

LAHU TRADE AND COMMERCE

by

Sanit Wongsprasert*

Introduction

This article describes the trading and commercial activities of the Lahu Nyi¹ villagers of Pang Fan village community in the hills of Phrao District, Chiang Mai Province, northern Thailand². These villagers are taken by the author to be fairly representative of the 16,389 Lahu hill people, who live in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang, Mae Hong Son and Tak Provinces³.

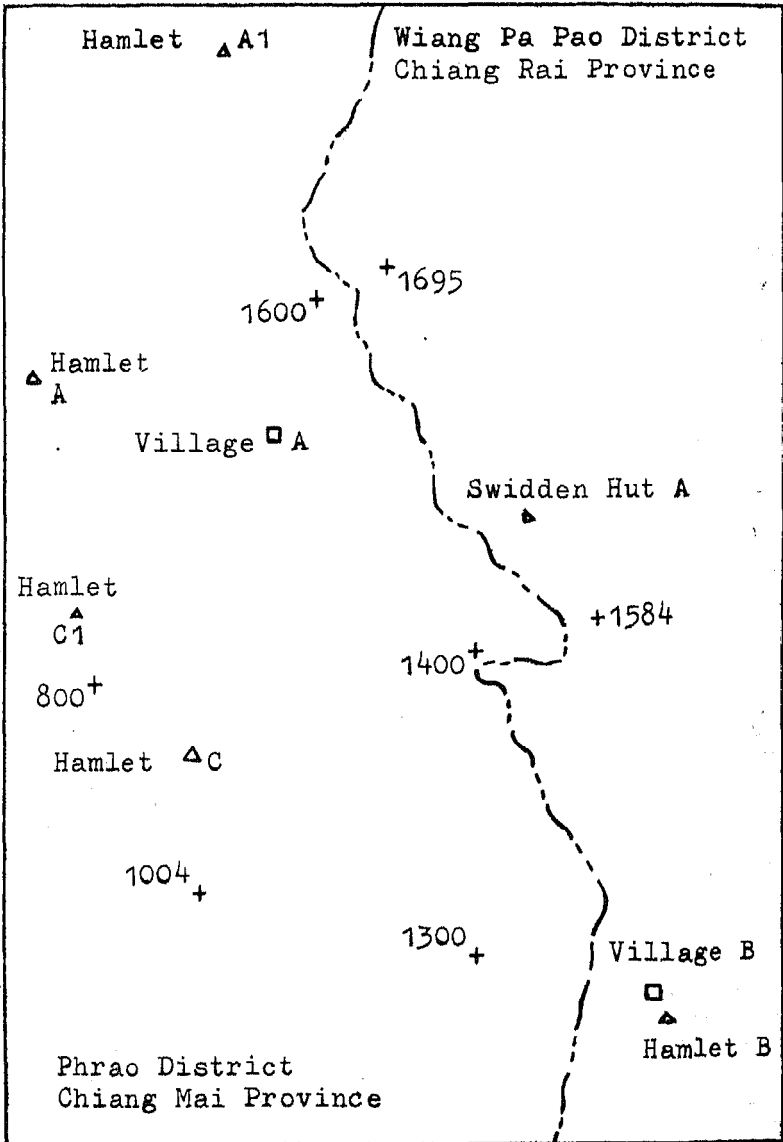
The Lahu Nyi system of kinship is bilateral or cognatic⁴. A village or small cluster of neighbouring villages comprises the basic political unit (Walker, 1969 : 44).

Like other highland peoples, the villagers under study practise swidden agriculture⁵. Their agriculture is mainly concerned with the production of food, both for local consumption and for exchange; rice, chilli and opium are the major crops with vegetables, melons, spices and tobacco as minor catch-crops. Fowl, pigs, cattle and water buffaloes are commonly found in the village. The Lahu keep their livestock as prestige commodities and for cash income.

The Lahu exchange produce among themselves and with other ethnic groups. Trade and commerce play a very important role in the relationship between the Lahu and neighbouring peoples.

