

Putting it All Together: Components of a Secular Song in Iu Mien

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Introduction

Thirty years ago, Charles Frake wrote a fascinating short article entitled "How to ask for a drink in Subanun" (Frake 1964). In describing a small but highly significant aspect of this Philippine culture, Frake took Ward Goodenough's proposal that an ethnography "properly specify what it is that a stranger to a society would have to know in order to perform any role in any scene staged by the society" (Frake 1964: 127) and linked it to Dell Hymes' notion of an ethnography of speaking: "specifying what the appropriate alternatives are in a given situation and what the consequences are of selecting one alternative over another" (127). Frake focused on specifying the linguistic and cultural skills which an outsider would need to master in order to function properly in the social context of drinking.

This paper focuses on one aspect of the Iu Mien (Mien, Yao) culture of Thailand and Laos.¹ It is a basic descriptive study, presenting an overview of the various components which a Mien singer must incorporate in some form or other in the performance of a secular song. Since I have dealt with many of these components in several previous articles (Purnell 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992), I will not go into any of them in much detail.² Rather, I will try here to pull the components together in summary form and thereby show something of the cultural knowledge Mien singers possess about their secular songs. This present paper thus attempts to provide some of the foundation needed to undertake an ethnography of communication through songs in Iu Mien.

Components of a Secular Song

One preliminary point at the outset. As one might suppose, the Mien concept of "song" differs from the Western concept. For example, the English word "song" covers a wide variety of lyrics set to music from *lieder* to lullaby, from hymns to rap, from "Happy Birthday" to the "Hallelujah Chorus," and almost everything in between. The Mien word most often glossed as "song" covers a much narrower semantic domain.³ There is no cover term in Mien which is as broad as the English term. Instead, Mien distinguishes between specific categories of words-plus-tune. Some of these terms will be introduced and described below.

The seven components of Mien secular songs which will be touched on in this paper are:

- A. Overall context
- B. Language variety
- C. Categories, participants, and topics
- D. Metrical structure
- E. Performance style
- F. Musical scale and the relationship between pitch and tone
- G. Padding syllables

The components described here are not ordered, though the presentation tries to follow a more general to a more specific line. Although they are treated separately for the sake of expository convenience, the components are interrelated, and choices made in one area will constrain or influence the availability of choices in another.

A. Overall Context for Singing

There are two major Mien contexts within which songs and other types of lyrics-cum-melody are used. These could be called the secular and the sacred, or perhaps better, the

literary and the ritual. Compositions within both these contexts have particular forms and functions and are accorded status to one degree or another. By contrast, the lullaby has words and a tune, but it is not considered to be a song. It is in a category all by itself, *laau5*, and has no status because of the language variety it uses, its truncated metrical structure, its limited content, and its all-too-common social function. This paper will focus only on secular songs.

B. Language Variety

Closely connected with the component of cultural context is the choice of language variety. The Iu Mien language system is complex and consists of three core language varieties or repertoires: (1) the vernacular language (*Mien2 waa6*), (2) the literary language (*nzung1-waa6*), and (3) the ritual language (*zie6-waa6*). The vernacular language is the basic or original language of this ethnic group and is historically part of the Miao-Yao, now sometimes called Hmong-Mien, language family. The other two languages and their accompanying forms, were borrowed from two different types of Chinese. The literary language was apparently borrowed from a type of Mandarin together with literary forms similar to Tang dynasty "Old Style" and "Regulated Style" poetry. The ritual language was borrowed from a type of Cantonese (Downer, personal communication) along with the Daoist manuals and ceremonies needed to perform the rituals.

In addition to this tripartite core language system, the Mien readily recognize a variety of languages at their periphery, such as the trade languages they use. The most important of these peripheral languages is southwestern Mandarin, which the Mien call "Chinese" (*Kaeq3 waa6*). By comparison, the literary and ritual languages, while obviously of Chinese origin, are not considered to be Chinese by Mien. These two language were borrowed sufficiently long ago that they have now been completely integrated into

Mien culture as "literary Mien" and "ritual Mien," respectively. A small sample of words comparing the three core languages is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Mien Core Language Varieties.⁴

<u>English</u>	<u>Vernacular</u>	<u>Literary</u>	<u>Ritual</u>
flower	<i>biang2</i>	<i>kuaa1</i>	<i>huaa1</i>
house	<i>biau3</i>	<i>oq3, win2</i>	<i>gaa1</i>
four	<i>biei1</i>	<i>fei5</i>	<i>si5</i>
three	<i>buo1</i>	<i>faam1</i>	<i>saam1</i>
hand	<i>buo4</i>	<i>siou3</i>	<i>saau5</i>
come	<i>daai2</i>	<i>daai2</i>	<i>loi2</i>
rise	<i>faau5</i>	<i>zaang6</i>	<i>siang5</i>
forest	<i>gem2</i>	<i>sen1</i>	<i>saan1</i>
large	<i>hlo1</i>	<i>daai6</i>	<i>taai6</i>
year	<i>hnyang5</i>	<i>nin1</i>	<i>nien1</i>
body	<i>sin1</i>	<i>sien1</i>	<i>saan1</i>
water	<i>wuom1</i>	<i>sui3</i>	<i>suei3</i>
ten	<i>ziep6</i>	<i>ziep6</i>	<i>sap6</i>

Ritual songs use primarily the ritual language, but there are important types of ceremonies in which the literary language plays a major role. Some ritual songs even use Chinese.

