

Sayings, Twisters, Riddles & Rhymes of the Lanna People

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๗ ฝน ตก สุข สุข
อื้อ มั่ว ได้ เตา
จุ หมา ยุย เขา เหลา

This article is a collection and description of a variety of spoken traditions of the Lanna ล้านนา (also called Khon Muang คนเมือง) people living in the Chiang Mai province during the late 1960s. It is based upon my collection of notes, recordings and memories from a four-year period (1967-1971) when I lived in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand. It relies heavily upon the literary genius of a small number of Lanna friends whose help I cherish to this day. Each original text is accompanied by a transliteration into English and a rough translation. The translation cannot, of course, match the meaning, the beauty, the humor, or the impact of the original. It is a sad sign of the times that many of these verbal gems are passing out of use. This is my attempt to preserve a few.

Rhymes for Children

During our four years in Chiang Mai my late wife Edith and I both worked full time – she at Chiang Mai Learning Center (an elementary school for English-speaking children) and I in the Music Department of Thailand Theological Seminary. For this reason we employed a nanny for our daughters. She was a lovable, loquacious and knowledgeable woman of very short stature named Fong Jun (ฟองจันทร์). This remarkable woman had a rich repertory of riddles, rhymes and sayings and seemed to be able to produce one for every facet of a child's life. I have noted about a half dozen of these, all of which were thoroughly memorized by our daughters and then promptly forgotten after our return to the United States. Contrary to Thai practice, I have put spaces between the Thai words to assist less experienced readers and to show the rhyme patterns more easily.

When the children were confined inside because of rain, Fong Jun would frequently chant the following rhyme to them:

ฝน ตก สุย สุย	fon tdok suey suey	The rain is dripping down.
จุก หมา ญุย เขา เหล่า	juey ma nyuey kao lao	Coax the dog indoors.

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อี บ้อ ได เต่า	Ee pbaw dai tdow	Your father caught a turtle;
อี แม่ แกง แค	Ee mae gaeng kae	your mother made a curry.

When the need arose to wipe a runny nose she would accompany the action with the following appropriate verse:

จี มูก ก็ ญอย	kee mook gaw nyoi	Noses are dripping.
จี ตา ก็ ไหล	kee tda gaw lai	Tears are flowing.
ละ วุน ละ วาย	la woon la wai	Everything's coming apart,
ล้า ปี้ ล้า บ้อ	sum pbee sum pbaw	down to the tiniest thing.

When the girls lost their baby teeth and had toothless gaps in front she taught them a rhyme for that stage of life:

เคี้ยว เว้า	kiewow wow	Front teeth missing -
เป่า ไฟ ดับ	pbow fai dap	(good for) blowing out candles.
ลัก กิ้น ดับ	lak ginn tdap	Sneak a piece of liver
เสี้ยง ตัง หม้อ	siang tdung maw	and eat the whole pot full.
กาบ จิ้น ฮ้อ	gaap jin haw	Bite a piece of jerky
ลั่น ไป ลั่น มา	lon pbai lon ma	and run around in circles.

When the girls were restless and would not go to sleep as soon as expected she would produce the following:

จะ ไป เตือด	je pbai duead	Don't fuss and wiggle.
เฮือด จะ ตื่น	hueat je tduen	The bed bugs will wake,
อาย หมิ่น จะ หั่น	ai muen je hun	Mr. Muen will see,
อาย ปั่น จะ สู้	ai pbun je hoo	Mr. Pbun will find out,
อาย หมู จะ ตี	ai mu je tdee	Mr. Mu will spank,
อาย สี จะ วา	ai see je wa	Mr. See will yell.

I joked with her that if she would add another line, thus . . .

อาย ตา จะ เตือด	Ai Tda je dueat	Mr. Tda will fuss
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. . . then the whole thing could go around again like the words of "Where have all the

flowers gone?” She was quite amused by that idea, but I cannot say whether or not my suggestion has found its way into popular usage. I rather think not.