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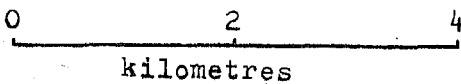
- 1) Known to the Thai as 'Mussur Daeng', see Walker, A.R. 'Blessing Feasts and Ancestor Propitiation among the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu)', in *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 60, Part 1, January 1972, 345-346.
- 2) The fieldwork that forms the basis of this study was conducted between October 1966 and September 1969, under the supervision of Anthony R. Walker, of the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Oxford.
- 3) According to the census of 1970-1973 of Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 4) By cognatic, I mean the type of kinship system which embraces all of an individual's father's kin, and all of his mother's kin.
- 5) The term refers to the agriculture cycle in tropical forest i.e.—burning-planting-harvesting-and forest regrowth (Rappaport, 1971 : 177).



The Study Area

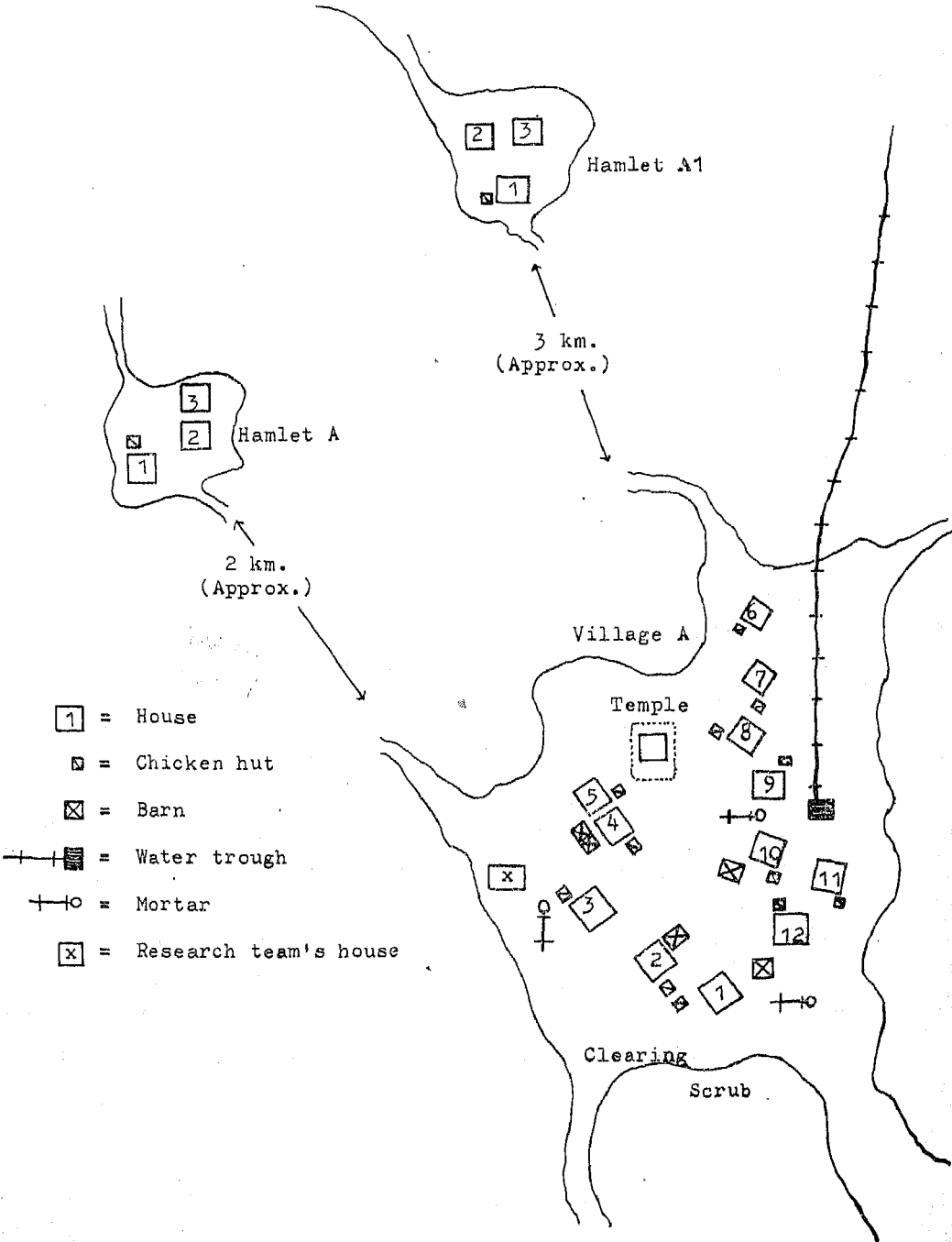
----- District and provincial boundary

1600+ Altitude in metres



Plan

Pang Fan Village (Village A) Community 1968



The study area consisted of three major settlements and these I have named Village A, Village B and Hamlet C⁶. Two smaller hamlets were attached to Village A, and there was a permanent, swidden hut established in the area. Village B had one hamlet, and Hamlet C had another small hamlet nearby. The population of Village A was 148, Village B 288, and Hamlet C 67.

Village A (including Hamlet C) is an official administrative unit recognized by the Thai government. Precipitously steep paths connect the Lahu villages and the Khon Muang (northern Thai people) communities. It is about eight kilometres or five hours walk from the nearest Khon Muang village to the Lahu settlements.

Most of the inter-ethnic group communications are economic in nature, and a variety of goods is traded. Before considering trade between the Lahu and other peoples, I wish to consider briefly the nature of economic transactions *within* Lahu villages.

A) Trade within Lahu Villages

Within the village there are traditional constraints on trade which inhibit the number of purely economic transactions which take place. For example, in 1968, 20 litres of unhusked rice cost about 13 baht (65 C. US.) in the open market. By comparison, the traditional Lahu price was only 3 baht (15 C.) for that amount of rice. As a consequence rice was more frequently lent and borrowed than bought and sold. 2-5 kerosene tins (40-100 litres) of unhusked rice were usually lent for one year or so. There was no interest account on this transaction. Chilli and vegetables, on the other hand, were not borrowed or lent, but exchanged on a reciprocal basis.

