HK'AWv K'Ov VE:
A LAHU NYI (RED LAHU) RITE OF SPIRIT EXORCISM

by Anthony R. Walker
(Singapore)

1. Introduction

This article describes a rite of spirit exorcism once practised by Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) communities among whom I lived in north Thailand from 1966–70. Particularly important here are the texts of three versions (one in the Shan language, two in Lahu) of the exorcistic prayer which was used, presented both in their original language and in English translation. The rite, during which a spirit specialist endeavoured to expel all sickness and sickness-causing spirits from the village community, was abandoned about 20 years ago by the Lahu villagers I studied. Informants gave several reasons why this was so, and these I shall discuss during the course of the paper. I do not know whether other Lahu Nyi communities still perform the rite described here. In any case, it seems to me important that I publish this account and the accompanying texts lest the information be lost forever.

To place the rite in its proper social and ideological context I shall begin with a short identification of the Lahu people, among whom the Lahu Nyi are an important subdivision, and note especially some of their views about the supernatural world. I shall then describe the exorcistic rite and present the prayer associated with it, in the three versions given to me by two well-known spirit specialists of my study community. Finally, I will comment briefly on the ceremony and compare it with the record of an earlier ethnographer who worked among a different Lahu division in another country.

The format of this paper follows closely that of others I have produced on the ritual idiom of the Lahu Nyi people I studied. Interested readers are invited to view the present contribution (albeit the first to appear in this journal) within the context of my previously-published textual work.

2. The Lahu People

There are some 300,000 or more people living in four different countries who identify themselves as "Lahu" and who speak one or another dialect of the same Tibeto-Burman language. They live in hundreds of small village communities in the mountainous borderlands of southern China, eastern Burma, northern Laos and northern Thailand (see map p. 248). Accurate population counts for Lahu in each of these states are unavailable. By far the majority, anywhere from 150,000 to 200,000 I should guess, live in China's southwestern province of Yunnan. Here, in 1953, the Chinese authorities set up the "Lan-ts'ang Lahu People's Autonomous Area" (redesignated "Autonomous County" or hsien the following year). At that time more than 46% of the Lan-ts'ang population was Lahu. South of the Chinese border, in Burma's Shan State, there may be as many as 80,000 Lahu, while another few thousand live in Lao-tian territory, in the far northwestern corner of that country. Finally, there are now over 30,000 Lahu in Thailand, their most southerly point of extension.

The name "Lahu" which these people give to themselves is of uncertain meaning. I have never myself come across a Lahu who could explain it for me. In a 1957 Chinese
newspaper article on these people\textsuperscript{10}, there appears what is probably no more than a fanciful folk etymology, but for want of anything better, it may be worth repeating. The name has to do with hunting, the article tells us. "In old times", so it goes, "when the different Lahu tribes [perhaps village communities] used to hunt together, whenever they caught a tiger – la in Lahu – they would divide the meat and eat it together at a special place called hu; therefore they call themselves 'Lahu.'" While it is true enough that la\textsuperscript{11} (high falling tone) means "tiger", I have no evidence that hu\textsuperscript{12} (very low tone) means "a special place where tiger flesh is eaten". Two other names are frequently used for this people, a point worth noting by anybody intending to search the ethnographic record. One is "Mussur", a Shan word derived from the Burmese moksa meaning "hunter"\textsuperscript{13}. It is a name well-received by Lahu, who set much store by prowess in the hunt. The second name is Lo-hei\textsuperscript{7}, as the Chinese have traditionally called the Lahu. Containing the character for "black"\textsuperscript{8}, this name seems to have derogatory connotations\textsuperscript{14} and has now officially been dropped by the Chinese authorities in favour of the indigenous "Lahu"\textsuperscript{9}\textsuperscript{15}.

Within the major ethno-linguistic category of Lahu are many subgroups or divisions. These include Lahu Na (Black Lahu), Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu), Lahu Hpu (White Lahu), Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu), Lahu Sheh Leh (meaning unknown) and many more besides\textsuperscript{16}. Just how these divisions have arisen among the Lahu and why some of them bear colour names is unknown. History, geography and language suggest an ancient cleavage between Black and Yellow Lahu\textsuperscript{17}, and probably other divisions represent more recent breakaways from these two major groups\textsuperscript{18}. There is evidence from modern times that religious factionalism is one of the reasons for the emergence of new subgroups among the Lahu\textsuperscript{19}. Colour names for social groups are relatively common through much of continental Asia from Turkey to China, but the symbolic connotations of a given colour vary widely\textsuperscript{20}, and those of Black, Yellow, White and Red Lahu are still improperly understood\textsuperscript{21}. Various combinations of dialectal, cultural and socio-structural differences distinguish one Lahu division from another, but all seem to recognize a common identity as Lahu\textsuperscript{22} "the Lahu people". Generally speaking, each Lahu village is occupied by members of a single division who marry either within that village itself or among neighbouring villages of the same divisional identification.

Like most hill-dwelling minority peoples of northern southeast Asia and southwest China, the Lahu occupy no continuous stretch of territory which either geographically or politically could be termed "Lahuland". Even in Lan-ts'ang County, where this people is most concentrated, Lahu villages are found interspersed with those of other hill peoples, principally Ka-wa (Wa) but also a few Aini and Yi (Lolo); while the valley inhabitants in that county are almost entirely Tai (Shan), with a few Han Chinese merchants, and government and party officials\textsuperscript{22}. In Burmese territory a similar pattern emerges. In the hills Lahu villages are interspersed mostly with those of Akha and Wa, with a few Lisu communities as well, while Shan occupy the valleys and a few Burmese and Chinese the towns. In the Nam Tha area of Laos, Yao and Lahu occupy the hills, Shan the valleys; and in northern Thailand Lahu have as their hill neighbours Yao, Hmong, Lisu, Akha and Karen while their valley neighbours are mostly Khon Muang or Northern Thai but also some Shan, particularly in Mae Hong Son province. Central Thai (Siamese) or Central Thaiized Khon Muang occupy the ranks of officialdom; Chinese and Indians (including Pakistanis and Bangalees) are town-based merchants.
Each Lahu village is headed by its own $hk'a^\wedge sheh\_hpav$ or "master ($sheh\_hpav$) of the village ($hk'a^\wedge$)", also known among Lahu Nyi as a $daw^\wedge$ "he who thinks [on behalf of the village community]". This man is invariably assisted in leadership by an informal council of respected old men, who also act as a check on the personal powers and whims of the headman. Among these elders the village priest ($paw\_hkii$ or $to\_bo\_pa$) or, in Christian Lahu communities, the pastor ($sa\_la\_pa$) is frequently the most influential. In some areas a Lahu headman has jurisdiction over neighbouring villages both of his own and other ethnic affiliation. Elsewhere the Lahu headman is subordinate within his area to a neighbouring leader, either Lahu or non-Lahu. Generally the senior authority in any particular stretch of hill country is the leader of the community which pioneered the area. Many Lahu headmen traditionally maintained political links with leaders of the dominant Tai-speaking valley peoples and, in China, with the representatives of the imperial government. Today hill village leaders are incorporated, to varying degrees, within the local administrative structures of their respective countries.

Lahu village society, for the most part, lacks clan, lineage or other corporate groups based on descent principles. The only major exception to this appears to be the Lahu Sheh Leh subgroup which has named patrilineages uniting several households into a single "spirit-worshipping group". These groups propitiate a common guardian spirit whose altar is located in one of the households of the patrilineage. In all Lahu subgroups, including the Sheh Leh, the fundamental social group is the autonomous household. Such households form village communities and remain in them for a variety of reasons including kinship and marriage ties, friendship and simple economic convenience. But such ties are more or less brittle and Lahu communities frequently break up, with some households leaving to join other communities or to establish new villages elsewhere.