When Fong Jun rocked a little one in a cradle or in a swing she would accompany the action with a short rocking rhyme which is strong in rhythm, but far-fetched in meaning:

โยก เยก เอย	yoke yake uey	Back and forth we rock.
น้ำท่วม เมฆ	naam tuam make	Water has risen up to the clouds.
กระต่าย ลอย คอ	gatdai loi kaw	The rabbits are up to their necks.

The final example from the considerable repertory of Nanny Fong Jun expresses the pitiful state of a woman whose husband has left her for a younger woman. I cannot say why she chose to teach this depressing verse to our daughters unless it arose from her own personal experience. (We English speakers, on the other hand, teach our little ones about such creature comforts as cradles falling out of trees and about dying before we wake.)

พ่อ ขา เอา แม่ น้า	pbaw ka aow mae na	My father took another wife
บอ เหมือน แม่ ตน	baw muean mae tdon	not at all like my mother.
สิบ ชาว คน	sip sao kon	Ten or twenty more
บอ เหมือน แม่ ขา	baw muean mae ka	could not match my mother.
ตูก ก็ ตูก	tduk gaw tduk	Now we're dirt poor
บอ มี อะไรยัง กิน	baw me anyang ginnn	and have nothing to eat.
แปง ตูบ จู ดิน	pbaeng tdoop joo din	We built a little shack
มด อิน ก็ ขึ้น	mot hin gaw kuen	but the ants have taken over.

Tongue Twisters

All of the tongue twisters I learned in Thailand were composed of a succession of monosyllabic words, reminiscent of the oldest layer of the Thai language as spoken by the Tai groups who migrated south from the southern regions of China beginning about fifteen hundred ago. The first tongue twister I learned in Thai

uses eighteen consecutive utterances of the “s” letter “ส” (Saw Sua). This twister is also found in the central region around Bangkok. The Lanna term for tongue twister is เล่นเสียงสัมผัสพยัญชนะ (twisted words).

สาว แสน สาย ใส่ เสื้อ สี ส้ม ใส่ ชิน สี แสด ใส่ สาย สร้อย ตาม ลิบ สอง เสน

Sao saen suay sai sua see som sai sin see saed sai sai soi sam sip song sen

(A beautiful young girl wore an orange blouse and a saffron skirt
and round her neck she wore thirty-two silver necklaces.)

The second example which I recall was taught to me by a music student named Sohng (ทรง) who was enrolled at the Thailand Theological Seminary. It is in the Lanna dialect and uses 14 consecutive explosions of the hybrid “p & b” (ป) sound not found in English.

ปู่ ปั่น ไป ป่า ไป ปะ ปู่ เปี้ย เป่า ปี่ ปาก ปอ เป่น ป้อด

pu pun pai pa pai pa pu pia pao pi pak paw pen pawd

(Grandpa Pun went into the woods and met Grandpa Pia who
was blowing a pipe so hard that his cheeks almost exploded.)

Another student named Waiwit (ไววิทย) from the province of Chiang Rai taught me a twister with just enough gruesomeness in its meaning to delight many listeners. It plays on the sound of the hybrid “t & d” - also not found in English.

There are 13 mono-syllables, all starting with the letter ต (taw tao).

ตก โต ติน ตั่ง ตก ติน ตาล ต้า ตอ ตาย ตอง แตก ต้ม

tok to tin tang tok ton tan tum taw tai tong taek tom

(A sticky-footed lizard fell out of a palm tree and crashed
onto a stump, splitting its gut open with a "Pop.")

I am sure that these three represent only a small percentage of the twisters to be heard around Lanna land. The learning of them has given me a great measure of delight.

Waiwit (meaning literally “quick of mind”) taught me another rhyme which is a border-line tongue twister. The following bit of bad luck is full of alliteration and onomatopoeia in which the Thai and Lanna languages are so rich. I have left several pairs of words un-translated to emphasize their function as “sound words.”

