



# ‘Cats give funerals to rats’: making the dead modern with lament

ERIK MUEGLER *University of Michigan*

This article compares funeral laments in a Tibeto-Burman-speaking community in Yunnan, China, from two periods: the early 1990s, after ritual revitalization was thoroughly underway, and 2011, after this community had come into more intimate contact with the modernity-obsessed cultures of urban and semi-urban China. Laments fashion grief in a public setting by conceptualizing the dead and their relations with the living in vivid poetic language. Laments from the early 1990s described these relations as a circuit of suffering, in which children returned a debt of suffering they owed their parents after the latter’s deaths. By 2011, innovative lamenters had reorientated their understanding of suffering to be personal, internal, and intimate. The dead became more ‘modern’, allowing the living, defined largely by their relations with the dead, to participate in ‘modernized’ forms of authentic, sincere emotional expression.

When I asked Lichink’æmo<sup>1</sup> to help me understand a lament I had recorded in her home village in northern Yunnan in April 2011, she gladly agreed. She and her husband, both nearly 80, were living with their son in the county town, a long way from the mountain valley they called Júzò, where they had spent most of their lives. Even here in their son’s new three-storey house, devoted to a flourishing business of banqueting officials, this language could bring harm if performed in the wrong context. For many reasons – this potential for harm, those lubricated officials, curious grandchildren – we chose to walk to a park to transcribe and translate our recording. The old couple had a cheerful word for all who stopped to watch as we worked at a table under the trees – tattered youths, shop employees, ladies who swept the park. When asked they patiently explained what we were doing. The onlookers’ comments – awed, respectful, patronizing, suspicious, dismissive – revealed a deep gulf in sentiment and sensibility between this and anything with which they were familiar. The recorder emitted tuneful wailing in a language that none but my old friends could decipher. Our bystanders made it clear that to them this was emotion expressed in a backward and exotic mode – a remnant of the past from within mountains barely yet illuminated by the light of modernity. All who happened by belonged to the marginal populations of an undistinguished small town struggling unevenly towards prosperity. Yet all let us know that this tuneful weeping marked a deep divide separating them from this pair of old farmers.

The shame and embarrassment this kind of reaction provoked in young people was one reason lament was in decline, Lichink'æmo told me. Like most of rural Yunnan, Júzò had changed enormously in the last two decades. The valley contained some twenty villages and hamlets. Nearly all its residents were officially Yi, an umbrella designation created during the 1950s ethnic identification campaign for a variety of groups with widely varying social structures, scattered over mountainous areas of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi, with a current population of more than eight million.<sup>2</sup> People in Júzò recognized affiliation with some Yi groups (nearby Lipo and Lolopo) while denying it with others (Nuosu, also nearby). They called themselves Lòlop'ò and spoke as their first language a variety of the Central dialect of Yi, in the Loloish group of Tibeto-Burman languages, which they called Lòloŋo.<sup>3</sup> Their valley had never been isolated, but recently more people there had been placed in contact with the Chinese-speaking majority in more intense ways than ever before. Most young women and many young men had emigrated to cities to find work, and they brought back urban sensibilities on return visits. And, in an expensive effort to cure what officials saw as the incorrigible backwardness and poverty of the valley's residents, a third of households had been moved to new villages established in the lowlands, where the state helped build houses and promised the 'three connections' (*san tong*): roads, water, and electricity.<sup>4</sup>

All this contact with the outside had made Lòlop'ò far more self-conscious about lament, Lichink'æmo told me. It was like drunkenness, she said, and she quoted a passage of the lament we were working on:

1	à bò p'ò me nà	oh younger brother
	ni zò go zò yæ lò	your youngest son
	pæ pò t'à chì zò	swallows in the cliffs
	chí ga ŋa ne pe	stricken with grief
	só ji dō jì yì bo	he got so drunk
	rò wú lə tu lə	his grief rose up
	rò k'ò gə tu lə	his sorrow emerged

In Júzò, drunkenness was an appropriate way to express grief. The aftermath of a funeral was often impressively chaotic: men lay about in varied states of incapacity, some sharing the paths with the dogs who prowled about eating the funeral offerings. Drinking was a way that men contributed to the collective fashioning of grief – a task that women engaged through lament. But in town or the diaspora villages, where others were watching, Lichink'æmo said, public drunkenness was shameful: no one would sleep on the road after a funeral, grief or no grief. And young people often had a similar attitude about weeping in public. It was backward and embarrassing – not the kind of civilized behaviour Lòlop'ò from Júzò preferred to display to their Han neighbours.

Lament is tuneful poetic weeping in ritualized settings. Once common in many parts of the world, it has repeatedly been treated as incompatible with modernizing sensibilities that value forms of emotional expression marked by sincerity, authenticity, individuality, and privacy. Modernizers have often framed the emotion expressed in lament with a series of contrasts: it is scripted not authentic, ritualized not spontaneous, communal not individual, public not private (Wilce 2005). Scholarship on lament in Asia and Europe has shown how, in processes sometimes lasting for centuries, it has succumbed to churchly opposition (Bourke 1993; Tolbert 1994), Christian evangelizing (Feld 1995; Schieffelin 2002), Islamist rationalization (Wickett 2010; Wilce

1998), socialist transformation (Holst-Warhaft 2000; Lee 2002), and other institutionalized methods of introducing modernizing technologies for crafting internalized, authentic, spontaneous, and sincere selves.

In China, funeral weeping (*kusang*) and bridal laments (*kujia*) were once very widespread. Lament among rural people in Hong Kong was a staple of mid-twentieth-century English-language ethnography of China (Blake 1978; 1979; Johnson 1988; 2003; R.S. Watson 1996). More recently, McLaren (2008a; 2008b) has made detailed studies of texts of bridal and funeral weeping in Nanhui, near Shanghai, actively performed in the 1920s and recorded and transcribed in the early 1980s. In most of China, lament had succumbed to modernizing projects by the middle of the century. On the eve of the socialist revolution, Lipo and Lòlop'ò in the mountains of Dayao, Yongren and Yao'an counties, were among the few Yi peoples in Yunnan who still lamented at funerals (Li, Li & Yang 2007). Among Lòlop'ò, lament and other forms of poetic language were called *mèkòpe*, 'speaking with metaphor'. The valley's rich heritage of *mèkòpe* was deeply harmed by the vigilant suppression of death rituals in the 1960s and 1970s, but in the 1980s Júzò residents revived lament, along with rich and complex rituals for the dead.

Though lament had not disappeared, it was changing. Women in Júzò were adapting it to fit more closely with new expectations about what persons should be, what emotion is, and how affect should be expressed. They were using lament to make the dead into subjects better aligned with the modernizing sensibilities that they found all around them. Here, I outline this transformation by comparing laments recorded in two periods: the early 1990s, after the reform era was thoroughly underway, and 2011, after this little valley had come into far more intimate contact with the modernity-obsessed cultures of urban and semi-urban China. Attitudes about ritual were very different in these two periods. In the early 1990s, people were actively reviving forms of ritualized language and action that had been suppressed before the reform era. Their central concerns were authenticity and fidelity to the forms of the past, and lamenters strove to bring to their verse the richness and precision of poetic form thought to prevail before the socialist period. In 2011, people were less concerned with authenticity and more willing to transform ritual forms in response to the pressures of the present. The most respected lamenters were innovators: women who brought new images and metaphors into this very conservative art form while preserving the poetic power of the verse of the past.

