

THE WORD *nzi* IN GREEN MONG (MIAO)

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In view of the current interest in Mong/Hmong studies, I am submitting my translational definition of the word *nzi*¹, a highly productive form in the Mong Njua (Green Mong) language. This form is an extremely difficult one to translate and the present rendering will, therefore, prove of considerable value to Tibeto-Burman Area specialists.

My qualifications as a translator of the Mong Njua idiom are set forth in the following paragraphs.

Field-work with the Mong Njua was first begun in 1949 and later continued during the years 1962-64 and 1966-67 in Naan Province, northern Thailand. The mountain villages where I was able to contact the Mong Njua were mainly Baan Khun Sathan and Kang Ho. The first-named village lies on the mountain Doi Khun Sathan close to the provincial boundary-line between Naan Province and Phrae Province. The second village is situated on the Doi Phuu Wae plateau, District of Pua, northeast of Naan City and close to the Laos border.

After having achieved a thorough knowledge of the language and culture of the Mong Njua, I compiled two dictionaries, wrote one grammar, and published numerous linguistic and ethnographic articles on this folk-group. (I here wish to thank the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the American Philosophical Society for their generous support.)

The Mong Njua (*móng njúa*) tribe is also known as the 'Green Miao' or 'Green Meo'. The name 'Miao' is derived from Chinese (*miáo*), while the Thai, Yon (Kam Myang), and Lao equivalent is 'Meo' (*méew*).² The Tribe itself, however, uses the ethnic name Mong (*móng*) to which a descriptive term is added to designate the particular branch of the Mong group. In reference to themselves, the tribesmen used the designator *njúa* 'to be green'.

¹ The Green Mong symbols used in the present article have mainly the phonetic values given them by the International Phonetic Association. For exceptions and modifications, see T. A. Lyman: *English-Meo Dictionary*, 2nd Ed., Bangkok, Thailand, The German Cultural Institute (Goethe Institut), 1973.

² I use the Haas system of Thai romanization. See Mary R. Haas: *The Thai System of Writing*, American Council of Learned Societies, Washington, D.C., 1956.

Given below is my final and current translation of the Mong Njua word **nzi**. The examples of usage are mainly taken from my work *Dictionary of Mong Njua*.³

nzi (**tũ**) 1. lord (either man or deity), lady (either woman or deity); nobleman, noblewoman; ruler, monarch, king, queen; divine being, god. 2. honorific for 'father'. (NB: The word **nzi** is seemingly only employed in meanings (1) and (2) by the Mong Njua of Khun Sathaan village, Thailand.) 3. (*as postposition to nouns*) lordly, noble, royal; holy, divine, godlike. 4. (*semantic extension of the foregoing*) superior, high-ranking, powerful, strong; high (of status); elegant, fastidious. (NB: In meanings (3) and (4), this word is only vaguely analyzed as a free form by most Mong Njua and is considered mainly an integral part of the total noun phrase.) (In meaning (1) = Thai **cãw**)

Examples of Usage:

1. **áo.tũ nzi** two kings; two queens; two deities.
vâng.nzi ruler, monarch; deity. (< **vâng** 'king, queen')
 (NB: This is a tautological compound derived from a Chinese word.) (= Thai **phrá? cãw**)
2. **nzi, kũ sãng não pã** Lord (Father), I want to eat cake. (NB: This sentence was not given by an informant but was overheard as part of a conversation between father and child in 1949. It is remembered by the author with distinct clarity.)
3. **yâng nzi** the Lamb of God ("godlike sheep"). (NB: This item was given to me by my friend the Rev. Donald Rulison who stated that it was volunteered by a Christian Mong as a translation of the Biblical phrase.)
4. **séng-nzi** the grandchild ("superior descendant" or "descendant of the first rank").
yâng.nzi pattern, example ("superior thing" or "elegant thing").
yéng.nzi drawing, picture, illustration ("elegant markings").

³ See T. A. Lyman: *Dictionary of Mong Njua: A Miao (Meo) Language of Southeast Asia*, Mouton and Company, The Hague and Paris, 1974.