ไอ ค้อก ไอ แคก	ai kaw ai kaek	I coughed a “kaw - kaek.”
ไอ กะดอ กะแดก	ai gadawk gadaek	I coughed a “gadawk - gadaek.”
ไอ ตก คั่น ไค	ai tdok kundai	I coughed till I fell downstairs.
ไอ ถู กะ ดิ่ง	ai tuuk gading	I coughed till I rang my bell.
ไอ ถู กะเตีอก	ai luuk gadueak	I coughed till my Adam’s apple
ดิ้น กะแคว กะแคว	din gadaew gadaew	shook with a “gadaew – gadaew.”

Old Lanna Wisdom

I spent a good deal of time in the remote rural areas of Northern Thailand before it was fashionable to call it Lanna. The word “Lanna” was known to the **Kon Muang** (native people) but it was not used extensively until the surge of positive northern national identity which occurred in the 1990s. On one of my field trips to look for **Pin Pia** players I arrived in the village of Ban Pucha in Lampoon Province. The village was home to four such players – a rarity in those days. One of the players, Nai Boon (นายบุญ) told me just how rare the Pin Pia was. The subject of rarity led him to launch into an old Lanna saying which begins on that subject and then moves to three others. I took time to learn it carefully and note it down properly. When I had mastered it I would spring it on them during subsequent visits – to their great delight. Here it is:

ของ เขียม หา ญาก	kong kiam ha nyaak	Rare things are seldom found,
ข้าว บอ ตาก ตำ ปีก	kao baw tdaak tum buek	Soggy rice is hard to pound,
ฝ้าย หีด ตอ บอ เข	fai huek tdaw baw kao	A frayed string is hard to thread,
สาว เฒ่า บาว บอ อัก	sao tao bao baw huk	An ancient maid will never wed.

This folk rhyme is an example of the popularity of the 16-syllable verse (4 lines of 4 syllables each). The Lanna word “not” (**บอ**) seems to be an exception to the rule and is not counted as one of the 16 syllables, perhaps because it has a light accent and “leans” into the following syllable. My translation follows the Western tradition of rhyming final words in lines. A more common rhyme scheme in Thailand is to rhyme the last word of a line with the second word of the next. Finally, I must say in fairness to “ancient maids” that I have heard variants of this verse which read:

บ่าว เฒ่า สาว บอ ฮัก bao tao sao baw huk An ancient bachelor will never wed.

The second example I heard from time to time was from elders who used it to caution the younger generation to choose their friends carefully else they take up the habits of those around them. This rhyme was also a favorite anecdote in sermons preached on the subject of following the correct path. It follows the popular 16-syllable pattern, with four lines of four syllables each.

เมื่อ ก่อน เดิม นั้น	mua gone duem nun	A long time ago
ด้วง อยู่ ใน จิง	douang yuu nai king	A maggot was in the ginger.
เพื่อ มา ฮู้ กิง	pua ma huu king	Before he knew it
จิง อยู่ ใน ด้วง	king yuu nai douang	The ginger was in the maggot.

The drum maker, Nai Noi NaKampan (**หนอย ณ คำปัน**) had a son named Nai Boon Tdueng (**บุญเติง**) from whom I learned the following Lanna incantation. It is a tongue-in-cheek magic spell which begins with the traditional “Omm” word from Sanskrit. The entire first line follows the form of a spell in the “abracadabra” manner. The remainder of the spell is pure parody.

โอม อะ ลึก ตึก ตัก	omm kaluek tduet tdak	Ommmm . . . Abracadabra
หมา เขี้ยว หัก	ma kieow hak	A dog with broken teeth
ขบ ฦ บอ เข	kop guu baw kaow	cannot bite me.

จาง พู เต้า	jaang puu taow	An old elephant
ไล่ กู บอ ตัน	lai guu baw tdun	may chase but not catch me.
กอน ละ เนอ	gawn la neuh	So be it!

