



Context:

Southeast Asians in California

Volume 10, Number 82, April, 1990

Folsom Cordova Unified School District
2460 Cordova Lane,
Rancho Cordova CA 95670
(916) 635-6815
Judy Lewis, Editor

*Number 79 was mistakenly skipped over.

Legends and Tales

This month's issue contains legends, folktales, teaching stories, and proverbs from many of the different ethnic groups who are often lumped together as "Southeast Asian" or "Indochinese". [As a rule, *Southeast Asia* refers to nine countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos; sometimes it is 11 countries, adding Portuguese Timor and Brunei. *Indochinese*, on the other hand, generally refers to the former *French Indochina*, or Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (the only refugee-producing countries in the region under current US policy). In a wider context, Indochina includes Burma, Thailand and Malaysia.]

In looking for things to include in this issue, we were intrigued by the number of origin tales that include a flood, and the subsequent marriage of a brother and a sister. Although only the Hmong and Khmu versions are included here, the Chinese and Mien also have floods, brothers and sisters in their origin tales.

There are a couple of teaching-type tales from Cambodia and Vietnam, and a story from Chinese that helps explain an idiom used in the language. Here and

there you will find proverbs and sayings. When possible, we included both the English and the native language versions.

Unfortunately, not all the English translations were completed by "insiders", altering the "flavor" of the English rendition.

However, in two of the stories it is possible to glimpse differences in the use of text. Compare the Vietnamese tale with the Khmu tale. Both of these were translated by insiders. The Khmu tale's translation is deliberately faithful to the original oral text's structure. Look at the way in which the story encourages memory—the story elements are repeated several times, and there is a cadence that is different from written text. In the Khmu version there is undoubtedly a verse structure or rhyme pattern that helps organize what is said and how it's said.

Now look at the the Vietnamese-written English translation. The background of formal education, particularly in a European tradition, is evident in the way the story is written. The structure of the paragraphs, the logical sequences, and the general prose style is familiar to

The *Tbal Kdoong*

Once there was a rich young widow who lived in the countryside with her brothers and sisters. Their house was quite isolated from the village. But the widow was grateful to be with her relatives because her baby was frail and sickly.

Now, a scoundrel living in the village knew that this widow was rich. Each time he passed the lonely countryside house, he thought of her riches and planned ways to rob her. Soon summer came and the young widow's brothers and sisters left for the rice fields each morning. The widow remained home alone with her sickly baby.

When the scoundrel learned that the widow was alone, he shaved his head and stole a saffron-yellow robe from the monastery. Then he dressed himself up like a Buddhist monk and walked down the country road to the widow's secluded house. When he reached the front of the house, he stopped and stood quietly. The young widow was sitting there with her baby. She saw the yellow-robed man standing patiently, and thought that he was a Buddhist monk. In reverence, she

carried her baby to him and said, "Venerable Sir, from which temple do you come? What do you wish?"

The scoundrel spoke to her, imitating the mannered speech of monks. "Madam, I hark from the temple yonder to gather incense and candles for my meditation ceremony. Dear madam, how many people abide with you and where may they now be?"

The widow answered, "Venerable Sir, my seven brothers and sisters live with me, but they left for the rice fields early this morning."

"Dear madam, why did you not go with them?"

The widow replied, "Reverend, I did not go with them because my baby is always sick. He cries all day, all the time."

And the scoundrel questioned her again: "Madam, what kind of sickness does your baby have?"

The widow answered, "Venerable Sir, I do not know, but sometimes my baby feels very cold. Then sometimes he feels very hot. He cries so much that sometimes I think he will die."

"The scoundrel sighed, "Oh, poor baby! I love this baby very much! How I love this beautiful baby! Why have you not taken him to the doctor?"

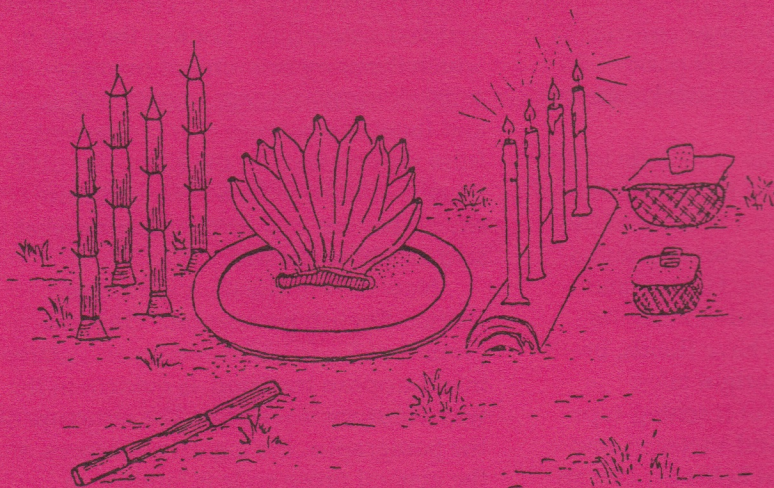
"Reverend Sir, I took my baby to many doctors, but none of them could cure him."

Then the imposter boasted, "Ah! I know all about this disease. I used to cure such diseases a long time ago and I can do so again. Do not worry any more."

The young widow begged, "Oh Reverend Sir, do help us, for I am alone and I have no husband."

Then the scoundrel told the widow to prepare a *slathorbysay* altar with incense, candles and bananas. When the widow had arranged everything, she invited the scoundrel to sit inside

[Carrison, Muriel Paskin, from a translation by The Venerable Kong Chhean. *Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gatiloke*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1987.]



slathorbysay altar with incense, candles and bananas

her house and she quietly paid reverence to him near the ceremonial prayer altar.