The Lahu, like most upland peoples of this northern Southeast Asian region, are traditionally slash-and-burn or "swidden" agriculturalists, cultivating a subsistence crop, dry hill rice, and a number of cash crops (opium poppy, cotton, chillies, etc.) on small plots cleared from hillside forest by cutting and burning the vegetation. When the nearby land has been used to the full (or before, if the supernatural omens are unfavourable or neighbours prove hostile), the village relocates in a new area. Under ideal conditions, villages seldom remain more than a decade in the same spot. Communities which cultivate opium poppy tend to site their villages at elevations around 1200 metres; here they have access both to high land, suitable for the variety of Yunnanese poppy they grow, and lower land which is preferable for rice. Communities which grow no poppy (Christians for example) may site their villages at much lower elevations and there are several instances of Lahu (both Christians and traditionalists) successfully adopting an irrigated rice economy in the lowlands.

With a long tradition of semi-regular migration, Lahu do not tend to build very substantial or long-lasting houses. Their dwellings, raised on stilts, are made mostly of bamboo, with wood only for the main supports and holding down the roof thatch. In many Lahu villages one building stands out from the others. It is the $bon\_yeh$, "blessing or merit house" or $haw\_yeh$, "palace house", as it is called among Lahu Nyi. This building is dedicated to the worship of $G'ur\_sha$, the supreme and creating divinity of the Lahu, and is the focus of ritual at the new and the full moon festivals each month.
The temple is invariably located at the higher end of the village and may be raised on stilts like ordinary dwellings, or built directly on the ground, the better to withstand the vigorous dancing which takes place in it. Where there is no temple the village may have a small shrine located against a tree at the head of the village and dedicated to the resident locality spirit who, through propitiation, becomes the guardian spirit of the village. Christian villages have churches, also called bon ye h, which often double as schools. The villages of Lahu Sheh Leh and Lahu Shi have as their ritual centre a ceremonial dancing circle, usually fenced.

This discussion of religious buildings leads us to the subject of Lahu ideology regarding the supernatural. These people are usually designated as “animists” and are frequently and unfavourably contrasted as such to their “Buddhist” neighbours, the Tai-speaking valley dwellers. But the label “animist”, besides suggesting that Lahu recognize the existence of spirits (in which they differ not one whit from their Buddhist neighbours), tells us precious little about Lahu views of the supernatural. Most Lahu communities, barring those who wholeheartedly subscribe to the tenets of Protestant or Catholic Christianity, philosophical Theravada Buddhism or Marxist atheism, posit the existence of a metaphysical realm which contains at least two, very different, categories of supernatural entity. First there is G'uiv sha, already mentioned, the premier supernatural force, creator of the world, omnipotent, omniscient, the upholder of moral excellence. Sometimes, as evidenced by the oft-used phrase “A pa G'ui v sha: Father G'ui v sha”, Lahu conceive of G'ui v sha as a single, anthropomorphic divinity. But at other times, it seems clear enough that G'ui v sha is regarded as a diffused spiritual force encompassing not only a premier creator-divinity but also a number of other supernatural entities, such as the female counterpart A e Ai ma “Mother Ai Ma”, g'ui v ma a daw “the divine headman”, and indeed the heavenly prototypes of all things in this world. In its single, personified, aspect, the Lahu idea of G'ui v sha is readily identifiable with the Semitic-derived concept of “God” as understood by the missionaries who brought Christianity to the Lahu, and it is in this light that Lahu Christians now understand and worship G'ui v sha. But the traditional concept is, perhaps, more complex. Of a lower order of supernatural being are the ne or spirits, mostly malicious, although some are capable of goodwill if treated with due respect and provided with adequate propitiation. Such ne include the spirits of dead persons (semi-benevolent ancestral spirits and the invariably malicious spirits of persons who have died “bad” or unnatural deaths), guardian spirits, spirits of natural phenomena like sun, rainbow, lightning, hill, stream, etc., and spirits of demoniacal possession.

Lahu traditionalists draw an important distinction between man’s physical body, aw, and its metaphysical counterpart, man’s aw ha or “soul” (sometimes conceived as a single entity, sometimes as a multiplicity). Malicious spirits are usually thought to attack the aw ha, either by “capturing” it from its rightful owner or by “piercing” it in some manner so as to bring damage to it. In either case the result is manifested through sickness in the physical body, frequently of a specific type according to whatever spirit has attacked the aw ha. Such sickness may lead to death unless the spirit originator can be persuaded to restore the soul to its normal condition. Apart from their ideas about G'ui v sha and the ne, Lahu communities usually have a body of religio-ethical knowledge clearly derived from their Buddhist neighbours in
the lowlands. Commonly-accepted Buddhist ideas include the concepts of merit and demerit, which affect positively and negatively a person's fortunes in this and subsequent existences, the belief in the sanctity of life to the degree that killing (inevitable among hunters) invariably brings demerit to a person; and the idea of rebirth. “Animistic” Lahu, at least in those communities of which I have personal knowledge in north Thailand, have no qualms about joining in the Buddhist rituals of their Tai neighbours should they happen to be visiting the lowlands; and in recent years, at least, a number of young Lahu men have donned the robe of the Buddhist monkhood, mostly as novices but some as full-fledged bhikkhu. Now clearly, with “animistic” Lahu on the one hand professing a number of essentially Buddhist ideas and sometimes entering the monkhood, while “Buddhist” Tai on the other hand firmly believe in the powers of spirits and patronize their own spirit specialists (whose rituals seem very similar to those of their Lahu counterparts), we must avoid making too rigid a dichotomy between the religious traditions of hillmen and lowlanders, especially when such a dichotomy also suggests a moral evaluation favouring one over the other.

In order to deal effectively with their metaphysical environment Lahu traditionalists usually have in their village a number of ritual specialists: priests, oracles and spirit doctors. Priests are concerned with the worship of G’ui sha and are more highly regarded than those who deal with the nê’ or spirits. Oracles are people who, in trance, become mouthpieces of G’ui sha, able to inform their clients of the cause of particular sicknesses or misfortunes; sometimes these oracles double as priests or spirit specialists, but not inevitably. Spirit doctors perform the appropriate rites of propitiation or exorcism when called upon to do so. In everyday life all these ritual specialists are ordinary farmers like everybody else. With a tradition of mobile hill farming, Lahu communities have not been able to support ritual specialists in the way that the Tai lowlanders support chapters of Buddhist monks in their villages.

3. The Hk’awv, K’o’ ve Rite

Hk’awv k’o’ ve, the name of the exorcistic rite with which this paper is centrally concerned, means “sending away (k’o’ ve) sickness (hk’awv from hk’awv na’v)”. Now entirely abandoned by the Lahu Nyi villagers I studied in north Thailand, this rite was once an annual affair which apparently took place sometime after the conclusion of the lunar new year festivities (late January to early February) and before the felling of the new swiddens (mid-February). But within this period no particular day seems to have been set aside for the rite. The reason why the rite was scheduled for this period, I was told, was to prevent any malicious spirit causing trouble to the villagers during the dangerous tree-felling operation. Sometime before these particular Lahu Nyi abandoned the hk’awv k’o’ ve rite, it had ceased to be an annual affair and was performed irregularly, when sickness struck a large number of villagers simultaneously. From what informants said, I would think that the regular annual performance was abandoned in the 1920s and the irregular performances in the 1950s.

The rite would take place at sunset. Some said this was to ensure that the expelled spirits would not easily find their way back to the village; others, perhaps more honestly, gave only “custom” as justification for the timing.