Two language varieties are used in secular songs: the literary language (LL) and Chinese (KW). Of these, the literary language is by far the most common. KW is used for poetry (*fei1*; Mandarin: *shi1*), epics (*gou3*; Mand: *xu4shi4shi1*), an ethics instruction book (*zu5 cong2 sou1*; Mand: *lun2li3shu1*) dealing with filial piety and respect in family relationships, titles of song sections, and prose introductions and conclusions to various types of songs.

The literary language is the typical language variety for literary works, primarily a wide variety of songs, but also including didactic material, proverbs and sayings, narratives, epics, and personal letters. It is also used for prose portions of books and titles of song sections.

LL and KW may also occur together in the same piece of literature. At times the writer may want to use KW for

reasons of aesthetics, prestige, or to handle a metrical requirement in an easier way. In these cases a small circle ^o is placed to the right of the character which is to be read/sung in KW rather than in LL. If an entire line (14 characters) is to be read/sung in KW, this is indicated in one of two ways. Either a small circle is placed above the first character of the line, or the characters for *su5 yae3* (Mand: *su4ye3* 'simple but elegant') are written small at the top of the line. Within a composition using LL, each character or line to be performed in KW must be explicitly indicated; otherwise, the language variety reverts to LL.

C. Categories, Participants, and Topics

The Mien readily distinguish a number of categories, or genre, for their secular songs, whether these are written or extemporaneous. Each category has typical participants who produce, listen to, or interact with the topics typically found in that genre. Table 2 gives a list of recognized song types.

Table 2: Iu Mien Song Types

<u>Category</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1. <i>zing2 you2 nzung1</i>	person (writer/singer) to object of affection	love, separation, desire to marry
2. <i>zei3 mui6 nzung1</i>	person to missing or far away relatives	desire to locate relatives be reunited
3. <i>naan6 zing2 nzung1</i>	person to general audience	lament, telling of one's troubles and sorrows
4. <i>zun2 lung2 ndie3 nung1</i>	person to general audience	lament, recounting great & heart-rending sorrows
5. <i>nung1-njaau5</i>	person to general audience	teaching, exhortation

6. <i>nzung1-gou3</i>	person to general audience	stories, legends
7. <i>jaap3-zaang3 nzung1</i>	person to general audience	60-year cycle, characteristics of those born in certain years
8. <i>cuot3 gaeng2 nzung1</i>	host and departing guest	sadness over departure, compliments
9. <i>maa4-dau2 nzung1</i>	host and guest	compliments, friendly repartee
10. <i>a'nziaau6 nzung1</i>	person to friends and reverse (may be competitive)	amusement, courtesy, work, and friendship, flirting
11. <i>nzung1-bom1</i>	group of one sex to a group of the other	amusement & courtship through skillful repartee
12. <i>nzung1-orm3</i>	group of one sex to a group of the other	riddles, hidden meanings in clever repartee
13. <i>nzung1-jun5</i>	wedding functionaries or guests	surname group in somewhat concealed speech
14. <i>nzung1-cen3</i>	wedding functionaries or guests	well-wishing & compliments in toasts at a wedding feast
15. <i>fei1</i>	person to esteemed guest or to general audience	poetry, proverbs, epics, or prose titles in a "Chinese" style

Category 15, *fei1*, plus some examples of category 5 (didactic compositions) and category 6 (stories and epics) are performed in Chinese (KW); the others are performed in the literary language.

Components B and C are obviously closely related. In order to perform a secular song appropriately, the language variety and the literary category, participants, and topics

must all be compatible in a culturally recognized way.

D. Metrical Structure

The fourth component of literary compositions is the metrical structure. As mentioned above, the literary language and metrical forms used in Mien song-poems were borrowed from Chinese and are patterned after Tang dynasty poetry. There are many excellent descriptions of these Chinese poetic forms, among them Downer and Graham (1963), Hawkes (1967), Liu (1962), and Stimson (1976). To understand how the Mien system is patterned after the Chinese tradition, it is necessary to look briefly at Mien lexical tones, the metrical value of the tones, meter in a poetic line, tone patterns in an ideal line or couplet, end rhyme, and the coda introduction.

a. **Lexical Tones.** Mien has eight phonetic tones but only six phonologically significant tones. These tones are the same in both the vernacular and the literary language (see Table 3). They are numbered following the system commonly used in Mien-Hmong and Mien-Chinese comparisons and which represents their putative historical origins.