After a while, the scoundrel asked her if she had a rice pounder—a *tbal kdoong*—nearby.

"Yes, Reverend Sir. There is one behind the house."

Then the scoundrel said, "I suggest that you take your baby to the *tbal kdoong* and set him in the large bowl under the pounder. I tell you to do this because a ghost is always with your baby filling him with great sickness. When you set your baby under the pounder of the *tbal kdoong*, the ghost will be afraid of being smashed and will run away."

The widow obeyed and took her baby to the *tbal kdoong* and set him in the large bowl under the pounder.

"Now," said the scoundrel, "jump up on the lever."

Again the widow obeyed. She got up onto the lever. When the lever went down, the pounding end rose up.

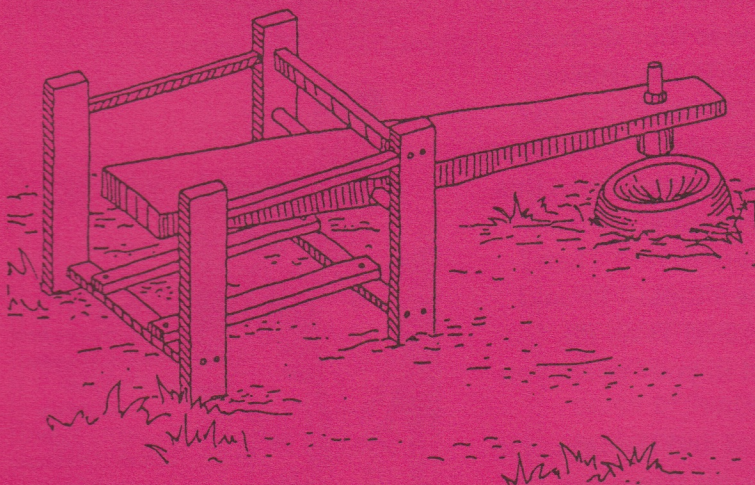
"Good," the scoundrel nodded. "Stay like that for a little while. I will go into the house and bring the incense and candles outside for our prayer cere-

mony."

And so the scoundrel went into the house and stole the young widow's jewels and diamonds and money. Then he ran away.

The widow could not do anything. She could not run after the scoundrel because if she jumped off the lever of the *tbal kdoong*, the pounder would come down and her baby would be crushed. It was no use calling for help because no one was at home and there were no neighbors nearby. So she stood on the lever of the *tbal kdoong* for the whole day, and the scoundrel ran safely away with her riches.

(Theravada Buddhist monks were always trying to free the people of their dependence on spirit belief and superstition. In this "modern story", the unfortunate young woman suffered because, instead of reasoning wisely, she believed in magical ceremonies.)



tbal kdoong



Building a Fire of Beanstalks for Boiling Beans

Ts'ao Ts'ao (155-220 A.D.) was a well-known writer of the Three Kingdoms period. He had two sons; the elder was named Ts'ao P'i and the younger Ts'ao Chih. Both had developed excellent literary skills and were gifted writers as well. They were both famous and talented men of their time. But Ts'ao Chih was considered to be the most creative and quick. He was admired by a great many writers and poets who also enjoyed making friends with him. Ts'ao Ts'ao originally had planned to have Ts'ao Chih succeed him, but later, because of a few disputes over trivial matters he had Ts'ao P'i become his heir instead.

After Ts'ao P'i became king of Wei, he could not stop worrying about his younger brother. He feared that Ts'ao Chih might do something to him. All the officials in the imperial court showed sympathy toward Ts'ao Chih. Ts'ao P'i could see this clearly and feared his position as king might well be in danger. So Ts'ao P'i made things difficult for his brother whenever possible and very much wanted him killed.

One morning, Ts'ao P'i was holding a session of the imperial court and ordered Ts'ao Chih to be brought in. "Everyone says that you are very creative and quick and that words flow from your lips as they do from the pen of a master writer. Is this true or not?" Ts'ao P'i asked. "You shall now perform in front of all the officials. If after seven paces you cannot make up a poem, then this rumor is false and I will cut off your head."

Ts'ao Chih had no alternative. "Then I ask my brother to give me a topic," he said.

"We are brothers," replied Ts'ao P'i, "so use this as your topic. But in your poem you cannot use the word 'brother'."

Thus, Ts'ao Chih paced and thought. He had not yet taken his seventh step when he began to recite a poem:

煮豆燃其

曹操 (西元155--220年)

是三國時代有名的文學家,他有二個兒子,哥哥是曹丕,弟弟是曹植,兩個人文學素養都非常好,能詩能文,是當時有名的才子。而曹植更是才思敏捷,許多詩人和作家都很佩服他,喜歡同他作朋友。曹操本來也有意要立他為繼承人,但後來卻因一些細故而改立曹丕。

曹丕立為魏王以後,仍然不放心的弟弟,怕曹植不利放他。又因為朝廷裡的大臣們,都同情曹植,曹丕看在眼里,怕自己的王位不保,就處處和他的弟弟為難,一心想要把他害死。

有一天,曹丕在上早朝的時候,命人把曹植找來,對他說:

「大家都說你才思敏捷,出口成章,不知道是真的還是假的?現在你就在殿文武百官面前表演一下吧!如果你走七步還吟不出一首詩,這些傳聞就是假的,我就要砍下你的腦袋。」

曹植聽了,無可奈何的說:

「那麼就請哥哥出題吧!」

曹丕說:「我們是兄弟,你就用這個當題目吧!但是詩裏面不可以用到『兄弟』這兩個字。」

於是,曹植一邊走一邊想,走了還不到七步就把詩吟出來了:

煮豆燃豆其
豆在釜中泣
本是同根生
相煎何太急

曹丕聽了,知道詩裏的含意手足情深,感到很慚愧,從此就不再為難他了。



[Peng Ming-hui and Yang En-sheng. *Stories from Classical Allusions*, The Overseas Chinese Library No., 3001. Taipei, Taiwan: Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, 1985.]