The master of ceremonies was the nê’ te sheh_hpa’ (nê’ “spirits”; te “to do, to be concerned with”; sheh_hpa’ “master, person, expert”) or spirit specialist. Because
frequently there are several such specialists in a Lahu Nyi village, the person chosen was usually the man most familiar with the exorcistic prayer to be recited on this occasion. Presumably because his services were required by his own community as a whole rather than by any particular clients, he would levy no charge. But if a village lacked its own knowledgeable specialist and so had to summon an expert from a neighbouring Lahu Nyi community, a fee would have to be paid. Traditionally the fee was one Indian silver rupee, each household contributing to this sum.

The officiating specialist's first task was to supervise, and usually to assist in, the construction and assembly of the necessary ritual paraphernalia, collectively termed "things for the h'awv k'o vve". In this task he would be helped by one or two other villagers. First, two large trays had to be woven from lengths of sliced bamboo. These trays, known as h'awv_t'pe, were to hold offerings for the spirits and each was approximately four ja square (one ja is the distance from the elbow to the tip of the outstretched fingers, about 40 cms). But size would vary somewhat depending upon the size of the village community and the number of offerings to be received. Apart from these trays other ritual objects had to be made. These included large and small replica knives, daggers and swords, all made from bamboo, and replica horses and elephants sculptured from the root of the wild banana plant. The replica weapons were only about 10-20 cms in length and the sculptured animals about 20 cms. Two of each article were made, one being put on each tray. The weapons were said to be objects pleasing to these malicious and hurtful spirits while the horses and elephants were intended to transport the spirits from the village.

Now it was the duty of each household to bring offerings comprising a pair of beeswax candles, several varieties of vegetable, grains of unhusked rice, salt and a few dried chillies to the presiding spirit specialist. The latter would direct some of the offerings to be put in each tray, and would himself gather into two large bundles all the beeswax candles, and place a bundle on each tray. One household (informants did not specify that it should be any particular one) was designated to prepare rice and a relish of chicken which, when ready, were placed on separate plates: two of rice and two of chicken. Members of the chosen household brought these along to the presiding specialist who put a plate of rice and a plate of relish in each tray. All the food offerings were said to be for the spirits, the cooked food to be eaten during their journey away from the village, the uncooked for them to take back to their own place. Beeswax candles are a necessary element in almost all Lahu rituals. In this case, they were lighted by the spirit doctor at the beginning of the ceremony as a summons for the spirits to attend.

Finally, the spirit specialist and one assistant would prepare a bamboo carrying pole and some rattan ropes with which they transported the trays of ritual offerings to a central location in the village. All the villagers were now expected to assemble, seating themselves around the trays. The officiating specialist would light the beeswax candles on both trays, after which two assistants lifted and carried the pole, with the trays suspended from it, on their shoulders around the mass of assembled villagers. Following the tray-bearers came the spirit specialist reciting the exorcistic prayer, preferably in the Shan language but, if unable to do this, then in Lahu. Examples of this prayer, as recited for me by different specialists, are as follows:
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1. Oh all you sicknesses, today on this good day, we bring for you a silver tray and a golden tray; we have great love for you all.

2. We bring for you seven kinds of rice; seven kinds of relish we really do bring for you; food wrapped in leaves we really do bring for you.

3. We bring for you an elephant, we bring for you a horse; we have great love for you all.

4. Do not put your sickness into our hearts and into our necks; today on this good day we bring for you seven kinds of rice, seven different relishes; we have great love for you all.

5. Carry [these offerings] on this horse and go back to your place, ride upon this elephant and go back; if you like this elephant, take it and ride this elephant and go back to your own place; if you like this horse, ride this horse and go back.

6. Do not put your sickness into our hearts and into our necks; the whole village brings for you seven kinds of rice and seven different relishes; we bring for you rice cooked in a section of bamboo, relish cooked in a section of bamboo; we have great love for you all.

Translation

1. Oh all you sicknesses, today on this good day, we bring for you a silver tray and a golden tray; we have great love for you all.

2. We bring for you seven kinds of rice; seven kinds of relish we really do bring for you; food wrapped in leaves we really do bring for you.

3. We bring for you an elephant, we bring for you a horse; we have great love for you all.

4. Do not put your sickness into our hearts and into our necks; today on this good day we bring for you seven kinds of rice, seven different relishes; we have great love for you all.

5. Carry [these offerings] on this horse and go back to your place, ride upon this elephant and go back; if you like this elephant, take it and ride this elephant and go back to your own place; if you like this horse, ride this horse and go back.

6. Do not put your sickness into our hearts and into our necks; the whole village brings for you seven kinds of rice and seven different relishes; we bring for you rice cooked in a section of bamboo, relish cooked in a section of bamboo; we have great love for you all.
7. Oh you spirits of the east, go out [of the village] by your eastern way; spirits of the west, you go out towards the west; the whole village brings for you good-tasting rice, good-tasting relishes, we have great love for you all.

8. Oh you spirits of the big villages and the big towns, we send you back to the big villages and the big towns; spirits of the old Buddhist temples, please go back to the old Buddhist temples.

9. Do not put sickness into our hearts, into our necks; today we bring for you good-tasting rice, good-tasting relishes, we have great love for you all.

10. Ride this elephant, ride this horse and go back to your own place; do not put sickness into our hearts, into our necks; the whole village brings for you rice cooked in a section of bamboo, relish cooked in a section of bamboo; we have great love for you all.

11. We have great love for you spirits of the east; spirits of the west we have great love for you; so today do not put sickness into our hearts or into our necks.

12. Oh take this elephant, take this horse; ride this horse and go away, ride this elephant and go away; we have great love for you all.

TEXT TWO (Lahu version)

1. A- O-, O-, hk'awv chi te' mo' ve, ya' nyi niy' te' mo' te' cu' ve, ya' nyi cho', ka', haw aw' chi' aw' taw' leh a', aw' chi' aw' taw' leh hk'awv ta'- pe' te leh cho', ka', haw aw' suh' yan' aw' chi' suh' yan' te leh hk'awv ta'- pe' te leh cho', ka', te' mo' te' cu' ve.

2. Hk'awv chi ve, niy' te' mo' te' cu' meu' hta', k'aw' sho' leh mo' ban yai', meu' lon' aw' peu ve meh_.

3. Cho', ka', hk'a' g'a' chi' g'a', hta', haw, la' men' ca' u' daw', u' taw' leh ca' suh' daw', suh' taw' leh ca' suh' daw', suh' taw' leh ya' nyi naw', hta', keu la' ve.

4. A-, haw hki' mvuh' hki' leh koe_ meh_ haw hpu mvuh' hpu hki' leh k'aw' _ meh_.

5. A-, te' hk'a' te' law' hko' hta', u'i', ka', i ka', chi ma' hk' o' hta', pu' pu' shaw' shaw' hki'aw' g'a' chi' g'a', hk'o' hta', haw ve, g'aw leh ya' nyi hk'awv na' ta' hki' chi ve' k'awv yu', leh mo' ban yai', meu' lon' aw' k'awv k'oe_ meh_.

6. Hk'a' g'a' chi' g'a', ta' aw' meh_ hki'awv g'a' hta', htaw' ta' neh_ pi' meh_ hki'awv g'a' hta', htaw' ta' pi' cawv cawv.

7. A-, hki'awv g'a' chi' g'a', cheh' sha' cawv sha' ve, zuh' g'a' hpaw' sha, mai' g'a' hpaw' da', ve, chi bon' k'awv ji' leh ta' pi' meh_.

