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. 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

1 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 Sihhandone* is a form of Lao oral poetry traditionally performed by the *mohlam* of South Laos. The verse form usually associated with this style of lam is *kʰɔɔn nɔɔn*. Though other verse forms, such as *kʰɔɔn tɔt*, for instance, may be used briefly during a performance of *Lam Sihhandone*, it is the *kʰɔɔn nɔɔn* 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. 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 (*sâmphât sâlaʔ*) and the (initial) consonant rhyme (*sâmphât phañhãnsanaʔ*). Vowel rhyme (assonance) includes paired-word rhyme (*sâmphât thím khuu*) and yoked-word rhyme (*sâmphât thím ʔéek*). Examples of paired-word rhyme found in our material include *nôy nôy* (S69) and *ʔuân suã* (T80). Examples of yoked-vowel rhyme are *kôm hóm phóm* (S91) and *nîi pham sî* (T13) and *dây mîi bây* (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 lii kây*.

Consonant rhyme includes continuous consonant rhyme (*sâmphât liân ʔáksɔɔn*) and separated consonant rhyme (*sâmphât khàn ʔáksɔɔn*).

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2 Under the Royal Lao government, Sihhandone 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 Sihhandone or Siphandone; in this paper I use the term Sihhandone throughout.

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

4 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 khác* (T42). Examples of separated consonant rhyme include *kɔn wày kɔon* (S106) and *ŋáw nɔam bɔɔ nɔay nɔay* (T28).

Professor Gedney (1989b: 537) has observed that “the internal rhymes linking phrases in a line of kɔon 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), *dɔy ɔy* (T42); yoked-vowel: *nɔn sɔmkhɔɔ* (S11); continuous consonant: *nɔaŋ nɔɔŋ* (S20), *wɔɔ wɔɔ* (S87; T50,52), *pɔu pɔu* (S90), *khit khit* (T62); and separated consonant: *hɔɔ yɔɔŋ hũu* (T17), *meen bɔɔ mũi* (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 hian hɔɔt lɔaw...
S59  (tãŋ) t体制机制 t体制机制...
S60  (mak) con hɔɔŋ con hɔɔy...
S82  (mak) hɔɔt tɔɔum hɔɔt tɔaŋ...

Second hemistich:

S32  dìn dàaw faay láaw
S82  pɔŋ pɔŋ pʰiɛŋ pʰiɛŋ pʰaap
S84  khúam pɔak máa máak
S91  lɔŋ kɔm hɔɔm pʰoṁ

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

T46  phɔn waa  bɔŋ sɔat  sʰia  sɯm  ʂɔk  sɔm  sɔwɔnɔy
T64  bɔוקר  hɔy  sɔŋkhɔan  nɔɔm  nui  nɯep  nɯem  nɔn  nɯaw

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 sɔɔ in line 24) from the writing system are used, but it is their sonal effect that we are concerned with here.

S8d  khɔy  kʰaaw  khwaćm  kʰɔɔp  khɔɔ  sɔɔn  phii  nɔŋ  cong  fɔŋ
S24d  thaw  thɔŋ  sɔɔk  saw  sɯen  sɔm  sɯep  mɔŋ
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 máy ʔèek position words (words from column B in the proto-Tai tone chart; see example in Gedney 1989a: 20) in kʰon nɔɔn 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: Separated:
S91d sịl lọŋ kóm hóom phóm S20d nāŋ nɔɔŋ sịi bāŋ
T24c sịl née m née m nām khuu T 27d khanāŋ nǐa neeq nɔɔŋ

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 ?uk rāŋ wîan wun wun pān dûn dîn dîn sîi

Distribution of Patterns of Tone

The smooth, flowing sound that such syllable-end similarity allows is characteristic of the kʰon nɔɔn 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 máy 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 kʰon nɔɔn, there are at least two additional positions in a verse of kʰon nɔɔn poetry that have clear patterns of tone distribution. Apparently there are rules, though they many 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)\textsuperscript{5} 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 occured 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 khloon, it thus appears that kloon hoon, 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 kloon hoon 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.