I have two guiding questions. The first is: what do laments do? Most explanations of what laments do focus on either a therapeutic or a political function. Laments give voice to grief and console the mourning (Feld 1995; Gamliel 2007), or they give voice to grievance and excoriate oppressors (Briggs 1993; Loraux 1998; Raheja 1994; Tan 2003). Laments in Júzò are clearly both therapeutic and political (Mueggler 1998). But to think of tuneful poetic weeping primarily in terms of these functions is to focus analysis on a particular mourner and her internal feelings of grief or grievance. It is thus often to use the analysis to recuperate lament in favour of what is so often claimed as the key attribute of properly modern subjectivity: personal, internalized emotion expressed in a sincere and authentic fashion. Laments in Júzò did not, in the past, work by expressing internalized emotions specific to the mourner. Instead, they worked on fashioning proper forms of relations between the living and the dead. Laments revealed what might be called the affective logic of these relations; grief was a product, deliberately made, of that logic. In laments from the 1990s, this logic was an economy of suffering

(*shú*) that circulated between generations of parents and children. Laments from 2011 shifted emphasis to a logic of intimacy (*ηξ*) as the foundation for relations with the dead.

Because laments are about fashioning proper relations with the dead, my second guiding question is: what kind of beings are the dead? In the 1990s, laments helped craft beings who were the sum of the offerings given them, the sum of the social relations contained in those offerings, and thus the sum of all relations among kin and friends. As Strathern has noted, ‘Where objects take the form of persons, actions and activities necessarily reveal the person in turn as a microcosm of social relations’ (1988: 176; cited in Battaglia 1992: 8). The work of funerals produced a detailed image of all the relations in which the dead had been embedded in life, revealing them to contain the whole of ‘society’. By 2011, laments performed in a nearly identical context addressed a very different form of being: people with distinctive biographies, shaped of individualized memories and internalized emotions – in short, ‘modern’ dead people. And, because the subjectivity of the living was increasingly shaped by their relations with the dead, modern dead helped make the living modern too.

### Lives

Funeral rituals in Júzò gave the dead material form in corpses, coffins, effigies, tombstones, and empty spaces where coffins had lain. As Stasch puts it in a similar context, ‘[R]elations with the dead ... throw into relief how the copresence of living persons is not self-evident and seamless but is composed of concrete semiotic media of contact’ (2009: 210). The dead were not ontologically different from the living in this regard; they, too, were problematically both absent and present through media of contact that funeral techniques created for them (Muegler 2014). A vivid few verses, repeated in every lament I recorded, spoke to the role of corpses and their surrogates in funerals:

2	mâ mi he ma chà	cats give funerals to rats
	á nò zì ma ru	dogs give funerals to leopards
	p’ò ma ru do go	we give a funeral to you, father

It is not that cats kill rats as hunting dogs once killed leopards, laments explained. It is that cats play with the corpses of rats, as dogs worry and fight over the corpses of leopards, and as the living play with corpses at funerals. Funerals used corpses and their replacements not as the emptied bodies of departed loved ones but as material foci for exchanges of gifts and words through which people established relations with the dead while transforming their relations with each other.

All lament in Júzò focused on corpses and their replacements. Lamenters addressed corpses as they were being washed and dressed, wept leaning their heads against coffins, and spoke to the empty spaces where coffins once lay. Lament was performed before and during two collective rituals. The first, held a few days after a death, was called *kukædo*, ‘emerging from the courtyard’, a vigil over the corpse, encoffined in the courtyard’s centre, lasting from dusk until daylight, after which the coffin was taken out and buried. I will call this the night vigil. The second, held seven days (for a deceased woman) or nine (for a man) after the night vigil, was called *nihèpi*, ‘dawn-to-dusk offering’, a vigil over the space where the coffin had lain in the centre of the courtyard, lasting an afternoon, after which an ancestral effigy was fashioned. I will call this the day vigil.

Close female relatives of the deceased began performing *ch’rèkò* (‘orphans’ verse’) shortly after the death and continued while preparations were being made for the night

vigil. After the corpse was placed in the coffin at the courtyard's centre, more distant kin gathered about the coffin to help sing orphans' verse. And some of these stayed in courtyard and house for the seven or nine days between the night and day vigils to continue intermittently to sing orphans' verse. The other styles of lament, *shrtsinjə* ('weeping for the dead') and *əchəŋə* ('weeping songs'), were performed during a day vigil and at no other time. A paid male ritualist sang *shrtsinjə* a single time to formally open weeping at a day vigil; it was never performed in any other context. Immediately afterward, women gathered about the empty space where the coffin had lain and sang *əchəŋə* for the duration of the afternoon. Outside these contexts, sung even in brief fragments, all three styles of lament were powerful signs of and inducements to madness, particularly the madness of overwhelming grief. During the socialist period, they were often used for this purpose: to mark oneself or another as mad (*t'æ*) and not fully responsible for one's own actions (Mueggler 2001).

The central way Júzò residents distinguish styles of lament is through participant roles. *Chrèmekò* is sung in the voice of the 'orphan' – a daughter or granddaughter of the deceased – by the orphan herself and by others on her behalf. The orphan is said to be directly addressing the deceased, yet she makes her address largely with the words of others and often through the mouths of others. Goffman's (1979) analytical roles of *animator*, *author*, and *principal* better clarify this situation than does the idea of *speaker*.<sup>5</sup> A performer of orphans' verse animates the words of a complex, many-voiced author. These were taken as ancestral words, handed down from the distant past, yet performers also acknowledged that skilled lamenters often contributed much improvisational content. For Goffman, a *principal* was 'someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who has committed himself to what the words say' (1979: 17). In orphans' verse, the orphan, real or imagined, is the principal. In the ideal case, she laments beside other women singing on her behalf; in less ideal situations, she may be absent, dead, incapable of lament, or non-existent. As for those who receive lament, the primary, ratified addressee of orphans' verse is the deceased and her spouse, if the spouse is also dead. Yet orphans' verse, and other styles of lament, also pull in a variety of unaddressed bystanders: primarily the other women on the lamenters' bench, who are learning and judging a lamenter's verses, but also others, further away, who may be powerfully moved by the layered chorus of weeping voices.

At night vigils, lamenters competed with a chaotic soundscape: bellowed instructions of a master of ceremonies, the murmuring of participants preparing for their part in exchanges, the bleating of goats at the end of their lives. At the most expensive vigils, the screams of a murdered pig and the ear-killing wail of double-reed trumpets (*suona*) drowned out all other sounds. Recording orphans' verse in context was thus very difficult. Lòlancemo, in her mid-seventies, and widely admired as a lamenter, sat with my recorder on the lamenters' bench to record other women, with limited success. Eventually, she suggested that she perform in private the orphans' verse she had sung for her mother and taught to dozens of younger women. Since lamenting outside of the proper context was an incitement to madness, she would not weep; she would recite in an ordinary voice. The setting was my room, where I lived alone. Since I had known and loved none of her dead, Lòlancemo said, they would not harm me as they might her if she performed in her own home. Later, she sat with me day after day, sipping tea with red sugar and gazing up with clever eyes as she helped me transcribe and translate.

The point of orphans' verse, Lòlancemo said, was to tell the story of the dead person's life in detail. You offered this life to the dead in song, just as you offered her everything

else – clothing, rice, meat, music, tears. Her lament began by addressing her mother with verses about the poverty she suffered as a child and as a young married woman:

3	ts'í tí nì k'ò lò tæ t'ù ts'í nì sa k'ò lò tæ t'ù à vò à næ t'ù à næ ye zò t'ù ...	when you were eleven or twelve when you were twelve or thirteen when you were just a child when you were but a chick ...
	tsi ve chí vò pè tæ lu shú dù yi dæ ba mì dù yi dæ ba ...	you wanted to make a family you married out to a poor place married out to a hungry place ...
	mùu nǎ tu mì zò m mì lu n jò lò bǎ lò shú zò n shú lu n jò	as hungry bats flap not a day without hunger as a brindled bull calf bleats not a day without suffering

Of all the forms of parallelism these verses display, that which reappeared most often in laments was the semantic coupling of poverty or suffering (*shú*) with hunger (*mì*). This coupling appears twice here: the 'poor place' (*shú dù*) and 'hungry place' (*mì dù*) of the sixth and seventh verses and the 'not a day without hunger' (*m mì lu n jò*), 'not a day without suffering' (*n shú lu n jò*) of the final quatrain.