8. Hk'a' g'a' chi' g'a', ca' u' daw', u' taw' leh hk'a' g'o', chi' g'o', ca' u' daw', u' taw' leh naw', hta', pe_ la' ve meh_.


10. Chaw ya' hta', ta' g'aw pi' meh_, chaw ya' ho'- ti', ma' cawv, ka' ti', ma' cawv, naw', ho'- ti', cawv, sheh' hpa', ka' ti', cawv, sheh' hpa'.

11. O-, O-, te' mo_ te' cu' ca' u' dawv, u', ca' suh' daw', suh' taw' leh naw', hta', ca_ la' meh_.

12. A-, haw hki' mvuh' hki' leh ca' ta' dawv, ta' k'o' k'oe_ meh_.

13. Ya', nyi leh naw', hta', hki'awv li', chi' li' fui_ la' ve meh_, aw', ka' fui_ la' ve, ban yai_ meu' lon' k'awv cheh' ca'- o o.
TRANSLATION

1. Oh, Oh, all you sicknesses, today we of this community bring for you, here at this place, relish and rice, oh, we bring relish and rice and we make the woven trays; here at this place we bring for you seven kinds of rice, seven kinds of relish and we make the woven trays, we of this community here at this place.

2. You sicknesses, we of this community once again remove you and send you away to the big villages and the big towns.

3. Here at this place, everybody brings for you food and drink, brings for you new food and new drink; today we put [offerings in these trays] for you.

4. Oh ride upon these elephants, ride upon these horses and go back to your homes; ride upon these white horses and white elephants and go back to your homes.

5. Oh today once again take back from this whole village, from all the people big and small, from everything and everybody, these sicknesses and return [with them] to the big villages and the big towns yonder.

6. Do not kill any of us; do not soil any of us [with sickness]; do not cause any of us to have [sickness].

7. Oh, may each one of us enjoy good health, may we sleep easily and sit well; with this blessing alone once again enwrap us, [this blessing] grant to us.

8. Everybody brings for you food and drink, every household brings for you and gives to you food and drink.

9. Here at this place, sicknesses here at this place, master of these sicknesses here at this place, sicknesses of the eastern side, go back to the eastern side, oh, sicknesses of the western side, go back to the western side.

10. Do not cut the people; do not soil any of us [with sickness]; do not cause any of us to have [sickness].

11. Oh, Oh, we of this community bring for you food and drink, new food and new drink, please come to eat.

12. Oh, ride upon these elephants, ride upon these horses and if you have finished eating and finished drinking, please go back to your homes.

13. Today we perform the rituals for you, we separate you [from us]; once again go and live and eat in the big villages and the big towns.

TEXT THREE (alternative Lahu version)

1. O°, O°, hk’a° ma aw° ce° yov law le° k’o° k’o, a daw° mo° ya° chi ma ve, to bo mo° ya° chi ma ve yo° law le° k’o° k’o, hki° kui° keh ku° ve, hk’aw° ta° vai°.

2. A°, hk’a° ma aw° ce°, hk’a° g’o°, chi g’o° ve, ui° ka° i ka° chi ma ve yo° law le° k’o° k’o, zuh° hki° mui hki° ve ve, yov law le° k’o° k’o, daw° ha° ga° hki° ve, zuh° ma° da°, mui ma° da° ve.

3. A°, hpi° ho° hk’a° ma aw° ce° ve yo° law le° k’o° k’o, eh° paw suh ve ka°, shu baw° suh ve ka°, a°, hk’aw° ta° vai° chi ma ve ka° yo° law le° k’o° k’o, hk’° ma aw° ce° ve, a daw° mo° ya° chi ma ve, to bo mo° ya° chi ma ve, ya° nyi yo° law le° k’o° k’o, la° meu° ca° lu ca° hta°, chi ma sho° leh yo° law le° k’o° k’o.

4. Hk’a° ma a daw° hk’a° hk’aw meu° hk’° hta°, to bo mo° ya° hk’a° ma aw° ce° ve hk’° hta° ve yo° law le° k’o° k’o, te° hk’aw° ti° mui° leh hk’a° ma aw° ce° ve, ca° lu ca° hta°, chi ma taw° ve la° leh yo° law le° k’o° k’o.
5. Nga\textsubscript{pa} leh a\textsuperscript{v} chi k'\textsubscript{o}, a\textsuperscript{h} gu\textsubscript{v} ma a daw\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} te\textsuperscript{v} peu\textsubscript{\textsubscript{pa}} leh chi pi\textsuperscript{v} meh\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}}, hk'a\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} ma aw\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} ce\textsuperscript{v} ve yo\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} law le\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o, yeh\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} hki\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{k}}'a hki\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} ve, hk'a\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} gu\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} g'o\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}}, chi g'o\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} ve yo\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} law le\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o, ui\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} ka\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} i ka\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} ve, zu\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}} ma\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} da\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}}, mui ma\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} da\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}} ve, hk'aw\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} na\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} ta\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} lai\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} chi ve yo\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} law le\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o, pa\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} leh taw\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} yo\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} meh\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}}, ya\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}} nyi yo\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} law le\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o.

6. O\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{o}}}, O\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{o}}}, peu\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{o}}, ya\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} neh\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} o, ci\textsuperscript{\textsubscript{h}} g'u\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}} hpeu\textsubscript{\textsubscript{h}} keu la o!

**TRANSLATION**

1. Oh, Oh, within the four corners of the village, all the people of the headman, all the people of the to bo pa\textsubscript{\textsubscript{\textsuperscript{67}}} [are suffering from] many kinds of trouble, many kinds of sickness.

2. Ah, within the four corners of the village, every household, every person, the big and the small, have trouble in sleeping, trouble in sitting; they have trouble, they cannot sleep well, they cannot sit well.

3. Ah, you spirits within the four corners of the village, [you have caused] death in childbirth, death by shooting, many kinds of sickness; [therefore] within the four corners of the village, all the people of the headman, all the people of the to bo pa\textsubscript{\textsubscript{\textsuperscript{67}}} today send you all this food prepared by their own hands.

4. Within the headman's village, within the four corners of the village, all the people of the to bo pa\textsubscript{\textsubscript{\textsuperscript{67}}}, within the four corners of the village, [all] with a single voice come and bring for you all this food.

5. If my order cannot reach [these malicious spirits], oh Divine headman\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{64}}, order but one time and reach [these spirits]; within the four corners of the village every household is in trouble, they cannot sleep well, they cannot sit well, [they have] many kinds of sickness; today please order [these troubles] to go out [of the village].

6. Oh, Oh, [my prayer] is finished! Oh all you people, come and spit!

The circumambulations of the tray bearers and officiating specialist would continue until the latter had finished his prayer, whereupon the party halted. The assistants then put the two trays on the ground and the spirit specialist called upon the people to come and spit into the trays (Text 3 verse 6 above). Each villager would come and expectorate once into each tray. The last to spit was the officiating specialist. This act of expectoration symbolized, according to my informants, the sending out of all sickness and sickness-producing spirits from the bodies of the villagers\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{69}}.

Finally, as everybody else returned home, the spirit specialist took the two trays and their contents to the outskirts of the village, leaving one on a pathway on the western side and the other on a pathway on the eastern side, according to some informants; others said one on a pathway at the top end and one on a pathway at the bottom end of the village. All were agreed, however, on the necessity of placing the trays in opposite directions; this was the reason for preparing two sets of offerings in the first place.