Generally, the Lahu do not sell their fowl to one another; as with rice, fowl are usually lent and borrowed freely. Nor are pigs bought and sold between villagers. When a man slaughters a pig (usually its weight was about 12 kg.), he will not sell it for cash but might lend some pork to fellow villagers. It is not economical to sell the meat because, as with rice, the price was fixed by custom at 3 baht per joi (1.6 kg.).

6) Hamlet C is too small to constitute a village because it lacked a temple and formal headman.

Large pigs are rarely killed for consumption by household members. More often the bigger pigs were sold to Khon Muang visitors for slaughter, and the meat was re-sold by them to the villagers. For example, two Khon Muang traders bought a 400 baht pig. They then slaughtered it and sold most of the pork (about 41 kg.) for 10 baht a kg. In this transaction the traders made a profit of about 5% or about 1 kg. of pork, which they consumed themselves⁷. After the lowland butchers had collected money from their customers, they repaid the original owner. This kind of transaction occurred fairly frequently.

Opium, unlike other commodities, is often bought and sold directly between villagers, the price being adjusted to seasonal and yearly fluctuations. Another contrast with the exchange of subsistence products and other commodities—which were not lent with interest accruing to the seller—is that opium is usually lent at 100% interest. Generally speaking, a man who wishes to obtain opium borrows some money and purchases direct from the seller. After his own opium is harvested he returns his debt with opium of double the value of the money he had borrowed the preceding year. For example, Household 9 borrows 50 baht from Household 1; after Household 9 had harvested their opium they repay with 160 grammes of opium, which had a value of 100 baht. Usually, the money is loaned during June–September, and returned between the months of January and February the following year. This money lending system is known as '*fī hkieŭ vuī ve*' (opium-green-to "mortgage").

Aside from these credit transactions, barter and sales for cash also occur. For instance, Household 12 bought opium from Household 5 with cash⁸. Household 3, on the other hand, bartered their horse to obtain opium from Household 1.