Poverty or suffering (*shú*) continued as the theme as the lament turned to the deceased's young married life:

4	jǐ lu jè n jò kà dù mǐ n jò lò dù jǎ n jò mæ jǐ dǎ gò va ne shú mæ jù p'a ká bù ne shú	you herded no livestock farmed no fields grazed no pastures so poor your trousers ended at the knees so poor your shirt backs were in tatters
	p'è dǎ né ho t'ù n shú cí n jè n shú yi n jè p'a pí lǎ zò pè	you raised daughters like stinging leaves so poor you had no straw so poor you had no buckets your aprons served as bags

Orphans' verse always began with the poverty of one's parents, then described a point where poverty turned to wealth. In the 1990s, that reversal of fortune was Liberation, coinciding with the dead person's children growing into adulthood.

5	à pá he chí pò zò ho zò vǎe tǔ né ho hé mo tǔ	in a little while your sons became men your daughters became women
	yí k'ù lè mo kǎe kǎe fǎng lǎ chí nǎe lò dù mǐ jǎe cí tǔ lǎ kà dù mǐ sho vǎe tǔ lǎ	as the bitter herb spread Liberation came your pastures expanded your fields widened
	jǐ lu jè ja ka kà lu tso ja ka wú mì k'ǎ pè zò kà dù mo pè wo	you gained every kind of livestock gained every kind of grain like rings on the buffalo's horns your fields increased

This temporal frame gives orphans' verse obvious affinities with 'speaking bitterness' (*suku*), the practice through which Chinese peasants learned to narrate their life

circumstances in scripted relation to the time of the nation. It is very likely that language from orphans' verse migrated into *suku* and vice versa between 1950 and 1958. But orphans' verse turned the narrative trajectory of speaking bitterness to its own ends. The fundamental narrative of all orphans' verse was the exchange of suffering/poverty (*shú*) between generations. The parents' suffering while raising their children in poverty was repaid in part by the children's suffering while caring for their parents in their later years. Liberation was worked into the narrative as a turn of fate that enabled children to care properly for their parents in old age.

Lòlancemo went on to describe her mother's illness, detailing the worried children's repeated calls on ritualists and diviners to search for a cause and cure. None of the cures they recommended had effect, and eventually,

6	wò jàè wò hà hà yì ga wò dé wò hò hò yì ga ŋo p'ò hò yì ga ŋo mo hò yì ga kæ lo fa n jò	I grasped her but she slipped away I hugged him but he wilted away my father has withered my mother has died there is no hope left
---	---	--

She described giving her father a cane, putting an official's cap on his head, tying a silken belt round his waist, clothing him in shirts of scarlet and sky blue, layer after layer until the buttons would not close, laying him on straw mats and felt pads, and covering him with cotton quilts and blankets.

Having sung of her mother's life and parents' deaths, Lòlancemo moved into the night vigil, describing the corpse crossing the threshold 'like a hungry cock', the white horse (the coffin) awaiting her, and the black goats giving up their lives for her. Funerals were occasions for hundreds of kin to affirm and transform their relations with each other through exchanges of meat, grain, and alcohol. These exchanges were organized as transfers among specified groups of kin: the sons of the deceased and their families and friends (*vedù*), married-out daughters and their families and friends (*zòmæ*), and the brothers of the deceased woman or deceased man's wife and their families and friends (*avə*). Goats and chickens (and sometimes a pig) were killed and cooked at the tail of the coffin; grain, boiled chickens, boiled goat meat, and sticky-rice loaves were exchanged at a winnowing basket at the coffin's head. Lòlancemo devoted just a few verses to this lengthy and tumultuous process. She repeated a well-worn metaphor to encompass the universe of kin relations: affines are balsam trees, fragrant but scattered; agnates are gourd-vine roots, winding but firmly rooted in place.

7	chì sǎè jo rú k'ò go mò nǎ pè t'è bǒ do go chì sǎè jo t'è bǒ do go á gǎ yì zò bǒ do go ǎ jì ŋǎè zò bǒ do go mo cè né je bǒ do go kà jǒ mo zò bǒ do go	call the gourd-vine roots back rely on the scattered balsam trees on the gourd-vine roots on kin from behind the house on neighbours from both sides on your mother's sisters and their daughters on all your mother's sons
	á nò zǐ ma ru chì mo k'ǎ p'è t'è do go chì ka k'è shǐ t'è do go ve né mà t'è do go wò p'ǎ du dàè t'è do go wò mo tso kǒ t'è do go n t'è cǐ n je n t'è yǐ n je	dogs give funerals to leopards offer a nanny with flat horns a billy with curled horns an old black pig a flapping cock a hen with dusty wings don't keep back even a straw don't keep back even water

After every exchange, groups of women from each kin group walked around the courtyard, each pouring out a cup of grain alcohol for every participant, man, woman or child. These exchanges were personal, even intimate: offerants looked recipients in the face, invited them to hold out their cups, and poured them out a fluid ounce or two before moving on. The hardiest participants managed to drink fast enough to keep pace; many, especially women and children, cached their take in jars to carry home:

8	né ho p'ə̀ jə̀ mó do go	this is the value of raising daughters
	zò ho nē jə̀ mó do go	this is the reason for nurturing sons
	kæ wú lò ho d̩ do go	a winnowing basket at the courtyard's head
	kæ mæ cæ ho d̩ do go	golden offerings at the courtyard's tail
	ji wú ə̀ lə̀ ji	fine throat-burning wine
	ji jò cæ ne ji	delicious gold-bearing wine
	mí hē mà lú ji	lowland sorghum wine
	mí ho kò k'à ji	mountain buckwheat wine
	à bò tē do go	offer it all to father

Lòlancemo's description of the funeral ended with the corpse riding its coffin/horse at dawn out of the courtyard to the graveyard, where its attendants covered it with mud. She concluded her lament with an appeal to fortune and fertility: that planting and herding go well, that the barn fill with black pigs and the corral with black goats, that the granary be stuffed with rice, that the sons and daughters be blessed with a sea of wealth.

What kind of being are the dead? It is true that living and dead persons constitute each other, as Hertz showed long ago (1960 [1907]), and it is easy enough to see the dead as absences around which exchanges among the living are reorganized and reaffirmed. Yet laments like this cast the dead in another light as well. Though lamenters insisted that orphans' verse should contain a detailed description of everything the dead person experienced in life, in order to offer it to him or her in death, laments actually described lives only briefly and formally, emptying the life of social particularity and anchoring it to a series of well-worn tropes. The substrate of all such narratives was *shú*, suffering or poverty, recognized as the impersonal but singular substance of every life: impersonal because suffering requires no particular personality, no memory, no self; singular because it is experienced uniquely by each being. Suffering extends parent-child relations beyond immediate, personal, and particular exchanges of care or nurture towards a more impersonal relation through time, in which parents suffer for their children when they are young and children return suffering to the parents after their deaths. As beings who consume their descendants' suffering, the dead are more than absent media for exchanges among the living. They are social beings who sense and experience. The ritual efficacy of laments depends upon their capacity to sharpen the senses of the dead so that they might take in all that is being offered to them. Other styles of lament thicken these connections between the exchange of the singular yet impersonal experience of suffering and the experiential being of the dead.

### Suffering

A day vigil, focused on the empty space where the coffin had lain seven or nine days before, was also the occasion for two kinds of lament: *shrtsiŋə* ('weeping for the dead'), followed closely by *ə̀chəŋə* ('weeping songs'). *Shrtsiŋə* formally marked the beginning of lament at this vigil. A ritualist, always male, was paid a jin of alcohol to perform a



song learned from his teacher, usually a man of a previous generation. The gender difference seemed to isolate the verses of *shrtsinjə* from the circuits of transmission along which laments sung by women travelled. The women who ordinarily worked with me on laments refused to help transcribe and translate *shrtsinjə*: they were afraid, their husbands said, as it was a matter for men. *Shrtsinjə* changed little between the 1990s and 2011, and though it was strikingly beautiful, there is no space to make it part of my story here.

