

THE Lǎ Hŭ NYĭ (RED Lǎ Hŭ) NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ¹ or Red Lǎ Hŭ are one of the major divisions of the Lǎ Hŭ peoples², a Tibeto-Burmese speaking hill folk whose villages are widely scattered through southwestern Yunnan, northern Burma, northwestern Laos and northern Thailand. Although reliable demographic data on all the Lǎ Hŭ peoples is lacking, they probably number some quarter of a million. Sources from the People's Republic of China give the number of Lǎ Hŭ in Yunnan as 180,000 (Moseley 1967: 162). In Burma they number some 66,000 (LeBar *et al.* 1964: 40), in Thailand, 15,000 (Young 1962: 85, United Nations 1967: 8) and in Laos, 2,000 (LeBar *et al.* 1964: 40). The Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ are the largest of the Lǎ Hŭ divisions represented in Thailand with, according to the figure given by Young (1962: 85), a population of 9,200 or more than 60 per cent of the total Lǎ Hŭ population of the Kingdom.

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- 1) In this article, the orthography of Lǎ Hŭ follows the system devised by members of the American Baptist Mission in Burma. Many Christian Lǎ Hŭ are literate in this writing system. For details of the system see Telford (1938). One of the best modern examples of the system is the New Testament in Lǎ Hŭ *G'ui Sha Ve Li Hpu Aw Suĥ* published by the Bible Society of Burma in 1966. The symbols above and below the line are tone marks. These have the following meanings:

\vee	= high falling pitch, long vowel and open syllable.
\wedge	= high level pitch, short vowel followed by a glottal stop.
$\bar{}$	= high rising pitch, long vowel and open syllable.
$\check{}$	= low level pitch, long vowel and open syllable.
$\underset{\sim}{}$	= low level pitch, short vowel followed by a glottal stop.
$\bar{}$	= very low level pitch, long vowel and open syllable.

- 2) Among Thai speaking peoples, the Lǎ Hŭ are generally known as 'Mussur', a³Shan word meaning 'hunter'.

Lă Hụ villages are dispersed among similar hill communities of other ethnic identities in all the national states in which they are found. Although there is some evidence of the former existence of a Lă Hụ state in the area which now forms the marches between the Wa Hills of Burma to the west and Yunnan to the east (Scott and Hardiman 1900 : 578), no such political entity exists today. Indeed, the Lă Hụ peoples have no political organization above the level of the village or small cluster or neighbouring villages (Walker 1967), nor does their cognatic descent system permit the wider supra-local solidarity to be found in some stateless societies (Middleton and Tait 1958). The Lă Hụ, like other hill peoples of South-East Asia, practise swidden agriculture.³ The economy of the Lă Hụ in Thailand, and probably elsewhere, is based on the production of a staple crop - rice, and cash crops - opium, chillies, etc.

This article is a preliminary report from the field. It is a fully detailed account of an important complex of Lă Hụ Nyĩ ceremonies and is intended as a contribution to Lă Hụ ethnography and not as an exercise in sociological analysis. It is written in the belief that a straight ethnographic account of this nature brings to print much intrinsically interesting data which would otherwise remain buried in field notebooks.

The data is based on personal observation and extensive interviewing of informants in two Lă Hụ Nyĩ villages in northern Thailand during the Lă Hụ New Year of 1967 and of 1968. The writer does not know whether the rites and celebrations described below are generally followed in all Lă Hụ Nyĩ villages, either in Thailand or elsewhere.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

It has been reported that the Lă Hụ New Year falls at the same time, or at least in the same month, as the Chinese New Year (Young 1962 : 15, Jones 1967 : 103). Lă Hụ Nyĩ of the three villages which the writer is at present studying celebrate their New Year at the end

3) 'Swidden' = a slashed and burnt jungle clearing.

of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth lunar months of the northern Thai calendar. In 1967, the New Year celebrations began on January 12, i.e. twenty-eight days prior to that year's date for the Chinese New Year. In 1968, the celebrations began on January 30, the same day as the Chinese New Year. Informants stated that ideally the New Year celebrations should begin on the thirtieth day of the fourth month of the northern Thai calendar. However, the celebrations may be delayed for either or both ritual and economic reasons. The Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ believe that during the New Year the spirits of the ancestors come to the village to witness the festivities. The dates of the New Year must be so arranged that the days on which the ancestor spirits *leave* the village are auspicious ones. Furthermore, the New Year period often coincides with the opium harvest. Heavy work in the fields may necessitate a delay in the celebrations as all work is prohibited on the New Year Days. However, the celebrations must take place before the end of the fifth month of the northern Thai calendar. Informants stated that if the celebrations were held outside this period, *Hk'aw sheh hpà* and *Hk'aw sheh ma*, the Male and Female Guardians of the Year and principal supernaturals to whom the celebrations are addressed, would fail to bless the proceedings by their presence.

The headmen and elders of a cluster of neighbouring villages decide upon the most auspicious and convenient dates for the celebrations, which are then held simultaneously by all the villages within that cluster. Different clusters of Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ villages may well celebrate the New Year at different periods within the same lunar month.

During the New Year period the villagers should wear new clothes, for this pleases the Guardian Supernaturals who will then be more disposed to grant their blessings to the whole village community. However, this prescription appears to be followed rigorously only by unmarried members of the community. These latter also bedeck themselves in the family's silver jewellery most of which is buried in the jungle near the village during the remainder of the year. During the month or so preceding the celebrations, the women spend much of

their spare time stitching new clothes for the female members of the household. (Male clothing is purchased ready-made, either at lowland Thai markets or from Thai traders visiting the village.) Fireworks are in great demand by the children at New Year time and these must be purchased from Thai traders. Unrefined sugar, bananas and candles are other items which must be purchased by each household in the village. These latter are offered to the Guardian Supernaturals (see below). Furthermore, each household must either kill a pig or purchase pork for the celebrations. A survey of household expenditure for the New Year of 1968 in the village in which the writer is living, may be found in Appendix One.

THE FEMALE NEW YEAR

The Lă Hụ Nyĩ celebrate the New Year in two distinct parts. The first part is known as *yă mĩ hk'aw* or "Female Year", the second as *haw hk'ă hk'aw* or "Male Year." The female and male periods are together referred to as "*hk'aw suh*" or New Year. This division of the New Year celebrations symbolizes both the celestial distinction between *Hk'aw sheh ma*, the Female Guardian of the year, and her spouse, *Hh'aw sheh hpă*, the Male Guardian, and the terrestrial distinction between the *yeh sheh ma* or wife of the household, and the *yeh sheh hpă*, the household head himself. While both Female and Male Guardians bestow their blessings at the New Year time on all the villagers regardless of sex, age or social status, it is particularly during the Female New Year that the Female Guardian gives her blessings for the coming year to the wives of the household heads, while during the Male New Year, the Male Guardian gives his blessings to the household heads themselves. Although, in an article of this nature, I cannot enter into the complexities of Lă Hụ religion, I would remark that the harmony between male and female elements is a recurrent theme in Lă Hụ Nyĩ religious ideology.

Two days of official preparations (as opposed to the unofficial preparations already described) precede the first of the two actual *yă mĩ hk'aw suh nyi* or Female New Year Days. The first of these

days is called *hk'aw tan nyi* (year-begin-day). On this day are prepared the glutinous rice cakes (*aw hpfuh*) which are an essential feature of the Lā Hū Nyī New Year celebrations. In the morning each household presents to every other household, beginning with that of the village blacksmith, a small basket of glutinous rice grains. This is the first of several inter-household gift exchanges which take place during the New Year period. They are known as *hk'aw li yu da ve* (year-custom-exchange). Each such gift exchange symbolizes the essential equality of all households in the village and the desire of the villagers that each household share equally in the fruits of the coming year. Furthermore, in return for its gift, the donor household receives from the recipient household its blessings for the New Year. The dependence of the village community upon its blacksmith, who manufactures the essential farming implements, is symbolized by presenting gifts to his household before any of the others, even before those of the village headman and the senior priest.

Each household mixes together its own glutinous rice with that it has received as gifts. The grains are soaked in water (generally in a bucket or an old kerosene tin) and on top of them is placed a bamboo spirit guard or *leh-ō* (Pl. 1) to prevent malevolent spirits entering the rice. Once well soaked, the rice is cooked. Immediately it has been cooked it is placed in a large wooden mortar and pounded with heavy wooden stakes (Pl. 2). Into the dough is mixed fried crushed sesame powder. The resultant mixture is shaped into flat cakes (Pl. 3), some no more than ten centimetres in diameter, others more than fifty centimetres. When cool, these cakes become almost brick-hard and must be re-heated before they can be eaten.

Also on *hk'aw tan nyi*, each household constructs a bamboo altar, called *aw hpfuh hti* (rice cake-keeping place), inside the house. (Pl. 4) This altar, suspended from the roof, is erected in the front portion of the house away from the sleeping quarters. Informants stated that it is particularly important that no member of the household sleep or, more seriously, copulate, under the altar. Such behaviour, it is said, would displease the Guardian Supernaturals and bring sickness upon the members of the household. The altar is

decorated with white paper streamers attached to bamboo sticks. These are to please the Guardian Supernaturals.

Hung above the altar are white paper-cuts in the shape of a human figure. (Pl. 5) These paper-cuts are called *to keû* (human body—appearance) or *chaw ha eñ* (man-soul-small). Each household prepares at least two such paper-cuts to represent male and female. Informants all state that these figures are offered to the Guardian Supernaturals to ensure the health of the household members. The headman of one of the villages under investigation said that these paper-cuts, which represented human souls, were offered as a substitute for actual human souls. He could not elaborate further. Most informants could offer no explanation of the symbolism, but all were certain that sickness would befall a household which failed to offer the paper-cuts.

Pine needles are placed on the altar and upon these are put the newly prepared rice cakes, together with crude sugar, bananas and candles. All these offerings are for the Guardian Supernaturals. The use of pine needles is of particular symbolic significance. In Lă Hụ, the pine tree is called *htañ sha*. The word element '*sha*' is also found in the three following words: *paw sha* meaning 'wealth', *dañ sha* meaning 'happiness' and *chěh sha* meaning 'health'. These are the blessings the household hopes to obtain from the Guardian Supernaturals.

In the afternoon of *hk'aw tan nyi* every household presents rice cakes and beeswax candles to every other household, once again beginning with that of the village blacksmith. The presentation consists of two beeswax candles and two rice cakes separated by a sprig of pine. One candle and cake are a gift from the household head and the other cake and candle from his wife. The presentation is usually made by the wife of the household head but there is no prescription in this matter. The recipient household places the gifts on its rice cake altar.

The senior priest or *to bo pa* takes two rice cakes from his own house to the *haw yeh* or village temple. These he places on the small altar at the right hand side of the temple which is dedicated to *G'ui*

Fu, a celestial spirit who guards the whole village community, its property and livestock. When he has placed the rice cakes on the altar, the *to bo pa* lights a number of beeswax candles and holding them in his right hands, he prays to *G'ui Fu*. A free English translation of this prayer (which in Lǎ Hŭ is couched in complex poetic language) is as follows:

Oh, this year, this New Year time, New Moon time, we once again make the glutinous rice cakes, we make them from the rice which we have cultivated with implements fashioned by the village blacksmith's own hands.

Oh, we once again make the glutinous rice cakes and put them to the side of the all-true, all-precious *G'ui Fu*.

G'ui Fu, the all-true, all-wise, You who protects us from the cuts of knives and axes, *G'ui Fu*, the all-true, the all-precious, at this time of the division between the years and the months, once again look upon your village, look upon the whole community within the four corners of the village and once again protect them from the ten kinds, the nine kinds of misfortune.^(a)

This year, this New Year, New Moon, every person humbles himself before You, once again looks to You and once again puts himself under You, oh *G'ui Fu*, the all-true, *G'ui Fu*, the all-precious.