\[
\begin{align*}
S96a & \quad \text{râay yâak khaaw khôc} & \quad \text{hoo khûc mooom hây sôn khít} \\
S99d & \quad \text{bôy khêèen têe leen mà} & \quad \text{sî? hôc tûc Üaw nôc} \\
S34b & \quad \text{tân têe phîân màa nàa} & \quad \text{sî? hôc tûc Üaw nôc} \\
TS3d & \quad \text{hâk phô? hîam hûup phîan} & \quad \text{pàan lîan lôc nîat liat bî}
\end{align*}
\]

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 (sâmphât thîam khuu) and yoked-word (sâmphât thîam ?èek) 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 (sâmphât lian ?âksôn and sâmphât khân ?âksôn). 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

\footnote{Tones in parentheses in this sentence indicate the tones of the modern Lao dialect spoken by the mohlam performers.}

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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 kɔ̂n nɔ̂n form requires a word having a m̂aŋ ʔeek 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 (cāp kha?) appear immediately before a m̂aŋ ʔeek position and thus do not disturb the general rhythm of the d line.)

10a. ᵚ̄n dẹ̀ dũŋ dɔ̌k m̂aŋ  sii kūl̄aŋ ḍǒm hɔ̂ŋ
11b.  phòŋ phiaŋ ph₢ay mèŋ  phu sàw̄eŋ wàm yɔ̂ŋ
12c. mɔ̌ŋ kui bāŋ ḅay dɔ̌n nii  liàng láam lēm pàak
13d. cāp kha? n̂a pḥuə  phûam pḥōm nii pham sii

As I have noted earlier (Compton 1979: 145), the designated positions for the use of m̂aŋ ʔeek and m̂aŋ thoo words and the contrast in the amount and type of use of internal rhyme are two of the primary characteristics distinguishing kɔ̂n nɔ̂n from kɔ̂n tāt. 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 nɔ̂n 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 kɔ̂n nɔ̂n. 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 kɔ̂n nɔ̂n verses of a Lam Sîthandone 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 kɔ̂n nɔ̂n in the Lam Sîthandone 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 kɔ̂n tāt poetry are performed within a performance that consists primarily of kɔ̂n nɔ̂n (see Compton 1979: 13). And the word tāt, which Kerr (1972: 600) defines as “cut, cut off, trim, break off, sever,” seems an appropriate description of the choppier feeling produced by the sounds of the kɔ̂n tāt 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 kāon ṇāon.

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 *kāon ṇāon* 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 *kāon ṇāon* 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 *kāon ṇāon* 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 *kāon ṇāon* 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  mì  nìi  
  náam/ khàa dây kaaw lôc nìi  pèe pàak pây hâa

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 ʔọy. 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 ɨ; a low mid tone with a slight initial rise and final fall (boxes A2 and A3), indicated by ɨ; 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 ɨ; a mid falling tone (boxes C2, 3, 4 and DL4), indicated by ɨ; and a high falling tone (box A4), indicated by ɨ. 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.
mōolām sīkhūun

1. pōon wōon  kēem nōon  pōon wōon
2. liāw hēn būa bāy wōon  lōm hāak màa tī fōn
3. bōok kākīn  pōon wōon  yuu  nāy  nām
4. ?ēy  ?ēy  ?ēy

5a. mī nī
   nāam/ khāa dāy kaw lōon nī  pēe pāak pāy hāa
6b. sīn sōn khūam khām māa  hāy cī cīn cām wāy
7c. phīan/ waa wĀnāa thāy  kō kiāy pūn pēn tōc
8d. khāy khaaw khūam kōop kēm  sōo phīi nōon cōn fān

9a. ?ān nāat nī
   phōn tōp tāŋ  hīak waa sāaw dūan phēen
10b. phūu phōn mī māt khēen  dāy tōp khūam khām fān
11c. pēn/ thī thāang nēew nān  sāmkhān kō wāw phōot
12d. bōon sāndōot phūu nōon  kā? lōo yāw tōc fēen

13a. waa/ phūa cāw nān luān khēen  nī kāy cāak hīan sāthān
14b. phōn phaan khōng khāaw māa  tēe mīa leen lām phīi
15c. phat/thānāa nēew sīi  khī wānāa ēt tōc
16d. cāw bōc pēn phūu  khōc mī khūam wāw tōc kān

17a. tāam/?āay nī nāng sī  fān bōn khūam lām
18b. bōc mī cām cāy kān nī  mīa leen lām kīn
19c. hāy/khūun yīin yān phōc nī  phōc cāy wāw tōc
20d. nāng sī? kīaw tōc nāa  nāar nōon sī bāan

