

## *Lao Poetics: Internal Rhyme in the Text of a Lam Sithandone Performance*

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Poetry is a cultural group's way of playing with sounds and presenting feelings and ideas in language that is attractive to the listener's ears or the reader's eyes. As Burnshaw has indicated, we need to consider "the poem as a work of sonal art" (1960: xi).

This sonal quality is particularly important to consider in analyzing the work of oral poets such as the Lao *mohlam*.<sup>1</sup> In a written discussion of the "poetics" of such an oral form, much is lost because the written examples can only partly convey the beauty of the sung poetry. And in translating such a piece, even more is lost, for the poetic style of one linguistic group is often far removed from that of another.

The words are the poem. Ideas can often be carried across, but poems are not made of ideas....they are made of words....An English translation is always a different thing; it is always an *English* poem. (Burnshaw 1960: xii)

What Professor Gedney (1989b: 489) has noted in speaking about Thai poetry appears to be true for Lao poetry as well:

Poetic artistry in Siamese verse finds expression mainly in the skillful manipulation of language within the constraints imposed by the various verse patterns. So much of the value of Siamese poetry lies in the form, as opposed to the semantic content, that translations into Western languages are notoriously disappointing.

For these reasons, in planning this discussion of the poetics of a performance of *Lam Sithandone*, I have chosen to include both a phonemic transcription of the Lao verses, arranged essentially as they might be if written out in Lao, and an English translation, which is presented in verse form, but which contains no rhyme and only a little alliteration. Essentially, the

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<sup>1</sup> A *mohlam* is an expert performer of *lam*, a form of essentially sung, somewhat extemporaneous Lao poetry.

phonemic transcription of the Lao provides the reader with some idea of the poem itself, the *sounds* of the poem if you will, while the English translation lets the reader in on the *ideas* that the poets expressed.

*Lam Sithandone* is a form of Lao oral poetry traditionally performed by the *mohlam* of South Laos.<sup>2</sup> The verse form usually associated with this style of *lam* is *kɔɔn nɛ̌n*. Though other verse forms, such as *kɔɔn tăt*, for instance, may be used briefly during a performance of *Lam Sithandone*, it is the *kɔɔn nɛ̌n* form that predominates. It is this poetic verse form that makes up the bulk of the lines of Lao poetry presented in the appendix to this paper.

The performance discussed in this paper was recorded in 1972 at a Lao radio station and was re-recorded, transcribed, and initially translated in 1973.<sup>3</sup> The two performers, Mohlam Sikhun (male) and Mohlam Thongbang (female), were renowned professional singers at that time.

I have described in detail elsewhere (Compton 1979: 136-146) the rhyme requirements for this form of poetry as discussed by Maha Sila Viravong (1970). For the benefit of readers unfamiliar with this form, I have bolded the words that fit into the external rhyme pattern for one verse of this form (see appendix). However, in the paper we will focus on the extensive use of internal rhyme in this performance.

## Internal Rhyme

The two major forms of internal rhyme in Lao poetry are vowel rhyme (*sămphăt sǎlaʔ*) and the (initial) consonant rhyme (*sămphăt phaŋsanaʔ*). Vowel rhyme (assonance) includes paired-word rhyme (*sămphăt thiam khuu*) and yoked-word rhyme (*sămphăt thiam ʔeek*). Examples of paired-word rhyme found in our material include *nɔɔy ɲɔɔy* (S69)<sup>4</sup> and *ʔuan suan* (T80). Examples of yoked-vowel rhyme are *kôm hɔɔm phóm* (S91) and *nui pham sii* (T13) and *dây mii bãy* (T44). It should be noted that in Lao, words of the same basic consonant and vowel patterns (CVV, CVC, or CVVC) are still considered to rhyme if they have different tones. Thus a yoked-vowel rhyme such as the following can occur: *kây ʔi kây*.

Consonant rhyme includes continuous consonant rhyme (*sămphăt lían ʔaksɔɔn*) and separated consonant rhyme (*sămphăt khàn ʔaksɔɔn*).

<sup>2</sup> Under the Royal Lao government, Sithandone was the name of a Southern province that had Pak Se as its capital. One style of *lam* from that area is referred to as Sithandone or Siphandone; in this paper I use the term Sithandone throughout.

<sup>3</sup> The data was collected in Laos under a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Grant during 1972-1973.

<sup>4</sup> The letter S plus a number indicates a line from Sikhun's performance; T plus a number indicates a line from Thongbang's performance. See appendix.

Consonant rhyme is what we usually refer to as alliteration in English poetry, and such alliteration or consonant rhyme strikes the eye almost immediately when one looks at the phonemic transcription in the appendix, most particularly in the verses performed by Mohlam Thongbang. Examples of continuous consonant rhyme are *khúam khám* (S10) and *khéen khóo* (T42). Examples of separated consonant rhyme include *kɔɔn wáy kɔɔn* (S106) and *ɲáw ɲáam bɔɔ ɲáɔy ɲaay* (T28).

Professor Gedney (1989b: 537) has observed that “the internal rhymes *linking phrases in a line of kɔɔn poetry have a close connection with the realities of actual speech*,” and that “much of the flow of Siamese speech consists of two- and three-syllable phrases.” An additional support for this view is that the “rules” presented for internal rhyme for Lao give us a two-word phrase minimum for both vowel rhymes (that is, paired-vowel rhymes) and consonant rhymes (that is, continuous consonant rhymes) and a three-word phrase for each of these when the rhyming words are separated by just one word (yoked-vowel rhymes and separated consonant rhymes). The result is that common, everyday phrases, which also happen to rhyme, fit nicely into the poetry, ready-made as it were. Such common phrases found in rhyme in my data include paired-vowel: *hak mak* (S78), *ɔɔ ɔɔ* (S80), *dây pây* (T42); yoked-vowel: *nân sǎmkhán* (S11); continuous consonant: *náaŋ nɔɔŋ* (S20), *wáw waa* (S87; T50,52), *pūu pāa* (S90), *khít khít* (T62); and separated consonant: *hày náaŋ hūu* (T17), *mɛɛn bɔɔ mǐi* (T32).

Further evidence for Gedney’s position that the internal rhymes have “a close connection with the realities of actual speech” is the extensive list provided by Roffe (1975) of four-syllable “elaborate expressions” found in everyday Lao speech, expressions that exhibit patterns of alliteration, assonance, and reduplication. Examples of similar sets found in this performance include the following, some of which appeared in the first hemistich of a line, others in the second hemistich:

First hemistich:

S51 (*mak*) *hɔɔt hían hɔɔt láw...*

S59 (*tāŋ*) *tɛɛ puu tɛɛ puu...*

S60 (*mak*) *con hɔɔŋ con hày...*

S82 (*mak*) *hɔɔt tūum hɔɔt tāaŋ...*

Second hemistich:

S32 *dín dāaw faay láaw*

S82 *phàa pheɛn phéɛ phǎaŋ*

S84 *khúam pàak máa mâak*

S91 *lónj kôm hɔɔm phóm*

All of the example expressions from the first hemistich are productive, that is they can be used as needed by substituting appropriate words in the second and fourth positions of the four-syllable phrase, as we see in comparing lines 51 and 82. These flexible four-word expressions are thus useful to the *mohlam*, who can manipulate them creatively to fit the variety of topics and performance situations they face.

The four types of internal rhyme discussed earlier can be found in abundance in the verses of both of these *mohlam*. For instance, Mohlam Sikhun uses vowel rhyme in thirty of his lines in which the final word of

the second hemistich of a line rhymes with the first or second word (or once in a while the third word) of the first hemistich of the next line. Two words in a row with the same initial consonant are common in everyday Lao speech and in Lao prose and poetry. We can find seven such pairs in the first four lines of Mohlam Thongbang's poetry alone.