You who are Lord of the Year and of the Month, three times in one day and three times in one night once again look over us and once again shield us from the nine kinds of misfortune.^(b)

Oh, joined by the same pure thoughts we once again pray to the side of *G'ui Fu*, the all-true, all-precious, we once again stretch out our hands,^(c) oh You who remove from the four corners of the village the ten kinds, nine kinds of misfortune, *G'ui Fu*, the all-true, all-wise, *G'ui Fu*, the all-true, all-precious.

(a) A poetic expression meaning 'all misfortune'.

(b) See note (a)

(c) The Lǎ Hŭ act of prayer often involves stretching out of the right arm and holding in the right hand lighted beeswax candles.

During the morning and afternoon of *hk'aw tan nyi* boys and younger men (married men as well as bachelors) spend much time spinning wooden tops on an area of reasonably flat ground in or near the village. The object of this game, called *hk'aw shi bq ve* (top-throwing), is for one man to spin his top in the centre of the playing area, whilst the others attempt to knock over this top whilst spinning their own, (Pl.6). Top spinning is an exclusively male pursuit.

Girls and young women have their own New Year game called *ma ni shi bq ve* (disk-throwing). In this game there are two teams of indefinite number. Each player has a flat wooden disk (approximately 20 cms. × 15 cms. × 3 cms.) which is slightly rounded at the ends. The game is played on a pitch about ten metres long. One team lines up its disks at one end of the pitch, (Pl.7). Each member of the second team, in turn, places her own disk on her right foot (Pl.8), runs about three metres and projects her disk towards those of the opposing team. The object is to dislodge to a distance of more than a fore-arm's length from its original position a disk belonging to a member of the opposing team. If the first team fails to score a single hit, the second team takes its place. However, if it succeeds, it moves closer up to its opponents' disks and, from a distance of some three metres, each member attempts to dislodge a disk, this time throwing her own with both hands. One failure at this stage disqualifies the opposing team, but if each member scores a hit, the whole team moves around to the other side of the row of disks and repeats the throwing procedure. Once again, a single failure disqualifies the throwing team, but if each member is successful, this team has won the round and continues as throwing team in the next round.

Both top-spinning and disk-throwing are essentially New Year games. Younger boys do spin tops at other times of the year, but older youths and men only play during the New Year period. Informants say that when the Guardian Supernaturals look down at the village at New Year time, they will be happy to see the young folk enjoying themselves and will therefore be pleased to bestow their blessings on the whole village community.

In the early evening each household head binds together two beeswax candles, lights these and places them on his rice cake altar. He then prays to the Guardians of the Year and other divinities, for the prosperity and health of his household during the coming year. There is considerable variation in the words of the prayers recited by the different household heads but the theme of each prayer is the same. A free translation of one such household head's prayer is as follows:

Oh, at the completion of another year, my whole household celebrates the New Year, yes, my whole household.

Oh, may there be no misfortune to the chickens, to all the animals belonging to the household.

Throughout the year, protect all the household, all the animals from the seventy-seven kinds of sickness. ^(a)

Protect us all from the cuts of knives and axes and from sharp points of wood.

Once again, ^(b) protect us all from the sickness arising from fear of retribution. ^(c)

Once again, help us that we may have no misfortune, that we may have great wealth like the people over there. ^(d)

Oh Father *Shā Cā* ^(e) and Mother *Nā bo ma*, ^(f) Mother who can do all things, You two who need only say something for it to transpire, you two who always speak the truth, my life is in your hands.

I cannot say something for it to transpire, I cannot always speak the truth.

(a) A poetic expression meaning 'all sickness'.

(b) i.e. 'protect us this year as you did last year'.

(c) The Lǎ Hŭ expression is *hpě haweh* 'to be tied up as with a rope (*haweh*) with that particular fear arising from the knowledge that one has wronged somebody and will ultimately have to pay for that wrong (*hpě*).

(d) The speaker refers to all wealthy townsmen.

(e) Here, Father *Shā Cā* refers to the supreme Lǎ Hŭ supernatural, G'uĭ sha. *Shā Cā* is also the name of a Lǎ Hŭ culture hero who, although mortal, obtained access to heaven without first dying.

(f) The female divinity and giver of fertility to the fields and crops.

Oh Mother *Nă bo ma*, you who need only say something for it to transpire, you who always speaks the truth, Oh *Father Sha Că*, Oh Heavenly Blacksmith, Oh Heavenly Headman, Oh wife of the Heavenly Headman, ^(g) Yes, all of you, three times in one day, ^(h) once again protect everybody in the house.

Three times a night, once again grant that we may have many animals under the house. ⁽ⁱ⁾

Yes, grant that there may be many people in the house.

Grant us wealthy lives so that the old men will talk about us, grant us dignity and wealth so that everybody will say 'Oh ho! they have plenty of money!'.
 Once again cover us all with this blessing.

Three times in one night, three times in one day grant that there may be no misfortune to any of us.

Yes, may there be no misfortune to the pregnant women.

May the whole household have pure thoughts and work together in the fields.

Oh from the yield of one day's work in the fields may we obtain nine boxes of money, and white clothes^(j) to fill nine rice barns.

Oh all elder brother blacksmiths, all headmen and all headmen's people in all four corners of the world,^(k) once again bless my household that we may have no misfortune.

- (g) The *Lă Hụ Nyĩ* believe that just as in the village on earth, so also in heaven there is a blacksmith, a headman and a headman's wife.
- (h) A poetic expression meaning 'continually'.
- (i) *Lă Hụ* houses are built on stilts. The cows, buffaloes, pigs and dogs sleep under the house at night.
- (j) 'White clothes' here means pure, good or beautiful clothes rather than the actual colour of the clothes (*Lă Hụ Nyĩ* clothes are generally black and red).
- (k) This is a literal translation of the *Lă Hụ* '*mĩ ma* (earth) *aw* (four) *eg* (corners)' meaning 'everywhere on earth'.

May every *kǎ shaŭ*,⁽¹⁾ every *la shaŭ*,^(m) every headman on the whole earth and in whole heaven bless our household that we may not be killed by men or by evil spirits.

Three times a night and three times a day bless us so that it will be said of this household that its members cannot be killed by men or by evil spirits and that in this household the supply of food and clothes is never exhausted.

From today and hereafter, oh all men and women, all Buddhist monks, three times in one day, three times in one night protect our household.

Help us to obtain great wealth.

May all policemen, all soldiers help us.

May all old men, all Buddhist monks help us.

Bless us that we may not be poor.

Oh Father *Shŭ Că*, Oh Mother *Nă bo ma*, three times a night from today and hereafter bless us that there may be no misfortune to this household.

Oh Father *Shŭ Că*, once again bless us all three times a day that we may suffer no misfortune, that we may have good health.

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- (1) The *kǎ shaŭ pǎ* is one of the ritual practitioners of a Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ village. If a villager falls sick for no apparent reason, a member of his household may decide to consult the *kǎ shaŭ pǎ*. The latter enters a trance state, during which the supreme Lǎ Hŭ supernatural, G'ui sha, informs him of the misdeeds of the sick man which have brought about his illness. The *kǎ shaŭ pǎ* informs the headman of the revelation he has received. The headman then both fines the sick man and prays for his recovery.
- (m) The *la shaŭ pǎ* is one of the ritual practitioners of a Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ village. His principal duty is to teach the villagers the commands of the supreme supernatural, G'ui sha, which he receives through his dream and trance experiences.

The lighting of beeswax candles is an essential beginning to the Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ act of prayer. For this reason Lǎ Hŭ often refer to themselves as *peŋ tŭ pǎ* (beeswax candle—lighting—men). It should be noted that two such candles are first bound together and then lighted.

The binding together of two candles symbolizes the union of the household head and his wife, the prayer being recited by the former on behalf of both.

The second of the official days of preparation for the Female New Year is called *hk'aw pi nyi*, (year-old-day). In the morning of this day the villagers kill the pigs of the New Year. Usually each household kills one pig, the animal being bludgeoned to death with a heavy wooden club (Pl. 9). Those households which do not have a pig to kill must, on this same day, purchase pork either from fellow villagers or from Thai traders. The pigs are killed in honour of the Guardian Supernaturals, but no prayer or invocation of any kind accompanies the slaughter. Some of the flesh is cooked and eaten that same morning. Many pieces of pork are hung above the rice cake altar as offerings to the Guardian Supernaturals (Pl. 4).

Later in the morning the unmarried boys and girls dress up in their new clothes which are lavishly adorned with silver coins, buttons and, for the girls, a large silver blouse clasp called *tī paweh*. Both boys and girls wear many silver bracelets. The girls wear large silver neckrings, earrings and bead necklaces.

The younger members of the community spend much of the day top-spinning and disk-throwing.

In the evening of *hk'aw pi nyi* a bamboo altar called *hk'aw ceh* (Year Tree), is erected in the center of the village (Pl. 10). This altar is dedicated to the Male and Female Guardians of the Year and is a replica on earth of the 'tree of immortality' to be seen in the moon.⁴ (Lă Hụ believe that if it were only possible to obtain a fragment of this tree the possessor would be free from sickness and death). Four long bamboos, approximately nine metres long, are inserted upright in the ground to form a square. The foliage is left on top of the bamboos to resemble the moon tree. Beside each large bamboo is placed a smaller one some one and a half metres long and with foliage removed. On top of these is placed a small matted bamboo shelf which forms the actual altar (Pl. 11). A section of bamboo, about twenty-five centimetres high, is buried to full depth in the ground

4) Lă Hụ see the lunar shadows to form the shape of a tree.

directly under the altar. This will contain water offerings to the Guardian Supernaturals.

During the evening each household must make an offering to the Guardian Supernaturals at the Year Tree. This offering comprises two rice cakes and two beeswax candles (one each from the household head and his wife) and a piece of pork. Any member of the household, male or female, may make the offering on behalf of the whole household and whilst doing so, this person pours water into the small container underneath the altar.

Towards dusk, fireworks are exploded and guns fired. The resounding sounds of fireworks and gunfire please the Guardian Supernaturals who will then be ready to bless the villagers in all their pursuits during the coming year.

At dusk many of the younger villagers form dance circles around the Year Tree. (Pl. 12). Girls and women form the inner circle of dancers whilst the boys and men form the outer circle. The dancing is led by a villager renowned for his expertise at the gourd flute. This man is called *k'a hk'eû pa* (dance man). Drum, gong and cymbals may also accompany the dancing. This dancing, in honour of the Guardian Supernaturals, continues late into the night.

Early in the evening both the *to bo pa* and the headman pray for the prosperity of the village community during the coming year. These prayers, addressed to the Male Guardian (and by inference also to the Female Guardian) are recited by both men, first at their respective rice cake altars and then at the Year Tree. Both prayers are similar in content. A translation of the headman's prayer is as follows:

Oh, today is the last day of the year, the last day of the moon, yes,
today is the last day of the year, the last day of the moon.

Today, all the headman's people, all the people of the right hand,^(a)
yes, all the villagers make the New Year Tree as beautiful as a flower.

(a) This phrase means 'all the males of the village'. The females are often referred to in the prayers as 'the people of the left hand'.

Once again we dress in our new clothes, yes, once again we dress in our new clothes, we dress in many clothes.

Oh You in heaven, Eternal Guardian of the Year,^(b) yes, Eternal Guardian, Oh Decider of the New Year,^(c) yes, this is the last day of the year, the last day of the moon.

You who decide the time of sickness and the time of death, decide this once again for us.

Oh, help us in time of death and sickness.

Eternal Guardian of the Year, may Your four birds of the year sing beautifully for us at night.^(d)

Guardian who counts all the villagers,^(e) this year give good fortune to all the villagers.

Oh, this year give us good fortune.

May there be no misfortune in the village.

Oh Guardian, protect us when we use the knives and axes.

Eternal Guardian in heaven, You who decide the New Year Day and the New Moon Day; yes, you who can count all the villagers, Oh, give us health this year.