21a. phō? waa
   ?āay nī mak hūup nōn  lōn liān liā kādāt
22b. nāy kua phūum phāap dēen  mēe hīn māa kīn kān
23c. yuu nāy thūaŋ ?āay  bōb bōy kīn kīn kūat nān
24d. thaw thāŋ thōŋ sōk sāw  sēen sām sēep mōn

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The main rhyme scheme is indicated by the bolded syllables in lines 5-9.
25a. ?ääay/ ciŋ day long pân pōŋ nii pēē pàak pāy hāa
26b. yīi pooy khuā mi nī máa sī? kōo kūm kāan sūan
27c. thāy/ suan neew nāam nān sāmkhān māak tūum ūay
28d. sīikhūun waa sī? dāy tāam cāy ?ääay phūu lām
29a. lōoy/ waa lōp ?iik sām bōc dāy huam lee phāy
30b. tāt sīn cāy wōn wāay sī? kīaw sōc sōen wāw
31c. ?āen/ hāy fūn khrōn thāw thān bāan miām khrōn hāw
32d. sīikhūun dāy ?ōk boon ?ān nīi hāy fān kōon dīn dāw faay lāaw

33a. khīi/ waa khūun hōēt haaw sī? hān tōc khūam mak
34b. tāŋ teec phīan máa nāa sī? ?ōt ?ōo yāw nōc
35c. sōŋ suan hāw hāy phōc kīaw nīi nōw nām kān nee
36d. thōngbān nāaŋ ?ōo yāa sī? het wee wēen kūh dūaŋ lāa phūu lām

37a. nī/ waa cāw booc khīt sām nīi nām tōc hāy tēm mat
38b. wāa hāy sīikhūun thāt kaaw lām thān nīi
39c. cāw/ phūt lii lāa dān khān pāy kā? thūk hēen
40d. ?ān nān booc thīk tōŋ nīi tāam bīaŋ boon lām
41a. thāa/ meen hāw hak dāy ?ōt ?ōo yāw kān
42b. hāy mān pēn phūa phān nīi dāŋ dōom dāa khāw
43c. wāw/ hāy fūn khrōn thāw dīn dōom bāan phān
44d. phūu sānguān sīi cēen sādeēn wāy boon lām

45a. khūun nīi kē? fān khīt sōc sām sī? khōo kīaw khūam mak
46b. tāt teec phīan phōc cāy si? kāaw wōn wāay wāw
47c. thōongbān ciŋ meen ?ääay mak cāw nīi pēn nāw khīi fōn
48d. mee nīŋ khrōn ?ōo yāaw phūu dīi ?ōo yā saan nām khrōn nāa

49b. nīi leew mak/ wōn wōn wāay wāay nīi dāŋ khūay hēn khāw
50c. thōongbān mak phāy máa booc khīi cāw cōn nāw sōŋ kōo kāw khāw
51d. mak hōot hīān hōot lāw kābūŋ khāw ?leep muay
52a. stikhuun nịi
  waa mak höct thuy
khop khuay khoŋ hían

53b. bon phay boɔ mii mæn nịi
moom nàan neew nɔɔŋ

54c. mak/höst khoŋ náy niə nịi
phën phèe phıi hom

55d. thık tẹe lóm kǎ? stì mọcy
cày lahɔɔcy yàak hup hɛn

56a. boɔ/meen phii waw lën
mak taltɔɔt khoŋ wɛn

57b. lāŋ tāa kɔɔ fən hɛn
yuu boɔ pɛn phoɔ mii

58c. hɛn/phay màa boɔ khii caw
nɛem tẹe náw kǎ? phoɔ yuu

59d. tāŋ tẹe puu tẹe puu
boɔ khoŋy phoɔ mak phay

60a. mak/cɔn hɔɔŋ cɔn hɔy
nǎm taa laŋ lin láy

61b. phoɔ pəan thay kǎp khoʊa nii
yəŋ kāay nǎm kɔɔn

62c. nɔɔŋ/kāaŋ khoŋ hɔn hɔɔŋ
mɔɔŋ láay cɔn lɔŋ piak

63d. ?ɔɔŋ hiak haa tẹe caw
cɔn kʰaw boɔ dày kǐn

64a. lāaŋ/nii thia cɔn waa dúiŋ
dɔɔk hāay kua phii sùun

65b. thɔŋbɔaŋ nàŋ tɔɔŋ
sādɔêt dúŋ təm fəa
nàa phàak nǒo haa kɛm pən
khán meen neew khoŋ kǐn