"A fire of beanstalks
is made for boiling some beans;
inside the kettle the beans weep,
'Originally we are from the
same roots;
why must you fry me so
severely?'"

Ts'ao P'i knew that the poem meant
blood ought to be thicker than water,
and he felt very ashamed. From that
time on, he never made things difficult
for his brother again.

"to build a fire of beanstalks for boiling beans"—
this idiom means "fraternal persecution", "fight
among brothers"

牛頭不對馬嘴

niu² t'ou² pu² tui⁴ ma³ tsui³
cow—head—not—fit—horse—mouth

a cow's head does not fit the
horse's mouth
*unrelated; unconnected; illogi-
cal or improper relationship*

井底之蛙

ching³ ti³ chih¹ wa¹
well—bottom—a—frog

a frog at the bottom of a well
*an ill-informed and uneducated
person*

虎頭蛇尾

hu³ t'ou² she² wei³
tiger—head—snake—tail

head of the tiger, tail of the
snake
*with a fine start but a poor
finish*

About the Mien Charter

The world was created by P'an Ku.
As Sky and Earth became distinct from
one another, P'an Ku's body expanded
to form the Universe. His work occu-
pied 18,000 years, during which he
formed the sun, moon and stars, the
heavens and the earth, himself increas-
ing in stature day by day, being daily six
feet taller than the day before. When
his work was finished, he died. His
head became the mountains, his breath
the wind and clouds, his voice the
thunder, his limbs the four quarters of
the earth, his blood the rivers, his flesh
the soil, his beard the constellations, his
skin and hair the plants and trees, his
teeth, bones and marrow the metal,
rocks, and precious stones, his sweat
the rain, and the insects creeping over
his body the human beings....

After a universal flood that killed all
but a brother and his sister, the human
race was restored by the brother's
marriage to his sister.

Five hundred years B.C. the Chi-
nese Emperor King P'ing promised his
daughter to anyone who could rid him of
King Kao, his enemy. A five-colored
dog named P'an Hu, a familiar Court
pet, succeeded, and brought back King
Kao's head to the Emperor. The dog
and Princess were married, and pro-
duced twelve children, six boys and six
girls. Each of them took a spouse, and
this was the beginning of the twelve
Mien clans.

King P'ing issued an imperial edict
which made P'an Hu a king [King P'an,
or Pien hung in modern Mien]. This
Charter also exempted all the descen-
dants of the twelve children from taxes,
and gave them permanent freedom to
cultivate "by the sword and fire" all the
mountains of the Empire.

(to page 11)

Mien

The Flood: How Hmong Names Began

A long time ago, the rivers and oceans flooded the earth.

All the people and animals were drowned, except one brother and sister. They were safe in a wooden drum.

The water rose higher and higher. When the drum bumped into the land of the sky it made a noise: ntoo-ntoo!

The sky people said to each other, "What's making this noise? What happened?"

Then they looked out and saw the drum. They saw the flood. They said, "Let's throw spears at the earth and make holes in it, so the water can drain away."

They did this, and the water went down.

The drum finally bumped against the ground and the brother and sister knew they had landed.

They got out and looked around. There were no animals, no people. They were all alone. They said, "What can we do?"

Then the brother said, "Marry me. We can have children. We can make more people."

The sister said, "You know I cannot do that!"

But he asked her again, and she said no. He asked her again and again.

Finally, the girl said, "If you want to marry me, you throw an stone down the mountain. I'll throw one down too. If the stones go back up the mountain, then I'll marry you."

So they threw the stones down the mountain.

At night, the brother carried the stones back up the mountain and

placed them together.

The next morning, when the sister saw the stones, she said, "We are brother and sister. But these stones came back up the mountain. They are together. So, if you want me to marry you, I will be your wife."

And the two married and lived together.

The wife got pregnant.

But her baby was not a real baby. It had no arms or legs. It was round like a stone. She and her husband cut it up and threw it away. They scattered the pieces everywhere.

Some fell in the garden—they became Hmong Vang. Some fell on weeds and grass—they became the Thao clan. Some fell on the rice bin—they became Hmong Cha. Some on the goat house—they became the Li clan. Some on the pig house—they became the Moua clan. The names of these clans sound like the places where the pieces fell.

The next day, the village was full of houses. There were families making fires. Smoke came out of every roof. And all the animals and insects were there.

The brother and sister weren't alone anymore.

Ntov ntoo saib ceg qhuav
Tuav ncuav saib qab-nthab.

chop-tree-watch-branch-dry
pound-sticky rice cake-watch-loft

When you chop the tree, look out for
dry branches overhead;
When you pound rice for rice-cakes,
look out for the loft.

(Think before you speak.)

*Hmong Folk Tales,
Retold in ESL.*
Edited by Charles
Johnson, ©1981.
St. Paul, MN:
Macalester
College. Story
teller: May Yang.
Written Hmong:
Se Yang and Tou
Doua Yang.
Translation: Tou
Doua Yang and
Charles Johnson.

Dej Nyab Ntiaj Teb: Xeem Npe Hmoob

Puag thaum ub, hav dej thiab dej hiav txwv tau nyab ntiaj teb.