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- (b) The actual Lă Hụ words are 'Nq pu hk'ay sheh ha sheh hpâ' which translated literally mean 'moon tree - year-keeper - month-keeper - man'. I mentioned above that the moon tree is believed to be the tree of immortality. Here the word is used as an honorific title for the Guardian Supernatural to stress his immortality.
- (c) The Guardian decides when the New Year should begin.
- (d) The Guardian of the Year possesses four celestial birds, two couples of husband and wife. The husbands are elder and younger brother. The elder brother, Nq pu co ngâ, and his wife sing for the long life of the villagers. The younger brother, Nq heh ha ngâ, and his wife sing for the wandering souls of the villagers which, on hearing the song, return to their owners. (The Lă Hụ Nyi believe that sickness follows the loss of a soul from the body).
- (e) This phrase means the Guardian 'who knows every individual person in the village'.

All the villagers once again dress in many clothes in your honour.

The Heavenly Headman^(f) has ordered us on earth to make the New Year Tree.

Oh, may the four birds of the year sing beautifully and bless all the villagers.

Oh, this year-end day may there be no misfortune to any of the villagers.

Oh yes, may all the villagers have good fortune and no sickness.

Once again, everybody dresses in new clothes.

During the next year, protect us so that we may all meet at the next New Year.

Oh may the food and drink not be exhausted.

You in heaven who are so rich, let us have wealth.^(g)

Oh You who decide the time of sickness and death, take care of all the villagers.

Yes, this year-end day we once again make the New Year Tree in the village.

Oh, tonight I once again pray with a good voice as is the New Year custom.

Oh, we once again follow the New Year custom and make the New Year Tree in the village.

Tonight, cleanse us of our sins.

Oh You in heaven, Decider of the New Year, Eternal Guardian, You who decide on the time of sickness and death, protect us from all trouble.

Oh, at this New Year time let there be no trouble for the people of the right side and the people of the left side.

(f) See note (g) of household head's prayer.

(g) The Guardian of the Year is believed to possess great wealth.

Let there be good fortune for everybody.
 Every day take care of the lives of all the villagers.
 Grant us long lives like the old men.
 Once again we follow the New Year customs.
 Let us have no trouble.
 All the villagers make ritual offerings to you.^(h)
 Oh You who decide upon the time of death and of sickness and of trouble, three times a day give us your blessings.
 You who hear all that we speak.
 You who always know all the villagers, all the people of the right side, all the people of the left side, everybody.
 Oh You in heaven, this year may all the villagers have good fortune.
 May all the members of the household have happy thoughts.
 May the husbands and wives not separate.
 May the sons and daughters not separate.
 Bless the men and women, everybody.
 Grant good fortune to all.
 May the animals flourish, may their hairs not fall out.
 You in heaven, Guardian of the Year and of the Month, grant us long lives like the old men.
 Once again protect us.
 Once again we follow the New Year customs and make the New Year Tree in the village.
 Oh Father in heaven,⁽ⁱ⁾ grant to everybody in the village happiness and freedom from misfortune during the year.

(h) The actual ritual offering mentioned in the prayer is a *hk'aṽ tañ*, a small wickerwork basket, attached to which are several bamboo sticks with pieces of cotton wool on the end of each. Such offerings, representing baskets of flowers are placed on the *aw hpfuḥ hti* as gifts to the Guardian Supernaturals.

(i) i.e. the supreme Lă Hụ supernatural *G'uṯ sha*. Although this is primarily a prayer to the Guardian of the Year, the headman here also invokes the blessings of *G'uṯ sha*.

Let nobody be killed by men or bitten by spirits.

I pray again that you give us blessings as strong as iron.

Every day and every night, give us blessings as strong as iron.

May everybody, big and small, throughout the year, sleep well and sit well.

May the food and drink taste good.

Give us this blessing.

This year may there be no misfortune, may we all be rich.

Give us this blessing, oh Guardian.

Oh, grant to everybody a long life and great wealth.

We keep the New Year Tree in the village, so once again give us good health and good luck.

This year, oh Guardian who decides the time of sickness and death, decide this again for us.

You who take care of us, protect us from all misfortune.

Oh Guardian in heaven, today we follow the custom of the ancestors.

We make the New Year Tree in the village.

You, oh Guardian who knows all the New Year customs, bless us.

Whilst both *to bo pa* and headman pray for all the villagers, each household head prays for his own household as on the previous evening.

On the next day falls the first of the two *yā mī hē'aw suh nyi* (female-year-new-day). At dawn each household makes an offering of a pair of rice cakes (one from the household head and one from his wife) to the House Spirit (*Yeh ně*), Water Spirit (*l̥ kâ ně*) and the village guardian, *G'uī Fū*. The offerings to the House Spirit and to *G'uī Fū* are placed on their altars in the house and temple respectively. Such gifts are made to ensure the protection of both the household and the village community. The cakes for the Water Spirit are placed on the raised bamboo trough which carries the water supply into the village (Pl. 13), and are to ensure that this spirit will not harm the village folk when they come into contact with water.

At about seven o'clock in the morning, dancing resumes around the Year Tree. This continues spasmodically for several hours. Top-spinnings, disk-throwing and yet another New Year game called *hkeh puñ shī bā ve* (ball throwing) occupy the young people for most of the day. Ball-throwing is played only by girls and young women, who form two lines about ten metres apart. The object is to gently lob a small cloth ball, stuffed with rice husks, to the person standing opposite one. This person must catch the ball and return it in a similar fashion.

Between about nine and ten o'clock in the morning, a female member of each household (generally the wife of the household head) goes round to every other house in the village and ritually washes the hands of the household head and his wife. The water is carried either in a section of bamboo or in a kettle. This rite, called *ĩ kâ lĩ yū dā ve* (water-custom-exchange), obtains for the donor household New Year blessings from the recipient household.

In the afternoon of the first Female New Year Day, parents are bathed by their adult children (Pl. 14). Respected elders of the village are also bathed by persons not of their immediate family. This rite, also called *ĩ kâ lĩ yū dā ve*, ensures the blessings of the elders for those who bathe them.

Dancing around the Year Tree begins at dusk and continues late into the evening. Fireworks are exploded and guns fired as on the previous evening. Early in the evening each household head prays at his rice cake altar as on the two previous evenings. The headman and *to bo pā* pray for the whole village community both at their individual rice cake altars and at the year tree, their prayers being identical to those of the previous evening with the single exception that the phrase 'Oh, today is the New Year Day, the New Moon Day' is substituted for 'Oh, today is the last day of the year, the last day of the moon'.

The following day is *yā mĩ hkh'aw suñ nyi loñ* (female-year-new day-big). Once again, dancing around the year tree begins at about seven o'clock in the morning. A little later, each household presents

to every other household in the village various foodstuffs and beeswax candles. It is essential that each household present a minimum of two rice cakes, a portion of pork and two beeswax candles. Other gifts are optional, but most households also present bananas, crude sugar and a one baht coin. Household heads with parents or parents-in-law in the village may also present these latter with clothes at this time. Generally, both household head and his wife bring these gifts to the other households. Before the presentation of gifts to a particular household, a member of the donor household (usually the wife of the household head) washes the hands of the recipient household head and his wife. If the recipient household head is not present when the gifts are brought to his house, the donor party leaves a bamboo container of water near the fireplace for the household head to wash his own hands when he returns. After the presentation of gifts, a member of the donor party fires a gun or ignites a firework outside the house. This ritual presentation of gifts has the same name (*hk'aw lī yū dā ve*) and the same significance as the earlier inter-household gift exchanges. Informants were unable to offer a reason for the firing of a gun or the ignition of a firework after the gift presentation other than that it brings good fortune to the donor household.

Around ten o'clock in the morning, one of the village elders makes an offering on behalf of the whole village community to the Guardian Supernaturals, *Hk'aw sheh hpa* and *Hk'aw sheh ma*. This offering, made at the year tree comprises gifts similar to those presented by every household to each other. The foodstuffs, candles and money are donated by each household in the village in as great or as little quantities as they wish. All the offerings are placed on a bamboo winnowing tray. The elder who is to make the offering lights several beeswax candles, which he places on the rim of the winnowing tray, and prays as follows :

Oh Eternal Guardian, at this New Year time protect the people of the headman, the people of the *to bo pa*, all people—big and small — every household in the village.

Protect every household in the village from the cuts of knives and axes, from sharp-pointed pieces of wood.

Throughout the year protect all the villagers, every household from the seventy-seven kinds of sickness.^(a)

Oh *Ai ma*,^(b) give to every household fertile fields and good crops.

Protect us everywhere we go when working in the fields.

Give to every household, to every villager food, drink and great wealth.

Give equally to everybody food and drink.

Protect everybody, big and small, from the cuts of knives, axes and sharp-pointed pieces of wood.

Protect everybody from the seventy-seven kinds of sickness.

Open the door of heaven and give your blessing to all the people that their animals may prosper.

You who rule one thousand, one million households, one hundred thousand groups of people, all people, big and small.^(c)

Grant to the whole village of the *to bo pa*, the whole village of the headman, to all people, big and small, to every household that the yield from one day's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten days, that the yield from one year's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten years.

Oh *Ai ma*, oh Father *Shā cā*, oh Eternal Guardian of the Year and Month, once again carefully grant these blessings to all the people, the big and small.

Grant that the womenfolk bear good children, as white as young banana shoots, may the children's bodies be as pure as the sun and the moon.

Give to every household, every person, big and small, freedom from misfortune and great wealth.

From today and hereafter, Oh Eternal Guardian, as I pray to you now, you pray for us thirty, three-hundred times^(e) so that every household may be well.

(a) See note (a) of household head's prayer.

(b) *Ai ma* is a female divinity. In other prayers she is referred to as *Nā bo ma* or *Nā shi ma*. She is a fertility supernatural who ensures for the villagers good crops.

(c) i.e. 'You, Guardian of the Year who rule over all people'.

(d) i.e. *G'ui sha*, the supreme *Lă Hu* supernatural.

(e) This phrase means that the Guardian should pray times without number for the villagers.

While the prime purpose of the above prayer is to invoke the blessings of the Guardian Supernaturals, it should be noted that the prayer also invokes the aid of the supreme Lā Hū supernatural, *G'yi sha*, and the female, divinity, *Ai ma*. However, the ritual offerings of pork and other foodstuffs are presented only to the Guardian Supernaturals, who alone of the divinities partakes of pork. The offerings are later redivided among the households of the village. If only a small number of coins are given, these are all taken by the elder who recites the prayer. If, on the other hand, there is a considerable sum of money, this is divided as follows: two-thirds is given to the dance leader and the remaining one-third is divided equally among the households of the village.

After the presentation of gifts to the Guardian Supernaturals, members of minor villages leave for the senior village within the village cluster to present their New Year greetings to that community. (One particular village may be considered the senior in the cluster, either because it is larger than all the others or because its headman is of senior rank to the headmen of the other villages (Walker 1967)). The villagers wear old clothes for the walk but carry their new clothes along with them in their shoulder bags. On nearing the senior village, the visiting party fires shots into the air to announce its impending arrival. Answering shots are fired by members of the senior village. At the outskirts of the village, the visiting party halts. Here the visitors change back into their new clothes. A money tree, called *hkaṵ tañ ceḥ*, is prepared. (the verb '*hkaṵ ve*' means 'to ask somebody for something', '*tañ*' means 'to make an offering [in order to procure for oneself some benefit]', '*ceḥ*' means a tree). A thin bamboo of about two metres in length is chosen and any member of the visiting party who so wishes, gives a one or five baht note, which is affixed to the bamboo. The presentation of this money tree ensures for the donor village the blessings of the recipient village. The money is later divided among the host villagers, with two-thirds going to the dance leader and one third being shared equally among the households of the village.