Table 3: Mien Lexical Tones

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Mid level | 3. High rise/rise-fall | 5. Low-mid rise |
| | High level (stop finals) | |
| 2. Mid-lowfall | 4. Low rise-fall | 6. Low level |

b. **Metrical Value of the Tones.** The six tones fall into two groups which form one of the foundational parts of the metrical system. Tones 1 and 2 form a metrical group called "level" or "even" tones; the other four tones together constitute what is referred to as the "oblique" group. These groups are shown in Table 4. This grouping provides for variety within a formal structure. That is, whenever the

metrical rules call for an oblique category tone, for example, the writer or singer has a choice of words having any of the four tones in that group. Some words have synonyms, one in the level category, the other in the oblique. Two such word pairs are "house" (*win2* and *oq3*) and "sorrow" (*faan2* and *yieq3*).

Table 4: Metrical Value of Mien Tones

(Level)		(Oblique)
1		3 5
2		4 6

c. Meter in a Poetic Line. A poetic line in Mien is traditionally written vertically and consists of two half-lines of seven characters, thus making a full line of 14 characters. Most writers on Chinese literature call each of the seven-character groups a line and the entire 14 characters a couplet. I have chosen somewhat different terminology which I feel reflects the Mien system more clearly. Mien writers call the seven-character half-line a *nqan5* and the 14 character line a *diu2*. They readily refer to the upper *nqan5* and the lower *nqan5*, and I have followed their use of the terms.

Each half-line falls into three structural groups: characters (or syllables) 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6-7, with the major break coming after syllable 4. Table 5 shows these structural groupings. The upper and lower half-line are referred to as "a" and "b", respectively. The major break (or caesura) is shown by a double vertical line; the minor break is indicated by a single vertical line.

Table 5: Meter in a Poetic Line

Upper half-line:	1a	2a		3a	4a		5a	6a	7a
Lower half-line:	1b	2b		3b	4b		5b	6b	7b

d. **Tone Pattern Within an Ideal Poetic Couplet.** An ideal couplet in Tang dynasty poetry consisted of 28 syllables in which the tone categories were regulated for two patterns. The first pattern was based on syllables 2, 4, and 6 (Downer and Graham 1963). This ideal pattern is shown in Table 6 where "X" stands for either of the two tone categories: level or oblique, and "Y" stands for the opposite category from "X". The first upper half-line could thus use either a pattern of Level-Oblique-Level or Oblique-Level-Oblique on the even-numbered syllables. The first lower half-line would reverse the pattern, and so forth.

The second regulated pattern affected the final syllable in each half-line. The writer or singer had to use the two tone categories in alternating fashion. The one exception was that syllable #7 in the first half-line could be from either the level or the oblique category.

Mien song-poems follow the Chinese external pattern for the #7 syllables. Older or more formal songs also follow the pattern on syllables 2-4-6, but more recent works are most often built on single full lines, not on couplets, so the internal pattern, if followed at all, is evident only on the lower half-lines.

Table 6: Tone Pattern Within an Ideal Couplet

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Upper 1:		X		Y		X	Oblique/Level
Lower 1:		Y		X		Y	Level
Upper 2:		Y		X		Y	Oblique
Lower 2:		X		Y		X	Level

e. **End Rhyme.** Mien older song-poems composed in the literary language often contain rhyme on contiguous #7 syllables on lower half-lines. That is, the final syllable of Lower 1 and Lower 2 in Table 6 would not only have a tone from the level category but would also rhyme. Modern works do not have end rhyme except perhaps by accident, and there appears to be no ready Mien word for or recognition of the concept of rhyme. Poems which use KW,

however, tend to be more formal and thus there are more examples of end rhyme in typical Chinese fashion.

An example of a couplet from a Mien poem in the literary language is given in Table 7. A rough interlinear translation is given and the pattern of syllables 2-4-6 for each half-line is given off to the right. In this example, "X" represents the Oblique category, "Y" the Level category.