Unfortunately, no livestock were bought and sold between villagers during the research period. There was, however, one transaction involving livestock which, incidentally, illustrates perhaps the mutual mistrust

7) These traders were able to estimate the weight of a pig to an incredibly accurate degree.

8) After opium was harvested, Household 12 sold all of its opium. Later, during planting of the next crop, they needed some opium for payment of addict labourers,

of the Lahu in dealing directly with one another. Household 2 wished to buy a cow, and Household 3 had a beast they wished to sell, but direct negotiations apparently failed to end in agreement. Then a Khon Muang trader bought the cow and a few days later resold it to Household 2 at the same price he had paid for it.

Other items, such as agricultural tools, hunting implements and jewellery, were very rarely bought and sold. In one case, however, a man bought a house from a villager who was leaving for 70 baht (US\$3.50).

To sum up, items concerned with subsistence needs are not bought and sold. Crops and animals that can be readily sold on the open market are sold for cash. In these transactions, however, Khon Muang middlemen often acted as intermediaries between Lahu sellers and buyers. Table 1 summarises this data.

Table 1
Modes of Transaction within the Village

Items	Modes of Transactions			
	Reciprocal Exchange	Borrowing and Lending	Loan with Interest	Bartering and Selling
Material	Making and repairing of implements	Agricultural and hunting implements	Money	—
Crops	Chilli and other vegetables for domestic consumption	Rice	Opium	Opium
Domestic animal	Lending and borrowing of packhorses	Fowl, and pork for domestic consumption	—	Bartered pork for opium ⁹
Wild animal meat	Wild animal meat is distributed by reciprocal exchange.			

9) There was one case when an opium addict slaughtered his pig and bartered it for opium,

B) External Relationships :

a) *Trading with neighbouring Lahu settlements.* Lahu who live in neighbouring settlements often trade crops and animals. A common type of transaction between settlements involved the acquisition of rice by the poor, opium addicted Lahu who lived in outlying hamlets. These people often obtained cash loans from more prosperous Lahu in the larger villages by mortgaging their crops soon after planting time. They would use the loan to buy rice from lowlanders.

This mortgage system is known as '*cā hkieŋ vui ve*' (green-rice-to mortgage). Unlike the 'green opium' mortgages, which could be obtained before actual planting took place, a 'green rice' mortgage was only granted after the crops were in the ground and on their way to maturity.

The reason for this difference may have been that 'green rice' transactions usually involved opium addicted mortgagees who could not always be trusted to honour their obligations. The mortgagers would only give loans once they had the security of a maturing crop. The addicted hamlet dwellers were not trusted for 'green opium' mortgages because mortgagers felt that they would consume the opium themselves instead of repaying their debts.

The interest on 'green rice' mortgage was usually about 100%.

Opium is the commodity which most frequently changed hands between the members of different settlements. These transactions were usually by direct cash sale, and involved members of both the small hamlets and the major villages. Opium is usually acquired in this way for local consumption. When transactions of this kind took place between Lahu, it was taken on trust that the drug was unadulterated. Where opium was sold to, or bought from members of other ethnic groups, proof was required of the purity of the opium before the transaction could proceed.

Chillies and vegetables were very rarely bought and sold between villages and hamlets.

Fowl and pigs were bought and sold on some occasions. The husband of a pregnant woman, for instance, often sought sacrificial fowl

in the other settlements. Sometimes when Village B slaughtered a large pig the villagers of Pang Fan would go to buy pork. When epidemics decimated the fowl and pigs of one village, its members might borrow stock from a village which had not been so affected. For example, in 1971, most of the pigs in Village A were killed by disease. They borrowed pigs from Village B, repaying the loan when their herds had been built up.

Cattle and horses are commonly bartered between members of different villages. Usually the buyer did not drive the animal to his village after he had paid its price, but left the animal to graze on its original ground. After weeks or months, the buyer would lead his stock to his village.