### Alliteration

Continuous consonant rhyme or alliteration of three or more words in a row, however, is so pervasive in the *kɔɔn nɛən* form that it deserves particular attention. For example, in this small sample of just eighty-one lines, Mohlam Thongbang has produced forty-one lines that have three, four, five, or even six words in a row using the same initial consonant. Twenty-seven of those lines have three words in a row, but of those, seven lines also have separated consonant rhyme on this same consonant as well. For example, line 8 has the pattern *t- n- t- t- t-*; line 11 has the pattern *ph- ph- m- ph-*; and line 13 has *ph- ph- ph- n- ph-*. In addition, two of the lines have double sets of three-word alliteration; that is, line 30 has *w- w- w- p- d- d- d-* and line 56 has *t- t- t- l- s- w- w- w-*.

Nine lines of Thongbang's poetry contain alliterative phrases of four words; one of those, line 15, contains two sets of four words: *m- t- t- t- t- ?- ph- ph- ph- ph-*. Line 73 contains separated consonant rhyme as well: *s- th- s- s- s-...s- l- l- h- l- m-*.

Three lines favor five-word phrases: line 40 has *?- kh- kh- kh- kh- ....kh- n- l- l- d-*; line 53 has *p- l- l- l- l- l-*; and line 62 has *ph- ph- ph- ph- ph- th-*.

The full lines containing six-word phrases are reproduced below. The alliterative initial consonants have been bolded for emphasis.

T46	<i>phən waa bāaŋ sâat sîa</i>	<i>súm sɔ̀ɔk sóm sǎwǎy</i>
T64	<i>bòɔk hàysǎŋkhǎan nôm nui</i>	<i>nêep nêem nám niaw</i>

Mohlam Sikhun's poetry shows abundant use of alliteration as well. In his 108 lines, we find thirty-three lines with three or more alliterative words in a row. Twenty-six of those lines have three words in a row; five lines have four words in a row and two lines have five words in a row. The examples of the full lines in which the five-word alliteration sets appear are provided below. Note that in the lines below words beginning with both high-class and low-class initials (*khɔɔ* and *khɔ* respectively in line 8 and *sɔɔ* and *sɔ* in line 24) from the writing system are used, but it is their sonal effect that we are concerned with here.

S8d	<i>khǎy khaaw khúam khôɔp khɔɔ</i>	<i>səən phii nômɔŋ coŋ fán</i>
S24d	<i>thaw thǎŋ sòok sàw</i>	<i>sɛən sâm sɛep mɔɔŋ</i>



## Final Consonants

Mohlam Sikhun and Mohlam Thongbang use final consonants skillfully also. Sets of syllables with two, three and sometimes four, five, six, or even seven of the same finals in a row can be found frequently in their poetry. There are three nasals and four stops that can occur in final position in Lao. Words ending in three of those stops (*-p*, *-t*, and *-k*) can be used to substitute for *mây ʔèek* position words (words from column B in the proto-Tai tone chart; see example in Gedney 1989a: 20) in *kɔ̌n nɛ̌n* form; consequently, they do not appear as sets of finals in this poetry. However, the three nasal finals *-m*, *-n*, and *-ŋ* are found frequently in pairs or threes, both continuous or separated. Line S8d above illustrates this with the final *-ŋ* of the line's last three syllables. A few other examples of this are found in the segments of lines provided below.

Continuous:

S91d *siʔ lɔ̌ŋ kóm hóm phóm*

T24c *siʔ néem néem nám khuu*

Separated:

S20d *náaŋ nócŋ sii bāaŋ*

T 27d *khanǎŋ nía neeŋ nócŋ*

The weight of these final consonant patterns is best illustrated with Thongbang's set of seven words in a row ending with a final *-n*.

T30c *ʔukʔǎŋ wían wun wun pāan dūn dīn đian sii*

## Distribution of Patterns of Tone

The smooth, flowing sound that such syllable-end similarity allows is characteristic of the *kɔ̌n nɛ̌n* form. The distribution of patterns of tone in the verse is guided by rules for the specific placement of tone (that is, words from column B and column C have designated positions in the verse). As a consequence of the form's use of words ending in *-p*, *-t*, and *-k* as substitutes in the designated *mây ʔèek* (column B) word positions, words ending in those stops rarely occur in any other positions in a verse. Out of a range of twenty-eight to about fifty syllables in a verse, perhaps only six to ten will end in final *-p*, *-t*, or *-k*.

Though it is not discussed by Maha Sila Viravong (1970) in his presentation of the tone distribution rules for *kɔ̌n nɛ̌n*, there are at least two additional positions in a verse of *kɔ̌n nɛ̌n* poetry that have clear patterns of tone distribution. Apparently there are rules, though they may not be written rules or even rules that the performers can explain, that govern the tones that can occur on the last word of line a in a verse and the last word of line d. The only tones occurring at the end of line a in Sikhun's material

were from boxes A1 (mid rising tone)<sup>5</sup> and A4 (high falling tone) and from boxes DS3 (short rising) and DS4 (mid tone) in the proto-Tai tone chart (see Gedney 1989a: 20). All of Mohlam Sikhun's tones on the last word of every verse (that is, the last word of line **d**) were from column A (rising [box 1], mid low [boxes 2 and 3], or high falling [box 4]). Two-thirds of the time, though, the high falling tone occurred at verse-end position. An almost identical pattern was found in Thongbang's verses.

Quite consistently, then, this form of poetry has words from column A (or DS) at the end of line **a**; words from column C at the end of line **b**; words from column B at the end of line **c**; and words from column A at the end of line **d**. Like the Siamese verse forms *râay* and *khlooy*, it thus appears that *kḥḥn nḥḥn*, with its placement of A, B, and C tones in rhyming patterns, is among those older verse forms that "lie on the other side of the great divide known as the 'tonal split'." (See Hartmann in this volume.) The total effect of poetry performed in the *kḥḥn nḥḥn* form, then, is one of the smoothly flowing sounds of syllables primarily ending in vowels or nasals, with tones distributed at predictable points within and at the ends of the lines.

### Assonance

Another poetic device used by these Lao performers is assonance. For example, we find sets of two, three or four words containing the same vowels in the following lines; sometimes these matched vowels appear in adjacent words, sometimes a word with another vowel intervenes. In medial position in Lao, all nine of the simple vowels can occur. Thus it is clearly by design, not by chance, that the following assonant sets appear.

S96a	<i>ʔâay yàak khaaw khḥḥ</i>	<i>hḥḥ khḥḥ mḥḥm hàay sḥḥn khít</i>
S99d	<i>bḥḥ khḥḥn thḥḥ leen míá</i>	
S34b	<i>tāy tḥḥ phíay máá nḥḥ</i>	<i>síʔ ʔḥḥḥ ʔḥḥy ʔāw nḥḥḥ</i>
T53d	<i>hak phḥḥ híam húup phían</i>	<i>pāan lían lḥḥḥ líat líat líi</i>

The following verse from Thongbang's performance illustrates nearly all of the kinds of internal rhyme we have discussed in this paper, as well as appropriate, rule-ordered tone distribution. Both paired word (*sámphḥḥ thíam khuu*) and yoked-word (*sámphḥḥ thíam ʔḥḥk*) vowel rhyme are found in this verse (lines 13 and 11, respectively), as well as continuous (lines 10 through 13) and separated (lines 11 and 13) consonant rhyme (*sámphḥḥ lían ʔáksḥḥn* and *sámphḥḥ khàn ʔáksḥḥn*). In addition, the whole verse is woven more tightly through the use of the same initial consonants or alliteration in lines 11 and 13 (*ph-*) and the fact that of the twenty-seven words in the first

<sup>5</sup> Tones in parentheses in this sentence indicate the tones of the modern Lao dialect spoken by the *mohlam* performers.

three lines, ten of them end in final *-ŋ*. To emphasize the high frequency of initial *ph-* and final *-ŋ*, they appear in bold below. Other alliterative sets are the four initial *d-* words in line 10, and the two initial *b-* and three initial *l-* words in line 12. Also, three of the four words that begin with *ph-* in line 13 have a final *-m*, as do two adjacent words in the second hemistich of line 12. Finally, external rhyme (last word of a line rhyming with first, second, or third word of the next line) links lines 10, 11, and 12. The words illustrating external rhyme have been underlined. (Note that words ending in stops appear only at those points in which the *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən* form requires a word having a *mây ʔèek* or a *-p, -t, -k* as a final, with the exception of the two words at the beginning of line 13d. However, these two words (*căp khaʔ*) appear immediately before a *mây ʔèek* position and thus do not disturb the general rhythm of the **d** line.)