After the conclusion of *shrtsinjə*, an orphan or her substitute began to ladle water from a bucket into a shallow hole dug where the head of the coffin had lain seven or nine days before. Women sat on two makeshift parallel benches on either side of this empty space to sing *əchəŋə*. All weeping songs began with addresses to the corpse that had once lain in the courtyard. The principal was the singer herself, expressing her sorrow in solidarity with the orphan, yet not in her voice or on her behalf. Here, too, there were bystanders, constructed in the verse itself, and not only among the living. Weeping songs were intended to serve as vehicles for offerings of tears, cloth, food, and alcohol to be passed to the focal dead of the day vigil and then on to additional dead, the singer’s own intimates, usually her parents or siblings, but often others as well. Here, invoking the intersubjective play of gesture and glance in which one person recognizes the hunger of another, so familiar to everyone in Júzò, a lamenter asks the focal dead of the vigil to pass on gifts to the singer’s own mother, dead for several years:

9	pī sū yí vǎè su mo pe sí k’ù mi ró tsò rǒ su à mo pe à mo pī jú gǎ lǎ mà su tsò mì t’ǎ hǒ dǎ nó gǎ lǎ ma su lè nǎ t’ǎ hǒ dǎ nó gǎ lǎ ma	sister’s mother-in-law is the one who apportions stretch out your wooden pan mother is the one who receives portion some out for mother don’t let her gaze hungrily at others’ food don’t leave her to look hungrily at others’ hands
---	--	--

After an initial address to the focal deceased, every weeping song performance moves through such transitional verses to address more intimate kin. Yet in some ways these intimate dead remain less than fully ratified participants in this exchange of gifts and song. They receive no offerings directly; their food and drink is channelled through the focal dead of the day vigil. And they often appear in verse as tentative presences, looking on at the feast from the ditch behind the house, where refuse is thrown, afraid to show themselves and receive food:

10	a mo dǎè jì wú lǎ ŋo sǎ li a gǎ lǎ tú hǎè nǐ dǎ sǎ li hǎ wò lǎ tú hǎè nǐ dǎ	mother, clutching your cane’s head I think of you stepping behind the house I think of you standing in the ditch there
----	---	--

The participant roles of the recipients of weeping songs are thus complex. The dead are subject to social hierarchies, the focal dead being the ratified recipients of the feast, the others relying on their generosity. To this may be added the varied roles of living listeners: weeping songs are always performed in concert with other lamenters also asking the focal deceased to pass gifts on to their own dead kin, creating a soundscape structured by many competing hierarchies of intimacy and distance for grief. In contrast, the roles involved in ‘speaking’ are relatively simple. Animator and principal are the same, as the singer voices her own grief rather than fashioning grief for others. Grief is individualized, each singer framing hers in relation to her own dead kin. Even authorship is less ancestral and more personal, as singers craft verses to fit the social circumstances of their own grief. It is perhaps for this reason that weeping songs have

lent themselves to transformation by laments crafting new forms of grief that are more individual, more personal, and more spontaneous than the participation frameworks of the other styles allow.

We found weeping song far easier to record *in situ* than orphans' verse, and we made many recordings. In 1993, Lichink'æmo, a skilled lamenter herself, sat next to Li Lanmei, whose laments she admired, to record her weeping song at a day vigil for her elder sister's mother-in-law. Later, Lichink'æmo helped me transcribe and translate the lament, consulting with Li Lanmei on verses that gave us trouble. This is my favourite weeping song from this period.

In the 1990s, the central theme of weeping songs was the labour required to produce gifts for the recent dead to pass on to others. Laments focused on two offerings: the hempen cloth in which corpses were swaddled; and rice, the most highly valued of grains. I will focus on the latter here. In describing both forms of labour, Li Lanmei's lament emphasized that the relations that produce grain are relations of mutual suffering which pair household members of the same gender but different generations: fathers with sons, mothers with daughters, mothers-in-law with daughters-in-law, and (in other excerpts) grandmothers with granddaughters.

11	p'ò jo zò jo shú mæ ɲæ mo jo ne jo shú mæ ɲæ ch'è kà su mo tì gà do go	father and son suffer together mother and daughter suffer together to make grain to give mother
	chì bù lí mí hò do go mò cæ k'a má tsè do go k'ò jì bæ wú tsè do go mì ká lò mò tsæ do go lò chè p'ú t'ú bù do go sí go lò lí vé do go lò jæ lò pu pò do go	bear manure to spread on the fields use a bamboo manure basket use a leather carrying strap lead down a plough ox bear down an iron-tongued ploughshare hand down the frame and yoke carry down a harness of braided vines
	né ch'è lí shě pò do go mo jo né jo pò do go chì jo mo jo pò do go	your orphaned daughter carries rice seeds mother and daughter carry together daughter-in-law and mother [in-law] carry together

The language of lament intertwines formal and semantic parallelism. Levin summed up Jakobson's influential view of parallelism as the foundation of the 'poetic function' simply: verbal art 'takes the form of placing naturally equivalent linguistic elements in equivalent positions or, put another way, of using equivalent positions as settings for equivalent phonic and/or semantic elements' (Levin 1962: 30). Though Jakobson focused his inimitable demonstrations of parallelism on morphological features like meter and rhyme, he also noticed that parallelism among such features is often made possible by semantic content, commenting, for instance, that 'rhyme necessarily involves a semantic relationship between rhyming units' (1987 [1960]: 81). Others have applied Jakobson's insights to forms of poetic speech where semantic equivalence receives far more emphasis than in Western-language poetics (Fox 2006). Semantic parallelism uses the meanings of words to poetic ends. It has been, in different eras, an exceptionally important feature of Chinese verse (Liu 1962; B. Watson 1971): for instance, Cheng (1982) investigated semantic parallelism in Song dynasty *jinti* verse, and Plaks (1990) sketched out the long tradition of Chinese literary theory concerning parallelism in verse.

In Lòlòŋo verse, semantic parallelism often takes the form of semantic couplets: verses that 'set pairs of word stems into identical morphological and syntactic

environments, expressing the inherent semantic connectedness of the stems’ (Mannheim 1998: 248). The first couplet of the excerpt above is an example:

- 11a      p’ò jo zò jo shú mà ñæ      father and son suffer together  
             mo jo né jo shú mà ñæ      mother and daughter suffer together

These verses are identical except for the paired-up (and pared-down) kinship terms *p’ò* and *zò*, *mo* and *né*. Each couple is placed into a single verse; the morphological and syntactic pairing between verses reinforces the coupling within each verse. In this way, dyadic relationships are doubled, parallel and cross: fathers with sons, but fathers also with mothers; mothers with daughters, but daughters also with sons; and a relationship is established between the two pairs to make a parallel-cross quartet. Drawing on Jakobson’s insight that ‘language is hierarchical at all levels of organization’, Mannheim (1998) shows that Quechua semantic couplets pair word stems that are *marked* and *unmarked* relative to each other, arranged so that the unmarked term usually precedes the marked. Greenberg (1988; 1990 [1980]; 2005 [1966]) applied markedness theory to kinship terms, attempting to identify universals that would apply with few exceptions across many languages. After comparing markedness in kin terms across many languages, he claimed that hierarchies held universally in two categories: genealogical closeness and generational distance. He summarized his evidence as follows: lineal relations are unmarked against collateral relations (e.g. sibling as against cousin); consanguinal is unmarked as against affinal (mother as against mother-in-law); male is unmarked as against female; older is unmarked as against younger; each ascending generation is unmarked in relation to the corresponding descending generation (grandmother as against granddaughter); and the closer a generation is to ego, the less marked it is. ‘Two basic factors are evidently at work: seniority and genealogical remoteness from ego’ (Greenberg 1990 [1980]: 319). The semantic couplets of weeping song most frequently hierarchize kin terms as Greenberg would predict, placing the unmarked before the marked term: in fragment 11a, father before son, and mother before daughter, but also the unmarked male pair before the marked female pair.