**Commentary**

My four major informants for the hk'aw\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} k'o\textsubscript{\textsubscript{v}} ve ceremony, all elders of my principal study community (one was the headman and two were practising spirit specialists), were agreed that the principal function of the rite had been to expel from the village
whatever illnesses the villagers were suffering and all the malicious spirits responsible for such sickness. But when we examine the various versions of the exorcistic prayer, it becomes fairly clear that the principal concern was not, in fact, with sickness in general but rather with sickness believed to originate in the plains where the Tai people live. (But I received no hint to suggest that the rite was directed against malaria, a valley-based sickness notable for its absence in the higher regions where most Lahu live.) This is the reason why the exorcistic prayer had preferably to be recited in Shan (the Shan, as we have seen, are the principal Tai-speaking neighbours of the Lahu in all countries where they live with the exception of north Thailand; and even here the Lahu Nyi are immigrants from Burma’s Shan State over the last eighty years or so). It is also the reason why, in one version of the prayer (Text 2 verses 2, 5, 13), the spirits are called upon to return to their natural abode: the villages and towns of the valley-dwellers. According to some informants, the reason why the trays subsequently were left on pathways outside the village was to encourage the malicious spirits and the sickness they had brought to head off along these paths back to the valley.

Once I had recorded and translated the texts presented in this paper, I confronted my informants with questions on these various references to (or hints of) the lowland origin of the spirits and sickness. I was then told that they believed that a single spirit, known as na beu nev (na, “sickness”, beu, “spirit”) controlled all the sicknesses originating in the valleys. I was further told that this na beu nev lives for most of the time in the valley with the Tai people. Occasionally, however, the spirit has insufficient to eat in the valleys and so comes up to the hills and troubles the Lahu people, afflicting them with various sicknesses which in the past had to be expelled by a performance of the hk’aw k’o ve ceremony. This would suggest, contrary to my informants’ earlier opinions, that many sicknesses but only a single spirit entity were expelled in the exorcistic ceremony. Whatever the case, the ambiguity seemed irrelevant to my informants.

Why was the hk’aw k’o ve ceremony abandoned by my study community (as well as by other Lahu Nyi villages in the vicinity)? I received answers to this question ranging from the laziness of present-day spirit specialists to the lack of need these days since people do not get as sick as they used to. But the most likely reason, it would seem, is that given by two of my principal informants, namely that the introduction among them of a temple-based cult, stressing the omnipotence of G’ui sha, removed the necessity for the exorcism. One informant simply said that these days sick people pray to G’ui sha, through the mediation of the village priest, to remove their ailments. Another informant dated the disappearance of the hk’aw k’o ve rite to the time of a famous Lahu religious leader, Paw khuv Yi, who, in trance, received a dictate from G’ui sha that the old custom be abandoned and that in future sick persons make offerings directly to Him.

Perhaps the abandonment of a rite so closely associated with a valley demon also represents a greater understanding, and therefore less fear, among these particular Lahu in north Thailand of the valleys and their inhabitants.

Postscript

In the literature on the Lahu people, at least so far as that literature is familiar to me, there is one other account of a rite which, in some of its details, closely resembles the hk’aw k’o ve exorcism I have described here. This is a ceremony described by a Scots
missionary attached to the American Baptist Mission, the Rev. James Haxton Telford. Telford worked mostly among Lahu Na and Lahu Shi for a quarter of a century (1916–1942). Unfortunately, however, in his principal contribution to Lahu ethnography, “Animism in Kengtung State,” he does not adequately distinguish between the Lahu subgroups. On the basis of the photographic record (provided in the original but not the published version of “Animism”) I would guess that his account refers mostly to the Lahu Na or Black Lahu division. The ceremony which Telford describes is, he maintains, essentially an offering rite to thehk’aw nev or hill spirit (hk’aw “hill”). His description is worth quoting in full (the emphases are mine):

Once every year the whole village makes an offering to the Mountain Spirit. This ceremony is one of the chief events of the year and it takes place during the full moon of July. In the morning every member of the village brings a candle, and a small quantity of paddy and rice, which gifts are presented to the Mawpa [in Lahu Nyi, nev te sheh_ hpa” “spirit specialist”] and he in turn takes them and offers them to the protective and helpful “Hka Ne” — Village Spirit [hk’a “village”] which resides in the reserve at the head of the hamlet — at which time the Seer invokes the aid of the “Hka Ne” as they proceed to exorcise the malignant Mountain Spirit. At noon time all the elders bring candles and food offerings and the Pawku [paw hku”, also known as to bo pa among Lahu Nyi] prays to G’uisha in the temple.

An important part of the ceremony is the preparation of two large trays on which are put all kinds of gifts for the Mountain Spirit. They cut down the Ama tree [unidentified] and from its wood they make large knives, guns, spears and small dahs. With clay they mould figures of horses, elephants and of men riding those animals. Other clay objects of fowls, pigs, dogs, cows and buffaloes are formed. From every house rice is collected and upon each of the two trays are deposited four mounds of cooked rice. Vegetables and meat of all descriptions are also offered. Pieces of cloth and sewing threads of various colours are added to the gifts. While these preparations proceed, others engage their time in making two long ropes and the loosely woven bamboo mat named “Leo” [leh-o”; a protective emblem against spirits]. When the many details have all been completed all the villagers both young and old gather in the middle of the village. The Pawku and the Mawpa stand facing each other at opposite sides of the sacrificial trays and while they hold in their hands lighted candles, each in his turn addresses the Mountain Spirit thus:

O Lord of the Mountain if your home is in the East return and stay there; if your abode is in the West go back there. If the source or mouth of the river is your dwelling place go and remain there. Just now we are offering to you all kinds of animals and food of every description. We have also brought you clothes. We are feeding you sweet food; eat it and go away to a city with a market place and people and where there are both raw and cooked meat; a place in which there is no lack of food, there go and live.

When the Pawku and Mawpa have finished their address to the Mountain Spirit, all the congregation expectorate and say “Twi-Twi”.

The trays are carried some distance from the village and are abandoned by some lonely path. The villagers take the two newly made ropes and place them on top and across the village gateway and a “Leo” is also fixed to the gate. A “Leo” is
taken by the head of each house and is placed above the door of the main entrance to each home. The ropes and “Leo” are for the purpose of preventing the return of the Mountain Spirit to their village and houses.

Common elements in the ceremony described by Telford for Lahu in Kengtung, Burma, (probably Lahu Na) and that described by myself in this paper for Lahu Nyi in north Thailand are as follows:
(a) construction of two trays
(b) construction of replica knives and guns
(c) carving of miniature horses and elephants
(d) offering of vegetables, meat, rice and paddy
(e) spitting into trays
(f) removal of the trays outside the village, where they are placed on a path
(g) the demand that the offending spirit(s) return either to east or west
(h) the demand that the spirit(s) go to the city (But why should a mountain spirit be asked to a city, as per Telford’s version?)
(i) the pre-eminent role of the spirit specialist in the ceremony

But, of course, against these similarities we must also note the several and important divergencies between the two ceremonies, viz.
(a) the time of the year that the ceremony should take place: July according to Telford’s account, late January to early February according to my informants;
(b) the supernatural entity to whom the rites are addressed: the Mountain or Hill spirit according to Telford, all disease-causing spirits or one such spirit associated with the lowlands according to my information;
(c) the absence in the Lahu Nyi ceremony as described to me of the morning rite in which the villagers bring offerings to the guardian spirit of the village, and the subsequent ritual delivery of those offerings by the spirit specialist;
(d) the complete absence in the Lahu Nyi ceremony of the noontime rite wherein the villagers bring offerings to the priest who presents them to G’ui sha in the village temple;
(e) the differing ritual paraphernalia and, in some instances, differing ways of preparing similar paraphernalia. Thus, in the Lahu Nyi ceremony described to me, there was no requirement for spirit traps (leh-o’) nor for models of men riding horses and buffaloes; furthermore bamboo replaced ama wood for the replica weapons and wild banana root replaced clay for the sculptures of horses and elephants.
(f) In the Lahu Nyi ceremony only the spirit specialist recited the exorcistic prayer, not the spirit specialist and priest; and the circumambulation of the gathered crowd during the recitation seems specific to the Lahu Nyi ceremony.