Wild animal meat and forest products were sometimes sold. Often the Lahu who lived in very small settlements adjacent to virgin forest carried barking deer or porcupine meat to sell and barter with members of larger settlements for opium. The price of wild animal meat was the same as that of pork (10 baht/kg.). Rattan, which was rare in the region, was often sought by the outlying hamlet dwellers. This material is either sold as raw material or is woven into baskets for sale to villagers.

Members of small settlements sometimes left their valuables in store in the larger villages. Generally, all the residents of this region recognized that Village B was the most secure settlement; it has many rich people, is well-equipped with firearms, and is internally united and cohesive. The senior kinsmen of many of the Lahu in the surrounding area live in this village. The head of Household 10 of Village A, for instance, left his cash savings of 4,000 baht (US \$200) in the safekeeping of his elder brother who lived in Village B.

Speaking in general, transactions of subsistence products such as rice, vegetables, domestic fowl and pigs, are subject to a system of traditional rules with regard to equivalent value and are therefore only carried out in special circumstances. The returns from sale of opium and livestock, on the other hand, vary according to current levels of supply and demand,

b) *Trade with other ethnic groups in the hills.* The Lahu of Pang Fan area do not have regular contact with many other ethnic groups in the hills. Most of their contacts are with Lisu or Yunnanese, and involve the sale or purchase of horses or opium. In early 1968, for instance, two Lahu of Pang Fan village went to a Lisu village to buy horses¹⁰. At the end of that year three Lisu who were newcomers to the region and had settled near Village B, came to buy horses from the villagers of Pang Fan.

As for opium trade, Household 11's head carried about one kilogramme of opium to sell at a Yunnanese village situated about 10 kilometres away. But this trade occurred because the Lahu could not wait for the Khon Muang trader to come to purchase his opium supply, and he needed cash to pay for a cow that he had already ordered from a trader. During preparation of poppy swiddens, the Lahu who had opium were reluctant to sell it to needy Lahu addicts because they wanted to use it as payment for their labour force. Consequently Yunnanese visitors came to sell opium to addicted Lahu.

Trading of domestic fowl and pigs with other ethnic groups is sometimes attempted, but rarely meets with any success.

The Lahu often exchange seeds of different strains of commonly cultivated crops with other ethnic groups. The head of Household 2, for example, exchanged a small amount of his opium with a Lisu for some of the latter's seed rice which was reputed to be of a successful strain¹¹. In another case a Lahu took some vegetables to barter for opium seeds at a neighbouring Lisu village. The Lahu believed that the Lisu seeds would provide him with higher yields.

10) The Lisu wanted to emigrate to Phitsanulok Province 140 km. south of Pang Fan. They wanted to sell the horses to the Lahu although some Yunnanese who lived near the Lisu village had offered to buy them. According to the Lisu informants, the Lisu said that they feared the Yunnanese would maltreat their horses, so they preferred to sell to the Lahu.

11) It provided higher yields than the rice strain that he had previously used and could be planted either lower or higher than 1,000 metres altitude.

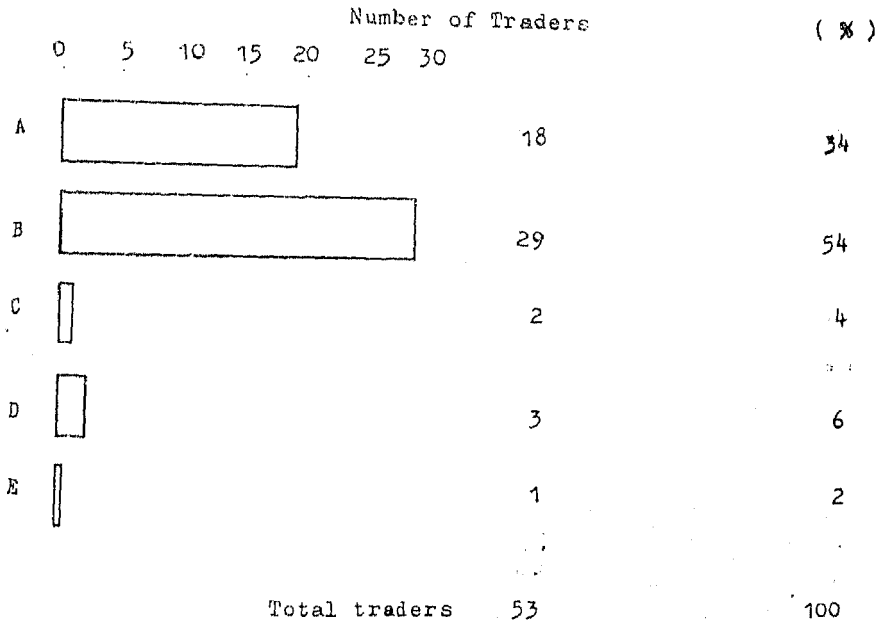
There are a number of conventions to be observed in the conduct of inter-ethnic group trade. For example, visitors should be provided with food and shelter; Lahu was the language generally used¹²; visiting traders should be very careful not to impose upon hospitality offered, usually, spending only a few hours or at the most one night in their host's home.