Greenberg argued that such hierarchies were residual in linguistic codes, reflecting cognitive hierarchies. In any case, they made natural sense to Lòlop’ò, who repeatedly ranked people by gender, generation, and lineal as against affinal status across many domains: seating patterns, sleeping places, food distribution. Indeed, poetic language might be understood as a way formally to diagram relations that are performed with more variation and less formality in other domains. Yet all such formalities are effective in verbal art only to the extent that they produce regularities that might then be broken or manipulated. Reversing ordinary hierarchies of kinship terms to create tension or emphasis was a deliberate feature of the art of lament. Take the final couplet of excerpt 11, where Li Lanmei makes a reversal in the familiar generational order, placing daughter-in-law before mother-in-law.

- 11b      mo jo né jo pò do go      mother and daughter carry together  
             chì jo mo jo pò do go      daughter-in-law and mother[-in-law] carry together

Li Lanmei was at the stage of life where she had a mother-in-law but was not yet a mother-in-law herself. Though she did not live with her husband’s ageing parents, she visited them frequently to bring them presents and cook for them. While she lamented as an orphaned daughter (*né chrì*), the terms in her lament that best described her own

roles in labour and life were mother (*mo*) and daughter-in-law (*chi*): in this couplet she perhaps found it natural to place both first, pairing them at the cost of the customary parallel of mother and mother-in-law.

In excerpt 11 (and in many other passages in this lament), hierarchically ordered semantic couplets containing kinship terms frame other verses that describe acts of labour. Each verse pairs a specific task, such as bearing, spreading, using, leading, handling, and carrying, with materials and implements: manure, baskets, straps, lead ropes, ploughshares, plough-frames, yokes, and harnesses. The insistent parallelism of weeping songs also couples tools (scoops and urns, winnows and sieves), products (seed and chaff) and body parts (hands and feet, left hands and right hands):

12	mò cæ k'à də wù mǎe ɲæ mò cæ jé le wù mǎe ɲæ sí cæ á gə rù mǎe ɲæ	weave a golden bamboo urn weave a golden bamboo scoop carve a yellow wooden ladle
	cí mo ɲə he t'e lí shf k'ə tò kò lí k'ə dæ kæ t'ə	in the pine-shingled barn scoop up the rice seeds scoop them into the courtyard
	mò cæ jo mo jù mǎe ɲæ mò cæ o je jù mǎe ɲæ chì jo mo jo o do go	prepare a golden bamboo winnow prepare a golden bamboo sieve daughter-in-law and mother winnow together
	mo jo ne jo o do go ji va ji va va do go te ko te ko o do go	mother and daughter winnow together shake and shake to sieve toss and toss to winnow

To grieve with weeping songs was to decompose in tuneful poetry the offerings of hemp and rice passed to the dead. Grieving broke these gifts down into the social relations of labour that had produced them. It disassembled those relations of labour into relations between body parts and implements, which were further decomposed into materials (bamboo, leather, wood, and stone). Finally, it dissolved these relations among body parts and the tools of labour into the singular but impersonal substance of suffering (*shú*), out of which all relations of labour were fashioned.

The most evocative form of labour in cultivating rice was uprooting the seedlings from their warm, crowded, fertile beds and transplanting them into the mud of wider paddies. Only women transplanted, stooping and backing up in rows, while men ploughed, harrowed, fertilized, and irrigated. It was labour that could only be accomplished in groups, and in each of the successive transformations of economic organization in the twentieth century women found ways to work communally, groups of related women transplanting together on others' fields for the entire season in exchange for others' labour on their own. Li Lanmei used transplanting as an occasion to express regret that she did not care better for her mother when she was alive:

13	lò né bìu tæ læ tæ nà lí ho chí p'ò jo zò jo kà do go mo jo ne jo kà do go mì tæ ní tí kò lo chí su mo tì gè do go ...	as worms burrow by the riverside transplant in the fourth month father and son farm together mother and daughter farm together back up planting seedlings to offer to mother ...
----	---	---

á gá sàè jó tsi	pears growing behind the house
su mi chr̃ su mo jó n lò l̃u bo	we orphans didn't feed mother enough
	ripe pears
ne chr̃ su mo jó n lò l̃u bo	this orphaned daughter didn't feed
	mother enough
zò chr̃ su mo jó n lò l̃u bo	this orphaned son didn't feed mother
	enough
n chí nò n go	we cannot rest without sadness
n jò jò n go	we cannot live without regret
ro lè lí p'æ shú do go	the right hand painfully ties the seedlings
væ lè lí tsa shú do go	the left hand painfully gathers the bundles
lí p'æ lí wo lè	once the seedlings are tied
p̃ĩ jo lí jo bù	grandmothers and granddaughters bear
	together
mo jo ne jo bù	mothers and daughters bear together
mo jo ch̃i jo bù	mothers[in-law] and daughters-
	in-law bear together

Weeping songs of the 1990s used strings of semantic couplets to bind closely together the domains of kinship, affect, and labour. Lamenters sometimes used these pairings to make correlations between particular kin and particular acts or feelings. Here, Li Lanmei pairs the orphaned daughter with sadness and the orphaned son (perhaps, in the singer's view, more to blame) with regret. And she correlates acts of the right hand, associated in both verbal and spatial organization with hierarchically superior kin, with grandmothers as against granddaughters, mothers as against daughters, and mothers-in-law as against daughters-in-law, but also with the orphaned daughter as against the orphaned son.

Mannheim (1998) suggests that the sequential ordering of pairs of words in semantic couplets reflects their cognitive hierarchy in a situation where the lexicon is characterized by a variety of different organizing principles in different domains. The domain of kinship terms, for instance, might ordinarily be organized along quite different principles than the lexical domain of affect or the domain of technical talk about labour – definitely true in daily life among Lòlop'ò. Weeping songs gained expressive power in the art of crossing these domains with similar hierarchical principles in the service of establishing a tightly organized context for the production of grief. This was the circuit of suffering: parents gave the gift of suffering to children when they were young through acts of nurture and care; children returned suffering to their parents in old age. The latter was an impossible task; the debt could be repaid only after the parent's death, through the suffering of labour transformed into the substance of offerings to dead. The pain (*shú*) of labouring together was the sole antidote to inevitable regret. Grief (*wúlə*, *kògə*, but also *shú*) was another name for the portion of this circuit in which suffering was returned to the dead. With weeping songs, lamenters fashioned grief in the public setting of the day vigil by using the resources of verbal art to make this economy as vivid as possible.

### Intimacy

Day vigils changed little in form between 1993 and 2011. Yet lament was changing quickly. The fine lamenters of Lòlancemo's and Li Lanmei's generation had all departed. Of those who remained in Júzò, Lichink'æmo said, perhaps her cousin Luo Meixiu was the most accomplished. She had learned lament from Lòlancemo, who had

also been one of Li Lanmei's teachers, but she had had much to weep about lately, and her laments had become more refined and creative. Lichink'æmo took me to her cousin's house on the morning a day vigil was to be held for a widow named Luo Guofu. Luo Meixiu was in the courtyard chopping feed for her water buffalo, while her teenage son, visiting home from the county town, sat on the porch sewing up a shoe. 'You can't just cry in your house or while you are working', she said cheerfully. 'A funeral is really the only time you can cry without harm. Of course I'll go and cry. I lost my own mother two years ago, and I still feel very bad. I still have to cry. To you this is a backward custom, but to us, well ...'. She was happy enough to let us record her lament if we could be discreet.