- |      |   |  |
|------|---|--|
| 10a. | <i>hɔɔm dɛ̌e dūaŋ dɔɔk mây</i>                    | <i>sɿi kũlɛ̌ap dɔm hɔɔŋ</i>            |
| 11b. | <u><i>phəɔŋ phǐaŋ phǎay mé̌eŋ</i></u>            | <u><i>phuu sǎwɛ̌eŋ wǎan yɔɔŋ</i></u>   |
| 12c. | <u><i>mɔɔŋ khǐi bǎaŋ</i></u> <i>bǎy dɔɔn nɿi</i> | <i>lǐaŋ láam lé̌em pàak</i>           |
| 13d. | <i>căp khaʔ ɲaa</i> <b><i>phúa</i></b>            | <b><i>phúam phɔɔm nɿi pham sɿi</i></b> |

As I have noted earlier (Compton 1979: 145), the designated positions for the use of *mây ʔèek* and *mây thóo* words and the contrast in the amount and type of use of internal rhyme are two of the primary characteristics distinguishing *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən* from *kɔɔn tǎt*. The analysis of the poetry of the performance discussed in this paper indicates a possible reason for the different adjectives used to describe these two forms of poetry.

The word *nɛ̌ən* is defined by Kerr (1972: 531) as “long; slow (*in speaking*); extended, protracted, lengthened.” It is just such a feeling of long, smooth, extended, stretched out sound that one gets when listening to lines of *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən*. The heavy use of alliteration and of sets of smooth syllables (those ending in vowels or nasals) noted in the data certainly contribute to the “lengthened” feeling that the *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən* verses of a *Lam Sithandone* performance produce. In addition, there is an apparent lengthening of the vowel of the first or occasionally the second word of a set of lines (**a** and **b** being one set; **c** and **d** another) in a verse of *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən* in the *Lam Sithandone* style. Thus, usually the vowel of the first word of line **a** and the first word of line **c** is somewhat lengthened, apparently to fit the musical requirement of the beginning of that set. Often right after that first word or note, the *mohlam* takes a breath that then lasts him or her through to the last word of the set (that is, the last word of line **b** or line **d**).

On the other hand, the tempo of the music often seems to pick up, and dancing may begin as sections of *kɔɔn tǎt* poetry are performed within a performance that consists primarily of *kɔɔn nɛ̌ən* (see Compton 1979: 13). And the word *tǎt*, which Kerr (1972: 600) defines as “cut, cut off, trim, break off, sever,” seems an appropriate description of the choppy feeling produced by the sounds of the *kɔɔn tǎt* lines, with their heavy emphasis on

the match of end line words carrying forward the external rhyme, further marked with the musical downbeat, from one line to the end word of the first hemistich of the next. At the same time, their less frequent use of internal rhyme means that the words within an individual line are not as tightly linked to each other as those in a line of *kṣṇaṇaṇa*.

## Conclusion

*Lam Sithandone* is performed by singers throughout the lower part of southern Laos and sometimes in other areas of Laos and Northeast Thailand as well. Its distinctive music is closely associated with the *kṣṇaṇaṇa* poetic form used in most of the verses sung at any one performance. Internal rhyme, one of the characteristics of that form, plays an important role in determining the sonal quality of the *Lam Sithandone* performances.

In this paper I have discussed the intricate patterns of internal rhyme in the *kṣṇaṇaṇa* form, and I have provided examples from the poetry of Mohlam Sikhun and Mohlam Thongbang to illustrate these patterns. These skilled performers use the Lao syllable patterns of CVV, CVC, and CVVC creatively to produce sets of similar sounds. As one might expect, the high-frequency Lao initial consonants, such as *s-* and the high-frequency final nasals, as well as high-frequency vowels, such as *aa* appear often in the data in the appropriate alliterative and assonant groupings. Through the use of vowel and consonant rhyme and specified patterns of tonal distribution, the beginning, middle, and end of the Lao syllables are used to the fullest to create pleasing patterns of poetry, music, and moods from sound.

The patterns of rhyme in the two- and three-word everyday phrases that Professor Gedney has mentioned and the four-word expressions discussed by Roffe have been found frequently as a part of the internal rhyme in this data and are additional building blocks that the singers use to construct their poetry. Patterns of tone distribution found in this form of Lao poetry give support to viewing *kṣṇaṇaṇa* as a type that existed prior to the tonal split discussed by Hartmann. Both the internal rhyme patterns presented in this paper and the patterns of external rhyme and tone placement rules of *kṣṇaṇaṇa* work together to help performers such as Mohlam Sikhun and Mohlam Thongbang produce sonorous *Sithandone* songs. What Gedney (1989: 489) has said of Thai poetry can be said of the poetry of the Lao *mohlam* as well, for their songs do indeed “exploit existing patterns in elegant and graceful ways.”

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## Appendix

The appendix contains the transcription of the data used for this paper, followed by a simple English translation of the Lao poetry. Following Tedlock (1983), I have experimented with some visual techniques for indicating sonal aspects of an oral performance in written form. As a beginning for Lao sung poetry, I have chosen to represent (in the transcription) just three significant timing units found in this material. The first unit is a set of two lines of poetry which are usually sung as a breath group. Usually these will be lines **a** and **b** produced as a unit and then lines **c** and **d**. At the beginning of nearly every set (that is, at the beginning of line **a** and the beginning of line **c**), one word or syllable will be set off from the others by a slight lengthening of either the vowel or the final nasal or a brief pause before moving on into the line; this word also appears to correspond with a particular note in the musical pattern. To set off those words used in such a way in this performance, I have placed a slash (/) immediately following each.

The second timing unit is found at the beginning of a set in which a word or phrase is followed by a significant pause (filled by instrumental music) before the singer embarks on the main line. Such words are placed on a separate line. An example of these two representations can be found in line 5a of Mohlam Sikhun's material. The first two words are followed in the performance by a significant pause, and the third word is held just a bit apart from the rest of the line.

S5a    m̐i n̐i  
          n̐aam/ kh̐aa d̐ay kaaw l̐oŋ n̐i            p̐e p̐aak p̐ay h̐aa

The third type of timing represented is shown by the wide spacing between the words at the end of lines 3 and 108 of Sikhun's material and at the ends of lines 4 and 81 of Thongbang's material; this spacing has been used to indicate the diminished speed at which these lines are sung as compared to the rest of the words in the performance.

These places at which the *mohlam* slow down are important signals of change; at the end of line 3 for Sikhun and line 4 for Thongbang, respectively, the introductory poetry is being completed. Immediately after this slowing down, the singers will each raise their voices in three extended, elaborated versions of the word *ʔəy*. Then they will begin the main part of the text in the normal rhythm of *Lam Sithandone*. The next time that we hear a slowdown in the music and words it signals the end of each individual performance (line 108 for Sikhun and line 81 for Thongbang). Just as with much Lao traditional instrumental music, a listener knows, upon hearing such a slowdown, that a change in or an end to a performance is being signalled. We have thus provided the wide spacing between words at just those points in the transcription where it occurred in the live performance.

The six tones of this dialect of Southern Lao are represented in the transcription by the symbols placed above the first vowel in a syllable (and above the x in the examples) as follows: a mid rising tone (box A1) by  $\acute{x}$ ; a low mid tone with a slight initial rise and final fall (boxes A2 and A3), indicated by  $\tilde{x}$ ; a mid level tone (boxes B 1, 2, 3, 4 and DS4), indicated by the absence of any symbol; a low, level tone (boxes C1, DL1, 2, and 3), indicated by  $\grave{x}$ ; a mid falling tone (boxes C2, 3, 4 and DL4), indicated by  $\hat{x}$ ; and a high falling tone (box A4), indicated by  $\acute{\acute{x}}$ . The pronunciation of what I have transcribed as *w* is a somewhat rounded *v* initially and *w* in final position. There are no consonant clusters in this dialect.