The visiting party proceeds into the village (Pl. 5), led by one of their number holding the money tree. As they enter the village, elders of the visiting party have their hands washed by one or more of the wives of the household heads of the host village (Pl. 16). There is no precise stipulation as to who should wash or be washed, but it was noticed that young people did not partake in this rite. Once again, this hand washing ensures for the donor the blessings of the recipient. The visiting party now moves on to the centre of the village. When near the Year Tree, men of the visiting party form into a line and approach the men of the host village who have formed into a similar line. The two lines of men approach each other and when no more than a metre apart, each man fires his gun into the air. All the men now proceed together to the Year Tree where they dance (Pl. 17). Here they are joined by the womenfolk of both villages who form the inner circle of dancers (Pl. 18). The money tree brought by the visitors is placed on the Year Tree by the *to bo pa* of the host village. Dancing by members of both villages continues for about half an hour after which the gathering disperses, the visitors retiring to the houses of their kinsmen in the host village.

In the afternoon, offerings of pork, crude sugar and rice cakes, brought by members of the visiting party, are offered to the Guardian Supernaturals by the *to bo pa* of the host village (Pl. 19). While making this offering, the *to bo pa* prays for the health and prosperity of the visiting village or villages. (A similar prayer, offered by the *to bo pa* of a (minor) host village on the occasion of the visit of members of the senior and of another minor village on the Male New Year Day, is recorded below.) The food offerings are later divided equally among all households in the host village. After this ritual offering has been made, members of the visiting party are free to return home. However, on the occasions witnessed by the writer, many visitors remained for one or more nights in the host village.

In the evening there is much dancing in the host village and a little in other villages of the cluster. Once again, household heads, headman and *to bo pa* recite the New year prayers as on previous evenings.

Following the second Female New Year Day is *ně taŭ nyi* (spirits - go out - day). On this day the ancestral spirits who have been in the village to witness the festivities since *hk'aŋ tan nyi* (the day on which the rice cakes were made), leave the village. On *ně taŭ nyi* the villagers may resume work in the fields but must return to the village at night and not sleep in their field huts. No prayers are offered and no dancing takes place on this evening.

The following day is called *chaw taŭ nyi* (people - go out - day). This day marks the conclusion of the Female New Year. Normal work in the fields resumes with no restrictions. Some informants maintain that the insertion of a *chaw taŭ nyi* between the Female and the Male New Year periods is an innovation, the custom having originated among Lā Hŭ Nyī in Burma within the last few years.

THE MALE NEW YEAR

Immediately following upon the *chaw taŭ nyi* after the Female New Year is the *hk'aŋ tan nyi* of the Male New Year. The Male New Year or *haŋ hk'aŋ* is also known as *hk'aŋ naŋch* (year - small). Informants are generally agreed that the Male New Year is of less importance than the Female New Year. However, only one informant offered an explanation for the differing importance of the two New Year periods other than that this was the decree of the ancestors. This one informant, a former ritual functionary with a considerable reputation for his knowledge of Lā Hŭ lore, stated that it is during the Female New Year period that the villagers eat much pork and since the care of the household pigs is pre-eminently a female task, therefore the Female New Year is considered to be more important than the Male New Year.

The *hk'aŋ tan nyi* rites of the Male New Year are similar to those of the Female New Year. Fresh rice cakes are prepared by every household and each household presents every other household first with glutinous rice grains and later with two rice cakes and two beeswax candles. Fresh rice cakes are also placed on the rice cake altar. In the evening, each household places two fresh rice cakes on

the Year Tree. Dancing around the Year Tree begins at dusk and continues spasmodically throughout the evening. Household heads, headman and *to bo pa* once again recite their New Year prayers.

The following day is the male *hk'aw pi nyi*. In the morning villagers who so wish kill a pig for the Male New Year. In fact, there is usually plenty of pork remaining from the Female New Year and few, if any, villagers can afford to kill a second animal.

On the Male New Year Day (there is only one Male New Year Day as opposed to the two Female New Year Days) dancing around the Year Tree begins around seven o'clock. Later in the morning parents and respected elders are bathed by their own children and those wishing to obtain their blessings for the coming year. Unlike Female New Year Day, the spirits are not fed on the Male New Year Day. In 1968, visitors from the senior and the one other village in the cluster arrived at the village in which the writer is living at 12.30 p.m. Rites identical to those already described then took place. In the afternoon, prior to the visitors' departure, offerings were made on their behalf at the Year Tree by the village *to bo pa*. The prayer recorded on this occasion was as follows:

Now may all the villagers be happy on this New Year Day.

Oh You who speak only the truth,^(a) bless everybody that they may enjoy good fortune.

The villages have followed the same customs.^(b)

The villagers have crossed many hills and streams and have come to this village.

They have dressed in white and yellow clothes^(c) and have come here.

Open your celestial box and once again bestow good fortune on everybody.^(d)

(a) The *to bo pa* is referring to *hk'aw sheh hpā*, the Guardian of the Year.

(b) The two visiting villages have both prepared rice cakes, pork etc. and have brought these to offer at the *hk'aw cel* of the host village.

(c) This phrase means 'clothes of many different colours'.

(d) The Year Guardian possesses a box in heaven in which he stores blessings to give to the villagers.

May the four Year birds in heaven protect the souls and lives of all the villagers.^(e)

You who speak only the truth, protect everybody so they may not be killed by men or spirits.

You in heaven, who speak only the truth, may your four celestial birds of the year once again sing beautifully nine times in one night.

Hereafter may *G'ui sha's* flag sing beautifully and bless both young and old that they may have no trouble and that nobody may kill them.^(f)

May there be many animals under the house^(g) and many people in the house.

May the four celestial year birds once again sing beautifully nine times so that the villagers may have many pigs and many fowl.

You in heaven, who speak only the truth, protect the villagers when they use the knives and axes.

You in heaven, one Divinity,^(h) speak nine times in one night that souls may enter the wombs of the womenfolk.⁽ⁱ⁾

Nă bo Nă shi,^(j) in one night speak nine times so that souls may enter the wombs of the womenfolk.

Nă bo Nă shi, let there be many animals under the house and many people in the house.

When I pray to you one time, oh Year Guardian, and to your celestial birds, do not forget my prayer.

(e) See note (d) of headman's prayer.

(f) *G'ui sha*, the supreme Lā Hū supernatural, possesses in heaven a flag which, fluttering in the wind, sings blessings to the people on earth.

(g) See note (i) of household head's prayer.

(h) The supreme supernatural, *G'ui sha*.

(i) The Lā Hū Nyī believe that after conception *G'ui sha* sends a soul into the womb of the pregnant woman to animate the embryo.

(j) *Nă bo Nă shi* is a female divinity and is worshipped as a fertility supernatural.

Three times in one day remember my prayer and protect the headmen and villagers.^(k)

When they use the knives and axes may they become rich,^(l) once again give this blessing.

May everybody, big and small, all the people find and obtain on the right side silver and on the left side gold.^(m)

The headman of Mae Saluam⁽ⁿ⁾ and his villagers have come here on this New Year Day and we are all happy together.

On this New Year Day, once again give Your blessings so that everybody may have good fortune and that nobody, big or small, may die.

(k) The headman and villagers of the visiting villages.

(l) i.e. 'may they obtain wealth from the fields worked with knives and axes'.

(m) i.e. 'may they obtain great wealth'.

(n) One of the visiting villages. The *to bo pa* who recited this prayer later informed the writer that he had forgotten to mention by name the senior village, Hk'â Loñ. (The headman of this village was not among the visiting party).

* * *

In the late morning and early afternoon of the Male New Year Day, each household performs a rite called *ā htaw ā htē aw cā ve* (big knives - small knives - rice - eat). Each household head places pieces of rice cake on all the knives, farming implements and guns owned by the household (Pl. 20). The farming implements and knives are placed together on a winnowing tray. The household head lights two beeswax candles, binds these together, and placing them on the rim of the winnowing tray prays to the Heavenly Blacksmith, who is believed to rule over all metal objects on earth. In the prayer, the household head requests that the implements may not harm the members of the household whilst in use during the coming year. The prayer, a translation of which is given below, must be recited by the household head or at least a male member of that household. A member of another household may not recite this prayer in the house. Should no member of the household be familiar with the prayer it is omitted, in which case the rite consists solely of placing pieces of rice cake on the implements. The prayer is as follows:

Oh, at the completion of another year, I once again give the big and small knives rice cakes to eat.

When we take the big and small knives to the fields may we always be well.

May they not cut our hands and feet.

Yes, may sharp-pointed pieces of wood not cut our hands and feet.

When we take these knives to the fields may there always be sufficient to eat.^(a)

You who control all metals, Heavenly Blacksmith,^(b) this is once again the time to pray to You that You open the door of Your celestial house and bless us.

When we prepare the fields may there be sufficient to eat.

When we prepare the fields may the points of the knives not cut our hands and feet.

(a) i.e. 'May the fields prepared with knives and axes give an abundant yield'.

(b) Just as there is a blacksmith in the village, so the Lā Hu Nyī believe that there is a blacksmith in heaven and this Heavenly Blacksmith has ultimate control over all metals on earth.

* * *

Later in the afternoon, each household ritually feeds the ancestral spirits of the household head and of his wife. For this rite, called *chaw suh aw cā ve* (people-dead-rice-eat), a meal is prepared consisting of rice, pork soup and tea. Two winnowing trays are placed in the front portion of the house and upon each tray is put one helping of each foodstuff, together with tobacco and home made cigarettes. The offerings on one basket are for the ancestral spirits of the household head and on the other for those of his wife. A wickerwork basket containing the household's silver jewellery which is likewise offered to the ancestral spirits is placed near the two winnowing baskets. An elder of the village, conversant with the rite, visits each household in turn and ritually offers the food, tobacco and jewellery to the ancestral spirits. He places beeswax candles on the rim of each winnowing basket, lights them and, squatting on his haunches in

front of the baskets, he summons the ancestral spirits to partake of the meal prepared for them (Pl. 21). As he begins his prayer he pours water from either a bamboo container or a kettle onto the bamboo slats of the floor in front of him. This is a symbolic washing of the hands of the ancestors who have come to partake of the meal. At the conclusion of his prayer, the elder again pours water onto the floor. This latter rite has a double significance. First, it symbolizes the washing of the ancestors' hands which have been soiled through eating. Second, it symbolizes the desire of the household members that the ancestors, having eaten, leave the house and return to their heavenly abode. A translation of the prayer recorded at one house on the Male New Year Day is as follows:

Oh, old man Cạ Shi,^(a) you who live in heaven and need only desire something for that desire to be satisfied,^(b)

And you also, Cạ Dạ,^(c)

Oh, your children here on earth have prepared for you very good food and very good drink.

Very good food and very good drink is now ready for you; Come and eat.

On this day, the New Year Day, tell all your group^(d) to come here and eat.

Oh you who live in heaven and need only desire something for that desire to be satisfied, give your blessings that there may be no misfortune in this house on earth.

Once again, give this blessing.

As the earth's life never decays, so grant that the lives of the women and of the men (of this house) may never decay.

(a) The name of the household head's mother's father. The household head's mother and father are both still alive. Only one ancestor of each spouse is called by name. Informants say that it is optional which name is called. Later in the prayer this ancestor is requested to call all the ancestors to come and eat.

(b) The Lă Hụ Nyi believe that a heavenly spirit need only think he wants something for that want to be immediately satisfied. Informants often give the example of hunger. If a heavenly spirit feels hungry, that hunger is immediately satisfied without the necessity of actually eating.

(c) The name of the household head's wife's father.

(d) i.e. 'tell all the other ancestors, not mentioned by name in this prayer, to come to this house and eat the meal prepared for them.'

Give eternal life like that of the earth to the womenfolk.^(e)

Give eternal life like that of heaven to the menfolk.^(e)

Protect from all sickness and decay all the men, women and children^(f) and all their animals and everything that belongs to them.