Table 7: From a Modern Mien Poem Without End Rhyme

<i>baeq6</i>	<i>horq6</i>	<i>nqorm2</i>		<i>sou1</i>	<i>tin1</i>	<i>zang6</i>	<i>jie5,</i>	X-Y-X
crane		hold in mouth		book	heaven		traverses,	
<i>mbuo5</i>	<i>njaau5</i>	<i>zuang5</i>	<i>ziu2</i>	<i>hiaang1-</i>	<i>lo4</i>		<i>bei1.</i>	X-Y-X
tell	teach	all		village	elders		know.	
<i>yaam6</i>	<i>in1</i>	<i>hlaai5</i>	<i>diu2</i>	<i>sing1-</i>	<i>wuon2</i>		<i>hin6,</i>	Y-Y-Y
not	for	any	reason	sound	content		appear,	
<i>cie3</i>	<i>su5</i>	<i>Iu1</i>	<i>Nyien2</i>	<i>duq3</i>	<i>ku3</i>	<i>fiou1.</i>		X-Y-X
just	say	Iu Mien	get to	good		do.		

A crane, paper in mouth, traverses the heavens,
Teaching everyone, informing village elders.
No special reason prompts this message,
It just tells the Iu Mien to do good.

This passage is an example of a recent didactic song. It begins the first song of a collection of 30 songs (*nzung1-njaau5*) sung by Mr. Van Chow Saechao over the Lao government radio station at Long Cheng in the early 1970s. Van Chow wrote his songs to encourage the Mien people to live good lives, to be faithful in home duties, to be honest and just in the administration of village affairs, and to be brave in fighting for their country. As is typical in modern compositions, there is no end rhyme. However, each half-line falls into the three set structural groups with the major caesura coming between syllables four and five. The final tones in each half-line alternate oblique and level tone categories as called for, and the internal X-Y-X tone

category alternation is followed in three of the four lines.

The older, more formal songs often occur in even-numbered lines, thus fitting into couplets. As mentioned above, the final syllable in the lower half-lines in many Mien couplets may rhyme, but are not required to do so. It is also possible for the final syllable in the first half-line to occur on a level category tone and to enter the rhyme scheme. An example from a 60-year cycle song (*jaap3-zaang3 nzung1*) is given in Table 8.

Table 8: An Older Mien Poem With *-iem* End Rhyme

<i>Jaap3-zaang3 yiet3 caau3 koi1 duang1 jiem1,</i>	X-X-Y
<i>Gin5 nyaang2 hmien1-min6 fai5 yiem2 yiem2.</i>	Y-X-Y
<i>Duq3 nyaang2 ziang2 liu4 lomg2 cai1 doi5,</i>	Y-X-Y
<i>Juang6 doi2 kiq3 ben6 zing5 gaam1-diem1.</i>	Y-X-Y

In the year of the rat and the ox, there is gold in the sea.
 You will see a woman with a beautiful face.
 Get her for your wife.
 Sharing you meals with her will be sweet indeed.

Although this couplet shows end rhyme, including the first half-line, it does not follow the strict Chinese pattern of internal tone alternation on 2-4-6 except in the middle two half-lines (level-oblique-level).

f. Coda Introduction. Van Chow's didactic songs are typical of personal communications, such as love songs, searching for relatives songs, laments, and letter-poems sent to individuals directly or via the airwaves, in that they contain five recognized parts, the middle three being the song proper. These are given in Table 9.

Table 9: Parts of a Mien *Doq6* (Reading Style) Song

- a. *ho6 daau2*: The writer's name, the addressee's name, and the reason for writing.
- b. *nzung1-gorn1*: The body, or main section, containing the reason for writing and most of the song's content.
- c. *nzung1-mba'ndong5*: The "middle section," a three character upper half-line which begins the coda and prepares the listeners for the end of the song.
- d. *nzung1-duei3*: The coda, or concluding section, wrapping up the content and downplaying one's ability to produce anything of value.
- e. *set3 muei4 nyei1 waa6*: Final details, including the date (year, month, and day) of writing.

The three-syllable "middle of the song" coda introduction uses one of several conventionalized phrases, such as "I'm not finished saying this," "I'm not finished doing this," "My words are not finished," and "I'm finished bothering you." Table 10 gives an example of a coda introduction and its lower half-line taken from Van Chow's first song.

Table 10: A Coda Introduction and Its Lower Half-line

zo6 yaam6 zien4,
do not finished,

zei3 dang2 nyin2 dun5 you6 naan2 koi1.
paper long words short so difficult open.

Y-X-Y

I'm not finished yet,

But a long paper and insufficient words have made clarity difficult.

Following the coda introduction, a song rapidly draws to a close. In his collection of songs, Van Chow typically wrote from three to six additional full lines to conclude a song. Other writers prefer a different number of lines. In 20 song-letters, most of them sent to a radio station in Chiangmai for possible broadcast, five had no coda introduction at all. In those that did, eight had one to six lines of additional text and seven had ten or more lines. One song had as many as 27 lines; another had two coda introductions followed by 19

and 10 lines of text, respectively.

Formal compositions, or longer works such as epics and other non-personalized songs, do not have a coda introduction. The song simply goes on to its conclusion. The structure of these songs, following Table 9, is thus simply a-b-e.