66c. mak/kāsǎŋ sēen dúiŋ
si? təw máa nɔɔŋ moom
khîi si? mɔɔcy ˈə̃oët boɔ pɛn

67d. fəa mii ˈnɔm yuu fəay
pəan kəsəuy ˈkəp h̥uʊk

68c. mak/pəan hɛn mak kùay
ngɔɔcy khaŋ mee boɔ wəan

69d. mak pəan lùuk nɔɔy nɔɔy
thəŋ phiíi khii çiə pií

70c. mak/səaw nàŋ khəaw nii
cɔn kɔn kəʔ boɔ mii

71d. nəaŋ cɔŋ hùa khaəw sii
mak pəan ləap pəa khoŋ

72c. mak/pəan mii mak pʰəŋ
mak yəak thəŋ khii siə

73d. yəak miə nəm moom nɔɔŋ nii
pháay khoŋ wəan hɛe

74c. mak/yəak miə ləam fiaŋ
mak yəak miə nəɔŋ hian

75d. nɔɔ mii ˈnɔp ˈkɔɔ kɔɔ nii
siʔ phəŋ fiaŋ dəʕ boɔ
khək həaw phənŋ nəw

76a. cin/meen təay mak cəw
cɔn wəaw kəm kəaw həa

77b. mak cɔn mua mii
boɔ hən bon təawən
yuu thəŋ fəa

78c. mak/?iŋi dəy ləa
pəan kəa mak kataay

79d. mak siʔ təay mii nii
hài pəen khii ?ʊn kɔɔ təam
80c. náam/ níi mia hiam máa phóc
tàn khoúc yuu ccc lóu
81d. ?áa pàak pêën cêc wóô
yâak khoúc wâw têc náaŋ
82a. mak/ hòot tūum hòot tâaŋ níi
phàa pheen pheè phâaŋ
83b. khiong sâm ?îaŋ náaŋ thêh
kêc khoóng khíí khüán nîcôñ

* * * * *

84a. níi lêe
thôngbêaŋ/ bôc meen ?áay khíí dêh
têc khüm pàak máa mak
85b. sák mak phian máa lâm
waa cá? ?ôm ?áw câw
86c. sàaw náaŋ
nî bôc khân máa khàw
hày sükhuûn tît têc
87d. ?ân níi háw phop phòc níi
khüm wâw waa sêí lâm

88a. sàaw náaŋ
khüun piap khíí phuû phòc níi
bîn wocn wîan bôn
89b. lêe hâa khoông khâaŋ
cáp nêa náaŋ bôc níi nêà
90c. khíí/ dêng pûu pàâ khoâaŋ
sákhoông nêc unh lôm tàêk
91d. nôc nop thêen thêck nâm
sêí lón kôm hóom phôm

92a. pâ/pòt pêân nhuân kêew
lûuk keen phílaálây
93b. bôc khay mîi ?isâìt
tíí dây ?ôop ?ôm kûam kêew
94c. náaŋ ?ôy
lûân dêng pûn pêân câw
sàmôô sôm sàaën khoông
95d. khân sâatâa thêik tûcô
sêí khéên fâat kàthiân máâ

96a. tâaŋ níi
cin waa?áay yâak khaaw khôô
hôô khoóc moom hày sôn khít
97b. bâaŋ bôn sônjsâaŋ khón
weethanâa nâm câw
98c. khoây waa
khân sêí wîan wón wâw
yâan khwâ bôc ?áw tôô
mân si? sia lêe liam
99d. yâan khüm het nàa sîam
bông khéên thêê leen mîa

100a. tân/ níi meen nôcng suay ?áay
manôô tôôp têam têt
101b. phûa pháaŋ phân phian ?áw
suan sêí khây khûí lêe w
102c. khün níi
mêen hûán hêm nôcng
bông nêêw náaŋ náw nàŋ
103d. cît thân phêe phup phêô
phôôy ?áay miay manôô
104a. sōo/ tōklōj meen nōn
105b. yaa si? mīi khūam tāhat
106c. bāt/ nīi stīkhūun ?āay
107d. hāy thōng’hān tōp tōn

hāy khān khāat khūam mak
sīik kōn kāy thōn
sīi cō? kōn wāy kōn
phōc sīi sōcn nēe bō

108. māa khon thāy kāy

khōc hāy cāw khit may dāy
wāy   wāy   nīi

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Mohlam Sikhun

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, 8
    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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7 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.