Despite the dissimilarities, the points in common between the ceremony described by Telford and that described for me by Lahu informants in Thailand seem significant. Maybe Telford was mistaken in attributing the ceremony to the Mountain/Hill spirit (although given his profound knowledge of the Lahu language this seems unlikely). But it should be noted that only a difference in tone distinguishes the Lahu word for “hill” (hkaw, mid-level pitch) from the word hk’aw (low-falling pitch) in the name of the Lahu Nyi ceremony, hk’aw k’o. ve. If indeed both ceremonies were addressed to the same supernatural entity, less important details could easily derive from the differ-
My research was centred in the districts of Phrao (Chiang Mai province) and Wiang Pa Sao (Chiang Rai province). I set up house in one Lahu Nyi village and made visits to two neighbouring communities. At this time, I held the position of "research officer" at the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai. I should like to record here my gratitude to the Director of the Tribal Research Centre, Khun Wanat Bhrukasri, and all his staff. Thanks also to my wife, Pauline Hettland Walker, for her help in the preparation of this paper, and to my colleague, Dr. Tan Chee Beng for his assistance with the Chinese characters.

Notes on: "The Lahu language is closely related to that of a neighbouring hill people, the Lisu. Both are Loloish languages (see diagram below). Although the subgroupings of Loloish have not been worked out in detail, students of Tibeto-Burmese languages now seem to regard Lahu, together with Lisu, as belonging to the Central Loloish branch of the Lolo-Burmese subgroup of the

FOOTNOTES

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9 The Lahu language is closely related to that of a neighbouring hill people, the Lisu. Both are Loloish languages (see diagram below). Although the subgroupings of Loloish have not been worked out in detail, students of Tibeto-Burmese languages now seem to regard Lahu, together with Lisu, as belonging to the Central Loloish branch of the Lolo-Burmese subgroup of the
Tibeto-Burman language family. Lahu shows close lexical affinities with Akha, spoken by another people who share the mountainous borderlands of the Yunnan-Indochina frontier. But recent linguistic work demonstrates that Akha, together with Phunoi and Mpi, belongs to the Southern, rather than the Central, Loloish group (personal communication, J. A. Matisoff, Dept. of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley). This serves to correct my earlier statement (Walker, "Rite to Propitiate the Water Spirit", 430, n. 5) that Lahu is closer to Akha than to Lisu.


There may also be a remnant Lahu community living in northern Vietnam. In 1948 the Chinese anthropologist Ruey Yih-fu[2] mentioned the existence of Lahu in the mountains north of Tonkin (see his "Yun-nan Shi-nan bien-ching ti Lo-hei jen [The Lo-hei of the Southwest Frontier Area of Yunnan]", Kuo-chi Wen-hwa [International Culture] 1,3, 1948, 1–2, p.1[2]). More recently, a Vietnamese scholar, Yuong Hoang Tuyen ("Some Ethnic Groups Only Just Saved From Extinction Living in Remote Parts of the Northwest", Vietnamese Studies, no. 36, Ethnographic Data III, 1974, 141–97, pp. 170–79 [also in a French edition]) has reported a group of people "secluded in the remotest corners of the mountains" in the Northwest Zone of northeastern Vietnam, numbering "no more than a few hundred individuals", who are commonly known

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as Co Sung, but who call themselves "La Hu". Until the 1950s, according to Vuong, these La Hu were highly mobile hunters and gatherers, cultivating nothing but subsisting primarily on wild taro. On the other hand, these people preserve a tradition that at one time they were swidden farmers, a way of life they are now relearning from their Coong and Ha Nhi neighbours. Apparently in the old days, the La Hu occupied a fairly definite territory but were compelled to vacate this by incoming Tai conquerors. Vuong reports that these Co Sung or La Hu, according to their own traditions, came originally from China and he hints at a possible connexion between them and the present Lahu peoples of Yunnan. Unfortunately, Vuong's short ethnographic summary of the Co Sung, lacking as it does any linguistic material, does not allow us to relate the Co Sung to the larger Lahu ethnolinguistic group with any certainty.

The 1965 edition of Jen-min Shou-t'a'e [People's Handbook] gives the Lahu population within the People's Republic of China as 180,000 (George Moseley, The Party and the National Question in China, Cambridge [Mass.] & London, MIT Press, 1966, 162). Fourteen years later, we might expect the Lahu population to number well over 200,000. But a more recent Chinese source, Chinese Nationalities, Hong Kong, Chien Chieu Publishing Co, 1972, mentions the Lahu (written Laku) in China as numbering "about 150 thousand".

"Lahu Nationality Autonomous People's Government Set Up in Lantsang in Yunnan", Survey of the China Mainland Press, U.S. Consulate-General, Hong Kong, 1953, item no. 554 (translated from New China News Agency, Kunming, 16 April 1953). See also, Ch'en Yin, "La-hu Tsu [Lahu Race]", Min-tsu Ts'uan-ch'ieh [Nationalities' Solidarity] (Peking), 1964, no. 4, 46-8[7].

Estimates of Burma's Lahu population vary from as high as 80,000 (see Paul W. Lewis, Introducing the Hill Tribes of Thailand, Chiang Mai, Faculty of Social Sciences, 1970, 80) to as low as 40,000 (see the Burmese publication, Pyi thanu su myan na naing ngan than g yin yin kye hku yo ya da le thuen san mya [Shan] Cultural and Traditional Customs of the Nationalities of the Union of Burma [Shan State], Central Organizing Committee, Burma Socialist Party Programme, Rangoon, 1970 [first edition, 1968], 47). The lower figure was recently reiterated to me in personal correspondence from a Burmese Lahu.

Paul W. Lewis in his "Lahus-Ethnographic Survey", unpublished lecture notes for the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1969, suggests the total Lahu population in Laos may be around 5,000. In recent years this number may have decreased, as a number of Lahu communities from Laos have sought political sanctuary in Thailand.

According to a very recent survey of Lahu villages in Thailand there are 31,266 Lahu in the kingdom, distributed through 5,455 households and 269 villages. This gives us an average of 116 persons and 20 households per village (Sant Khankeaw and Paul Lewis, Laku/Akha Survey 1979, Chiang Mai, Tribal Integrated Health Project, 1979, 49).


Lahu words in this article are transcribed in an orthography devised by American Baptist missionaries in Burma and Yunnan. This orthography, the most widely used among Lahu outside China, uses superscript and sub-script marks after each syllable to indicate the seven tones of Lahu. There are five open tones (long vowel) and two checked tones (short vowel ending in a glottal stop). These are indicated as follows:

- superscript wedge (ca'): high-falling open tone
- subscript wedge (ca): low-falling open tone
- superscript straight line (ca'): high-rising open tone
- subscript straight line (ca): very low open tone
- no mark (ca): mid-level open tone
- superscript circumflex (ca): high tone, checked
- subscript circumflex (ca): low tone, checked

Further details of this orthography can be found in Telford and Saya David, Handbook of Lahu, and in James A. Matsloff's "Note on the orthography of Lahu" in my Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy, XXXIII-V.

In writing the ethnic group name "Lahu" and the subgroup names, "Lahu Nyi", etc. I have joined the syllables La and hu and omitted tone marks, to conform to the usual practice in the ethnographic record.