You who need only say something for it to transpire, you who always speak the truth, three times in one day and three times in one night give your blessings^(g) bless the work in the fields so that the yield from one day's work may not be exhausted in ten days and the yield from one year's work may not be exhausted in ten years.

Oh, once again give this blessing.

Oh, come to eat and drink!

May the yield from one day's work in the fields not be exhausted in ten days, may the yield from one year's work in the fields not be exhausted in ten years.

You who need only desire something for that desire to be satisfied, you who always speak the truth, carefully protect the people of this household from the cuts of knives and axes, of sharp-pointed pieces of wood.

Three times in one day, three times in one night, this year and hereafter, take care of your children, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren, that they may suffer no misfortune.

Do not allow them to be foolish or senseless.^(h)

Three times a day bless them all that they may be as pure as water, as pure as a river rock.

(e) Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ believe that heaven and earth are marital partners. Heaven is the husband and earth, his wife. Thus, the eternal life of the male heaven is requested for the menfolk, and the eternal life of the female earth, for the womenfolk.

(f) i.e. 'of this house'.

(g) i.e. 'to the household members'.

(h) The word used in the prayer is 'vĭ'. The verb 'vĭ eĥ ve' means to be unconscious or senseless, as a result, for example, of having been knocked on the head by a falling tree or having consumed an excess of alcohol.

This concludes the prayer requesting the ancestors to come and eat. Should any of the known ancestors have been opium smokers, the officiant now offers opium to their spirits reciting the following prayer whilst so doing:

Oh, you who need only desire something for that desire to be satisfied, take this opium, divide it amongst yourselves, and smoke it in heaven.

When you have finished eating, once again bless your children on earth so that the yield from one day's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten days, that the yield from one year's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten years.

Once again give this blessing.

Do not allow your grandchildren or your great grandchildren to be foolish or senseless.

You who need only say something for it to transpire, you who always speak the truth, look carefully on all of them.

* * *

The food offerings which have been presented to the ancestral spirits may later be eaten by members of the household, but not before a little of each substance has been fed to the household dogs. Informants say that should they eat this food before first having given some to the dogs, they would become absent-minded, constantly forgetting everything. Apparently, the power (not a spirit) which produces this ill effect enters the dogs thus permitting the household members subsequently to eat with impunity.

In the evening of the Male New Year Day dancing around the Year Tree begins at dusk and continues late into the evening. Once again, headman, *to bo pa* and household heads recite the New Year prayers.

The next day is *ně taŋ nyi* when the ancestral spirits once again leave the village. These ancestral spirits had left the village on *ně taŋ nyi* after the Female New Year, but had returned on *hk'aw tan nyi*

of the Male New Year in order to witness these latter celebrations. Early in the morning of this day, the dance leader performs two or three dance rounds at the Year Tree. A little later the headman comes to this altar and lighting two beeswax candles prays as follows:

Oh, this year, Guardian of the Year and of the Month, protect until next year^(a) the whole village of the headman, the whole village of the *to bo pa*, everybody – big and small – every household, every person, yes every household, every person.

Protect everybody from the cuts of knives and axes.

This year may we not be troubled by sickness.

Once again, protect us from the cuts of knives and axes.

Once again, protect us from the seventy-seven kinds of sickness.^(b)

Oh, until next year let us have great wealth.

To every household give many animals under the house and many people in the house.

Oh Guardian of the Year and of the Month, until next year carefully look after every household and shield every household from all trouble.

Protect every household, every person from the cuts of knives and axes.

Oh may the whole village have pure thoughts, may all the villagers prepare the fields together, may there be no misfortune through sickness.

May the whole big village^(c) of the headman, the village of the *to bo pa*, not be troubled by sickness or cuts.

(a) i.e. 'protect us throughout the coming year until next year when we shall again pray to you'. The Guardian of the Year is invoked only during the New Year period.

(b) i.e. 'all sickness'.

(c) The Lǎ Hŭ text here reads '*mǎ caw g'a ve a daŭ hĕ'â ma aŭ cĕ*'. '*Mǎ caw g'a*' means 'cannot walk around' '*a daŭ*' means 'headman', '*hĕ'â ma*', village', '*aŭ cĕ*', 'four corners', i.e., the four corners of the headman's village which is so large that one cannot walk around it. This is a poetic expression, the village in question comprising only twelve houses.

Oh, once again at the same time give to every household, every person, to the whole village of the headman dignity^(d) and wealth.

Oh Guardian of the Year and of the Month, until next year, once again look after us so that there may be no misfortune.

Oh, once again bless every household that they may have dignity and great wealth – that the houses may be full of money and that they may suffer no misfortune.

Today we pull out the New Year Tree and throw it away over there, near the village.^(e)

Do not be angry and trouble us (because we do this), for now the New Year ceremonies are finished.

Today, Oh Guardian of the Year and the Month, the New Year is over.

Today, we once again pull out the New Year Tree and throw it away over there, near the village.

It is the all true Father^(f) who has ordained every custom.

We do not mean to offend you.

Next year you may rule again,^(g) so do not curse any of the people, do not speak evil of any of the people.

-
- (d) The word in the Lă Hụ text is 'shē lē'. A person possesses 'shē lē' if he has sufficient wealth to allow him to live in style and thus be accorded respect from his fellow villagers. The accent appears to be on 'style', rather than pure wealth. However, 'shē lē' comes from wealth rather than simple respect. A poor headman who is unable to dress and eat well may well be accorded the respect due to his position, but he will not be said to possess 'shē lē'.
- (e) The *hk'aw cēh* is thrown away in the jungle near the village.
- (f) i.e., the supreme supernatural, *G'ui sha*.
- (g) *Hk'aw shēh hpā*, the Year Guardian, rules over the village only during the New Year period. He is invoked at no other time. However, he does protect the villagers throughout the year.

Each household now takes back from the Year Tree two rice cakes and some pork. These two rice cakes are placed on the household's rice supply, which may be kept in a barn near the old rice field or in a large basket inside the house. This rite is believed to ensure that the rice supply will be sufficient until the next harvest. The Year Tree is now removed and thrown away on the outskirts of the village.

As the Year Tree is removed from the centre of the village, so also on the morning of *ně taò nyi* each household removes its rice cake altar. Before removing this altar, the household head lights two beeswax candles and prays to the guardian supernaturals. A translation of one such prayer recorded is as follows:

Oh you in heaven, Eternal Male Guardian of the Year, Pure Female Guardian, this morning we remove the *aw hpfuh hti*.

Oh, bless us that the yield from one year's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten years, the yield from one day's work in the fields may not be exhausted in ten days.

Once again bless us that there may be many people in the house and many animals underneath the house, that there may be no misfortune.

At the completion of the coming year^(a) we will once again give You presents and You will once again give us your blessings.

(a) i.e. at the next New Year time.

* * *

On *ně taò nyi* the villagers return to their normal work in the fields but, as on the *ně taò nyi* of the Female New Year, they must return to the village at night.

The following day is *chaw taò nyi* when all restrictions on the villagers' activities are removed and village life resumes its normal course. After eleven days of intermittant rites and ceremonies, and many weeks of preparation, the New Year ceremonies are finally at an end. Most villagers now turn to the task of felling the new swiddens.

THE LĀ HŪ NYĪ NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS - RESUMÉ OF DAYS AND NOTE ON SPECIAL PROHIBITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

The following is a resumé of the LĀ HŪ NYĪ New Year Days :

Date by Western Calendar 1967 1968	LĀ HŪ Name of Day	English Translation
<i>YĀ MĪ HK'AW</i> —FEMALE YEAR		
Jan. 12. Jan. 30.	<i>hk'aw tan nyi</i>	year begin day
Jan. 13. Jan. 31.	<i>hk'aw pi nyi</i>	year old day
Jan. 14. Feb. 1.	<i>yā mī hk'aw suh nyi</i>	female new year day
Jan. 15. Feb. 2.	<i>yā mī hk'aw suh nyi loñ</i>	big female new year day
Jan. 16. Feb. 3.	<i>ně tañ nyi</i>	spirits go out day
Jan. 17. Feb. 4.	<i>chaw tañ nyi</i>	people go out day
<i>HAŴ HK'Ā HK'AW</i> —MALE YEAR		
Jan. 18. Feb. 5.	<i>hk'aw tan nyi</i>	year begin day
Jan. 19. Feb. 6.	<i>hk'aw pi nyi</i>	year old day
Jan. 20. Feb. 7.	<i>haŵ hk'ā hk'aw suh nyi</i>	male new year day
Jan. 21. Feb. 8.	<i>ně tañ nyi</i>	spirits go out day
Jan. 22. Feb. 9.	<i>chaw tañ nyi</i>	people go out day

Villagers may continue their work in the fields on *hk'aw tan nyi* and *hk'aw pi nyi* days. On *hk'aw suh nyi* or actual New Year Days they may on no account go to the fields or undertake work of any kind. On these days the villagers must remain in the village unless they make a New Year visit to relatives in other villages or join the ceremonial New Year inter-village visiting. On *ně tañ nyi* days the villagers may go out to work in the fields but they must return to the village at night. On both *hk'aw suh nyi* and *ně tañ nyi* days, no green

vegetable must be brought into the village. Informants generally could offer no reason for these prohibitions other than that failure to observe them would bring sickness to the guilty parties. With respect to the prohibition regarding green vegetables, one informant stated that if a villager were to bring such vegetables into the village on a New Year Day it would signify that he had been to his fields in contravention of Lǎ Hŭ custom. However, no other informants offered such an explanation which, at any rate, fails to take into account the similar restriction on *ně taŭ nyi* days when work in the fields is permitted. A particularly interesting prohibition is that concerning the entrance of Thai and certain other peoples to the village on both *hk'aw suh nyi* and *ně taŭ nyi* days. While people such as Chinese, Miao and Lisu who customarily prepare rice cakes at New Year, may enter a Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ village on *hk'aw suh nyi* and *ně taŭ nyi* days, others, such as Thai people, who do not prepare such cakes, are prohibited entry. The villages which the writer is at present studying today only partially follow this New Year custom, as they do not have the means of upholding it against possible infringement. At the entrance of the village *a leh-ō* (PL. 22) and a small section of wood are attached at the end of a rope to a bamboo pole. If an outsider sees such a sign he should refrain from entering the village. If he contravenes the restriction on entry he should traditionally pay a fine in silver rupees to the village headman equal in weight to the piece of wood hung at the village entrance.

Throughout the New Year period the Lǎ Hŭ villagers must refrain from quarrelling amongst themselves or criticising each other. It is said that if the Guardian Supernaturals hear such quarrelling or unfriendly remarks, they will say that the village community is unstable and will cause it to break up during the coming year. If there are any disputes to be settled between villagers, these must be held over until the end of the New Year celebrations.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The New Year is by far the most important period in the annual ritual cycle of the Lă Hụ Nyĩ village community. Certain important structural themes may be seen to underlie the rites and ceremonies that take place during this period. The themes which seem to be most significant are as follows :

1. Village Solidarity

The New Year period is one of the few occasions when the Lă Hụ Nyĩ village acts as a unified social group. Lă Hụ Nyĩ village society is marked for its lack of social cohesion above the level of the individual household. Certainly, the headman and *ta bo p̄a ro* senior ritual practitioner are important and influential members of the community (Walker 1967). However, this community may at any time break up, individual households either moving off together to form a new village or attaching themselves to other villages in the neighbourhood. Neither the headman nor the *to bo p̄a* has the authority to prevent such a fission of the village community. The village owns no property in common. Each constituent household manages its own fields and the produce therefrom belongs exclusively to it. The headman and *to bo p̄a* are not necessarily the most prosperous members of the community. Neither may exact tribute either in cash or kind and while each household is expected to contribute a day's labour at the time of the cutting of the new fields and again at the rice harvest to both the headman and the *to bo p̄a*, neither man is able to insist on this service. During the fifteen months that the writer has been living in a Lă Hụ Nyĩ village, the headman has only twice summoned every household to co-operate in a particular non-ritual activity, on one occasion to repair the bamboo trough bringing water to the village and on the other to recut the pathway to the neighbouring Lă Hụ village. At New Year, however, the autonomous households stress their common membership of the village community. The several gift exchanges between the households during the New Year period may be seen to symbolize the interdependence of these units within the total village structure. The direct prohibition on intra-village strife during this period once again reinforces the idea of village solidarity.