The same overall metrical system used in LL song-poems is also found with KW poetry, although the upper half-line in a couplet sometimes has only six characters. In such cases there are two three-character syntactic groups, but the final character in the line enters into the final tone and rhyme restrictions. The other three half-lines show the X-Y-X internal tone pattern (see Table 11 for an example).

E. Performance Styles and Literary Genres

The fifth component of secular songs has to do with styles of performance. As mentioned above, secular song-poems can be divided into two categories: *nzung1* "songs" and *feil* "poetry". *Nzung1*, of which there are a number of recognized types, use LL; *feil*, on the other hand, use KW. There are four performance styles of secular song-poems, depending on the literary category and composition type. *Nzung1* can be performed in three styles: *doq6* "reading" style, *baau5* "elaborate" style, or *cen3* "toasting" style. Some types of *nzung1* (e.g., #1 love songs) can be done in either the reading style or the elaborate style, whereas others typically use one or the other style but not both. For example, #7, a 60-year cycle song, is performed in *doq6* whereas #10, casual songs, are done in *baau5*. *Feil* compositions, on the other hand, are all performed in the *gorng3* or "speaking" style. Table 12, following Table 2 above, gives the categories and their performance styles.

Table 11: A Poem in the Chinese Style (*Gong3 Kaeq3*)

	<i>yin2</i> people	<i>bu5</i> not	<i>bi3,</i> comparable		<i>huaa1</i> flowers	<i>bu5</i> not	<i>tong2,</i> alike,
<i>sien5</i> winding	<i>huaa1</i> flower	<i>bu5</i> not	<i>bi3</i> comparable		<i>guei5</i> precious	<i>huaa1</i> flower	<i>hong2.</i> red.
<i>gin1</i> gold	<i>huaa1</i> flower	<i>yae3</i> also	<i>yau5</i> desires	<i>yin2</i> silver	<i>huaa1</i> flower	<i>pei5,</i> fitting,	
<i>lu5</i> trail	<i>siang5</i> on	<i>caau3</i> weed	<i>huaa1</i> flower	<i>pei5</i> fitting	<i>bu5</i> not	<i>tong2.</i> alike.	

People are not comparable, flowers are not alike,
 A vine's flower is not to be compared to a precious red flower.
 A gold flower should be paired with a silver one.
 A wild flower along the trail is not a fitting mate.

Table 12: Categories and Performance Styles

<u>Category</u>	<u>Performance Style</u>
1. <i>zing2 you2 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
2. <i>zei3 mui6 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6</i>
3. <i>naan6 zing2 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
4. <i>zun2 lung2 ndie3 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
5. <i>nung1-njaau5</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
6. <i>nung1-gou3</i>	<i>doq6</i>
7. <i>jaap3-zaang3 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6</i>
8. <i>cuot3 gaeng2 nzung1</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
9. <i>maa4-dau2 nzung1</i>	<i>baau5</i>
10. <i>a'nziaau6 nzung1</i>	<i>baau5</i>
11. <i>nung1-bom1</i>	<i>baau5</i>
12. <i>nung1-jun5</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
13. <i>nung1-orm5</i>	<i>doq6 / baau5</i>
14. <i>nung1-cen3</i>	<i>cen3</i>
15. <i>fei1</i>	<i>gong3</i>

The remainder of the paper will focus on the performance styles of song-poems done in the literary language, leaving aside further mention of compositions done in KW.

a. Reading Style (*doq6*). Songs done in the *doq6* style are considered plain in comparison to those done in the *baau5* style. In the reading style, the singer proceeds straight through a line of characters, blending lexical tone and musical pitch in a relatively non-embellished way and inserting a moderate number of extra vocalisms called "padding syllables." Musical pitch and padding syllables (*Components F and G*) will be discussed below. For now it is sufficient to characterize the *doq6* style as simple and straightforward.

b. Elaborate Style (*baau5*). Songs performed in the *baau5* style are typically thought of as being "real" Mien songs. *Baau5* songs are written in couplets (two full lines of 14 characters each). The couplets are often indicated with a tie ($\overbrace{L2 \quad L1}$) at the top of the page linking each pair of lines. These songs are done in a highly elaborate or embellished style, using a great many padding syllables and repeating all seven syllables in the lower half-line. A *baau5* song requires the singer to use *njuot3 nyei1 qie5*, an intricate, winding voice. A *doq6* song by comparison uses a *zaq6 nyei1 qie5*, a straight voice. To sing a line of a *baau5* song thus takes many times longer than it does to sing a line of a *doq6* song. As a result, *baau5* songs demand more of a listener in terms of concentration and wait time to get beyond the padding syllables which surround most of the lexical syllables in order to derive the meaning of the lyrics. It is thus understandable why longer compositions are done in the more simple *doq6* style. Nevertheless, being able to perform in *baau5* style is held in very regard as a cultural art form.