Tib neeg thiab tsiaj txhu tau poob dej tuag tag, tsuas tshuav ob nug muag xwb. Nkawd tau mus nkaum rau hauv ib lub nruas.

Dej tau nyab siab zuj zus. Lub nruas tau ntab mus tsoo ntuj nrov ntuj-ntoog!

Neeg qaum ntuj sib noog zom zaws hais tias, "Dabtsi ua li cas ais pheej muaj ib lub suab nrov ntuj-ntoog li ntawd."

Ces neeg qaum ntuj thiaj li tau ntsia nqis los rau ntiaj teb no ces pom ib lub nruas. Lawv pom dej nyab ntiaj teb. Lawv thiaj li hais tias, "Muab hmuov nkaug ntiaj teb kom to qhov es xwv dej thiaj li yuav xau taus."

Ces lawv txawm tau ua li ntawd, ces dej txawm nqis tag.

Lub nruas tau poob los tsoo npoo av, ua rau nkawd thiaj paub tau hais tias nkawd tau poob los ti npoo av lawm.

Nkawd thiaj li tau tawm hauv lub nruas los thiab xam qhov txhia chaw. Tsis pom muaj tsiaj txhu thiab neeg hlo li. Muaj nkawd xwb, nkawd thiaj li hais tias, "Wb yuav ua li cas?"

Ces tus nus txawm hais tias, "Koj cia li yuav kuv xwb las mas. Wb thiaj li yuav muaj me tub me nyuam los nrog wb nyob. Wb thiaj yuav ua rau neeg coob tuaj."

Tus muam teb hais tias, "Kuv ua tsis tau li ntawd."

Hnub tom qab, tus nus rov noog tus muam dua thiab, tab si tus muam teb hais tias tsis tau thiab. Tus nus twb noog tus muam tag lawm los nws rov noog dua thiab.

Thaum kawg, tus muam thiaj li hais tias, "Yog koj xav yuav kuv no, wb ib leeg nqa ib txhib zeb mus lawm saum roob. Kuv dov kuv txhib mus ib sab roob, koj dov koj txhib mus ib sab roob.

Yog ob txhib zeb rov ntog los sib khwb ua ke no yuav los yuav."

Ces nkawd txawm muab ob txhib zeb dov saum roob lawm nram kwj ha.

Hmo ntawd, tus nus rov mus khaws ob txhib zeb koj rov los sib khwb cia ua ke rau saum roob.

Tag kis sawv ntxov, thaum tus muam pom ob txhib zeb sib khwb ntsees, nws hais tias, "Wb yog nus muag, tabsi ob txhib zeb no ho ntog rov los sib khwb ua ke rau saum roob. Yog li ntawd, koj xav kom kuv yuav koj los kuv kuj yuav koj, thiab ua koj tus poj niam."

Ces ob nug muag txawm sib yuav.

Nyob nyob tus poj niam muaj ib plab me nyuam.

Thaum tus poj niam yug tau tus me nyuam los na has tsis zoo xws li teb chaws me nyuam. Nws tsis muaj tes thiab tsis muaj taw. Nws kheej kheej li lub toob twg. Nws thiab nws tus txiv thiaj li tau muab txhoov ua tej daim koj mus pov rau nram tej. Nkawd koj mus pov rau qhov txhia chaw.

Pov ib daig rau nram vaj, pov ib daig rau nram hav nroj, pov ib daig rau saum txhab, pov ib daig rau nram nkuaj tshis, pov ib daig rau nram nkuaj npuas.

Ces daim nqaij uas koj mus pov rau nram vaj txawm ua hmoob VAJ. Daim pov rau saum txhab, ua hmoob TSAB. Daim pov rau nram hav nroj ua xeem hmoob THOJ, mus li ntawd mus txhua txhia xeem hmoob.

Tag kis sawv ntxov los, muaj neeg coob coob nyob puv nkaus lub zos. Lawv tau rauv taws, pa taws ncho oo niab qhov txhia chaw, txhua txhia lub ruv tsev.

Ces tej me nas noog kab ntsaum txawm cia li muaj los.

Ob nug muag thiaj li tsis nyob ob leeg xwb txij thaum ntawd los.

The Story of the Flood

Brother and Sister went to dig out a bamboo rat. They dug the bamboo rat like this, they dug on for that bamboo rat, then caught up to the bamboo rat there.

The bamboo rat was there; he turned and spoke: *"Why are you digging me out? I'm burrowing a hole for myself. The flood is coming,"* he said.

"Oh, is that so?"

So spoke the bamboo rat, he spoke to them: *"It is, so please do not kill me! You should not dig me out, I am still burrowing my hole. Still making it deeper. You should return home to make yourself a long drum, go and cut a big tree. Carve yourselves a drum; make yourselves one. In one week's time you must make it ready."*

After that they returned home to make a long drum, and in one week the long drum was finished. They crawled in together.

"In one week you must cook yourselves rice, you must cook yourselves rice. In one week you should cut out the wax to close up the drum."

They cooked rice, so that they could eat when the flood arrived.

It was not a person that told them: a bamboo rat told them, and they did as he said.

Nobody knew that the flood was coming, to rise over the villages, over the houses, nobody else knew.

They knew it from the bamboo rat, but they did not tell anybody else.

They did as he said.

They cooked rice and cooked more, cooked more and more and put it into sacks, filled sack after sack—sacks like we have now—then put them all in, into that drum there.

That week is coming——We are

Lwaq ôm pék ôm qèen

Prée pô' mook ni'

yoh khwaq tkan.

Khwaq tkan tke',

khwaq tkan ni' yoh yoh kwt tkan ni',
sut.

Tkan yat ni'

gaay;

gaay pr'ôôm pô': "Boo khwaq leey
ô' eh meh?