2. Inter-Village Solidarity

In the introductory section of this article, it was noted that Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ society lacks any supra-local solidarity above the level of the village or cluster of neighbouring villages. I have written elsewhere (Walker 1967) of the importance of the cluster of neighbouring villages in both traditional and contemporary Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ society. At the New Year the solidarity of the cluster of neighbouring villages is symbolized by the ceremonial inter-village visiting.

3. The Equality of the Villagers and of the Households

An important theme underlying the New Year rites, and one which is constantly stressed by Lǎ Hŭ informants, is the essential equality of all the villagers and all the households in the village. In practice, some members of the community are more important than others. The headman, *to bo pǎ* and elders are clearly more important personages than are the young men and women and poverty-stricken opium addicts. Again, some households are considerably more wealthy than others. Indeed, some opium addicts are little better than servants of the wealthier households who pay for their labour in opium. However, at New Year time the several reciprocal rites of gift-giving and hand-washing symbolize the essential equality of every household in the village – be it that of the headman or of the most poverty-stricken opium addict. Again, a constantly recurring theme of the several New Year prayers is the request to the supernaturals that all the villagers, all the men and women, all the people, young and old, should share equally in the fruits of the coming year.

4. The Harmony of the Sexes

Another recurrent theme of the Lǎ Hŭ Nyĭ New Year rites is the harmony between male and female elements. We have seen that the celebrations as a whole are divided into two distinct periods – the Female New Year and the Male New Year. The principal supernaturals to whom the rites and ceremonies are addressed are the Male and the Female Guardians of the Year, who are husband and wife. At least two paper-cut human figures must be placed on the rice cake altar –

one to represent male and the other, female. At the gift presentations, both to other households and to the various supernaturals, each household presents two rice cakes—one from the household head and one from his wife. Both male and female villagers have their special New Year games and both male and female villagers must dance at the Year Tree. At the ancestral feeding rites both the ancestors of the household head and those of his wife are invited to partake of the feast.

5. The Dependence of the Village Community on the Spirit World

The dependence of the village community on the spirit world is the most overt theme of the Lă Hụ Nyĩ New Year celebrations and the one which Lă Hụ informants are most ready to stress. It is particularly during the New Year period that the villagers attempt to re-establish a harmonic relationship with the spirit world. Primarily they attempt to please, and thereby obtain blessings from, the Male Guardian and the Female Guardian of the year. However, at this time they also propitiate the spirits of house, village and water. In the New Year prayers, apart from the Guardian Supernaturals, the supreme Lă Hụ supernatural, *G'uj̄ sha*, the female divinity, *Nă bo ma* (also called *Ai ma* and *Nă shī ma*), the celestial birds, the heavenly headman and his wife (*G'uj̄ ma A daṽ* and *G'uj̄ ma A daṽ ma*) and the Heavenly Blacksmith (*G'uj̄ ma Ca l̄*) are all invoked. The ancestral spirits are believed to come to the village to witness the celebrations and, before their final departure, are ritually fed. Shortly after the conclusion of the New Year celebrations, evil spirits are exorcised from the houses.

The Lă Hụ Nyĩ village community having re-established social, sexual and spiritual harmony, the villagers confidently enter another year.

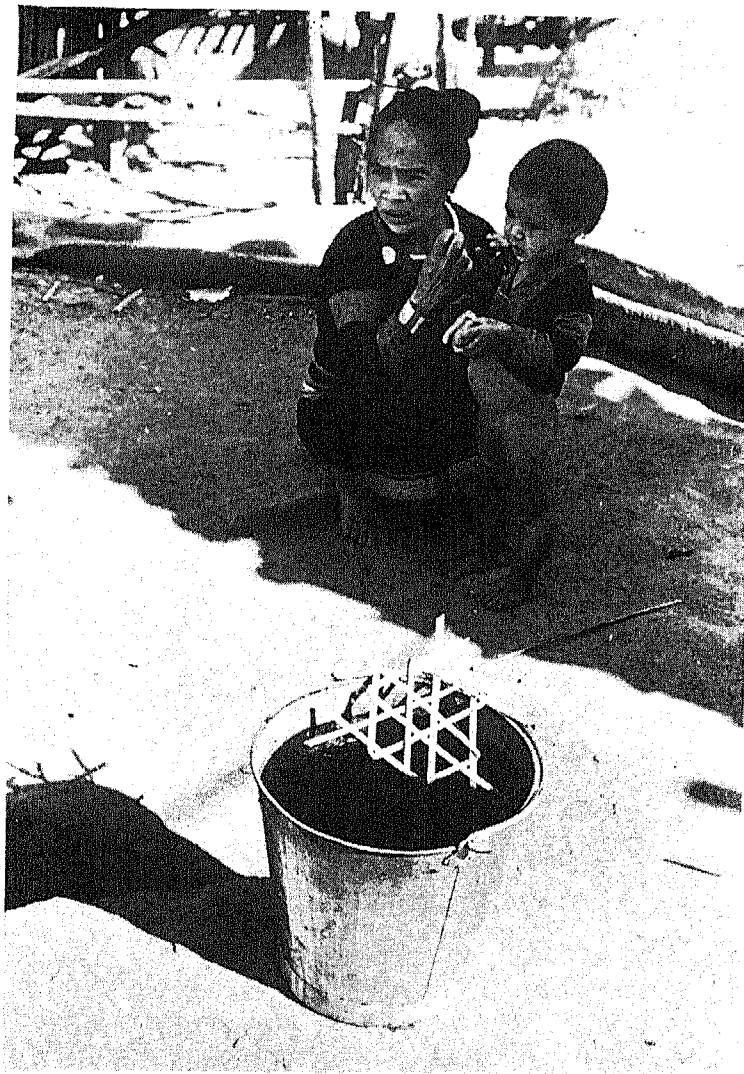


Plate 1 A *Leh-ō* or spirit guard placed on top of a bucket of glutinous rice to prevent malevolent spirits from entering the rice grains



Plate 2 Kneading a dough of glutinous rice (fried sesame later to be mixed into the dough are in the basin on the right of the picture)



Plate 3 Glutinous rice cakes

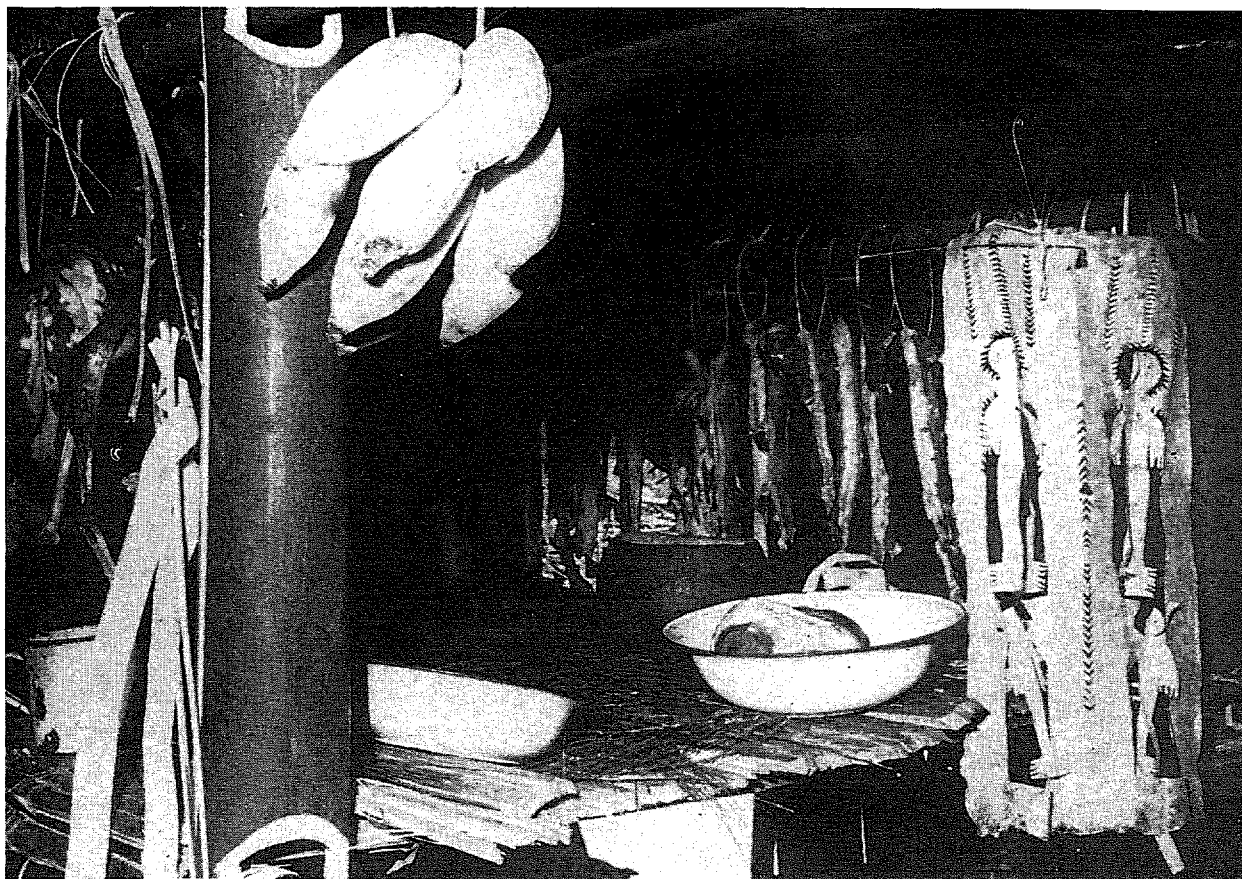


Plate 4 The aw hpfu hti or rice cake altar erected in each house for the New Year celebrations