- |      |                                   |            |                                |
|------|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|
| 1.   | pôon wáon                         | kêem nōwɔŋ | pôon wáon                      |
| 2.   | liăw hên bũa bãy wáon             |            | lóm hàak máa tii fówɔŋ         |
| 3.   | bòok kákiaŋ                       |            | pəon wáon                      |
|      |                                   |            | yuu náy nâm                    |
| 4.   | ?ăy                               | ?ăy        | ?ăy                            |
| 5a.  | míi nui                           |            |                                |
|      | ńáam/ khàa dây kaaw lōwɔŋ nui     |            | pəe pàak pãy <b>hăa</b>        |
| 6b.  | sìn sōwɔŋ khúam khám <b>máa</b>   |            | hày cii cing cām <b>wây</b>    |
| 7c.  | phíaŋ/ waa wánnáa <b>thây</b>     |            | kōw khây pūn pēn <b>tōw</b>    |
| 8d.  | khây khaaw khúam khōw <b>khōw</b> |            | səon phui nōwɔŋ cōŋ <b>fáy</b> |
| 9a.  | ?ān nāat niŋ                      |            |                                |
|      | phən tōwɔŋ <b>tāŋ</b>             |            | hīak waa sǎaw dūaŋ <b>phéŋ</b> |
| 10b. | phuu phən mii mǎt khěŋ            |            | dây tōwɔŋ khúam khám fīaŋ      |
| 11c. | pēn/ thii tháaŋ néew nān          |            | sāmkan kōw wāw phōt            |
| 12d. | bōon sǎndōot phuu nōwɔŋ           |            | kǎ? lóay wāw tōw fēen          |
| 13a. | waa/ phũa cāw nān luaŋ khēen      |            | nii kǎy cǎak hīan sǎthān       |
| 14b. | phōn phaam khōwɔŋ kháaw máa       |            | təe mǎa leŋ lam phii           |
| 15c. | phat/thanāa néew sii              |            | khii wánnáa tít tōw            |
| 16d. | cāw bōw pēn phuu                  |            | khōw nii khúam wāw tōw kǎn     |
| 17a. | tāam/?āay nii naŋ sīŋ             |            | fáy bōŋ khúam lám              |
| 18b. | bōw mii cām cǎy kǎn nui           |            | mǎa leŋ lám khīn               |
| 19c. | hày/ khúun yāin yǎn phōw nui      |            | phōw cǎy wāw tōw               |
| 20d. | ńáŋ si? kǎaw tōw nàa              |            | náaŋ nōwɔŋ sīi bǎaŋ            |
| 21a. | pho? waa                          |            |                                |
|      | ?āay/ nii mak hūup nōwɔŋ          |            | lōn līn fā kǎdǎt               |
| 22b. | ńay kua phúum phāp dēen           |            | mēe hīn máa khīn kǎn           |
| 23c. | yuu náy thúaŋ ?āay                |            | bōw bǎy khīŋ khúat naŋ         |
| 24d. | thaw thǎŋ thōŋ sōok sǎw           |            | sēen sām sēep mōwɔŋ            |

<sup>6</sup> The main rhyme scheme is indicated by the bolded syllables in lines 5-9.

25a.	ʔaay/ ciŋ dâw lóng pǎn pǔwŋ nǐi	pēe pàak pǎy hǎa
26b.	yǎi pǔwŋ khúa mǎi máa	siʔ kòot kũm kǎaŋ sǎn
27c.	thǎŋ/ suan nēew náam nǎn	sǎmkhǎn mǎak tũm flay
28d.	sǎikhúun waa siʔ dâw	tǎam cǎy ʔaay phuu lám
29a.	lǎoy/ waa lǒp ʔiik sâm	boow dâw huam lée pháy
30b.	tǎt sǎn cǎy wón wáay	siʔ kiaw sów sóon wâw
31c.	ʔǎon/ hǎy fǔŋ khón thàw	thǎŋ bǎan mǎaŋ khǔwŋ háw
32d.	sǎikhúun dâw ʔòok boon sǎthǎanǐi boon nǐi	ʔǎn nǐi hǎy fǎŋ koon đin dǎaw faay láaw
33a.	khǎi/ waa khúun hǎot haaw	siʔ hǎn tǔw khúam mak
34b.	tǎŋ tēe phiǎŋ máa fláa	siʔ ʔòot ʔwŋy ʔǎw nǔwŋ
35c.	sǔwŋ suan háw hǎy phów kiaw nǐi	flaw nám kǎn nēe
36d.	thǔwŋbǎaŋ náaŋ ʔǎoy yaa siʔ het wēe wǎwŋ	khǎi dǔaŋ làa phuu lám
37a.	flǎi/ waa cǎw boow khít sâm nǐi	nám tòow hǎy tēm mat
38b.	waa hǎy sǎikhúun thát	kaaw lám thǎaŋ nǐi
39c.	cǎw/ phat líi láa đǎn	khǎn pǎy kǎʔ thuk hēeŋ
40d.	ʔǎn nǎn boow thǎik tǔwŋ nǐi	tǎam bǎaŋ boon lám
41a.	thàa/ meen háw hak dâw	ʔòot ʔwŋy ʔǎw kǎn
42b.	hǎy mǎn pēn phúa phǎn nǐi	đaŋ đǎm dǎa khǎw
43c.	wâw/ hǎy fǔŋ khón thàw	đin đǎm bǎan phǎn
44d.	phuu sǎŋuǎn sǎi cēeŋ	sǎđēeŋ wǎy boon lám
45a.	khúun nǐi kǎʔ flǎŋ khít sǔok sâm	siʔ khǔw kiaw khúam mak
46b.	tǎt tēe phiǎŋ phów cǎy	siʔ kaaw wón wáay wâw
47c.	thǔwŋbǎaŋ ciŋ meen ʔaay mak cǎw nǐi	pēn ɲaw khǎi fǎn
48d.	mēe flǎŋ khón ʔǎoy sǎaw phuu đǎi ʔǎoy	saan ɲaam khón náa
49b.	nǐi lēew mak/ wón wón wáay wáay nǐi	đaŋ khúay hēn khǎw
50c.	thǔwŋbǎaŋ mak pháy máa boow khǎi cǎw	cǎn ɲaw sóŋ kòot khaw
51d.	mak hǔot hían hǔot lǎw	kǎbũŋ khǎw ʔēep múay