Ô' eh déé dé' hntu'.

Ôm pék, ôm qèen cii root!" lav. "Ôô, meh
tqni'?"

Pr'ôôm tkan, pr'ôôm pô' noo:

"Meh tqni' an boo

taa phann déé!

Boo khwaq déé al bwan, ô koo cii hnoot eh
an jru' hntu'.

Hnoot eh an jru'.

Boo lee véé eh boo d'

briiq,

yoh kool boo dé' s'ooq hnam.

Toh

boo dé' briiq;

sap

boo dé' em.

Néey môôy aathit gi an boo hôôc."

Waay noo koo véé hvat eh déé dé'

briiq ni'.

Noo guat yat baar gôn.

"Môôy aathit

an noo pôq déé dé' huut,

dé' seq liit briiq gni'."

Noo tôm mah gni',

than déé cii mah yém ôm pék ôm
qèen cii root ni'.

Gee al meh gôn lav néey; meh tkan ni'

lav, noo koo eh taam tqni'.

Me' koo al neeq sah ôm pék ôm qèel cii

root hloo baan, hloo mwaq ni',

koo al ah me' neeq.

Noo gni' neeq yêe tkan, koo al véé lav me'
dé'.

(This is the first section only, in one of the two Khmu orthographies. A booklet, *The Story of the Flood*, is available for checkout at the SEACRC.)

Narrated by Khan
Suksamphan
Transcribed and
translated by Dam-
rong Tayanin, Kham-
meung Manokoune,
Frank Proshan.

tabooed Sii-Tav Sii-Kaa, people who were born on that day.

Ooo. They day arrived, the week ended and they entered the drum. Splash, splash already, as they crawled into the drum. Carefully they spread wax all over the drumhead, sealed the drum, sealed it up.

Until there was no hole at all. Then...

On Kot-Nii day the flood truly arrived.

Down came the water, it rained, rainnnnned and rained, seven days and seven nights.

It became a flood then that rose over the mountains and mountain ranges.

Evvvvvery body died, the land slid, the termite hills broke, and only the two in the drum survived,

Brother and Sister inside of that drum.

Hreeeeey, hreey, hreeeeey the floated on water. After seven days, they pricked a hole, the water remained everywhere, and they didn't open it yet. There passed another week, seven days, they pricked it again and the water was gone!

They scraped away the wax, scraped it off and came outside.

No villages, no houses, they saw not a single tree, nothing, the water had covered everything, and everything was gone when it receded.

Well, then, there they were, they didn't know what to do.

They didn't have a thing to eat, and so they ate earth. Brother and Sister, they ate earth instead of rice, and it was spirits made them do so. They lived like that, not knowing what to do: *"Sister, go to the south way down there. I will go to the north. Try to find a husband, and I will seek a wife. Whoever we find, we should marry."*

They were one brother and one sister. She went way down to the south. *"When you go you should sing, you should whistle."*

They must have walked in a very nice place there. He walked and sang and

whistled. Then he heard *"vééééééq."* And he saw someone walking far away on the mountain there.

Someone else was there already.

They started to walk toward one another. *"That must be my friend already, there's someone else here."*

They went on.

She approached, they came closer and it was not someone else, only Brother and Sister.

They departed again, they left, she went on. He went along singing along, he went. He came finally to another village, to another mountain over there, they walked toward one another again. He heard someone singing *"kléév, kléév,"* but he saw no one but her.

The flood was long over, but there were still no villages, no trees, nothing.

So then, they met in the same way for the third time.

Now, there was still one *tkook* bird, one single bird remaining, a *tkook* whose spirit had left it. And that *tkook* bird cried, *"Tok gook, gook, Brother and Sister, embrace one another!"*

And so they had to marry one another.

There were no trees, no timber left, only piles of logs. They floated with the water, and those they used to build themselves a house there. They endured the cold, the freezing there, they ate the earth. Those ones, Brother and Sister there. Brother and Sister are not allowed to marry one another, they were the first ever to do so.

She was pregnant, she was pregnant for three years, that Sister. But she never gave birth, pregnant for three years. Her time finally came then. Out came a round gourd, not a human being.

They placed the gourd outside their home. They fenced it, placed it outside, and fenced all around it, outside their hut. They kept the gourd inside the fence. It got bigger every day, it got bigger and bigger every day. It grew bigger day after day after day.

And then he thought: *"Oh, this gourd is enormous, huge already."* They stayed, stayed in their hut, from their house they heard, *"wut, wut, wut, wut, wut."* Then he asked: *"Ha, who is talking? There must be some of our people around."*

He went out, opened the door and looked, but nobody was there. He listened very carefully and the sound came from the garden. Carefully he approached, nearer and nearer. He heard someone talking inside the gourd. The gourd was huge now, enormous, and someone inside was talking.

(People have spirits today, it all began right there.)

"Well, what should I do? Someone is inside the gourd. There is somebody inside there, the child of this gourd, the gourd's child."

He took a big iron rod and heated it in the fire, as the spirits directed. The first ones to come out were the Africans, I think, who rubbed off the charred gourd. It was the dark people, the Rmeet [Lamet]. Outside, there was a big, long log.

Out came the Rmeet first, so the people always told. Out came the Rmeet first, came and sat down.

The parents bundled up packages: packages of cotton thread, packages of *hmpiat* thread, packages of everything: things to make clothes, to make cotton cloth, to make needles, they gathered a little of everything.

They took all kinds of things, they bundled them up and distributed

them. They came out and sat down, came out and sat down.