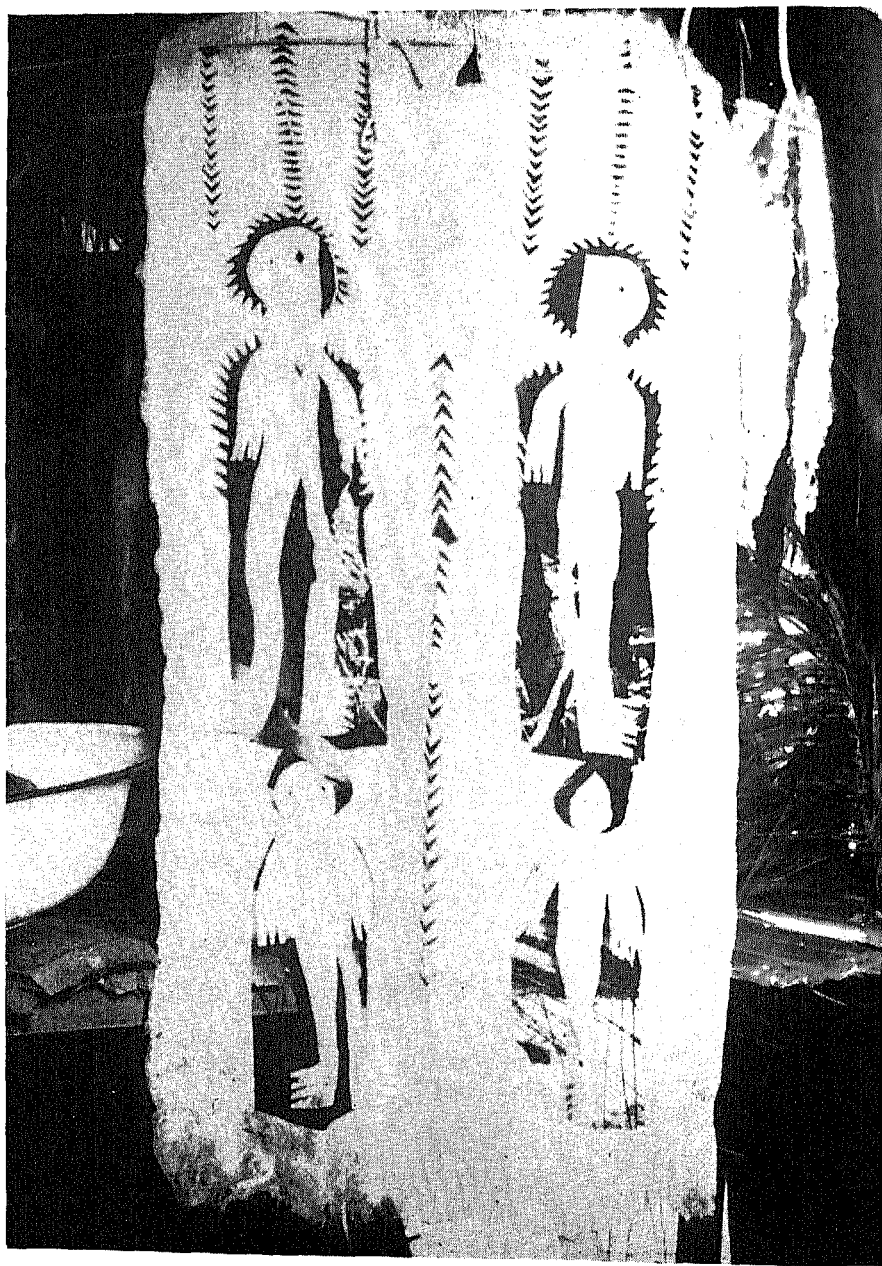


Plate 5 *To keû* or paper-cuts in the shape of a human figure offered to the Guardian Supernaturals of the Year and hung above the rice cake altar



Plate 6 Top spinning, a game played by adult males only at New Year time

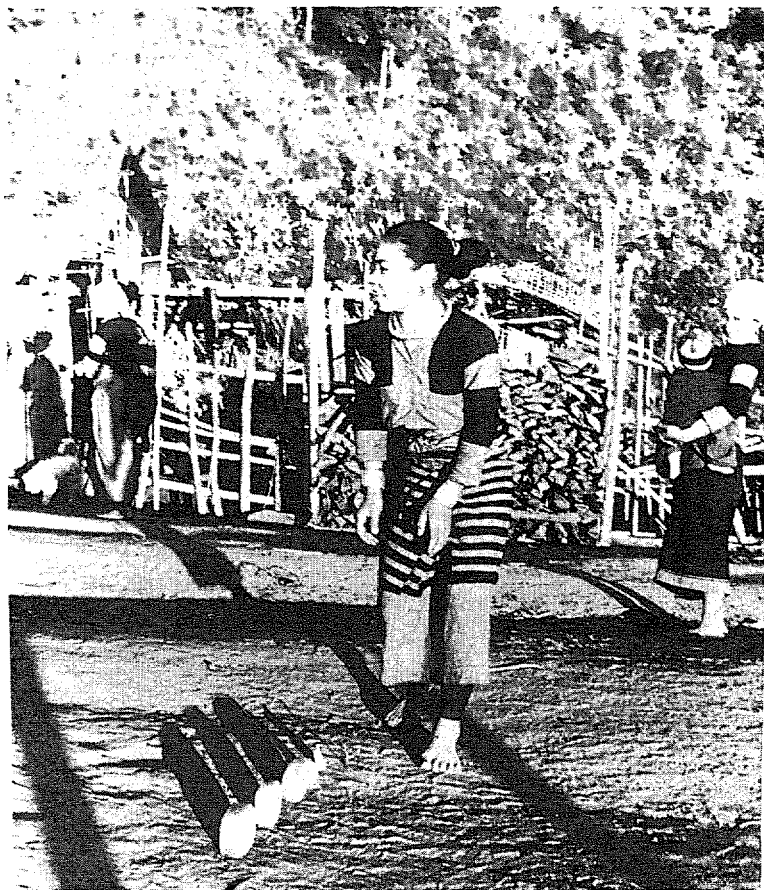


Plate 7 Lining up a row of disks for the disk-throwing game



Plate 8 Girls preparing to project their disks during the disk-throwing game



Plate 9 Slaughtering a pig

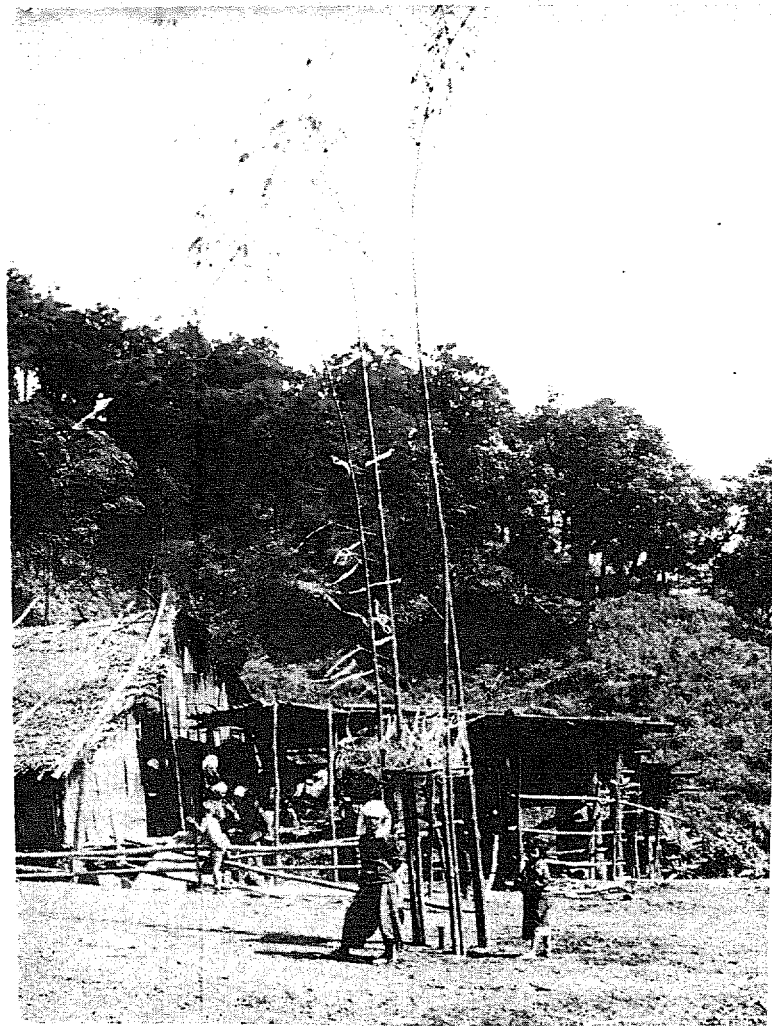


Plate 10 The *Hk'aw Ceh* or New Year Tree erected in the centre of the village in honour of the Guardian Supernaturals of the Year



Plate 11 The altar at the New Year Tree on which are placed rice cakes, pork and pine needles, offerings to the Guardian Supernaturals of the Year



Plate 12 Dancing around the New Year Tree at night; the dance is led by a villager renowned for his expertise on the gourd flute

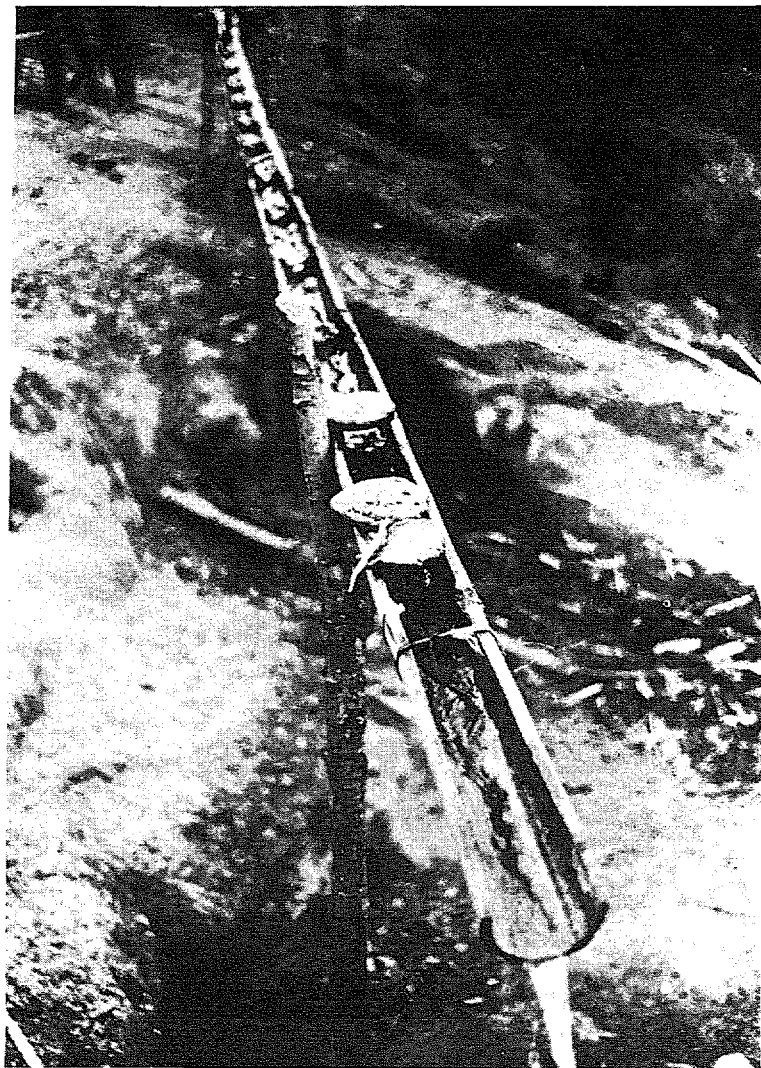


Plate 13 Rice cakes offered to the Water Spirit at the bamboo water trough which brings the water supply to the village



Plate 14 Ritual bathing of elders



Plate 15 Member of a junior village entering a senior village to offer their New Year greetings to members of the latter community



Plate 16 A woman of a host village ritually washing the hands of a visitor from a nearby village



Plate 17 Dancing around the New Year Tree



Plate 18 Women and girls form the inner circle of dancers around the New Year Tree



Plate 19 The *to ho pa* or senior ritual functionary of a host village offering gifts to the Guardian Supernaturals of the Year on behalf of a visiting village

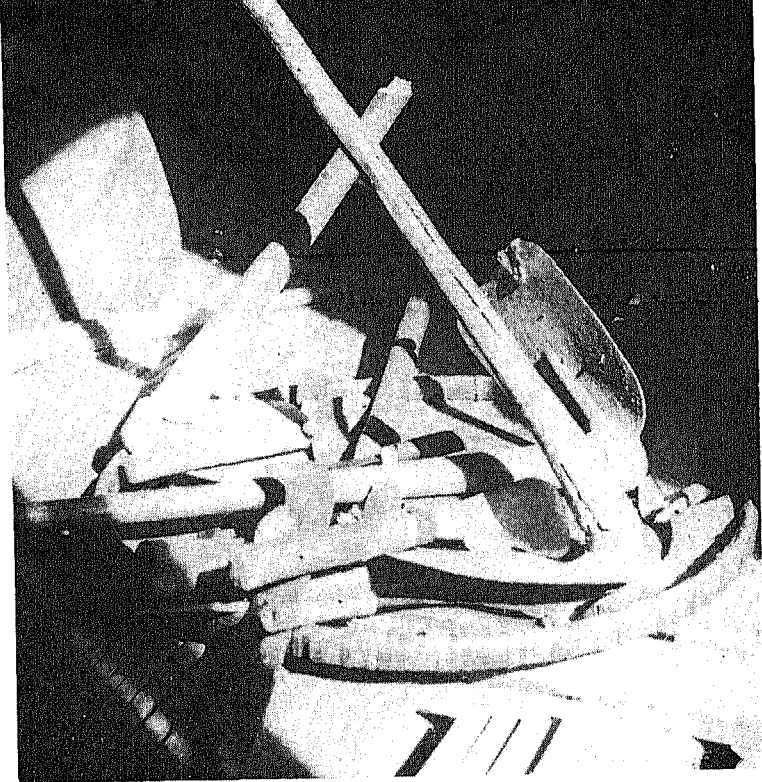


Plate 20 The ritual feeding of the household's farming implements when pieces of glutinous rice cake are placed on each implement