The first person known to have reduced Lahu to writing in a Roman script was H. H. Tibé, an American Baptist missionary in Burma (see The Baptist Missionary Magazine [Rangoon] LX-XXXVII, 11, 1907, 483 and Telford's History of the Kengtung Mission [unpublished typescript on file at the headquarters of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Valley Forge, Pa.]). Tibé's romanization was subsequently improved by other missionaries: James Telford, Vincent Young and Paul Lewis. A good example of the modern romanization is the New Testament in Lahu (G'iuw sha Ve Li', Hpu A'w, Su'h, Rangoon: Bible Society of Burma, 1966). Besides the romanization of Lahu used here, two others are to be found. One is that used by Roman Catholic converts (see, for example, Gh'iu Sha, Ve, Bo, Khod, Shi', Khod, Le', Catech-
is probably the source of an assumption found rather frequently in the early literature that the Lahu are connected or even identical with the Moso or Nishi (Na-khi) people of northwestern Yunnan (see, for example, James George Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, London, Alexander Moring, 1906, 96–7; & G. Soulie & Tchang Yi-Tch'ou, "Les Barbes soumis du Yunnan", *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise de 'Extreme-Ori ent VIII*, 3, 1908, 149–379, p. 355; George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* *Vol. I Part I: Introductory*, Calcutta; Government Press, 1927, 80; Eric Seidenfaden, "The Gospel of St. Marc in Musso", *J. Siam Soc. XXIV*, 1, 1930, 84–7). This confusion has led some writers (e.g. Scott, *Burma*, 96; Seidenfaden, "Gospel of Marc", 85) to claim for the Lahu a recorded history dating back to the eighth century of the Christian era. It is true that the Nishi, like the Lahu, speak a Lolo-related language; but recently published material on Nishi (Li Lin-Tsan, Chang K'un & Ho Ts'ai, "Moso Sound and Tone Charts", in F.S. Drake, ed., *Symposium on Historical, Archeological and Linguistic Studies on Southern China, South-East Asia and the Hong Kong Region*, Hong Kong; Hong Kong University Press, 1967) makes it quite clear that—far from being the same as or even closely related to Lahu—it is a widely divergent member of the Loloish family (see also diagram in n. 3 above).

12. James A. Mati sof t (personal communication, 1972), the foremost contemporary authority on the Lahu language, rejects this journalistic etymology. His own attempts to reconstruct the etymon of the word "Lahu", through tracing possible cognates, have thus far been unrewarded (see his "Lahu and Proto-Lolo-Burmese", *Oc cisional Papers of the Wolfenden Society on Tyto- Burman Linguistics*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Dept. of Linguistics, 117–221, pp. 148–50).

13. It is perhaps as well to record here that confusion of names—the Shan "Mussur" with "Moso"—is probably the source of an assumption found rather frequently in the early literature that the Lahu are connected or even identical with the Moso or Nishi (Na-khi) people of northwestern Yunnan (see, for example, James George Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information*, London, Alexander Moring, 1906, 96–7; G. Soulie & Tchang Yi-Tch'ou, "Les Barbes soumis du Yunnan", *Bulletin de L'Ecole Francaise de 'Extreme-Ori ent VIII*, 3, 1908, 149–379, p. 355; George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* *Vol. I Part I: Introductory*, Calcutta; Government Press, 1927, 80; Eric Seidenfaden, "The Gospel of St. Marc in Musso", *J. Siam Soc. XXIV*, 1, 1930, 84–7). This confusion has led some writers (e.g. Scott, *Burma*, 96; Seidenfaden, "Gospel of Marc", 85) to claim for the Lahu a recorded history dating back to the eighth century of the Christian era. It is true that the Nishi, like the Lahu, speak a Lolo-related language; but recently published material on Nishi (Li Lin-Tsan, Chang K'un & Ho Ts'ai, "Moso Sound and Tone Charts", in F.S. Drake, ed., *Symposium on Historical, Archeological and Linguistic Studies on Southern China, South-East Asia and the Hong Kong Region*, Hong Kong; Hong Kong University Press, 1967) makes it quite clear that—far from being the same as or even closely related to Lahu—it is a widely divergent member of the Loloish family (see also diagram in n. 3 above).


17. See Ch'ien Yin, "La-hu Tsu [Lahu Race]", *Min-tsu t'uan-chieh [Nationalities Solidarity]* IV, 1964, 46–81[16].


21. A common assumption is that the designations refer to the dominant colour of the people's clothes (cf. R. G. Woodthorpe, "The Country of the Shan", *The Geog. J., VII*, 6, 1896, 577–602, p. 597). This may be true for the Lahu Nyi or Red Lahu, but I have found no good evidence that the designations "Black" and "Yellow" Lahu refer to costume (see my "Divisions", 263–5).

22. Information from Lahu now living in Thailand who once knew the Lan-ts'ang area, and from Professor Rave Yih-fu of the Academia Sinica (Taiwan), who studied the Lan-ts'ang Lahu in the winter of 1934–5. When the "Lahu Nationality Autonomous Area" was set up in Lan-ts'ang in 1953, Lahu, Han Chinese, Aini, Ka-wa (Wa), Yi (Lolo), Tai Shan, P'uman and Minchia were involved (Survey of *China Mainland Press*, 1953, item no. 554).

23. From Shan, paw "father", hku* (Shan, khun), a title of respect.

24. *To from aw, "body", bo from aw bon "meritorious", pa_ is the male suffix, thus "meritorious male body". (The wife of this official is known as to bo ma "meritorious female body" [ma_, female suffix]).

25. From the Burmese hsaya (originally Pali), "teacher".


27. See my "Lahu of the Yunnan-Indochina Borderlands", 332–4.

A detailed account of the agricultural cycle of a particular Lahu Nyi village in north Thailand can be found in vol. 2 of my Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy, 348–444. A synopsis of the data there is to be found in my "The Swidden Economy of a Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Village Community in North Thailand", Folk XVIII, 1976, 145–88. A reworking and additional analysis of the same data is to be found in Snit Wongspraset's Lahu Agriculture and Society, M. A. thesis, Sydney University, 1975.

In recent years, rapid population growth in north Thailand's hill country has created ever-increasing pressure on the land. Consequently, for want of anywhere else to go, some communities are occupying the same village site long past the time they would consider ideal. Several Lahu villages I know have been located in the same spot now for over 20 years.

Early on, Christian missionaries prohibited their converts not only from indulging in opium but also from cultivating the poppy.

From av, bon "blessing, blessed, merit, meritorious" and yeh, "house".

Haw", from Shan, "a prince's palace".

The etymology of the word G'u½, sha is obscure. By itself, the syllable g'ui means "water, liquid, juice" (see James A. Mitsoff's Lahu-English Dictionary, prepublication first draft, 1965–9, 612 [to be published by University of California Press, circa 1980]. The meaning of sha (mid-level tone) is obscure. The interesting rendering by Theodore Stern in his "Ariya and the Golden Book: A Millennial Buddhist Sect among the Karen", J. Asian Stud. 27, 1968, 297–328, p. 300 as "Living Breath" is difficult to accept. In Lahu, "life" is a sae, to be alive: sae te ve. "Breath" is aw, sha; the second syllable sha differing in tone from sha in G'u½, sha. G'u½, plus sha", therefore, means literally "water breath", and is used as such to refer to "the cool atmosphere of a stream, the pleasant coolness around running water" (Matisoff, Dictionary, 614).

For details of the rites associated with shi, nyi or lunar festival days see my Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy, 190–92.