8 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 ⁹
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.

⁹ 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.¹⁰
    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.¹¹

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....¹²

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¹⁰ A traditional Lao dish of spices, hot peppers, minced meat, and vegetables.
¹¹ Of the plant *Eriocaulon cinereum* R. Br. (Kerr 1972: 13).
¹² 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;\(^{13}\) 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.

\(^{13}\) 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.
m sócám tháchbään

1. may may kēemʔay may may
2. tāay bāat śiíkhuun wāw say khǒo huam nee kāp kāay
3. phùu sāy boŋ mīi lāay mīi teή tūaʔ mōt plī
4. nōng waa kēūnʔay lūŋ plōok līkī nāāŋ yāak khīi māā mее hāy mān mēm mōm
5. ?īoŋ ?īoŋ ?īoŋ
6a. bōŋ/ tēe phiī kaw tāaŋ kāxōng sōp mīi wāan wāan pāat thōo nōc khuun ?īoŋ
7b. cōn mee līa hūu khōc kāma? miay manōō nōcŋ
8c. khōc waa nēw khōc kān cēt tēem nī tuāŋ tāam tēm?ānnāat
9d. māa phāat phī phōc hāy phāa máy mōcŋ mīi miay dōom
10a. hōc m/dē dūn dōk máy sī kūlāap dōm hōcŋ
11b. phōc phīn phāay mēn phuu sāwēęż wāan yocŋ
12c. mōcŋ/ khīi bāaŋ bāy doon nī liāŋ láma lēem pāak
13d. cāp khaʔ nāa phūa phūam phōc mīi pham sī
14a. bōc/pākaat kaw sīi nī sēn saaŋ sāw mōt
15b. mēn tēe tām tōt tū tān phum phīn phōc phī phōc
16c. yaan/ tēe cōm kāsāt tāay sāay bōc phōc phīn sōp
17d. sāaw suə sōm khāan māay hāy nāāŋ hūu waa phōc hēn
18a. khrōc/nīŋ khrōc kīaw wēn yāak khōc huam hīan sōcŋ
19b. yāak khōc hōcŋ hīan mōcŋ yuu nōcŋ nām nōcŋ
20c. cāw waa sāay paw pōcŋ pēʔ pāan bōc mīi phāy sīʔ khōc kīaw wōn kīŋ kāʔ bōc mīi
21d. hāa phūu māa kīaw wāw
22a. bāaŋ/māa phōc mīi nī sīʔ khōc kīaw hāy tēm cāy
23b. thuk sin khrōc phāay nāy bōc būat sīŋ thāaŋ cāw
24c. thōn/ mēn khrōc kīaw sīʔ nēem nēem nām khuu
25d. nēw nāāŋ khrōc kōp kūū hāa sūu bōc mīi
26c. thōn waa sēeŋ/ sōk sī kāsān nōcŋ yāaŋ sīa cāy bōc dāy phī phī tīitī dāy lām?īoŋ
27d. hīaŋ thuk mīi thuk khōc khānāŋ nīa neeŋ nōcŋ
28a. thuk/ sin sāat sām nōcŋ khōc nāw nūam bōc nōoŋ pāay
29b. tāay lēe w bāaŋ bāy khīit yāak khōc khīun khōc sōn

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30c. ?ủk/ ?ạŋ wıan wùn wùn  pạan dũn dĩn dọan sìi
31d. hạa hoom hóoy  si? naï? né? phóc phún meen bōc mìi

32c. pạan/miá thií nàañ dàn  sẹn káaśán sụt suá
33d. nám khôn kđuy phọ‘ mòn nám ñáay nì boon fôn