Plate 21 A village elder offering foodstuffs to the ancestors of a household head and his wife

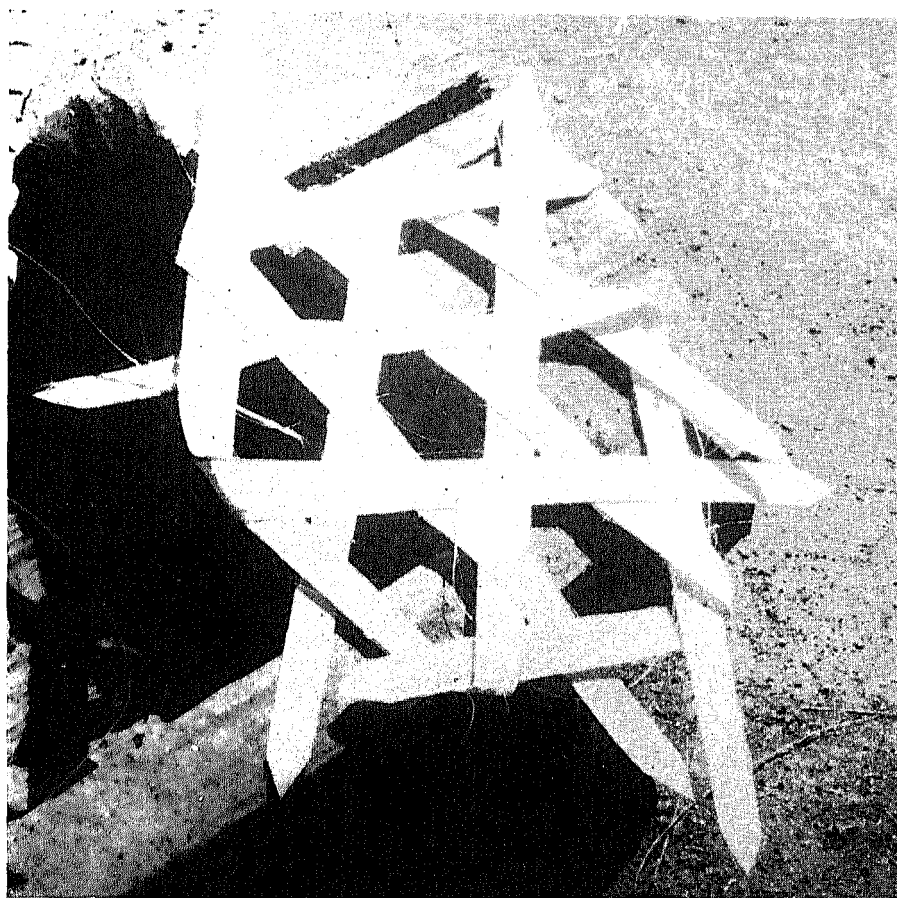


Plate 22 A *leh-ō* which when tied to a bamboo pole at the village entrance signifies that strangers should not enter the village area

APPENDIX ONE
HOUSEHOLD NEW YEAR EXPENDITURE*

House	Household Head	No of Members	Items	Cost (Baht)	Place of Purchase	Total Expenditure (Baht)
1.	Cạ Taṽ	12	Jackets (5)	635.00	Muang Phrao	1,329.00
			Shirts (2)	64.00	" "	
			Vests (3)	54.00	" "	
			Trousers (6)	111.00	" "	
			Socks (8)	18.00	" "	
			Shoes (7)	107.00	" "	
			Hat (1)	14.00	" "	
			Cloth ¹	17.00	" "	
			Towels ²	19.00	" "	
			Fireworks	12.00	Village	
			Cigarettes	25.00	"	
			Pork (killed pig) ³	253.00	" —	
2.	Sha Ō	5	Vests (4)	19.00	Muang Phrao	231.00
			Trousers (2)	38.00	" "	
			Socks (2)	12.00	" "	
			Shoes (1)	13.00	" "	
			Towels (4)	10.00	" "	
			Fireworks	3.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	7.00	" "	
			Bananas	6.00	" "	
			Pork (killed pig)	123.00	" —	
3.	Co Tị	9	Shirts (1)	65.00	Village	523.50
			Trousers (5)	77.00	"	
			Socks (3)	18.00	"	
			Shoes (3)	13.00	"	
			Towels (8)	20.00	"	
			Cloth	17.00	"	
			Fireworks	6.00	"	
			Crude Sugar	4.00	"	
			Bananas	2.00	"	
			Candles	1.50	"	
			Pork (killed pig)	300.00	" —	

* This survey was conducted by Khun Snit Wongprasert, Junior Research Officer for the *Lā Hā* research project of the Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai.

1) This cloth is used to make clothes for the children, sarongs for the women and leggings for all members of the household.

2) These are small hand towels which are used by the villagers exclusively as headwear.

3) In assessing the household expenditure on pork for those households who killed a pig for the New Year, I have taken the estimated market value of the animal and deducted, where necessary, the cash or cash equivalent received from the sale of part of the flesh.

House	Household Head	No of Members	Items	Cost (Baht)	Place of Purchase	Total Expenditure (Baht)
4.	Ā Nū Hpǎ	6	Shirt (1)	15.00	Muang Phrao/Village	134.00
			Vests (3)	14.00	" "	
			Trousers (1)	16.00	" "	
			Belts (3)	7.00	" "	
			Towels (4)	12.00	" "	
			Fireworks	13.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	3.00	"	
			Bananas	2.00	"	
			Candles	2.00	"	
			Pork ⁴	50.00	"	
5.	Pā N̄yi	3	Shirts (5)	109.00	Chiang Mai/Village ⁵	354.50
			Vest (1)	10.00	Village	
			Trousers (3)	54.00	"	
			Socks (3)	20.00	"	
			Shoes (1)	20.00	"	
			Towels (5)	12.00	Muang Phrao	
			Belt (1)	5.00	" "	
			Cloth	68.00	" "	
			Fireworks	6.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	3.00	" "	
			Bananas	0.50	" "	
			Candles	4.00	" "	
			Pork ⁶	43.00	" "	
6.	Pū Tā	8	Shirts (2)	24.00	Village	158.50
			Vests (5)	34.00	Village/Chiang Mai ⁵	
			Trousers (1)	16.00	Village	
			Socks (3)	12.00	Village/Chiang Mai ⁵	
			Belt (1)	3.00	Chiang Mai	
			Towels (5)	12.00	Village/Phrao/C.Mai ⁵	
			Fireworks	6.00	Village	
			Cigarettes	10.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	4.00	"	
			Bananas	2.00	"	
			Candles	2.00	"	
			Pork ⁶	33.00	"	

4) Pork purchased from Thai trader.

5) A member of this household accompanied the research team to Chiang Mai.

6) Pork purchased from one of the neighbouring households in the village which had killed a pig.

House	Household Head	No of Members	Items	Cost (Baht)	Place of Purchase	Total Expenditure (Baht)
7.	Eh Loñ	7	Shirts (3) Vests (3) Trousers (4) Socks (3) Shoes (2) Towels (5) Fireworks Crude Sugar Bananas Candles Pork ⁷	40.00 23.00 61.00 16.00 19.00 12.00 3.00 15.00 3.00 1.00 33.00	Muang Phrao " " " " " " " " " " Village " " " " " " " " "	226.00
8.	Eh Naw	8	Shirts (7) Vests (3) Trousers (3) Socks (6) Shoes (6) Towels (8) Cloth Fireworks Crude Sugar Bananas Candles Pork (killed pig)	110.00 28.00 53.00 33.00 67.00 23.50 72.00 9.00 4.00 1.00 2.00 103.00	Muang Phrao " " " " " " " " " " " " Village " " " " " " " " — ⁸	505.50
9.	Laŵ Eū	7	Jacket (1) Shirts (2) Vests (3) Trousers (1) Socks (4) Shoes (5) Towels (8) Fireworks Crude Sugar Bananas Candles Pork (killed pig)	120.00 36.00 27.00 18.00 27.00 67.00 32.00 30.00 4.00 2.00 2.00 482.00	Muang Phrao " " " " " " " " " " " " Village " " " " " " "	847.50

7) Pork purchased both in own and neighbouring Lā Hū Nyī village.

8) This household purchased pork from fellow villager in addition to killing its own pig.

House	Household Head	No of Members	Items	Cost (Baht)	Place of Purchase	Total Expenditure (Baht)
10.	Eh Heh Loñ	7	Shirts (6)	64.00	Muang Phrao	507.00
			Vests (1)	8.00	" "	
			Trousers (3)	37.00	" "	
			Socks (2)	10.00	" "	
			Shoes (4)	47.00	" "	
			Towels (6)	25.00	" "	
			Belt (1)	5.00	" "	
			Cloth	5.00	" "	
			Fireworks	3.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	8.00	"	
			Bananas	3.00	"	
			Candles	1.00	"	
			Pork (killed pig)	291.00	—	
11.	Pu Shai	11	Jacket (1)	130.00	Muang Phrao	390.50
			Shirts (2)	38.00	" "	
			Vest (1)	10.00	" "	
			Trousers (6)	73.00	" "	
			Socks (2)	10.00	" "	
			Shoes (1)	13.00	Village	
			Towels (9)	22.50	"	
			Cloth	15.00	Muang Phrao	
			Fireworks	3.00	Village	
			Crude Sugar	4.00	"	
			Bananas	3.00	"	
			Candles	1.00	"	
			Pork ⁹	68.00	"	
12.	Ca Suñ	7	Jacket (1)	75.00	Muang Phrao	627.00
			Shirts (4)	75.00	" "	
			Vests (2)	13.00	" "	
			Trousers (6)	125.00	" "	
			Socks (1)	6.00	" "	
			Shoes (2)	30.00	" "	
			Hat (1)	12.00	" "	
			Towels (6)	15.00	" "	
			Cloth	5.00	" "	
			Bullets ¹⁰	72.00	Village	
			Bananas	3.00	"	
			Candles	6.00	"	
			Pork	190.00	Killed pig	

9) Pork purchased from a neighbouring household which had killed a pig.

10) The household head is the proud owner of a Carbine U.S. manufactured rifle. The bullets were purchased from a fellow Lă Hư, for the express purpose of firing during the New Year celebrations.

House	Household Head	No of Members	Items	Cost (Baht)	Place of Purchase	Total Expenditure (Baht)
13.	Kǎ Htǎ	4	Shirts (2) Vests (2) Trousers (1) Cloth Fireworks Bananas Candles Pork ¹¹	32.00 25.00 21.00 23.00 4.00 3.00 2.00 10.00	Muang Phrao " " Village " " " " "	120.00
14.	Yǎ Hpu	8	—	—	{ opium addicts living in outlying hamlet, who participated in ceremonies but made no purchases.	
15.	Cǎ Hkǎ Nȳi	5	—	—		

Grand Total of Village Expenditure **Baht 5,954.00**

Average Single Household Expenditure **Baht 396.93**

Average Single Household Expenditure

(excepting the two households with no expenditure whatsoever) **Baht 458.00**

11) Pork purchased from a neighbouring household which had killed a pig.

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