The nine-stage Lanna saying on the **Stages of Life** gives a pithy and humorous description of each decade of human life. It is a very popular piece of folk wisdom which I heard from the mouths of many people around Chiang Mai. It seemed to be one of those bits of lore which almost everybody seemed able to recite. This version was written down for me by Rev. Thanit Osiripaibul (อาจารย์ ธานีต โอศิริไพบูลย์) a native of Chiang Mai and now the pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Covina, California.

สิบ ปี อาบ น้ำ บ่อ หนาว	Age 10 - Cold bath, no problem
sip pi aab nam baw nao	

ชาว ปี แอ้ว สาว บ่อ กาย	Age 20 - Chase girls without tiring
sao pi aew sao baw gai	

สาม สิบ ปี บ่อ หน่ย สั้งขาร	Age 30 - Your physique has no limit.
sam sip pi baw nai sungkan	

สี่ สิบ ปี เญ้ยะ กาน เหมือน ฟ้า ผ่า	Age 40 - You work like thunder.
si sip pi nyia gan muan fa pa	

ห้า สิบ ปี สาว หน้อย ด่า บ่อ เจ็บ ใจ	Age 50 - Young girls' insults don't hurt.
ha sip pi sao noi da baw jep jai	

หก สิบ ปี ไอ เหมือน ฟาน โขก	Age 60 - You cough like a mad buck.
hok sip pi ai muan fan koak	

เจ็ด สิป ปี บะโหก เตม ตั่ว

jet sip pi bahoak tem tua

Age 70 – You’re covered with age spots.

แปด สิป ปี ไค่ หัว เหมือน ไห่

paet sip pi kai hua muan hai

Age 80 - Your laugh sounds like crying.

เก้า สิป ปี ไช้ ก็ ตาย บ่อ ไช้ ก็ ตาย

gao sip pi kai gaw tai baw kai gaw tai

Age 90 - Get sick & die; stay well & die.

I have heard instances in common speech when a speaker might wish to convey which decade he has reached without revealing the exact number of his years. Thus a man of 56 years might drop the hint that he has reached the stage “when girls’ insults no longer hurt.”

Spoonerisms

The literary phenomenon of the “spoonerism” is found in Thai and in the Lanna dialect. However, instead of an exchange of initial consonants as in English (“pea soup” becoming “sea poup”) there is an exchange of vowel sounds (“pea soup” becoming “pou seap”). Although the vowel sounds are exchanged, the tones of the words remain in their original places. This practice is called “backward talk” (พูด กลับ by the Thai and ອຸ້ ປີ້ນ by the Lanna). Backward talk is sometimes used to semi-disguise the ugliness of an insulting sexual remark. Examples of this unsavory practice will not be cited here.

Innocent examples of backward talk are found in courting riddles and rhymes - the subject of the following section. A girl being asked her name by a suitor might turn her name backwards, then give the boy a synonym for the backwards version as a riddle to test his acumen and to assure him that she is not an easy catch. Example:

He: ^๓น้อง ^๓จ้อ ^๓อะหยัง ^๓กรับ nong chue anyang krup

May I ask your name?

She: ^๓ข้า ^๓เจ้า ^๓จ้อ ^๓แอ่ง ^๓บอ ^๓แตก ^๓เจ้า kajao chue aeng baw tdaek jao
My name is “an unbroken bowl”

If he is quick witted he will realize that “an unbroken bowl” is also “good bowl” and that “good bowl” is a spoonerism for her name, thus:

^๓แอ่ง ^๓บอ ^๓แตก is a synonym for ^๓แอ่ง ^๓ดี which turns into ^๓อี ^๓แดง (her nickname)
aeng baw tdaek aeng dee ee daeng

There are two examples of backward talk which have moved from their origins in courting rhymes into every-day speech in the Chiang Mai region. These are the pairs of words which mean “got one already” and “can’t take another one.”

