK SQUARES VOCABULARY



(These words are Hmong Leng dialect—this type of stitchery is a *Moob Leeg* specialty.)

HMONG LENG SKIRT

The skirt made by the Hmong Leng women has been a Hmong trademark throughout the centuries. In photos of the Ch'uan Miao⁸¹ in China in the late 1920's, the skirts are remarkably similar to the Laotian Hmong skirts of the 1970's, and the Chinese accounts of the Hmong living in China 30 centuries ago speak of the intricately patterned skirts.

The skirt is made of three long strips of cloth, once hand-woven, then purchased from itinerant merchants, and now purchased at discount fabric stores. The top piece, the *tu-shee*,⁸² is hidden under the sash when the skirt is worn, and so it is not decorated. It has the waist band sewn on, over the anchored pleats. The pleats, which are about a half-inch deep, reduce a length of skirt from five or six yards to about a yard and a half. The anchoring stitches are of at least two sorts, one named the centipede and the other is the millipede. Running stitches are sewn through the center of each pleat, at about 5 inch intervals down the length of the skirt, and pulled up tight, accordian-style, to crease the pleats in place. Each time the skirt is worn, the running stitches are pulled out, and replaced before the skirt is stored away.

The middle section, *tu-ntu*,⁸³ is white or light blue fabric which has been batiked with dark blue or indigo dye. The skirts shown in photos from Thailand and Laos have the batik section without any further needlework, and from this comes the name, "Blue" Hmong. On today's skirts, the batiked designs are almost hidden by applique strips and triangles. There are several patterns to the batik, simply called 'skirt marks', with names like, "water buffalo horn", "snail", "cross", "crooked wax line", "wax scales".⁸⁴ The design of the batik determines the placement of applique which will be sewn on later.

The batik spoon is made of zinc or copper, with a bamboo handle; artists here have to send to Thai refugee camps to buy the tools, if they did not bring one with them. The wax, beeswax with an orangey color, is melted in a pan, the batik spoon dipped in, and the spoon held in the air until the wax is cooled to the right temperature. The batik spoon is held so the tip is towards artist's body, and the wax lines are drawn in smooth pulling motions towards the body. There are batik spoons for wider lines, and ones for finer lines. The designs are very symmetrical, but are drawn without pencil, ruler, or picture.

⁸¹ in David Crockett Graham's *SONGS AND STORIES OF THE CH'UAN MIAO*, 1954.

⁸² *tug si*

⁸³ *tug nthu*

⁸⁴ *txaj tab: txaj kub-twm, txaj qaab qwj, txaj khaub-lig, cab tswv nkhaus, nplai cab...*

After the entire length of fabric is designed with wax, the dye bath is prepared. The dyes are purchased from Thailand, red, black, and purple, along with a fixative⁸⁵. In the old days, dye was prepared from the indigo plant. The dyes are dissolved in water, and boiled down, then mixed with boiling water which has been poured through wood ashes.

The waxed fabric is loosely folded, wet with cool water, then soaked in the dye bath,⁸⁶ and the excess dye drained off into the dye pan. The fabric is spread out to dry, out of the direct sun, which might melt the wax; this dying-and-drying process is repeated three times. After the third time, the fabric is placed in a pan and boiling water is poured over it, to melt out the wax, which may be recovered for later use. The fabric is rinsed in warm water, and then hung up to dry. Where the wax has melted out, the white or light blue color of the original fabric forms the design, surrounded by dark indigo blue.

Later, the batiked design forms the base for applique. Long strips of satiny fabric, in white, bright pink, yellow, and lime green, are sewn on, sometimes one strip laid on top of another. The 'wax scales' form triangular spaces for cloth triangles that are sewn on. The finished design sometimes has a name, like "meat hook".⁸⁷

The bottom section of the skirt, the *tu-tang*,⁸⁸ is applique and cross-stitch done on a loosely woven fabric, usually black or white. The needlework so completely covers the base fabric that none of the original color shows through. Often the design of the bottom section repeats or complements the design of the middle section. The bottom edge is bound with a strip of fabric, and is called the "foot" of the skirt.⁸⁹

The skirt is worn with the opening in the front, with the waist band tied as one might tie an apron string. The opening is covered with the long black apron, and a length of black fabric are wound around the girl's midsection, from ribs to hips. Over the black sash goes a bright pink shiny cloth sash, embroidered sashes, or coin belts. Traditionally, the girl's legs are wrapped in black leggings from the ankle to the knee.

Girls in the United States are going to school, and not learning the traditional needlework and batik skills. Without the time necessary for sewing a skirt for the New Year, which may take the full year to complete, girls now buy the skirts from women here who have the skill, or from Thai refugee camps, where the women have much time to sew. In the old days, a girl's skirt, and other embroidered articles of clothing,

⁸⁵ A lab analysis of the dyes could not identify them specifically (there are over 3,500 dyes listed in the *Society of Dyers and Colorists' Manual*, 2nd edition, 1956), but a reasonable guess is: purple—methyl violet or crystal violet; red—chromoxane cyanine or mordant brown; black—naphthyl blue black; fixative—sodium hydrosulfide hydrate.

⁸⁶ *tsaus*

⁸⁷ *tswv nqaij lauj*

⁸⁸ *tug taab*

⁸⁹ *tswv taab taw*

were a public testimony to her skills, creativity, and willingness to work hard—all desirable attributes for marriageable girls.

DLAIM TAB MOOB HMONG SKIRT: VOCABULARY



khaws ntse-tab

'gather-pleat-skirt'; the pleats are anchored in the top section with special stitches; the pleats are held in place with long threads, that are pulled out each time the skirt is worn.

lub nplai nplai

can mean 'scale (fish, turtle, reptile)', or 'kernel of corn'. Whether or not that is the same meaning as the applied triangle is unclear. *Lub nplai* is the name given to the triangle; *nplai ntaub* is a triangle of fabric; *nplai cab* is a batik triangle.

tswv xyaab

'line-straight'. Applied bands of *tswv yas* fabric running the length of the skirt piece. They are often done by machine now, but before, they were always sewn by hand, as is everything else on the skirt.

cab tswv nkhaus

'wax-line-crooked'; a zig-zag line in the batik, where fabric will later be sewn.

tswv nqaij lauj

means 'hanging hook'; refers to this pattern of bands, more difficult because of the many cut ends, rather than one long piece folded back and forth.

xuv tswv nkhaus

'thread-line-crooked'; zig-zag line made of cross-stitch.

nthu tab

middle section of the skirt. The base fabric is the *cab* or batik (*ciab* in White Hmong). It is indigo¹ on white, or indigo on light blue. There are several designs for the batik patterns, and very few of the women in the U.S. remember all of them. Most of the designs are called *txaj tab* or 'skirt mark'.

taab tab

bottom section of the skirt. Often the cross-stitched and applied design of this section repeats or complements the batik and applied section above. The bottom bound edge is the *taab taw*, or foot of the skirt.