Out came the Rmeet first. Out came the Rmeet first, rubbing off the charcoal left by the hot iron rod. After that, we came next. Then came the Chinese and the Hmong. The Hmong and the Mien came next. Americans and French came out last, so beautiful, so white.

There.

Thus people have told us from the beginning, the story of how villages were first made.

There were several bundles there, and we Kmhmu took one, took one of the bundles, the biggest one there, but it was coarse and loose.

The Lao, they took the small bag, the small bundle that had silk and wool inside, so they know how to make silk, to make gossamer, then.

Everyone had a bundle.

The Americans, the French had another bundle. They took the bundle of metals, to make screws and motors, to make cars for themselves. Whatever anyone wanted, the parents would give them.

They came and sat down on the log, many peoples came out then.

And the parents gave things to each people.

Well then.

They lived there, without knowing what to do. Then they built villages.

They made villages, made houses for themselves.

They began to have rituals, to have traditions.

"Miss Thousand Hats comes up along the Nam Beng river, Miss Platycerium comes up along the Nam Tha river."

Everything was arranged as it happened

"Miss Thousand Hats comes to drown

villages, drown houses, Miss Platycerium comes to build villages, build houses. To make the tiger have thighs, to make people have tatoos.

The Dai thus have songs, the Chinese thus have elephants," they say.

Some people could read the alphabet: the Lao, the Thai, the Americans, all of them, Lao and Thai. They have pens and pencils to write.

They made an alphabet for each different people. Each group had its own alphabet. We Kmhmu didn't have anything.

Once people called to have a meeting, and the Kmhmu went, but they ate melons and heard nothing they said.

Well then.

The others talked about what to eat and what to make.

Each country, each people, but we Kmhmu ate melons. We crunched deafeningly on the cucumbers, so others gained knowledge.

The boats, they made boats: *"What would you like to use to make a boat?"*

The Kmhmu then, they wanted to use hides, to make a boat from hides: buffalo hides, cow hides, since they are large, they sewed them into a boat.

The Lao, they used wood.

So they went, the elder brother and the younger brother (they say we Kmhmu are under the Lao).

One day they had a boat race, and ours it sank down, sank down under the water, the Kmhmu boat made of hides. It became heavier and heavier. Into the water it sank and they called out for help from the Lao.

"Yes, if you agree to be our servants, that you will be our servants, that you will be below us, then we will help you out."

"Oh, we agree, we agree." Heh, heh, heh, heh.

The Lao took their boat. They came

in their wooden boat.

I'm saying that the Kmhmu were always unfortunate, right from the start.

Sooooo the story goes.

(from page 5)

In the 14th century, there was a great flood in China and the Mien left their rice-fields for the 80,000 mountain tops where they cultivated dry rice. A few years later the Empire suffered a great drought that lasted three years. Neither rice nor other grain was left in the public storehouses. The deepest ponds went dry and not the smallest ripple was left in which a carp could swim. Firewood caught light of itself, and dry iogs began to smoulder. The hearts of our people were troubled. There was no way in which they could make a living. They ate anything they could find. The people fought each other for survival. Sadness reigned in all hearts. The Blessed Descendants of the Twelve Yao Clans could stand it no longer. After much thought they decided to try crossing the lakes and seas. They planned the course so that after seven days and seven nights they would come to shore in a new place.

But after three months at sea, they were nowhere. The Blessed Descendants of the Twelve Yao Clans searched the heavens, but saw no way out. They looked overboard into the ocean, but the water was too deep. They feared that evil winds would blow them to the gate of the Dragon Kings of the Five Seas.

Since the beginning of time, King P'an had sent the Five Horsemen to save the people. So he would surely save the Twelve Descendants of the Twelve Yao Clans.

They prepared money from white

(to page 16)

The Story of Betel Leaf and Areca Nut

Once upon a time, the Cao family had two sons who looked very much alike. The elder son was called Tan and the younger one was Lang.

When Tan was eighteen and Lang was seventeen, their parents died.

Left by themselves, their fraternal love became deeper than ever.

One day, the Luu family took the two brothers home to look after them and to provide them with adequate assistance to continue their schooling.

Seeing that the brothers were of good character, the Luu family allowed their daughter to marry the older brother.

After the marriage, Tan became so fond of his wife that he did not have time to stay close to his brother.

Lang felt rejected. One day, being unable to bear his solitude, he followed

a small path into a forest, and finally he reached the bank of a stream. In the cold dew of the late night, Lang died of exhaustion, and then turned into a lump of limestone.

When Tan saw that his younger brother was missing, he was filled with remorse and became extremely worried. Finally, he decided to leave home to find his brother. He, too, followed the path into the forest and eventually, he stopped at the bank of a stream. He sat on a lump of limestone and cried



Truyện Trầu Cau

Ngày xưa, họ Cao có hai người con trai giống nhau như đúc.

Người con đầu tiên tên là Tân và người con sau tên Lang.

Năm hai anh em lên mười bảy mười tám tuổi thì cha mẹ đều mất cả.

Trong cảnh quanh hiu, tình cảm của hai anh em trở nên thâm thiết hơn trước.

Một ngày kia, hai anh em được nhà họ Lưu cho thương tình đem về nuôi và cho ăn học.

Thấy hai anh em có tính tình hiền lành, nhà họ Lưu cho người con gái của mình sánh duyên cùng người anh.

Sau khi lập gia đình, người anh gần bó với vợ nên không còn thì giờ để gần gũi người em.

Người em cảm thấy buồn tủi. Một ngày kia, không chịu nổi sự cô đơn, người em lần theo đường mòn đi vào rừng, và sau cùng dừng lại bên một bờ suối. Đêm khuya, sương lạnh, người em kiệt sức chết, rồi hóa thành một tảng đá vôi.