^๓ มี ^๓ แล้ว	is turned into	^๓ แมว ^๓ ลี
mee laew		maew lee
^๓ เอา ^๓ แถม	is turned into	^๓ แอม ^๓ เถา
aow taem		aem taow

These two pairs are often heard together to form the meaning, “I’ve got one (some) already, I can’t take another (anymore). This most often implies that “I am committed to some one and cannot get involved with another.” The following example is lifted from a popular courting verse:

^๓เป็น ^๓แมว ^๓ลี ^๓เป็น ^๓บอ ^๓แอม ^๓เถา ^๓สอง
Pbuen maew lee pbuen baw aem taow song
(I’ve got one already – I can’t take another.)

Another example of backward talk is the pair of words:

โดย	กัน	(to go together)	which turns into	ตัน	โกย
tdow	gun			tdun	gowy

I heard this pair of words used in a little verse expressing jealousy towards a friend who was having more success with the opposite sex.

ขอย	เป็น	ล้ำ	koi pbuen lum	I envy them so,
เป็น	ได้	ตัน	โกย	pbuen dai tdun gouey
อ้าย	ขอ	ทาน	โดย	ai kaw tdan tdouey
ยัก	ก้วย	จี้	เบี้ย	sak gouey kee pbia
				even the tiniest portion.

A final example which I recall from Chiang Mai is a short warning not to speak or act too quickly without considering the consequences. It involves exchanging the second and last vowels of a four-word phrase, thus.

กิน	หนูน	เมื่อ	แลง	changes to	กิน	แนน	เมื่อ	loon
ginn	noon	mua	laeng		ginn	naeng	mua	loon
(Eat jackfruit in the evening					"eat crow" next day)			

I will cite one more example of backward talk which was heard frequently in the 1960s. It was used to express pleasure or displeasure in a given situation. The word pair:

เปิง	ใจ	was reversed into	ไป	เจิง
pbueng	jai		pbai	jueng
(I'm pleased)			(same meaning - hidden)	

This pair was also heard in the negative form to express displeasure thus:

ฮา บ่อ เปิง ใจ

ha baw pbai jueng

(I'm upset)

ฮา บ่อ ไป เจิง

ha baw pbueng jai

(same meaning - hidden)

Courting Riddles and Rhymes

After the work of the day a young man would bath, eat supper, put on fresh clothes, apply a sprinkling of white body powder, grab his musical instrument (if he played one), usually a fiddle called Salaw (สลอ) or a lute called Sueng (ซึง) or a stick zither called Pin Pia (พิณเปียะ). Then he would set off through the un-electrified village towards the home of the girl of his desire, playing his instrument along the way. Arriving at the house he might tease the girl out of her room to listen to him play. If the girl's parents approved of the young man they would allow her to come out into the front porch-like room to listen to the hopeful musician. If their approval was more generous they might retire into the back room, leaving their daughter alone with the suitor, provided that both of them were engaged in an activity which kept both of their hands busy in the approved manner. If the parents heard the spinning wheel in motion and the musical instrument still sounding they knew that the potential lovers were interacting at the acceptable degree of intimacy.

The boy might break the ice by asking what the girl had to eat for supper. Her answer might contain some code words to reveal her level of interest for him. For example, there is a kind of curry called "gaeng bafuk" which rhymes with the word "huk" (the word for "love"). This would be a sign of encouragement for the boy. If she answered that she had a bowl of another food (which might rhyme with the word "disgusting") then he might as well set his sights on another girl.

If the boy felt emboldened by her response he might include the following verse in this song told to me Dr. Boon Chom.

หญ้ง มา งาม แต	nyang ma ngam tdae	You are so beautiful
เจ้า แวน เจา ไส	jao waen ngaow sai	like a sparkling crystal.
ไค ตาย เป็น ไส	kai tdai pben hai	Let me come back as a louse
ติด จอง ผา แต่ง	tdit jong pa tdaeg	in the corner of your blouse.
ไค มัด นอง เนง	kai mut nong naeng	or live in the knot
ติด แจง ผา ตอง	tdit jaeng pa tdong	that holds your skirt.