52a.	sĩikhuun nĩi waa mak hōt thùy	khop khūay khōng hían moom náang néew nōng
53b.	bəŋ phǎy bōo mĩi mĩan nĩi	phĩn phée phĩi hom
54c.	mak/ hōt khōng náy nĩa nĩi	cây lahōy yàak hup hén
55d.	thũik tē lóm kǎ? si? mōy	
56a.	bōo/ meen phii wāw lén	mak tǎlōt khĩn wén
57b.	láp tǎa kōo fǎn hén	yuu bōo pēn phōo mĩi
58c.	hén/ phǎy máa bōo khĩi cǎw	néem tē gǎw kǎ? phōo yuu
59d.	tāŋ tē puu tē puu	bōo khōy phōo mak phǎy
60a.	mak/ cōn hōng cōn hày	nām tǎa laŋ lín lǎy
61b.	phōo pǎan thǎy kǎp khúay nĩi	yaan kǎay nām kōn
62c.	nōon/ kǎaŋ khĩn hōn hōn	mōon láay cōn lōŋ piak
63d.	?ōn hĩak hǎa tē cǎw	cōn khǎw bōo dǎy kĩn
64a.	lǎaŋ/ nĩi thia cōn waa diin	dōok hǎay kua phĩi sũn
65b.	thōŋbǎaŋ náang ?ōy	nàa phǎak nōo haaw kām pǎn
66c.	sǎdōt dũn tǎm fǎa	khán meen néew khōng kĩn
67d.	mak/ kǎsǎn sēn diin	si? ?ǎw máa nōo moom
68a.	fǎa mĩi góm yuu liay	khĩi si? mōy pǎet bōo pēn
68c.	mak/ pǎan hén mak kúay	pǎan kǎsuǎy kǎp hùuk
69d.	mak pǎan lùuk nōy nōy	gōy khǎaŋ mē bōo wǎaŋ
70c.	mak/ sǎaw náang khǎaw nĩi	thǎŋ phĩi khĩi cǎa pii
71d.	ñaaŋ cōn hǎa khaw sii	cōn kōn kǎ? bōo mĩi
72c.	mak/ pǎan mĩi mak phōeŋ	mak pǎan lǎp pǎa khōeŋ
73d.	yàak mĩa nām moom nōng nĩi	mak yàak thōeŋ khĩi sia
74c.	mak/ yàak mĩa liam lian	pháay khōeŋ waan hē
75d.	mak/ yàak mĩa liam lian	mak yàak mĩa nōon hían
76a.	ciŋ/ meen ?ǎay mak cǎw	si? phōo lian dǎy bōo
77b.	mak cōn múa mĩn	khōo khǎw phōeŋ gǎw
78c.	mak/?iĩli dǎy lǎa	cōn wāw com kǎw hǎa
79d.	hak mak sǎaw náang ?āmkhāa	bōo hén bəŋ tǎawén
80d.	mak si? tǎay mĩi nĩi	yuu thōŋ fǎa
81d.	mak si? tǎay mĩi nĩi	pǎan kǎa mak kataay
82d.	mak si? tǎay mĩi nĩi	hǎy pēn khĩi ?un kōo tǎam

80c.	ñáam/ nĩi mĩa hĩam máa phỏ	tần khỏc yuu cỏc cỏc
81d.	?áa pàak pẻn cỏc wỏ	yàak khỏc wỏw tẻn nỏn
82a.	mak/ hỏt tũm hỏt tỏn nĩ	phỏa phẻn phẻc phỏn
83b.	khỏn sỏm ?ỏn nỏn thỏ	cỏc khỏc khỏ khỏn nỏc
* * * *		
84a.	nĩi lẻw thỏn bỏn/ bỏc mẻn ?ỏy khỏ đỏ	tẻn khỏm pỏak máa mak
85b.	sỏk mak phỏn máa lỏm	wỏa cỏ ?ỏm ?ỏw cỏw
86c.	sỏaw nỏn lỏ bỏ khỏn máa khỏ	hỏy sỏikhỏn tít cỏ
87d.	?ỏn nỏ hỏw phỏp phỏc nỏ	khỏm wỏw wỏa sỏ lỏm
88a.	sỏaw nỏn khỏn pỏp khỏ phỏu phỏn nỏ	bỏn wỏn wỏn bỏn
89b.	lẻ hỏ khỏn khỏn	cỏp nỏ nỏn bỏ mỏ nỏ
90c.	khỏ/ đỏn pỏu pỏ khỏn	sỏkhỏn nỏn lỏm tỏak
91d.	nỏc nỏp thẻn thỏc nỏm	sỏn lẻw nỏn ?ỏy sỏ lỏn kỏm hỏc phỏm
92a.	pỏ/pỏt pỏn nuay kẻw	lỏuk kẻn phỏlỏalỏy
93b.	bỏc khỏ mỏ ?ỏsỏn	tít đỏ ?ỏp ?ỏc kỏm kẻw
94c.	nỏn ?ỏy lỏn đỏn pỏn pỏn cỏw	sỏm sỏ sỏn sỏn khỏn
95d.	khỏn sỏatỏ thỏk tỏn	sỏ khẻn fỏat kỏthỏn máa
96a.	lỏn nỏ cỏn wỏ ?ỏy yỏak kỏaw khỏ	hỏc khỏ mỏcỏ hỏy sỏn khỏ
97b.	bỏn bỏn sỏn sỏn khỏn	wẻethỏnỏ nỏm cỏw
98c.	khỏc wỏ khỏn sỏ wỏn wỏn wỏ	yỏn khỏ wỏ ?ỏw tỏ
99d.	yỏn khỏn het nỏ sỏm	mỏn sỏ sỏ lẻ lỏm
100a.	?ỏn/ nỏ mẻn nỏn suay ?ỏy	bỏn khẻn thẻ lẻn mỏ
101b.	phỏ phỏn phỏn phỏn ?ỏw	manỏ tỏp tỏm tít
102c.	khỏn nỏ mẻn hỏn hỏn nỏn	sỏn sỏ khỏ khỏ lẻw
103d.	cỏ thỏn phẻc phỏp phỏ	bỏn nẻw nỏn nỏw nỏn
		phỏc ?ỏy mỏy manỏ

104a. sɔo/ tɔklɔŋ mɛɛn nɔɔŋ  
105b. yaa siʔ mui khúam táhat  
106c. bát/ nui sɛikhuun ʔây  
107d. hây thɔɔŋbãaŋ tɔɔp tɔɔn

108 máa khón tháy káy

hây khân khâat khúam mak  
liik kɔɔn kây thɔɔn  
siʔ cɔʔ kɔɔn wây kɔɔn  
phɔɔ siʔ sɔɔn nɛɛ bɔɔ

khɔɔ hây câw khít may dây  
wáy wáy nui

1. So smooth, thy cheeks, so smooth.
2. I see those lotus leaves ripple only  
When the wind whips the waves,
3. Telling the leaves to glide  
In the water.
4. Oh! Oh! Oh!
- 5a. Today when I loudly proclaim this,  
Explaining this to you
- 6b. And completing this speech for you,  
You should remember it.
- 7c. As for the excellent Vanna,<sup>8</sup>  
He also revealed his numerous desires,
- 8d. Giving news and advice on the subject  
And inviting our relatives to listen.
- 9a. The girl whom he answered and praised  
Was called Duangpheng.
- 10b. She was courageous  
And was able to answer on the topic discussed.
- 11c. When she spoke that way,  
She exaggerated important things.
- 12d. For self-satisfaction, you dear (Thongbang),  
Then spoke of her husband.
- 13a. You said that her husband had been provoked  
And had fled far from their home,
- 14b. Going away  
A long time ago, in a hurry.
- 15c. Trying to improve (the singing) so that it would be appropriate,  
Vanna contacted (you).
- 16d. You are not a person who would avoid  
A debate.

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks are due to Davone Sirimanodham Knott and Souphanh Savady who worked with me on the first drafts of these translations; however, any errors in the final form are my responsibility.

<sup>8</sup> Sikhun is referring to a *mohlam* performance given on a different occasion by Vanna and Duangpheng (mentioned in line 9). Both were well-known Southern Lao *mohlam* in the 1970s. Sikhun and Thongbang were also present at the performance referred to in this verse.

- 17a. As for me,  
I sat quietly and listened and observed the singing.
- 18b. There was no sincerity between you  
When you sang.
- 19c. Allow me an opportunity to meet you;  
I'd be content to speak further.
- 20d. I still want to court you,  
Young lady called Bang,
- 21a. Because I like your body  
To an incomparable degree,
- 22b. More than this this earth.  
Boulders come to block my way;
- 23c. In my heart, I have never been exposed;  
My body shakes; I sit
- 24d. Like one extremely melancholy,  
Regretful and depressed.
- 25a. Consequently, I have decided to tell you of my desires now,  
Explaining them to you.
- 26b. I reach out for you  
To embrace your garden,
- 27c. Everything about that garden,  
But most importantly the large bael fruit <sup>9</sup>
- 28d. I, Sikhun, think that I will obtain it  
As I, the one who sings, wish.
- 29a. Or are you going to hide again  
So that I don't get to unite with you, to look at you and whisper to  
you?
- 30b. If you're having trouble making a decision  
About this courtship, I invite you to speak.
- 31c. Call all the elders from our towns and villages  
To listen to this first
- 32d. Which I, Sikhun, will broadcast over this (radio) station  
Of the land of Laos.
- 33a . It's as though I, Khun, were eager  
To return to the subject of love
- 34b. Only to cajole and charm you  
In order to win you.