Thấy em vắng nhà, người anh đầy ân hận và vô cùng lo lắng. Cuối cùng người anh quyết định bỏ nhà đi tìm người em. Người anh cũng theo lối mòn đi vào rừng, và sau cùng dừng lại bên một bờ suối. Người anh ngồi trên tảng đá vôi khóc cho đến khi chết, rồi hóa

himself to death. He then turned into a tall tree. Later it came to be known as the areca palm-tree.

Back at home, the wife did not see her husband return, so she went to look for him. She too followed the path and eventually, she too stopped at the bank of a stream. She sat under the areca palm-tree and cried herself to death. She then turned into a climbing tree which entwined itself around the areca palm-tree. It later became known as the betel tree.

One day years later, King Hung III passed by that place and heard the people in that area tell the story of the three people. The King told them to fetch an areca nut and a betel leaf and grind them together with limestone. They saw a red color appear from the mixture.

The King thought that betel, areca, and limestone were the real symbol of marriage, love and brotherhood. The King then asked the people to plant the betel tree and areca palm-tree everywhere to recall the three people's great but tragic love for one another.

From then on, betel-chewing has become a popular custom for Vietnamese people. In Vietnam today, Vietnamese families still use betel and areca in wedding ceremonies and other important events.

thành một cây cao. Về sau được gọi là cây cau.

Ở nhà người vợ không thấy chồng về bèn đi tìm. Nàng cũng đi theo con đường mòn, và sau cũng dừng lại bên một bờ suối. Nàng ngồi dưới gốc cau cho đến lúc chết, rồi hóa thành một dây leo quấn lấy cau. Về sau được gọi là dây trầu.

Về sau, một hôm vua Hùng Vương Thứ III đi qua chỗ ấy và nghe dân trong vùng kể câu chuyện về ba người. Vua bèn lấy một quả cau, một lá trầu và một ít đá vôi nghiền với nhau. Tức thì thấy một màu đỏ hiện ra.

Nhà vua nghĩ rằng, trầu, cau và vôi chính là biểu tượng đích thực của nghĩa vợ chồng và tình anh em. Ngài bèn bảo dân chúng trồng cây cau và cây trầu khắp nơi tưởng nhớ mối tình cao đẹp nhưng thương tâm của ba người.

Từ đấy, ăn trầu đã trở thành một tập tục phổ thông của người Việt Nam. Ngày nay, ở Việt Nam, các gia đình vẫn còn dùng trầu và cau trong các việc cưới hỏi và trong các buổi lễ quan trọng khác.



[Nguyen Xuan Thu. *Selected Vietnamese Folk Tales. Truyen Co Tich Viet Nam Chon Loc*. Victoria, Australia: School Community Studies, Phillip Institute of Technology, 1986.]

The Beginning

We are back at the very beginning of the world. Heaven and Earth communicate with each other. In Heaven the ruler is the Phya Theng [heavenly spirits]; on Earth there are three chiefs: Khun Khet, Khun Kan, and Khun Pu Lan Xong, and they govern a brutal and unruly humanity.

Civilization has not yet made its appearance; men live by hunting and fishing. The Phya Theng wishes for a share of their prey; he demands it of them several times without success. Deeply angered, he takes his revenge by causing a flood. The three Khuns had foreseen this catastrophe and had built themselves a floating house. Borne upon the waters they arrive in Heaven, offer the Phya Theng their apologies and obtain permission to remain with him.

After a certain lapse of time the flood begins to subside and the Earth appears once more. The three Khuns beg to be allowed to return to the Lower Land (*muong lum*): on taking leave of them the Phya Theng presents them with a buffalo.

The three Khuns settled at Na Noi [*Muong Theng*] and with the help of their buffalo they began to lay out rice fields. But at the end of three years, the buffalo died.

From his nostrils there sprang a creeping plant that bore three pumpkins. These fruits grew to be enormous. When they were ripe a loud noise was heard inside them. Pu Lan Xong took a piece of red-hot iron and pierced a hole in the Pumpkins: immediately crowds of men came pouring out. There were so many of them that the opening was too narrow to allow them through; seeing this, the Khun seized a chisel and cut new

openings for the them. Such is the origin of the two races that people Laos: the Khas [pejorative for Khmu] came out through the hole made with a red-hot iron; the Thais [the Thai and the Lao are of the same ethnic stock] are those who passed through the hole hacked by the chisel. The Khmu are dark and wear their hair done up in chignons; the Thais are light complexioned and wear their hair short.

Khun Pu Lan Xong then set about civilizing the Sons of the Pumpkin. He taught them how to build houses, he explained the marriage and funeral rites, the respect due to parents and the cult of the ancestors. But these men soon multiplied to such an extent that the three Khuns no longer sufficed to govern them. In answer to the prayer the Phya Theng, or Fa Kun, sent down to Earth three others—Tao Phya, Khun Ku and Khun Kon—but they were a failure; so he called them back and sent in their place his own son, Khun Borom.

[from Louis Finol's French translation, in "Legendary Origins" in the *Kingdom of Laos*, by Rene de Berval]

Khun Borom

Being now truly King, Borom chose the best of the new men to be chiefs and the most gifted of the new women to be the wives of his seven sons.

The elephant upon which he rode to Earth, a gift from his father, had died three years after his arrival. He made the tusks into seven pieces and gave them to his children; he divided up the other precious objects he had brought with him.

Next he divided the immense crowds of people into seven groups and gave one of his sons to each of them as King.

On an auspicious day, he summoned his seven sons and their wives,

Lao

From the *Kingdom of Laos: Land of the Million Elephants and of the White Parasol*.