This sentiment above is reminiscent of that expressed by Romeo while gazing at Juliet – “O that I were that glove upon her hand, that I might touch her cheek.” He might continue with a piece of flattering entreaty thus:

น้อง แดง ดี ฮัก	nong daeng tdee huk	Dear little one, my Love,
เจ้า แม่ งาม สวย	jao mae ngam souy	You are such a beauty.
อ้าย ขอ อยู่ โดย	Ai kaw yuu tdouy	I’d like to be a member
เป็น จาว บ้าน นี้	Pben jao ban nee	of your household.

She might test him by declaring that he already has someone and that he should not go looking for another.

เป็น แมว ลี	pbun maew lee	You’ve got one already
บอ แอม เถา สอง	baw aem taow song	and can’t take another.
จี เอื้อ น้ำ นอง	kee huea naam nong	An extra passenger
ซ่อน สอง จ้ง ลม	sawn song jung lom	will capsize the boat.

He might respond with the following bit of bravado:

เอื้อ ของ อ้าย นี้	huea kong ai nee	This boat of mine
เป็น เอื้อ สมัย	pben huea samai	is a modern boat.

ชี้ สัก เต้า ได	kee suk tdao dai	No matter how many,
มัน ตึง บ่อ ล่ม	mun tdueng baw lom	it will not capsize.

If she wants to tease, taunt or test him further she might give out this four-liner which I learned from Amnuey Kalumpat (นายอำนวย กล้าพัค):

กำ ปาก ว่า แต่	gum pbak wa tdae	Your words sound true,
น้ำ ใจ บ่อ ตาม	naam jae baw tdam	but your heart doesn't agree.
เป็น ฟู่ เอา งาม	pbuen foo aow ngam	Your flirting words are
น้ำ ไส สวย หน้า	naam sai suey nah	like cold water in my face.

He retorts by turning her words to his advantage:

กำ ปาก ว่า แล้ว	gum pbak wah laew	Whatever my words,
ก็ แล้ว ตึง ใจ	gaw laew tdueng jai	my heart always agrees.
ปาก ว่า จะ ได	pbak wah je dai	If my mouth says one thing,
ใจ ก็ ว่า อัน	jai gaw wah un	my heart says the same.

If the girl is bold enough to want the suitor to know that she is available, she might utter the following four-line gem, according to Paw Nan Tda (พอหนานตา) of Sarapee District:

บ่อ มี สัก นิด	gbaw mee sak nit	I've got no one,
บ่อ ติด สัก หน้อย	baw tdit sak noi	nobody at all -
เหมือน ลม บัด ดอย	meuan lom pbat doi	as sure as the wind
บ่อ ดิ้น บ่อ ตวง	baw din baw tduang	cannot rattle a mountain.

If she is even bolder she might invite him up to sit with her, using another four-liner which comes in many variations. I will cite three of them.

มา เตอะ มา เตอะ	mah tdueh mah tdueh	Come in, come in,
นั่ง เมอะ อิง กัน	nang mueh ing gun	come sit up close.
ไผ หัน จัง มัน	pai hun jang mun	Don't worry if we're seen.
ของ เฮา หล่าง ได้	kong how lang dai	This is our matter alone.

A variant to the fourth line above is:

กรรม เวร ของ ข้า gum wane kong ka It is our fate to be together.

A humorous variant on the same rhyme was told to me by Dr. Boon Chom.

มา เตอะ มา เตอะ mah tdueh mah tdueh Come in, come in,
 จะ ไป นั่ง ตัด ตง je pbai nang tdat tdong but don't sit in the center.
 ฝา ก จะ ไหล ลง faak je lai long The floor slats might separate
 ตง จะ ไหล ก่อน tdong je lai kawn and the joints all run together.

(In other words, “don't sit so far away from me!”)