The couplet in Table 13 is taken from the only *baau5*

song in the collection of 30 didactic songs in Van Chow's notebook. The song is set off from the other 29 songs in that all its 28 pairs of lines are linked by a tie indicating to the reader that this song should be sung in *baau5* style.

**Table 13: A Song Performed in the *Baau5*
(Elaborate) Style**

<i>fong6 bin3 Iu1-baeng1 zaang3 ziu2 guoq3,</i>	X-Y-Y
<i>doi5 zam6 hlaai5 zei2 fing1-dau3 nzie1.</i>	X-Y-X
<i>cuot3 muon2 buang2 hiuaang1 huaa5 ben5 git3,</i>	Y-Y-X
<i>buang2 git3 ben5 jiem1 buoq6 zuang5 baeng1.</i>	X-Y-X

I want to tell the Iu Mien soldiers to control the countryside,
Whenever you must fight, may your stars assist you.
When you go out and meet danger, may it be changed to good,
When you meet with good, may it become golden to preserve you.

c. Toasting Style (*cen3*). *Cen3* songs are performed only at weddings. They are essentially the same as *doq6* songs except that each line is orally introduced by the word *cen3*, indicating that a round of drinks is called for in connection with the song. Some of the songs are general expressions of best wishes for a successful feast. Others are used to praise a particular functionary or group (e.g., the host, the cooks, the head musician) and are often followed by a self-deprecating response from the recipient. When toasting songs are offered to specific people, they can occur in couplets with the first half-line reduced to three or five syllables giving the person's title or role. In such couplets, the introductory words *cen3* are used only at the beginning of the couplet.

The two *cen3* syllables which precede every line of the song have several functions. Textually, they function as a marker of category type. Ideationally, the syllables indicate that a toast is being offered. Interactionally, they call the recipient and the general audience to begin another round of celebratory drinking. The introductory syllables also have

a musical function. They contain the melodic movements found at the end of both an upper and a lower half-line. The use of two *cen3* syllables, the first with a rising glide and the second with a falling glide, thus recapitulates the essence of an entire musical line (see section F below).

Table 14 gives two examples of *cen3* songs taken from a wedding manual used in Laos by Yao Ching Saechou and his son Fou Vang. The first couplet is from a general song which begins with the flood story, an important part of Mien ethnic identity, and ends with best wishes for happiness and harmony during and after the wedding feast. The second couplet is the first part of a short song addressed to the head musician, the oboist, praising him for his talent and manual dexterity.

Table 14: Two Songs in the *Cen3* (Toasting) Style

a. A General *Cen3* Song

Cen3, cen3.

Ging1 ding6 yun2 nin1 hong2 sui3 faat3, X-Y-X

Ciet3 ziu1 ciet3 ie5 yiem5 tin1-ding2. Y-X-Y

Cen3, cen3.

Ha2 lou2 mbuei5 zang6 tin1-dong2 noi6, Y-X-Y

Faan2 dong4 luei2 ding2 fiem1-bin6 ging1. X-Y-X

A toast! A toast!

In the first year of the reign, the flood waters rose,

Rose for seven days and nights until they reached up to heaven.

A toast! A toast!

The gourd floated up to heaven,

Banging into Thunder's dwelling, alarming him.

b. A *Cen3* Song Addressed to a Wedding Functionary*Cen3, cen3.*

	<i>Cui1-diq6 sai1,</i>	
<i>Cin1-baan1 nyin2 nyou4 siou3 duang1 mbai2.</i>		X-Y-X
<i>Naau6 hin5 dorn2 duang1 ku3 yiem3 diu3,</i>		Y-X-Y
<i>Zuang5 zei3 yuoq6 nzoi2 zoi5 njie6 jaai1.</i>		Y-X-Y

A toast! A toast!

Master oboist,

A thousand songs are in your fingers.

You enliven the hall and put us in the mood for drinking.

We have been invited and sit here in rows.

F. Iu Mien Musical Scale and Its Relation to Lexical Tones

The sixth component of Mien secular songs is the musical scale used and the interaction between musical pitch and lexical tone. Three areas will be briefly mentioned. First, songs in the literary language which have been investigated so far use a pentatonic scale. The performance of the two wedding songs (*nzung1-cen3*) by one singer used the musical pitches approximately C-D-F-G-A. By comparison, a different singer performing poetry (*fei1*) used B-C-E-F-G. The pitch differences are not considered to be significant. Since Mien songs are unaccompanied performances, they are not tied to a particular set of pitches or musical key. Although this is an area still to be investigated, I assume that variation in the patterns of intervals will be found, similar to the considerable variety of pitch modes in the tetratonic and pentatonic systems which occur in Hmong vocal music (see Catlin 1982 which is based in part on the work of Mareschal 1976).