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<sup>9</sup> Fruit of the *Aegle marmelos* (Kerr 1972: 1103).

- 35c. Let the two of us consider courting  
Each other again.
- 36d. Dear Thongbang, don't digress  
Like dear Duang, the one who sang.
- 37a. Or haven't you thought about it again,  
These willful retorts to me
- 38b. That cause me, Sikhun,  
To reply and sing in this way?
- 39c. You evade and resist the topic,  
Singing about any and everything.
- 40d. That's not right  
At a performance of *lam*.
- 41a. If we can perhaps love each other,  
We can cajole and charm each other
- 42b. And make the singing connected and relevant  
As the founding singers did in ancient times.
- 43c. We could perform for the old ones,  
For those venerable singers,
- 44d. Those who have preserved and pointed the way,  
Demonstrating our singing for them.
- 45a. I, Khun, am still thinking of searching again,  
Of asking to communicate my love for you.
- 46b. Only of those things which satisfy me  
Will I speak.
- 47c. Thongbang, how I love you!  
I'm cloudy and somber like rainy weather,
- 48d. Dear woman, dear beautiful woman,  
Beautiful creation of the gods.
- 49b. Having said this, my love for you is restless  
Like a buffalo seeing the rice.
- 50c. Thongbang, whomever I've loved in the past can't compare with you.  
Dejectedly, unhappily I hug my knees to my chest.
- 51d. My love reaches even your house and granary,  
Your large [rice storage] baskets, your small [sticky rice] baskets,  
your woven rice steamer.
- 52a. I, Sikhun, say that I love even your dishes,  
Everything in your house.
- 53b. Though I've looked at everyone,  
I've never seen anyone like you, royal lady.

- 54c. My love reaches even to your skin,  
There under the very clothes you wear.
- 55d. When the wind caresses your body, I want to steal a look;  
My heart moans; I want to sweep in and look.
- 56a. I'm not just speaking playfully;  
I love you all night and all day.
- 57b. When I close my eyes, I see you in my dreams.  
I can't contain my restlessness even for a single day.
- 58c. All the women I have seen can't compare to you.  
Just seeing your shadow makes it possible for me to live.
- 59d. From the beginning of my awareness,  
I have never met anyone I loved.
- 60a. I love you to the point of screaming and crying  
'Til tears flood my face continuously
- 61b. Exactly like a plow follows  
Behind a buffalo.
- 62c. When I sleep at night, I become restless and hot  
Until my pillow becomes wet with saliva.
- 63d. I call out, searching only for you,  
Until I don't even eat.
- 64a. Sometimes I even thrash about  
More violently than if I were possessed by spirits.
- 65b. Thongbang, dear woman, I start and bump the wall;  
My forehead swells up with a lump as big as a fist.
- 66c. I love you ravenously;  
If you were food, I would swallow you whole.
- 67d. My hands are always groping;  
I'll probably faint; I can't open it.
- 68c. I love you like the civet cat loves bananas,  
Like the shuttle with the loom.
- 69d. I love you like the little child  
Loves to sit on his mother's hip, never wanting to be set down.
- 70c. I love you, woman, this time  
Completely like I love the flute reed.
- 71d. I pace until my knees are exhausted,  
Until my buttocks disappear.

- 72c. I love you like a bear loves honey;  
 I love you like I love fish *lap*.<sup>10</sup>  
 I love you like I love leaning back on a mattress.
- 73d. I'd like to return home with you, royal lady;  
 I'm carrying the fish basket and throwing out the fish net.
- 74c. I love you; I want to return home with you and take care of you.  
 I love you; I want to return home and sleep beside you.  
 Can you care for me in return?
- 75d. I raise my hands in respect to you;  
 I ask the protection of your shadow.
- 76a. How I love you!  
 Until I grumble and scratch my head.
- 77b. I love you until I'm drunk and can't open my eyes  
 To see the sun up in the sky.
- 78c. I really love you, darling.  
 I love you, precious woman,  
 Like a bird loves a seedling.<sup>11</sup>
- 79d. I love you so much I might die today.  
 If you wanted me to be your warm excrement, I would comply.
- 80c. Now, when I meet you,  
 A lump appears in my throat.
- 81d. I open my mouth and I'm nearly mad.  
 I just want to speak with you.
- 82a. My love reaches your breasts, your earrings,  
 Your clothing, your skin.
- 83b. Your adornments  
 Are appropriate and praiseworthy....<sup>12</sup>

\* \* \* \*

<sup>10</sup> A traditional Lao dish of spices, hot peppers, minced meat, and vegetables.

<sup>11</sup> Of the plant *Eriocaulon cinereum* R. Br. (Kerr 1972: 13).

<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the whole performance has not been translated, as it is much too long. Instead, at this point we move on to the last section of the poem to provide a sense of how the *mohlam* ends his performance. This pattern of providing a translation only of the first and last sections of the performance is also followed with the text from Thongbang, the female *mohlam*.



- 84a. This concluded, Thongbang, it is not that I am a rascal;  
My words of love just come
- 85b. Not to flaunt love, merely to sing,  
Saying I will take you.
- 86c. Young woman, won't you compete  
And let Sikhun communicate with you?
- 87d. Concerning this, we met  
And agreed that we would sing.
- 88a. Young woman, I, Khun, am like a bee  
Flying and circling in the air,
- 89b. Searching for something charming,  
I alight on the branch of the Nyang tree;<sup>13</sup> but there is nothing.
- 90c. I'm like a crab or a fish stuck  
In a swamp and exposed to the air.  
That's how it is, dear woman.
- 91d. I pay my respects and pour water before the gods;  
I will bow my head almost to the carpet.
- 92a. Pure like a diamond  
From heaven,
- 93b. Seldom is there anything which can bond with,  
Embrace or cover this jewel.
- 94c. Dear woman, just everything about this gem is like you,  
Always a worthy, shining thing.
- 95d. If our fate is right,  
It will strike us, arouse us.
- 96a. So I want to ask you for news of love,  
To request you, royal lady, to please think
- 97b. With compassion of one who is  
Suffering over you.
- 98c. I think that if I persist in speaking,  
I'm afraid that you won't have me; I will be deceived.
- 99d. I'm afraid that I, Khun, will become withdrawn.  
If my feelings are truly hurt, I will run away.
- 100a. In this, if you should help me,  
My heart will follow close to you;
- 101b. I'll persevere in this relationship,  
And things should improve then.

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<sup>13</sup> A hardwood tree, *Dipterocarpus alatus* Roxb. or possibly the tree *Dipterocarpus turbinatus* Gaertn (Kerr 1972: 522).