c) *Trade with lowlanders.* Since the Lahu produce a surplus of some crops and livestock, Khon Muang, especially the foot-hill dwellers, frequently seek trading contacts with them. Unlike transactions with the Lisu and Yunnanese, which are sporadic, regular trade relations have developed between Lahu and lowlanders. The Khon Muang specialise in different kinds of trade goods: some sell only local food products, such as rice cakes, fruits, fresh water fish, fermented crab sauce and so on; some were middlemen bringing goods from lowland markets to sell in the hills; others trade in rice and livestock, or specialise in the purchase and sale of firearms; whilst a few traders come merely to buy opium from the hill dwellers. The following diagram illustrates the frequency of visits made by these different kinds of traders.

The capital letter A traders who numbered about 18 (34%) were irregular visitors. These traders sold local foot-hill produce. They were likely to appear in the Lahu village when the hill folk had their ritual celebrations, where they joined in eating the pork curry. When these Khon Muang visited the village in large numbers (4-6), the locals felt that their settlement was being invaded by hungry hordes¹³. The villagers also kept careful watch on their guests as they had been known to set fire to Lahu fallow swiddens on leaving the village, in order to flush out wild game and to encourage bamboo shoot growth. The lowlanders had ignored the frequent Lahu appeals to desist from this practice and their actions provoked a good deal of hostility, to the extent that some Lahu had threatened death to offenders.

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- 12) The Lisu and Yunnanese bachelors also looked for Lahu girls, because they recognized that a Lahu bride-price was low. Coached by Lahu boys, these visitors were taught sufficient Lahu to court the girls, and at the same time the Lahu boys imitated words that the visitors were saying.
- 13) The Lahu were understandably reluctant to slaughter their pigs when irregular lowland traders visited the village on occasions of ritual celebration.

Diagram One
Frequency of Visits by Khon Muang Specialist Traders



Note: A--Traders who sold and bartered local foot-hill products and took vegetables, chilli, a small amount of opium, and a few pigs back home.

B--Traders who were middlemen; they carried goods from the market which they sold or bartered for the Lahu produce. They took the Lahu goods to sell in the market.

C--Traders who bought and sold livestock and large pigs.

D--Traders who bought only opium (0.16 to 1.6 kilogrammes).

E--A trader who traded only pistols and modern hunting implements.

The capital letter B, C, D, and E traders in the diagram represent permanent trade-partners¹⁴ of the Lahu. They numbered about 35 persons (66% of the total number of traders) were permanent and trusted trade-partners. The villagers often order items they need from the market through these trade-partners. Items ordered might range from a box of matches, to such things as large quantities of rice, livestock and even sub-machine guns. For example, Household 5 ordered three large kerosene tins of glutinous rice through a trader; a few days later that trader brought the rice to him. Surprisingly, the price that the trader charged his partner was close to that he originally paid himself.