On the lamenters' bench, Luo Meixiu began by addressing the focal dead of the funeral, her nephew's wife. After death, she sang, the soul hid in the forest, numb with anger like a mouth numbed by Sichuan pepper. Her children found her there and bore her back in the form of a pine sapling to carve into an ancestral effigy. Her son brought her water to drink, as the water in the underworld is foul with leaves; her daughter brought rice, as rice in the underworld is clotted with worms. 'Actually', Lichink'æmo said as she helped me transcribe, 'no one cared about that pitiful old woman. She died with no one to tend her'. Her first husband had died long ago; her second husband divorced her; her sons abandoned her; her daughter moved away. Luo Meixiu would have attended her nephew's wife's funeral in any case, Lichink'æmo went on, but she had little reason to grieve for the old widow. 'Take a mouthful of rice', Luo Meixiu sang, 'and pass a mouthful on to mother'. She established claims on the dead widow on behalf of her mother by repeatedly invoking an intimacy of place: the deceased and her mother had been neighbours in life, so they must be friends in the underworld:

14	cé p'ò duí tsì zò jò dù yì duí dā lǚ ɲǎè bò tsì rǒ ló mo ló dù chù ju dā lǚ ɲǎè tsì sǐ tsì vǎ kǎ kà dù tǐ vá dā lǚ ɲǎè  hè yì mó mi yì ma lè tú jr ɲǎè a lù su mo lò	as Han write paired phrases your houses were paired on the same path as cicadas chant you herded along the same roads hemp seeds and hollow stalks you planted the same ground  you have dropped into the underworld you must see each other there oh nephew's wife
----	---	--

It was not only her mother whom Luo Meixiu came to mourn, however. She mentioned her little brother, her father-in-law, her sister's son, and her sister's husband, all of whom died within two or three years. With each, she evoked a scene of intimacy with the dead widow: here she mourns her father-in-law.

15	a lù su mo tè ɲǎè mi jò t'ù lǚ ɲǎè mò nǒ t'ǐ pè ɲǎè chì sǎè t'ǐ ju ɲǎè t'ǎ nǒ chì bó ɲǎè ...  a lù su mo ni lò ni ne lu t'ǎ gò lǒ ne lu pe gò lǒ	think nephew's wife of when you were in our world seedlings around one tiled house vines around one gourd a many-branched pine tree ...  oh nephew's wife give some to him give him my speech
----	--	---

It was as though the circuits along which gifts and grief might flow among different dead were opened up by friendship and proximity in life, rather than formal images of kinship relations, as in the past. Lichink'æmo commented:

Each of these deaths brought her further hardship, and perhaps that is what she is weeping about here. She had to kill a goat for each funeral, and goats are expensive now – 500 to 600 *yuan*. And because they were such close relatives, she had to bring a big one, plus alcohol, candy, and cigarettes. When her father-in-law died, the whole burden fell on her, because her husband is a drunk and his elder brother is an idiot.

Only twice in Luo Meixiu’s lengthy lament did she employ the kin-ordering semantic couplets that were a staple of the *ǎchǎng* of the 1990s. Both instances simply paired father and mother in coupled verses; gone were the deftly ordered cross-parallel quartets that correlated kinship terms with acts of labour and expressions of affect. Luo Meixiu made repeated invocations of her nephew’s wife, her own mother, and the other intimate dead her lament addresses, as well as referring to herself repeatedly as ‘your orphaned daughter’. These addresses are consistent in style with those used in the laments of the 1990s. But nearly every other kinship term was used to refer to a specific relative, living or dead, in a specific context: I count forty-nine instances in this lament, referring to twenty-nine separate people in all. One example is the fragment about Luo Meixiu’s dead younger brother and his drunken youngest son that I quoted in the introduction. Here is another, about the children of the focal deceased:

16	ni zò ho zò vǎè lǎ	your first son
	rǎ vú lǎ ga be	his heart aches
	rǎ kǎ gǎ ga be	he is truly in pain
	zò ho zò ba lǎ	your third son
	wò t’ǎ be n kǎ to dù	his hands no longer have strength
	a lù su mo lǎ	oh nephew’s wife
	ni né go né tí lǎ	your only daughter
	fu li cé mì yì	married out to Han lands

Apart from direct addresses to the dead, such personalized references to kin were absent in laments from the 1990s. In those laments, kinship was public and categorial, a matter of ordering varied participants into stereotyped hierarchies, rather than private and personalized, drawing directly on the singer’s knowledge of specific persons.

To our surprise, after establishing relations between her nephew’s wife and her more intimate dead, Luo Meixiu did not launch into descriptions of mutual suffering in labour. Instead, she sang a detailed biography of her mother’s life. Though the context of the day vigil made her lament *ǎchǎng*, weeping song, it was thematically more like *chǎmèkò*, orphans’ verse, than *ǎchǎng* from two decades previous. Yet the orphans’ verse of the 1990s narrated the shape of a life – it could be any life – moving from deep poverty in youth to expanding pastures and increasing herds in middle age, and then to the tragedies of illness and death. In contrast, Luo Meixiu presented specific scenes from her mother’s life, beginning with her love of ear-rings as a girl:

17	à mo ts’i tí nì k’ò lo	mother at eleven or twelve
	ts’i ní sa k’ò lo	at twelve or thirteen
	nó p’u nó nǎ zò	white and black millet
	p’u nó nǎ dǎ lu pǎ nǎè	they say you loved ear-rings
	p’u nó nǎ nǎ lu pǎ nǎè	you could afford no ear-rings they say
	ts’i tí nì k’ò lo	at eleven or twelve years
	wò mo ló tsǎ lu pǎ nǎè	they say you herded goats on the mountain
	lò né kǎ tsǎ lu pǎ nǎè	you laboured by the riverside they say
	ni dǎ ne lu t’ǎ dǎ lu nǎè	you used to say this
	ni p’ò jí nè lu nǎ pǎ sǎ	they say your father parted early
	ni p’ò jí cǎ lu nǎ pǎ sǎ	your father died young they say
	ni p’ò nó nǎ tǎ nǎ pǎ nǎè	they say you longed for a father

And she repeatedly used metaphors for intimacy in speaking of her mother – not merely the spatial intimacy of good neighbours, as when singing of relations among the dead, but affective intimacy as well:

18	à mo ηḗ mi jò t'ù le ηḗ nì mo lò sḗ ye fu à lə zò à lə t'ə lè tə ηḗ dḓ vḗ n jò lè à mo la né bù nḗ nḗ	mother when you were in our world we two, mother and daughter held the eggs tightly you spoke clearly you never scolded me mother we were like paired water-bugs
----	--	---

The orphans' verse of the past often made reference to Liberation as the point where fortunes turned, fields expanded, and granaries filled. This was not appropriate for Luo Meixiu's mother's generation. Instead, Luo Meixiu used the phrase 'government policies improved', referring to the rural tax liberalization of the early 2000s. Yet this was not the paean to stuffed granaries and fertile herds of earlier orphans' verse. Fire in the first verse of this fragment is a common metaphor for pain.

19	pḗ pò à tó mà ηo mà n jò sḗ ηo jò lḗ n go p'á lḗ n go	fire on the mountainside I too have no luck I have no skills no learning at all
	æ mæ jen ts'ə tsḗ ka lḗ ch'ì lu à mo jḓ m mæ tsḗ lu à mo cí m mæ	now government policies have improved not in time to give mother good food not in time to give mother clothing ...
	nì shú bù pḗ mḗ ts'ì yi ga nì shú vé tà kḗ t'ə tḗ lḓ p'a pí p'a dḓ ch'ì p'a dḓ lè té ch'ì ch'ì su rḓ r'ì tsò	the belt of your suffering has broken the strap of your back basket has parted your shirt-front is wet your shirt-tail is wet we are all orphans

Perhaps Luo Meixiu's most moving verses were a direct, detailed portrait of her mother in her last days:

20	à mo bó nḓ cæ ne k'ü t'ì nà k'ò lò bḗ bḗ le bá le n do ga ne pḗ t'ì le t'ì le n do ga ne pḗ nì dḓ ne lu t'ə à mo lè ts'ì wú gḓ ηo ch'ì ts'ì k'á dḓ ηo	mother you lay like a coiled boa you sat like a horned owl you lay but could not sleep you sat but could not sit still this is what you said mother you used your elbow as a pillow you drew your knees up in the blanket
	à mo ηḗ mi jò t'ù lḓ né ch'ì né te lò sḗ k'ò à mo lə dḓ t'ù ch'ì no wú n tse ηa pḗ wú chà ne mó dḓ cí chà ne mó dḓ	mother, when you were in our world when this daughter returned to visit mother you said, 'my feet hurt up to my head' 'massage my head' 'massage my feet'