- 102c. I, Khun, am attracted to you. I see you;  
I look at the way you sit and
- 103d. My soul is completely destroyed; I talk to myself;  
I am tired at heart.
- 104a. Discuss and agree, dear;  
Put your love into words.
- 105b. Don't hide your decision from me,  
Nor avoid the issue, I beg of you.
- 106c. At this point, I, Sikhun,  
Will stop the verses for now
- 107d. To let you, Thongbang, reply to me  
As to whether or not you will have me.
108. Come, person from a far away place,  
Please make sure you think it over very soon.

mđwlam thwngbãan

- |      |                                   |                     |                               |
|------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1.   | may may                           | kêem?âyay           | may may                       |
| 2.   | tây baat sikhúun wâw say          |                     | khđw huam nee káp kây         |
| 3.   | phuu sáy bww mii lăay             |                     | mii tē tũa? môt p̄i           |
| 4.   | nđwng waa                         |                     |                               |
|      | kđon ?ây lōop lōokli              |                     | năan yăak khii maa mee        |
|      |                                   |                     | hây mán môm                   |
| 5.   | ?ăy                               | ?ăy                 | ?ăy                           |
| 6a.  | bđng/ tē phii kaaw tâan           |                     | kăsong sđw mii wăan wăan      |
|      |                                   |                     | păat thoo nđw khúun ?ăy       |
| 7b.  | cđn mee lía húu khđw              |                     | kăma? miay manoo nđwng        |
| 8c.  | khđw waa                          |                     |                               |
|      | néew khđw khăn cēt tēem nui       |                     | tũan tăam tēm ?ămnăat         |
| 9d.  | măa phăat phii phđng hây phaa mây | mđwng mii miay đwom |                               |
| 10a. | hđw/ đēe đũan đđok mây            |                     | sii kũlăap đđm hđng           |
| 11b. | phđng phiaŋ phăay mēng            |                     | phuu săwđng wăan ywng         |
| 12c. | mđwng/ khii bāan bãy đwom nui     |                     | liăŋ lăam lēem pāk            |
| 13d. | căp kha? gaa phua                 |                     | phúam phđwom nui pham sii     |
| 14a. | bww/ pākăat kaaw sii nui          |                     | sén saan săw mđw              |
| 15b. | mēng tē tām tđot tūt ?ăn          |                     | phum phiaŋ phđn phđw          |
| 16c. | yaan/ tē cđwom kăsăt ?ây          |                     | sáy bww phđn phian sđw        |
| 17d. | săaw sua sóm khăan măay hây       |                     | năan huu waa phđng hên        |
| 18a. | khđw/ nđng khđw kiaw wên          |                     | yăak khđw huam hiaŋ sđwng     |
| 19b. | yăak khđw hđng hiaŋ mđw           |                     | yuu nđw nam nđwng             |
| 20c. | căw waa                           |                     |                               |
|      | sáy paw pđwng pđ? pān             |                     | bww mii phăy si? khđw kiaw    |
| 21d. | hăa phuu măa kiaw wăw             |                     | wón kđng kă? bww mii          |
| 22a. | bāan/ măa phđw mui nui            |                     | si? khđw kiaw hây tēm cãy     |
| 23b. | thuk siŋ khđwng phăay náy         |                     | bww biăt siŋ thaaŋ cãy        |
| 24c. | thđng/ meen khăn khđw wăw         |                     | si? néem néem nam khuu        |
| 25d. | néew năan khăn kđw kuu            |                     | hăa sũu bww mii               |
| 26c. | thđng waa                         |                     |                               |
|      | sēen/ sđok sii kăsăn nđwng        |                     | yăan sĩa cãy bww đay phii     |
|      |                                   |                     | ziifi đay lăm ?ăy             |
| 27d. | fiang thuk mii thuk khđw          |                     | khăănăŋ nĩa neeng nđwng       |
| 28a. | thuk/ siŋ săt sām nđwng           |                     | khđw găw gũam bww gđy gaa     |
| 29b. | tây lēew bāan bãy                 |                     | khít yăak khđw khũan khđw sôn |

30c.	ʔũk/ ʔaŋ wian wun wun	pãan dũn đĩn đĩan sii
31d.	hãa hɔɔm hɔɔy	siʔ nãʔ nẽʔ phée phĩn mɛɛn bɔɔ mĩi
32c.	pãan/ mĩa thĩi nãaŋ dãn	sɛɛn kãsan sũt sua
33d.	nãm khɔn khũay phɔʔ mɔn	nãm ʔaay nĩi bɔɔn fɔn
34a.	lĩaŋ/ nãn nãŋ bɔɔ dĩa nĩi	mĩi khuu khĩm khũan
35b.	thuk ʔãbãn kãʔ phɔɔ pãy	neɛŋ nɔɔn nãy dĩaaw
36c.	thuk/ siŋ bãan bãy hàaw	hãa phũa phãy bɔɔ huam
37d.	sɛɛn siʔ khɔɔ khàw	luam lóay bɔɔ dĩa kãʔ daj mãay
38a.	thuk/ yaaŋ ʔua khiam khãy nĩi	khɔɔy thaan khũn lúu
39b.	bɔɔk hàay bãa mãa súu	waa bɔɔ ʔaw pãy sɔɔn
40c.	ʔua/ khiam khúan khúan khãam	khanĩŋ lãay lãn daj
41d.	thaw thãŋ phĩt phãat khĩn	lóay kũm kɛɛ cãy
42c.	nãaŋ/ lóay ʔaw tɔɔ dĩa	pãy nĩŋ khɛɛn khɔɔ phũuk hàay
43d.	kɛɛ cãn cɔɔŋ nãaw	dĩa phɔɔ mĩan sũwãŋ
44a.	yãan/ thɔɔŋ caŋ bɔɔ dĩa	mĩi bãy bàat bãaŋ ʔaay
45b.	hɛn cãʔ nĩŋ khɔɔ khɛɛn hàay	daj khĩi nãaŋ ʔua
* * * *		
46a.	phɔn/ waa bãaŋ sãat sĩa	súm sɔɔk sóm sãwɔay
47b.	piap daj mãalãa	lia nĩi dũu đɛɛŋ dɔm ʔaa
48c.	ũp/pãphan mãa kãy	yãan nãaŋ hɔay hàay com
49d.	yãan nãaŋ kôm nãa hàay	lɔŋ phũum cãw tɔɔp mãa
50a.	phĩi/ khúam wãw waa yãak sɔɔn	khãn lĩik bɔɔ nĩi lɔp
51b.	bɔɔ pɔp sãaw mɔɔlãm	siʔ leɛn khĩn mĩa bãan
52c.	wãw waa/ bɔɔ mĩa bɔt tãn	phɔɔ siʔ cãm cɔɔŋ cɔɔ
53d.	hak phɔʔ hĩam hũup phĩan	pãan liãn lóŋŋ lĩat lĩat lĩi
54a.	khɔɔŋ/ thuk thĩi thĩi sɔok mĩʔ	mĩi bãŋ bɔɔn bũn lãay
55b.	thɛɛn kaaw thɔŋ kãp phũa	kãʔ ʔaan phɔŋ phũum phũa
56c.	ciŋ/ hɛn tũa tɔk tãŋ	lãasãwãŋwɔŋ waaŋ
57d.	mãa sãwãn suu lĩn deɛ	siʔ sɔɔn sĩn sóm
58a.	cɔn/ sãaw khɔɔ khàw kôm	hũacãy mɔɔp món thĩi
59b.	sɛɛn sĩa sãy sɔŋ	khĩt nĩi bɔɔk bãan cãy kũum
60c.	pɛn/ phũu sũu sãk kãa	sãkũn pɛn sĩa phũu ñay
61d.	sɔŋ khɔn nɔp nɔɔp wày	wón wun waa kaaw đĩan

62a.	khít/khít máa pháaw	phían phóoy phúut phóng thǎlǎen
63b.	wǎw tee sǎaw mǎolám	phùu been bǔa bay khǎa
64c.	bǎok/hǎy sǎnkhǎan nǎom nǐi	nēep nēem nǎm nǎw
65d.	khǎw kiaw kǎn baat wǎw	sǎnǎehǎo say
66a.	bǎan/nǐi ʔit miay pǎon	méew bǎw yǎak kǐn nǔu
67b.	pǔu bǎw mǎay máa	kuat dǎy yuu khéem nǎon nǎoy
68c.	ʔǎoy/ bǎw sǎm kǎp khǎw	ʔǎw sǎn máa nóm nǎan
69d.	nok ʔiǎn pǎot mǎakmǎy	ʔǎw ʔǎn hǎy suu kǐn
70c.	hǐn/ bǎw mǎay kǎp pháa	sēen siʔ fǎn thǎa thǎak
71d.	fǎn baat tee lǔy	khóm pháa phǎn thǎw khéen
72c.	mǎan/ dǎn sǎay néen nǎon	bǎw mǎay kǎm kǎn kiaw
73d.	siʔ thiaw sǎw sóy sóon	siʔ lǔan lǎw hǎy ʔiip mǎa
74c.	bǎan/siʔ láa kǎon kǎy thǐm	sǎm sǎaw sēen sǎnǎa
75d.	sǎon ʔi khǎy pǎak tǎan	dǎy lǎn tǎon tǎim mǎa
76c.	bǎan/siʔ kǎy kǎon ʔǎay nǐi	wǎan sǎa sǔt cǎak
77d.	khǎn phii hak hǔup nǎoy	ʔǎoy sǎay wǎw bǎon cǎn
78c.	siʔ/ cǎm cǎp tǎan	kǎon tǎa wǎan sēen sǎnǎa
79d.	nēem máa phii dee nǎa	phǎʔ nǎon cǎw bǎw tǎay
	ʔǎn dǎy khéen phé ʔǎoy	
80.	ʔǎan sǎan kēem ʔǎay	ʔǎan sǎan
81.	nēem bǎn nǎan nǎy tǎa	cǎn mēen ʔǎot sǎnǎa
		mǎa mǎa phǎw