Edited by René de

Berval, in collaboration with Prince Phetsarath, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, Katay D. Sasorith, Thao Nhouy Abhay, Oudom Souvannavong, Princess Souvanna Phouma, Suzanne Karpelès, Andrée-Yvette Gouineau, George Coedès, Paul Lévy, Henri Marchal, François Martini, Charles Archaimbault, Phouong Phimmason, Kruong Pathoumxad, Pierre S. Nginn, Thao Khène, Raoul Serène, Tay Keoluangkot, Marc Mauger, Louis Vaissière, Claude Vercoutre, Bernard B. Fall, A.R. Mathieu, René Tissot. Translated into English by Mrs Teissier du Cros, Alexander Allan, John W. Fisher, E.R. Pratt. Saigon: France-Asie, 1956 (French), 1959 (English).

along with all the other people, and spoke to them.

To the Princes, he said:

I ask you to be good Kings to your people; to do your best to earn their love; to avoid quarrelling and live in friendship together and to see to it that your people look upon one another as you yourselves look on one another as elder and younger brothers; that the rich help the poor; to take advice before action; and to never fight against one another.

Never kill your wives for their transgressions; they were the first to be born, to cause their death would be to bring down trouble on the country, and make short the rule of your Kings.

May those who respect my words and are mindful of my counsels be happy in all their descendants, may those who are forgetful be short-lived.

Addressing himself to their wives:

Go to rest before your husbands, and be the first to rise; always forestall their commands, do not wait for them to order you to prepare food, fabrics, whatever is necessary to their welfare; be mindful of their servants, watch over the plantations, the gardens.

Whatever you hear in your home, tell it not beyond your walls; whatever you hear beyond your wall, tell it not in your home.

Suffer the wicked in your house as well as the good; what knowledge you may have of good and evil, think well before you make it known to your husbands, then act according to your heart.

In the countries where you will reign, have four, three, or two friends to advise you; when they are of a different opinion from you, think well before you follow your own counsel.

When the Kings, your husbands, will judge or condemn someone, never make it your business to examine their reasons with a view to making them change their mind.

Do not dispose of what belongs to your husband; do not give your love to another man.

And finally, refrain from lying in speaking of your possessions; do not drink spirits to the point of forgetfulness; do not smoke opium for these are shameful things. Seek to imitate [Pra Buddha], our Master, who when he sees a poor man does not wait for him to beg for alms.

Finally, after installing the Kings, he ended by saying:

Go and rule over your countries and keep my counsel in your hearts.

Store up riches in order to share them; set a portion aside in case of famine, and if that scourge does not occur, then give them to the women to be distributed in alms.

Set aside another portion for the hermits and old monks.

Set a third one aside for those chiefs who have been of assistance in the conduct of affairs.

A fourth for those exiles who come and ask you to give them shelter.

Another for the blind, the crippled, and the wounded.

And lastly, one that you may have the necessities if some evil neighbour attacks you or forces you into war.

If you receive gifts, give equivalent presents back.

[From Auguste Pavie's French translation, in "The Testament of Khun Borom", in the Kingdom of Laos, by Rene de Berval

To judge an elephant, you must look at its tail;
In the case of a girl, you must see her mother.

When there's a drought, the ants eat the fish;
When there's a flood, the fish eat the ants.

Lao

(from page 1)

American teachers.

Listening to an old woman tell this story would likely be similar to listening to the Khmu story. Think of the differences in the way you *tell* your child a bedtime story (say, the *Three Little Pigs*) as opposed to how it sounds when you *read* it aloud. To which rendition does your child pay closest attention? Dr. Seuss capitalizes on this oral style in his stories. Oral and written forms are quite different, but often in school we assume that children are familiar with both. There are stylistic conventions that need to be taught directly, and children from homes without written text need plenty of exposure. For one thing, children need to know that important elements will not be repeated many times; the listener/reader has to be alert to recognize and remember which are the important ideas.

Students will not be able to mimic this style in composition writing automatically. One remedy is to provide lots and LOTS of reading—the style and syntax will be analyzed and processed by the brain and when asked to produce, there will be something to produce. The other remedy, more useful for older students, is to teach the written style explicitly (explaining the unwritten “rules” of written English), and to compare oral and written styles.

Read through the Khmu translation again—now imagine how American history could be taught in this form...

(from page 11)

paper, and made ready three animals for a major sacrifice. They beseeched the Pantheon of the Ancestors, their Founding Ancestor and the Forebears, and the Five Banners of Horsemen to turn their heads to face them. They made a written promise to hold a great ceremony if these Holy Beings would enter their ships and protect the Blessed Descendants of the Twelve Yao Clans.

After this, before three days had passed, the ships found their proper course. The waters opened a way and brought the vessels to the shore, the horses to the streets. They settled down in Kwangtung province in the Lochang province. Next, according to a verse in the Yao ritual book,

One party went ahead to the Hu

Kwang region;

And another moved off towards

Kweichow;

A third tried to find a territory in

Kwangsi;

*Where the mountains are wide there
can be no concern.*

*And there are still mountains on the
borderlands of Yunan!*

Notice to subscribers

Context will begin a new mailing list in September 1990. The subscription year runs from September to June, and the cost is \$5.00. You can pay with 20-25¢ stamps, or you can send a check, made out to *Folsom*

Cordova USD-Context. The district currently covers the cost of development and printing, but we need subscribers to cover the mailing costs. Overseas mail, of course, runs more.

Context: Southeast Asians in California

c/o Folsom Cordova USD
Transitional English Programs Office
2460 Cordova Lane,
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670