Laments from the early 1990s established the dead as locations in a temporal economy of suffering. Reorientating this economy, Luo Meixiu's lament presents suffering not as mutually fashioned by cross-generational pairs and quartets of kin, but as personal and internal, experienced by the singer as a lonely sorrow, voiced to uncaring mountains and rivers:



21	à mo ɲo shú dǒ tǎ kǒ n sa ɲo shú dǒ wò mo tǎ wò mo tǎ bu lù sɛ lù wò mo mù he pǐ yì ga	mother my suffering is too much to speak of I speak my suffering to the mountains the wind in the mountain pines replies the mountain winds blow my words away
	shú dǒ lǒ né tǎ lǒ né yì vǎ pǐ yì ga lǒ né yì vǎ lǒ lǒ lǒ né yì vǎ sa sa	I tell my suffering to the river the river carries my words away the river only babbles the river only gurgles

Orphans’ verse had provided a formal narrative with which to understand any life as a movement from hardship in youth to ease in old age, and to understand grief as the effort to stem regret by repaying the dead with suffering. Luo Meixiu’s lament turned this formula inside out, speaking of specific scenes from her mother’s life and death, claiming that the turn to prosperity had come too late to ease her mother’s suffering, and displaying her own grief as flowing from lost intimacy with her mother. Intimacy has replaced suffering as the central affective logic in this lament. Here, the dead are composed of specific memories, explicitly voiced. Luo Meixiu’s mother is owed not the suffering of communally labouring kin but the sincere heartbreak (*wúlǎ*) of a daughter personally attempting to come to terms with her loss – a grief that often breaks the frame of its deeply conventional medium with a searching, questioning voice:

22	tǎ da lí vǒ zǒ kǎe lu pɛ kǎe n sa gǎ ... ɲo me à mo ma n kǒ à mo nǐ me ɲo tǎ ma	siskins in the pine trees I know nothing else to say ... my eyes cannot see mother mother can your eyes see me?
----	--	--

In short, the dead addressed by Luo Meixiu’s lament are more recognizable to us than those of earlier laments. They are familiar because they have attributes we habitually identify as ‘modern’. Their lives are described not as transformations of conventional assemblages of social relations, but as the lives of individualized beings recalled in specific memories. And the living too, defined in lament through their relations with the dead, appear to have the attributes required of modern subjects. Their grief is individual rather than communal; it is internal and private rather than external and public; it springs into being spontaneously, rather than being deliberately fashioned. Though their sorrow is brought to a ritualized public setting, it is expressed there, rather than produced there through the collective labour of kin. As a result, this grief carries the trappings of sincerity and authenticity, the gold standard for ‘modern’ emotion – and the standard against which lament in so many places has been judged, often in humiliating fashion, as belonging to backward or primitive forms of emotional life (Robbins 2005; Sahlin 1992).

## Conclusions

Across China, rural people, particularly the poor, and most particularly minorities, live under immense *time pressure*. In myriad ways, the rural poor are repeatedly told that they exist in another time, a ‘backward’ (*luohou*) time, and they must strive without cease to come forward to the present. The message comes from every direction: from state agencies, from Han neighbours, from urban elites, from returning migrants. In Júzò, this message, though taking widely differing forms over the last half-century, has been incessant. Like many in rural China, the women who are refashioning lament

there are groping towards new ways of being persons in a context where their once insular home has exploded outwards, subjecting them to the corrosive gazes of many different others, all avid for some version of modernity. From their parents and grandparents they inherited effective ritual technologies for constructing subjectivity, centred on creating proper relations with the dead. They rescued many of these technologies, of which lament was among the most flexible and powerful, from sixty years of consistent denigration and inconsistent suppression or prohibition.

The ways women grieved in the early reform era show evidence of being deeply influenced by the conditions of the socialist period: by the mid-century euphoria, quickly deflated, about the possibilities created by Liberation; by the forms of collective labour in which ‘mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, grandmothers and granddaughters’ worked side by side; by ideologies that insisted that the only legitimate source of wealth was labour; and by the household registration (*hukou*) system that kept this community’s members home and in mutual contact, allowing them to develop the sense that their entire social world might assemble in a single courtyard. In this sense, lament and the dead were already modern, though in a very different mode. The transformations I have indicated here are merely another in a series of responses to successive efforts to modernize the people of this valley.

In many ways, this is a familiar story: a great deal of scholarship has shown that the production of sincere, authentic, internal affect is a common effect of ‘modernizing’ aspirations and projects in China and beyond (some fine recent examples are Keane 2007; Lempert 2012; Moore 2011; Rofel 2007). Is it remarkable that such globally familiar forms of subjectivity might emerge through efforts to fashion proper relations with the dead? I suggest that it is not. In his classic *longue durée* history of death in the West, Ariès (1982) proposed that the shape of individuated personhood usually identified as the core of modern forms of subjectivity began to take shape in elite experiences with death in the eleventh century. Rich, educated, and powerful people, seeking to assert their wills in new ways, began to replace past forms of relations between self and other with a sense of individual identity and personal destiny. The notion of the immortal soul became a foundation for the experience of centring one’s person on individual identity: one imagined one’s own immortal soul chiefly by elaborating in collective, ritualized settings the shapes of the souls of dead others. Ariès writes, ‘The individual insisted on assembling the molecules of his own biography, but only the spark of death enabled him to fuse them into a whole’ (1982: 605). I read Ariès’s unique insight here to be that what we take as ‘modern’ forms of subjectivity have depended from the start on ritualized relations with the dead. Women in Júzò find themselves under pressure to craft forms of personhood that are indirect descendants, along a long and tortured path, of the forms that Ariès explored. It is hardly surprising that they should find a resource for this in tuneful, poetic conversations with their dead.

#### NOTES

The students and faculty of the University of Michigan Linguistic Anthropology Laboratory worked through an earlier version of this article: Georgia Ennis, Judith Irvine, Michael Lempert, and Bruce Mannheim offered invaluable aid. I am also grateful to David Porter and three anonymous reviewers for *JRAI* for their thoughtful comments.

<sup>1</sup> All names of consultants in this article are pseudonyms. Adult Lólöp’ò use teknonyms — the birth-name of their first child, with the suffix *p’ò*, ‘father’, or *mo*, ‘mother’ — except on documents or with

Chinese-speaking outsiders, when formal Chinese names are used. I choose between teknonyms or Chinese names to signal my degree of familiarity with different consultants.

<sup>2</sup> For ethnography on Yi groups, see Harrell (2000; 2001a; 2001b).

<sup>3</sup> On Loloish languages and their classification, see Bradley (1979) and Van Driem (2011).

<sup>4</sup> I distinguish between words in Chinese and Loloish by underlining the former and italicizing the latter.

<sup>5</sup> For an illuminating discussion on Goffman's legacy in relation to participant roles, see Irvine (1996) and Levinson (1988).