Second, a melisma (a decorative musical glide) occurs at or near the end of every half line. In upper half lines, there is an rising melisma before the final syllable. In lower half lines, on the other hand, there is a falling melisma before the final syllable (i.e., between syllables #6 and #7). These musical glides are shown in Table 16 below where they are

marked as Ri and Fa, respectively. As mentioned in section E.c. above, the two *cen3* syllables which precede each full line of a wedding song in "toasting style" exhibit the melismatic characteristics of an entire 14-syllable line in that there is an ascending glide after the first *cen3* and a descending glide on the second *cen3* which is followed by a "padding syllable" (see below) on a low pitch.

Third, there is a definite, though at times somewhat abstract, relationship between lexical tone and musical pitch, similar to that found in other tonal languages, such as Thai (Mendenhall 1975) and Cantonese (Yung 1983a, 1989). Broadly speaking, lexical tones which are high or rising (tones 3 and 5) occur on the highest musical pitches (F, G, and A), whereas low or falling tones (tones 2 and 6) are found on the lowest pitches (C and D). Tones 1 and 4 occur on musical pitches similar to those of tones 2 and 5, respectively. For a more complete description of pitches and tones in an Iu Mien wedding song, see Purnell (1992). One line of this song is given in Table 16 below with upper case letters representing prominent pitches and lower case letters representing primarily passing notes.

G. Padding Syllables

The final component which a singer must consider is that of "padding syllables." Padding syllables (Mand: *chen4 zi*) are extra syllables or vocalisms which a singer during a performance inserts before, between, or after the full (or basic) syllables of the text. A variety of such syllables are used in Chinese opera (Liu 1974; Yung 1983b, 1989). In Mien songs, unlike some types of Chinese songs, padding syllables are never written but are supplied extemporaneously by the singer.

In his study of Cantonese opera, Yung (1983a, 1983b, 1989) describes six types of padding syllables, two of which he calls "phrase leader syllables" and "nonsense syllables." Yung considers the latter type, meaningless vocalisms, to be the least important of his six categories. Although they

occur frequently, he says, they are used simply "to intone certain notes of a melisma after a regular syllable" (1989:101).

Yung shows in detail that the singer in Cantonese opera has considerable freedom to manipulate a rather fixed song text through the skillful use of the various types of padding syllables. A study of padding syllables, he concludes, "reveals in some detail the inner creative process of the singer: the conflict he faces and the solution he chooses when he is confronted with considerations of textual meaning and musical aesthetic standards" (1989:104).

Virtually all padding syllables (PSs) in Mien secular songs are meaningless syllables. Two exceptions to this are the phrase leader syllable *cen3* in wedding songs (discussed above) and the syllable *faa1* in *baau5* songs (to be mentioned below). Although all the other padding syllables have no lexical or structural meaning, they are nonetheless important. They are patterned in their form, their function, and their placement in the song line.

a. PS Form. All Mien padding syllables are open syllables. Most are simple vocalic entities such as */ei er a u o or/*, where */er or/* represent [ə ɔ] respectively. All but */ei/* are central and back vowels. In other padding syllables, certain vocalic nuclei may be preceded by one of a very limited number of consonants: */nyei wei zei na la lo lor/*. When the simple vowel */a/* is preceded by a syllable with a final consonant or glide, it picks up the phonetic value of that preceding sound directly or in assimilated form. For example, */ging1 a/* is [kiŋ ŋa] */ndap3 a/* is [dap ma], and */sou1 a/* is [sou wa].

b. PS Function. Mien padding syllables have several functions. One function is to buy time for the singer. The Chinese characters used by the Mien are not always written clearly or written in their standard form. Thus a singer may need a few seconds to try to figure out what the next character is. In extemporaneous performances in which no written text is used, a singer may need time to think of what he or she wants to say next within the tonal constraints of

the metrical system.

A second function of padding syllables is to let the audience know where the singer is in the line of a song. In *doq6* songs, for example, padding syllables carry the ascending melodic glide at the end of the upper half-line as well as the descending glide just before the end of the lower half-line. Also, in *baau5* songs, the syllable *faa1*, related to *faam1* one of the words for "three" and to the *faa1* of *faa1-ziep6* "thirty," is used when the singer comes to the end of a full line. It lets the audience know that he or she is now going to repeat the lower half-line as a third segment and is thus two-thirds finished with singing the full line.

A third function of these syllables is to set a pattern of musically high and low pitches within a song line to provide a relatively stable framework within which full syllables may vary. For example, in a *doq6* or *cen3* song, despite some melodic variation from line to line because of the interaction between lexical tones and musical pitch on the full syllables, all lines have a basic though somewhat abstract melodic similarity. Table 15 gives the relative pitches for each position in the line that can have a padding syllable.