The “Come in, come in” pattern has many variants, some serious, some tongue-in-cheek like the one I learned from Ajan Thanit:

นั่ง เตอะ นั่ง เตอะ nang tdueh nang tdueh Come in and sit -
 บอ ใจ ดี ไผ baw jai tdee pai No seats are reserved.
 ดี หัว กัน ไค tdee hua kun dai (except the very top step
 เป้น ดี หมา โกง pben tdee ma gong is for the spotted dog)

Courting flatter can take an insulting turn in this silly verse, which I believe is used only in hypothetical situations with imaginary girls whose beauty is not greatly admired. It uses at 3-4-3-4 syllable pattern instead of the more common 4-4-4-4 pattern:

งาม เตอะ เตอะ ngam tdae tdae She's a beauty,
 เหมือน เปะ ยอง ตอ muean pbae yong tdaw like a goat squatting on a stump.
 งาม แด นอ ngam tdae naw A real beauty
 เหมือน ตอ ไฟไหม้ muean tdaw fai mai like a fire-burned stump.

In another four-liner the boy assures the girl what a fine provider he would be for her, but may have overstated his case.

น้อง อัก อ้าย เตอะ	nong hak ai tduh	If you'll love me,
อ้าย จาง เขาะ กิ้น	ai jang sawh ginn	You'll never want.
จิ กูง ไต้ ดิน	jee goong t dai din	Garden grubs underground
อ้าย ขุด กิ้น ได้	ai koot gin dai	I'll gladly dig for you.

If the boy were rebuffed in his amorous endeavors he might give the girl a mild warning as in this verse taught to me by Rev. Prachuab Dechawan (อาจารย์ประจวบ เดชะวรรณ) of Chiang Mai.

แห่ ไป เตอะ นก	hae pbai tduch nok	Flutter on, little bird.
จัก ตาย ญก บวง สัก วัน	jak tdai tuuk bouang	One day you'll be
	suk wan snared.	
ด้วง อยู่ ใน ไม้	doung yuu nai mai	Like a worm in a tree
ไผ่ ผอ บอ หั้น	pai paw baw hun	that cannot be seen,
จัก ตาย สัก วัน	jak tdai sak wun	yet succumbs one day
เปื้อ นก บะ แห่	pbeua nok bahae	to the wily woodpecker.

If the boy wishes to show disdain or contempt for his rejection he might use the following words taught to me by the same Rev. Prachuab :

สาว เป้อ เลอะ	saow pbue lueh	There are girls galore,
ข้า บอ เอา เขา	ka baw aow kaow	I don't need this one.
ข้า จู เขา มา	ka juu kao maow	I was just pretending
ขน หนา แขง ข้า	kon nah kaeng ka	like the hair on my shin.

(She is as important to me as the hair on my shin.)

There is considerable Lanna folklore surrounding the subject of the front steps of the house and the pottery container used to wash the feet before entering the house. In the olden days each house had a large water crock (โองน้ำ) at the base of the steps to the house. All visitors would remove their sandals and wash their feet using a coconut dipper to dip water from the crock. There was a saying that an extra large water crock outside a house indicated that a beautiful girl lived inside (to accommodate the unusually high traffic of male visitors). A variant on the beautiful girl/water crock connection was a saying which commented upon the wetness or dryness of the top step. It insinuates that if you have a beautiful daughter you should not expect your front steps to be stay dry.:

สาวงาม อยู่ บ้าน ไດ หั่ว คันไต้ ตั้ง บ่อ แห้ง

sao ngam yuu ban dai hua kun dai tdueng baw haeng

(Wherever a beautiful girl lives the front steps will never dry out.)

Conclusion

If my representations of these saying, twisters, riddles and rhymes do not match the perfection of the original it can be attributed to the passage of thirty-seven years since I first heard them and committed them to memory. I hope that native Lanna speakers will seize their heritage so that the words of Amnuey Kalumpat may not totally come true. In a recent letter me he lamented thus: “Present-day people of Chiang Mai are throwing their valuable heirlooms away and chasing after cheap, modern and mostly foreign trinkets. I don’t know what we can to shake them awake.”

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Rev. Prachuab Dechawan - close friend and pastor of a church in Las Vegas

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