34a. làŋ/ nàn náñ bōc dāy nìi mìi khuu khım khdùan
35b. thuk ?ábâñ ká? phọc pây neeŋ nócon náy dāaw
36c. thuk/ sɨŋ bāan báy hāaw hāa phùa phây bōc huam
37d. sẹn sì? khọc khàw luam lọy bōc dāy k’à? dán màay

38a. thuk/ yáaŋ ?úá khiam khâay nìi khoa chy than khûn lúu
39b. bōok háy bāa màa sùu waa bōc ñâw sôon
40c. ?úá/ khiam khùán khùán khâam kháníŋ lāay làan dàn
41d. thaw thàŋ phít phâat khùn lọy küm kēe cāy
dày phóc mián siwish

42c. náañ/ lọoŋ tâu tōo dāy pây níŋ khẹ̌en khọc phùuk háy
43d. kée cán cōŋ náaw dáy phóc mián siwin

44a. yáaŋ/ thócŋ cāŋ bōc dāy mìi bây bàat bāaŋ ?ọọy
dán khíí náañ ?úá
45b. hên cá? níŋ khọc khẹ̌en háy dar khíí náañ ?úá

*   *   *   *

46a. phōn/ waa bāaŋ sáat síâ    süm sōc sóm sáwɔɔy
47b. piap danŋ máaláá    lia ní duú dëŋ dóm ?âa
48c. úp/páphaan máá kây    yáaŋ náañ höoy háy cóm
49d. yáaŋ náañ kóm nāa háy lóŋ phùum cāw too pàap máá

50a. phií/ khdùm wâw waa yàak sôon khoán liik bōc nîi lôp
51b. bōc pôp sâaw mòlám si? leen khîn miá bâan
52c. wâw waa/ bōc mìi bót tāan phọc sì? cám cōŋ cōc
53d. hak phọ? hîam hùup phhian pāa lánn lōc̢̄n fîat fîat lîi

54a. khoón/ thuk thií sôok mìi? mìi bâŋ bōon bûn láay
55b. thën kaw thën káp phûa kâ? ñàan phọc phûum phûa
56c. cîŋ/ hên tâa tōk tâŋ làasâwâwöŋ wáaŋ
57d. máa sâwân suù fîn dée si? sôc sìin sôm

58a. cón/ sâaw khoéc khâw kóm hûacây mōc món thìi
59b. sẹen sì sâay són khîí nîi bôk bâan cây kûm
60c. pên/ phùu sùuŋ sâk kâa sâkûn pên šia phûu này
61d. són khoón nop nóop wày wón wùn waa kâaw dàn

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62a. កែត/កែត មាន ភាគ
63b. គោ ទៅ សែគ មេលោក
64c. បឹក/ ហែ សាស់ហាន នុន នុឈួ
65d. ក្បែរ កែឈ កែស បារ គោ
66a. បែក/ នុឈួ ?ំច មួយ ពួច
67b. បេះ គោ មាន មាន
68c. ?ំរាណ/ គោ សែម កាល គោ
69d. ក្លើរ គោ កែឈ មេលោក
70c. ក្លើរ/ គោ មាន កាល ភាគ
71d. សែរ បារ គោ រោយ
72c. មាន/ ដែល សំរាធ នុន នុឈួ
73d. សៃរ ទីំ សែរ សៃរ សៃរ
74c. បែក/ សៃរ ធ្លាក កាល ធ្នូ
75d. សៃរ ធ្នូ កាល ពាក ឆន
76c. បែក/ សៃរ ខ្លើក ឈួ ឈួ នុឈួ
77d. ភៃរ ផីំ ហារ ហិត នុឈួ
78c. សៃរ/ សោយ សែរ ឆន
79d. ឈួំ មាន ផីំ ដី នុឈួ
80. ?ំនែសែរ ក្លើរ ឈួ ឈួ
81. ឈួំ បេះ ឈួស ឈួ ឆន មាន ភាគ
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\(^{14}\)
    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.

\(^{14}\) 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,  
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.  

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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15 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).

16 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 Oua17
   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.18

* * * * *

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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17 Nang Oua and Khun Lu are the heroine and hero, respectively, in a traditional Lao narrative, *Khun Lu, Nang Oua*.
18 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\textsuperscript{19} break?

80. Full and alluring are your cheeks,
    Full and alluring.
81. When I look into your gentle eyes,
    How beautiful they are!

\textsuperscript{19} 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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