1. So new, thy cheeks, so new!
2. I nearly died when you, Sikhun,  
Asked to sleep with me.
3. Men are like that!  
You just tell lies all year long.
4. I think that you're never satisfied.  
I want to ride a mare and escape.
5. Oh! Oh! Oh!
- 6a. Look at what you've said—  
Only sweet and pleasant things,  
Right, Khun dear?
- 7b. Until my throat grew dry,  
And I felt tired.
- 8c. I think that the special design of the material  
Has the full power to attract,
- 9d. Opening it up, it is so beautiful  
That one becomes faint and tired.
- 10a. Sweet-smelling are the numerous flowers;  
The rose smells sweet for a long time.
- 11b. The bee is a kind of insect  
Which seeks sweet stealthily.
- 12c. It looks like the flowers of the Dohn tree<sup>14</sup>  
Are a mass of yellow.
- 13d. The flowers bloom on the branches;  
Bunches of many colors appear simultaneously.
- 14a. Not announcing their appearance,  
They tremble, spread, and die out.
- 15b. Insects which prick and sting attach themselves to the bunches,  
As if delighted to find them.
- 16c. I'm only afraid that your royal highness won't be satisfied  
With a single flower;
- 17d. You'll just enjoy it, intending  
To let the woman think you've just seen her.

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<sup>14</sup> The *Elaeocarpus* tree, possibly *poilanei* Gagn. (Kerr 1972: 50).

- 18a. Point one: you asked to relate to me;  
You wanted to ask that we two live together.
- 19b. You wanted to share my pillow,<sup>15</sup>  
To stay and sleep with me.
- 20c. You said that you were a free man,  
That you don't have anyone who has anything to do with you.
- 21d. You can't even find someone to come and talk with you;  
You don't even have someone to flirt with.
- 22a. I, Bang, come to meet you today,  
To court you, to satisfy you.
- 23b. Everything within me,  
I will not withhold from you.
- 24c. Even if it's to compete, I ask to speak;  
I'll parry with my partner.
- 25d. A person like me will compete with you  
Since I have not found a sweetheart.
- 26c. Although I'm extremely sorrowful, I desire you.  
But I'm afraid that I'll be sorry, and I won't get you,  
Really, dear *mohlam*.
- 27d. As for unhappiness, I have it all.  
I languish from love and sleep too much.
- 28a. For my entire life,  
I ask to be protected by your shadow; I cannot easily raise my head.
- 29b. When I die,  
I think that I want to be with you; I ask shelter.
- 30c. *I'm very disturbed*,  
Just like the surface of the earth in the fourth month.<sup>16</sup>
- 31d. One seeks a path,  
And a crack will break open; there is none.
- 32c. Just like when I resist  
My desires are greatly increased.
- 33d. Following you because I'm confused,  
Following you to a place where we can be together.
- 34a. As for that, I still don't  
Have a partner to satisfy me.

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<sup>15</sup> This phrase also can be used to refer to the "auspicious moment for the ceremony of arranging the pillow during the wedding" (Kerr 1972: 1209).

<sup>16</sup> During the hot, dry season in Laos.

- 35b. Well enough to take care of me  
And sleep with me in the forest.
- 36c. To preserve all that is pleasant,  
Whoever seeks a husband won't sleep with him.
- 37d. Even though he asks her many times  
And is unsuccessful, it's as intended.
- 38a. Everything (about this) is like when the gracious Oua<sup>17</sup>  
Was waiting for Khun Lu
- 39b. To ask her to become engaged,  
But he didn't take her.
- 40c. The gracious Oua carefully calculated  
And thought about many things, such as
- 41d. All the mistakes that she had made;  
After that she became depressed.
- 42c. So then she took herself  
To be hung by the neck, tying herself
- 43d. Onto the sandalwood tree until it bent over,  
Ending her life.
- 44a. I, Thong, am afraid that since I can't get you,  
I, poor dear Bang,
- 45b. May hang myself by the neck  
Just like Nang Oua.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \* \*

- 46a. People say that some kinds of creatures  
Only seek pleasure
- 47b. Just like they seek flowers  
Which appear red and fragrant.
- 48c. If you come close,  
I'm afraid that I'll cry and complain.
- 49d. I'm afraid that I'll hide my face,  
That you'll cause me to lose my pride; answer that!

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<sup>17</sup> Nang Oua and Khun Lu are the heroine and hero, respectively, in a traditional Lao narrative, *Khun Lu, Nang Oua*.

<sup>18</sup> As with Mohlam Sikhun, we now move to the last section of the performance.



- 50a. You said that you wanted to sleep with me;  
Entwine with me, that you wouldn't run away from me.
- 51b. That you wouldn't flee from (this) *mohlam* woman,  
Or go running back home.
- 52c. Your speech did not have meaning  
Enough to enchain me.
- 53d. You like me because my body is smooth;  
I'm ticklish and cry out; my blood flows.
- 54a. For every place that has happiness today,  
There are some places which have much merit.
- 55b. Speaking again about a husband,  
Let's consider your proud family line.
- 56c. So you see me adorned;  
The royal palace is empty.
- 57d. Please come to heaven to play with me;  
We'll sleep happily together.
- 58a. Finally, I ask to enter, bowing my head.  
I give you my heart.
- 59b. Your very name makes me think  
Of disclosing my unhappiness.
- 60c. You are from a high, powerful  
And important ancestry.
- 61d. People pay their respects to you.  
If they are disturbed, you advise them.
- 62a. What are you thinking of  
That makes you want to court
- 63b. But a *mohlam* woman like me  
Who just sells her words?
- 64c. You tell me to treat you carefully  
With my head bowed in respect, vowing to care for you.
- 65d. You ask that we court as we speak  
About love.
- 66a. I, Bang, am tired of being fed;  
The cat doesn't want to eat mice.
- 67b. A crab that doesn't want to be observed  
Stays along the edge of a small pond.
- 68c. Sugarcane doesn't mix with rice;  
What will you use to bind them together?
- 69d. A singing mynah is tired of fruit;  
What will you give it to eat?

- 70c. If the stone doesn't go with the machete,  
Even though you try many times to sharpen it,
- 71d. It won't become sharp  
And will tire the arm.
- 72c. Just like my fate  
Which is not in accord with yours.
- 73d. Even though we have each other many times,  
It will deceive us and make us hurry home.
- 74c. I, Bang, will say farewell now,  
Handsome bachelor.
- 75d. I invite you to reply,  
To say more.
- 76c. I, Bang, will go before you;  
I'll leave you here.
- 77d. If you love my small body,  
Oh, you'll speak truthfully.
- 78c. *I will finish answering you,*  
You of the melancholy eyes, extremely handsome man!
- 79d. Please turn and look this way!  
You won't die!  
When will the *khene*<sup>19</sup> break?
80. Full and alluring are your cheeks,  
Full and alluring.
81. When I look into your gentle eyes,  
How beautiful they are!

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<sup>19</sup> This is the musical instrument which is used to accompany most *mohlam* performances. This instrument is made of matched bamboo pipes, and its sound has an organ-like quality.

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