For example, the following example from Clarence Hendershot's "The Shan States-South of Yunnan", Amerasia VII, 1943, 239–48, p. 242: "Among the medley of tribes that make up...the inhabitants of the Shan States, the Tai (Shan) are in a class by themselves. They are more advanced than the 'lesser breeds' such as the Lahuas, and Kachins....The Tai have an ethical religion (Buddhism) as against the animism of their neighbours".


For an account of the earliest Christian missionary activity (Presbyterian) among the Lahu, see Daniel McGilvary's A Half Century among the Siamese and Lao, New York & London, Fleming Revell, 1912, 322–6, 333–7. The next missionaries to arrive among these people were the Baptists, whose work is summarized by Saw Aung Din & E. E. Sowards in their "Work among Lahuas, Was, Akhas", in Burma Baptist Chronicle, Maung Shwe Wa, Genevieve Sowards and Ervine Sowards, eds, Rangoon, Burma Baptist Convention, 1963. Roman Catholic missionaries were also active among Lahu in both Burma (from 1912) and Yunnan (from 1933). (personal communications, Fr. Jean St-Guily, formerly of the Mission of the Fathers of Belém in Siam and Fr. G. Zimbaldi of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions).

See my "Rite to Propitiate the Sun Spirit", 167–8; "Rite to Propitiate the Rainbow Spirit", 227–9; "Propitiation of the Lightning Spirit", 212–13; "Rites to Propitiate the Hill Spirit", 63; "Rite to Propitiate the Water Spirit", 437–8.

See my "Blessing Feasts", 361–2.

See my "Jaw Te Meh, Jaw, Ve", 381; and "Funerary Chants", 163.

Of the guardian spirits, probably the most important is the yeh, ne' or house spirit (see my "Propitiating the House Spirit", 50–52).


Periodically an oracle enters a trance and is said to have become possessed by G'u½, sha, who causes him or her to weep and shake. In Lahu such a trance state is known as G'u½, sha aw, ve, yaw ve (yaw ve "to come down"). Thus these Lahu conceive that the person in a trance is joined as with a rope to the supreme supernatural being. The oracle does not send his or her aw, ve or "soul" on a trip to the heavenly regions, in the classical manner of a shaman, nor do these Lahu believe that G'u½, sha actually enters the oracle's body.
I am not myself familiar with the Lahu prayers, whether in the Shan language as here or in Lahu, make much use of couplets, more for their pleasing sound than to convey any additional meaning.

The use of the numeral "seven" is simply for poetic effect and suggests "plenty" of relishes. It is not to be taken literally.

Shan people like to cook rice and relishes by wrapping them in leaves, stuffing them into a green bamboo section and placing this in the hot ashes of a fire. See verse 6.

A reference to the model elephant and horse prepared for the rite.

"Hearts and necks" is another example of a poetic couplet.

Words in brackets are absent but understood in the original text. Their omission in an English translation would obscure the intended meaning.

"The big villages and big towns" are those belonging to the Tai peoples on the plains.
Unfortunately, Telford does not provide the original Lahu text for this prayer.

[1] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[2] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[3] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[4] Ch. and Northern Thai  

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64 In certain articles published in the J. Siam Soc., v.3, “Lahu Nyi New Year Texts – I, II, III”, “Prayer at Childbirth” and “Rite to Propitiate the Rainbow Spirit”, I have given a word-by-word “working translation” - Length and cost preclude the regular use of this very detailed analysis in my textual work, but the interested reader might like to look at the above-mentioned five J. Siam Soc. articles to see how the poetic language typically breaks down.

65 “White” is a propitious colour, pleasing to the spirits; it is also, of course, the actual colour of the sculptures since they are fashioned from banana root.

66 See p. 237 for a discussion of the idea of “master of the sicknesses”.

67 “All the people of the headman, all the people of the to bo pa-" is a poetic reference to “all the villagers”. The to bo pa- is the senior priest (see above, n. 24).

68 The divine prototype of all earthly headmen, who participates in the Rainbow Spirit (see p. 236).

69 An informant expressed it thus: Neh-chi-gu-u-i-f-hpeu-n, keu-k0, a na neh-aw to huak, ve o’u k’aw, hu-k’aw, k’o-o aw hu-k’aw lo-e, ve yo-yo. “If we send out our spittle, the sicknesses in our bodies go out with the spittle and enter the trays.”

70 An informant said: Hk’awv chi meuy hu-k’aw Kaw- Law’ leh Pi’-Chawv geh cheh’ ve yo-yo. Chi patau Kaw- Law’ hkaaw Pi’-Chawv hkaaw ga yaw pi’ ve yo-yo. “This sickness (hk’aw’v) lives in the sicknesses in the Northern Thai and Shan peoples. For this reason, we have to speak to it in the Northern Thai language and the Shan language. Because the Northern Thai people (whom the Lahu call Kaw- Law’) are the immediate valley neighbours of the Lahu Nyi I studied, the latter see them as more or less identical to the Shan (Pi’-Chawv) who were the lowland neighbours of their grandfathers and greatgrandfathers before they settled in Thailand.

71 One informant explained it like this: Na-beu-hi chay leuy meuy hu-k’aw, ve mu’ o, leuy mu’o k’o, li’ tsuhah te leh bo a daw” “A device for stopping the sickness.” This refers to the pa’ keh’ ve or rite of purification (see my “Lahu Nyi Purificatory Rite”). The li’ tsuhah is a small bundle of bamboo sticks, tightly bound, with cotton wool on top, the whole being about 20 cms. in length and 5 cms. in diameter, and it is a common Lahu Nyi offering to their highest supernatural being; the word li’ tsuhah comes from the words awv li “custom” and tsuhah ve “to bind together”, but the symbolism is unclear.

72 Paw hkuv Yi bo paw-leh hu-k’awv, k’o-o ve ta’ te lo-yo; chaw na-yo k’o li’ tsuhah te leh pa’ keh’ pi’ k’o-o ve yo-yo. “Paw hkuv Yi preached: do not do the hk’aw’v, ve: if people are sick, make li’ tsuhah and get purification, he said.” Paw hkuv Yi must have been living around the turn of this century. According to one of my informants he was responsible for the whole temple-based G’u-i-f sha cult presently found among Lahu Nyi (see my “Messianic Movements among the Lahu of the Yunnan-Indochina Borderlands”, Southeast Asia: An International Quarterly, 2, 1974, 699-711, p. 703).


74 J. Siam Research Soc. XXVII, 2, 1937, 86-238.


76 “Animinism”, 177-78.

77 Leh-o” from the Shan and Northern Thai ta-leo, Central Thai cha-leo. G. B. McFarland’s Thai-English Dictionary, Bangkok, 1941, s. v. cha-leo describes this ritual object as “A device made by folding and crossing thin bamboo strips to the shape of two equilateral triangles, sointerlaced as to form a six-pointed figure, having open spaces between the slats. This chaleo design is ancient and well-known. It serves many purposes...”. Two purposes McFarland mentions, “a charm to keep off evil spirits” and “a boundary mark”, are identical with those of the Lahu leh-o”. See also Phya Anuman Rajadhon’s “Notes on the Thread-Square in Thailand”, J. Siam Soc. LV, 2, 1967, 161-82, esp. pp. 162-3, where he includes two sketches of Thai chaleo”. Phya Anuman likewise mentions, among other uses, the chaleo “as a charm against evil spirits”.

Unfortunately, Telford does not provide the original Lahu text for this prayer.

[1] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[2] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[3] Ch. and Northern Thai  

[4] Ch. and Northern Thai  

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[5] 陈盈, 拉祜族, 民族团结, 北京