## REFERENCES

- ARIÈS, P. 1982. *The hour of our death* (trans. H. Weaver). New York: Vintage.
- BATTAGLIA, D. 1992. The body in the gift: memory and forgetting in Sabarl mortuary exchange. *American Ethnologist* 19, 3-18.
- BLAKE, F. 1978. Death and abuse in marriage laments: the curse of Chinese brides. *Asian Folklore Studies* 37, 13-33.
- 1979. The feelings of Chinese daughters towards their mothers as revealed in marriage laments. *Folklore* 90, 91-7.
- BOURKE, A. 1993. More in anger than in sorrow: Irish women's lament poetry. In *Feminist messages: coding in women's folk culture* (ed.) J.N. Radner, 160-82. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- BRADLEY, D. 1979. *Proto-Loloish*. London: Curzon.
- BRIGGS, C. 1993. Personal sentiments and polyphonic voices in Warao women's ritual wailing: music and poetics in a critical and collective discourse. *American Anthropologist* 95, 929-57.
- CHENG, F. 1982. *Chinese poetic writing* (trans. D.A. Riggs & J.P. Seaton). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- FELD, S. 1995. Wept thoughts: the voicing of Kaluli memories. In *South Pacific oral traditions* (eds) R. Finnegan & M. Orbell, 85-108. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- FOX, J. (ed.) 2006. *To speak in pairs: essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*. Cambridge: University Press.
- GAMLIEL, T. 2007. 'Wailing lore' in a Yemenite-Israeli community: bereavement, expertise, and therapy. *Social Science & Medicine* 65, 1501-11.
- GOFFMAN, E. 1979. Footing. *Semiotica* 25, 1-30.
- GREENBERG, J.H. 1988. The present state of markedness theory: a reply to Scheffler. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 43, 367-74.
- 1990 [1980]. Universals of kinship terminology: their nature and the problem of their explanation. In *On language: selected writings of Joseph H. Greenberg*, 310-27. Stanford: University Press.
- 2005 [1966]. *Language universals: with special reference to feature hierarchies*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- HARRELL, S. (ed.) 2000. *Field studies of ethnic identity: Yi communities of Southwest China*. Nanning: Guangxi People's Press.
- 2001a. *Ways of being ethnic in Southwest China*. Seattle: University of California Press.
- (ed.) 2001b. *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HERTZ, R. 1960 [1907]. A contribution to the study of the collective representation of death. In *Death and the right hand* (trans. R. Needham & C. Needham), 29-88. London: Cohen & West.
- HOLST-WARHAFT, G. 2000. *The cue for passion: grief and its political uses*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- IRVINE, J.T. 1996. Shadow conversations: the indeterminacy of participant roles. In *Natural histories of discourse* (eds) M. Silverstein & G. Urban, 131-59. Chicago: University Press.
- JAKOBSON, R. 1987 [1960]. Linguistics and poetics. In *Language in literature* (eds) K. Pomorska & S. Rudy, 62-94. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- JOHNSON, E.L. 1988. Grieving for the dead, grieving for the living: funeral laments of Hakka women. In *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (eds) J.L. Watson & E.S. Rawski, 135-63. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2003. Singing of separation, lamenting loss: Hakka women's expressions of separation and reunion. In *Living with separation in China: anthropological accounts* (ed.) C. Stafford, 27-52. London: Routledge Curzon.
- KEANE, W. 2007. *Christian moderns: freedom and fetish in the missionary encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- LEE, N.C. 2002. *The singers of lamentations: cities under siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- LEMPERT, M. 2012. *Discipline and debate: the language of violence in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LEVIN, S. 1962. *Linguistic structures in poetry*. The Hague: Mouton.
- LEVINSON, S.C. 1988. Putting linguistics on a proper footing: explorations in Goffman's concepts of participation. In *Erving Goffman: an interdisciplinary appreciation* (eds) P. Drew & A. Wootton, 161-227. Cambridge: Polity.
- LI, Y., Z. LI & F. YANG (eds) 2007. 'Meige' de wenhua xue jiedu [Deciphering the culture of 'meige' (*mèkèpè*)]. Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe.
- LIU, J. 1962. *The art of Chinese poetry*. Chicago: University Press.
- LORAUX, N. 1998. *Mothers in mourning: with the essay 'Of amnesty and its opposite'* (trans. C. Pache). Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- MCLAREN, A.E. 2008a. *Performing grief: bridal laments in rural China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2008b. Making heaven weep: funeral laments in Chinese culture. *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 39-40, 369-84.
- MANNHEIM, B. 1998. 'Time, not the syllables, must be counted': Quechua parallelism, word meaning, and cultural analysis. *Michigan Discussions in Anthropology* 13, 238-81.
- MOORE, H.L. 2011. *Still life: hopes, desires and satisfactions*. Cambridge: Polity.
- MUEGLER, E. 1998. The poetics of grief and the price of hemp in Southwest China. *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 979-1008.
- 2001. *The age of wild ghosts: memory, violence and place in Southwest China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 2014. Corpse, stone, door, text. *Journal of Asian Studies* 73, 17-41.
- PLAKS, A.H. 1990. Where the lines meet: parallelism in Chinese and Western literatures. *Poetics Today* 11, 523-46.
- RAHEJA, G.G. 1994. Introduction: gender representation and the problem of language and resistance in India. In *Listen to the heron's words: reimagining gender and kinship in North India* (eds) G.G. Raheja & A.G. Gold, 1-29. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ROBBINS, J. 2005. Introduction: humiliation and transformation: Marshall Sahlins and the study of cultural change in Melanesia. In *The making of global and local modernities in Melanesia* (eds) J. Robbins & H. Wardlow, 3-22. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- ROFEL, L. 2007. *Desiring China: experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- SAHLINS, M. 1992. The economics of develop-man in the Pacific. *Res* 21, 13-25.
- SCHIEFFELIN, B. 2002. Marking time: the dichotomizing discourse of multiple temporalities. *Current Anthropology* 43(supplement), S5-17.
- STASCH, R. 2009. *Society of others: kinship and mourning in a West Papuan place*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- STRATHERN, M. 1988. *The gender of the gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- TAN, D. 2003. *Lun Gang Ao Tai minjian wenxue* [On the folk literature of Hongkong, Aomen and Taiwan]. Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe.
- TOLBERT, E. 1994. The voice of lament: female vocality and performative efficacy in the Finnish-Karelian *itkuvirsi*. In *Embodied voices: representing female vocality in Western culture* (eds) L.C. Dunn & N.A. Jones, 179-94. Cambridge: University Press.
- VAN DRIEM, G. 2011. Tibeto-Burman subgroups and historical grammar. *Himalayan Linguistics Journal* 10, 31-9.
- WATSON, B. 1971. *Chinese lyricism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- WATSON, R.S. 1996. Chinese bridal laments: the claims of a dutiful daughter. In *Harmony and counterpoint: ritual music in the Chinese context* (eds) B. Yung, E.S. Rawski & R.S. Watson, 107-29. Stanford: University Press.
- WICKETT, E. 2010. *For the living and the dead: the funerary laments of Upper Egypt, ancient and modern*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- WILCE, J.M. 1998. *Eloquence in trouble: the poetics and politics of complaint in rural Bangladesh*. Oxford: University Press.
- 2005. Traditional laments and postmodern regrets: the circulation of discourse in metacultural context. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, 60-71.

## « Les chats font des funérailles aux rats » : quand la modernité des morts passe par les lamentations

### Résumé

Le présent article compare les lamentations funéraires dans une communauté de langue tibéto-birmane du Yunnan, en Chine, sur deux périodes : début des années 1990, alors que le rituel était en pleine renaissance, et 2011, suite à des contacts plus étroits de cette communauté avec la Chine urbaine et semi-urbaine, obsédée par la modernité. Les lamentations donnent forme au chagrin sur la scène publique en conceptualisant les défunts et leurs relations avec les vivants dans un langage poétique fleuri. Les lamentations du début des années 1990 décrivaient ces relations comme un cycle de souffrance dans lequel les enfants remboursaient, après la mort de leurs parents, une dette de souffrance qu'ils avaient envers ceux-ci. En 2011, des pleureuses innovantes ont réorienté leur interprétation de la souffrance vers une émotion personnelle, intérieure et intime, rendant ainsi les morts plus « modernes » tout en permettant aux vivants, définis largement par leurs relations avec les défunts, de participer à des formes « modernisées » d'expression émotionnelle, sincère et authentique.

Erik Mueggler is the author of *The paper road: archive and experience in the botanical exploration of West China and Tibet* (University of California Press, 2011) and *The age of wild ghosts: memory, violence and place in Southwest China* (University of California Press, 2001). He is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

*Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, 101 West Hall, 1085 South University Avenue, Ann Arbor MI 48109, USA. mueggler@umich.edu*