In Table 15, full syllables which are part of the written text are given as S1, S2, etc. "Hi" indicates either a relatively high level pitch or a low-to-high rising pitch, whereas "lo" indicates either a relatively low level pitch or a high-to-low falling pitch. "Rise" indicates a rising musical glide, "fall" a falling glide.⁵ At the boundaries of structural groupings in the lower half-line, that is after S2 and S4, the singer apparently has the freedom to choose either high or low pitch for the PS. Table 16 is an example of a typical line from a *cen3* wedding song with the musical pitches of both the basic syllables and the padding syllables indicated directly over them. Padding syllables and their pitches are placed in parentheses, and rising and falling melismas are shown as Ri and Fa, respectively.

c. PS Placement. There are both obligatory and optional rules for the placement of padding syllables in the upper

Table 15: Base Syllables Plus Positions and Musical Pitches of Padding Syllables

Upper half lines: S1	-	S2	-	hi	- S3 - lo - S4 - lo	- S5 - S6 - hi	-	S7	- rise
Lower half-lines: S1	- lo - S2	-	hi/lo	- S3 - lo - S4 - hi/lo	- S5 - S6 - fall	-	-	S7	- lo

Table 16: Musical Pitches and Padding Syllables in a Line of a *Cen3* Song

fG	(Ri)	EFGC(Fa)	L						
<i>Cen3</i>	(o a), <i>cen3</i>	(a).							
fD	C..G (H)	FEDC (L)	FDC (L)	D	AG (H)	A (Ri)			
<i>Nyien2</i>	<i>waab6</i> (wei)	<i>sing1-</i> (a)	<i>sing1</i> (a)	<i>daai2</i>	<i>yiem3</i> (nyi)	<i>diu3</i> (la o),			
A	DFG (H)	DC (L)	C	A	dFG (Fa)	C (L)			
<i>Duq3</i>	<i>gor5</i> (zei)	<i>meng2</i> (a)	<i>dau2</i>	<i>dou3</i>	<i>lei4</i> (o er)	<i>kung1</i> (lo).			

and lower half-lines of a song. Conceivably, there could be a PS before or after all 14 full syllables in a line. However, this does not happen. With only rare exceptions, the obligatory constraints on PS placement are as follows:

- (1) No PS occurs before the first syllable of either half-line.
- (2) No PS occurs between S1 and S2 in an upper half-line.
- (3) No PS occurs between S5 and S6 in either half-line.
- (4) A PS occurs after S7 in an upper half-line.
- (5) A PS occurs between S6 and S7 in a lower half-line.

At all the remaining places where it would be possible to put a PS, the singer has the option to use or not to use a PS. If a PS is used, however, it must follow the pitch pattern specified above. Singers have their particular patterns of PS use. For example, it is quite common for a singer to use a PS between S2 and S3 in upper half-lines, but the frequency of use and the choice of a particular PS varies. Two singers, A and B, were quite different. Singer A used a PS in the S2-S3 slot in 17 of 22 lines of his song, and each time the only PS he used was *wei*. Singer B, on the other hand, had a PS in that slot in 17 of 20 upper half-lines of his song, using *wei* or *ei* 13 times and *a* four times. Moreover, singers' preferences change over time. To illustrate, singer C recorded a particular twelve-line song for me three times: once in 1972 and twice in 1984. In 1972, he used a PS in this upper S2-S3 slot only twice in the 12 lines, each time with *a*. In 1984/1, he used six PSs in this slot, choosing *wei* twice and *a* or *na* the other four times. In 1984/2, however, he used PSs 10 times out of 12, choosing *wei* or *ei* four times and *a* or *na* the remaining six.

Conclusion

To sum up this paper, several major components of Iu Mien secular songs have been presented. A singer or song writer must keep both the structural constraints and the opportunities for creative variation in mind in both

composition and performance. Much more ethnographic and linguistic work needs to be done on this part of Mien culture, but perhaps the components described briefly here can facilitate such future investigation.

Notes

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2. These papers cover the metrical system of the Iu Mien secular songs, the interaction between lexical tone and musical pitch, and the patterns of inserted vocalisms called "padding syllables."
3. See also Chao (1956) who gave specific terminology for the variety of "song" types in Chinese.
4. For a description of the practical orthography, called the Unified Script, used here, see Purnell (1987). For the stops and affricates, /b d z j g/ are voiceless unaspirated, /p t c q k/ are voiceless aspirated, and /mb nd nz nj nq/ are plain voiced. In the present paper, tones are marked by numbers instead of letters as in the Unified Script. The hyphen between words indicates a tone change on the tone to the left.
5. There are also some mid level pitches which have not yet been adequately analyzed and are thus omitted here.

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