Whilst many lowland traders were middlemen between the markets and the Lahu villagers, some Lahu were middlemen between lowland traders and Village B, which was less accessible. To give one instance of such a transaction: a trader wanted to buy 640 grammes of opium from Household 10's head, but the Lahu man had none. The Lahu then went to Village B and bought the required amount of opium for the Khon Muang. The Lahu middleman retained 50 baht from the agreed price in payment for his services.¹⁵

Trading relations between the Lua' and the lowlanders clearly depended on the existence of a cash economy (Kunstadter, 1969 : 74). This was also true in general for the transactions between the Pang Fan villagers and Khon Muang traders. But whilst the Lua' had no goods or property which could be used as credit with the lowlanders, the Lahu, on the other hand, had their opium to raise loans from the lowlanders of cash or rice. As an example: during August two Lahu of Household 9 went to a Khon Muang head man of a valley village. The Lahu men mortgaged 0.16 kg. of opium (which would cost about 100 baht when it was harvested), for about 35 litres of husked rice (equivalent to 50 baht). During February when most of the opium had been harvested, the Khon Muang creditor sent his sons to collect the debt. However, there was only one lowlander who gave credit to the Lahu, although he never visited Pang Fan village.¹⁶

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- 14) Kunstadter found that the S'kaw and the Lua' in Mae Sariang District had not developed regular relationships with lowland trading partners (1969 : 74).
- 15) Some Khon Muang traders used to visit Village A, but not Village B. Opium trading was rarely conducted between strangers.
- 16) Lahu did not call Khon Muang money-lenders *pau liang* as did the lowlanders. Instead they used the money-lender's first name as they would for ordinary people.

Essentially, the language used in trade with Khon Muang was Khum Myng (the northern dialect of the Thai language). Some traders, especially the middlemen, speak sufficient Lahu to conduct their business. All Lahu household heads and young men could speak Khum Myng. Some women used Lahu mixed with the visitors' language to bargain for the items that they needed.

Table 2 below shows the seasonal purchase to Khon Muang produce by Lahu.

Table 2
Seasonal Purchase of Khon Muang Produce by Lahu

Month	Category of Items					
	Foot-hill ¹⁷ produce	Market ¹⁸ goods	Rice	Livestock	Hunting ¹⁹ implements	Salt
Jan.	x	x	—	—	x	x
Feb.	x	x	—	—	x	—
Mar.	x	x	—	—	—	—
Aprl.	x	x	—	—	x	—
May	x	x	—	—	x	—
June	x	x	x	—	—	—
July	x	x	x	—	x	—
Aug.	x	x	x	x	—	—
Sept.	x	x	—	x	—	—
Oct.	x	x	—	x	x	x
Nov.	x	x	—	x	x	x
Dec.	x	x	—	—	x	x

Note : x represents supply of items

17) Rice-cakes, noodles, chicken curry, crude sugar, fresh fish, fermented crab sauce, duck-eggs, banana, jackfruit, mangoes, vegetables, bamboo-shoots, etc.

18) Food such as dried fish, canned fish, sweet milk, and biscuits; and also clothes e.g. shirts, trousers, shoes, etc.

19) Gun powder, caps, bullets, firearms, etc.

In all I counted 85 items brought to the Lahu by the traders, and 13 items which were sold by the Lahu. This imbalance does not mean that the Lahu were at a disadvantage in these transactions. In fact, if anything, it was the lowland traders who were at a disadvantage, for they needed Lahu goods more than the Lahu needed the commodities they brought to the hills. A Khon Muang who wanted to buy chilli, for instance, had to speak gently and be persuasive. With other things, such as pigs and cattle, the lowlanders had to form a friendly relationship and give good reasons as to why they wanted to buy that particular commodity. Some traders used the word "beg" instead of "barter" or "buy" when referring to the Lahu's goods, and "help" when referring to receiving the goods they had carried a long way. This kind of trade relation often involved the exchange of small items offered by the traders at the time of the visits. For example, many visitors carried only dried fish to barter for Lahu chilli; however when the Lahu had enough fish for several days they might not require this dried fish, although they wanted other items. However, the Lahu might "help" the traders when they reduced the price of their other goods.

During Khon Muang traders' visits, the Lahu sold their produce to the lowlanders. The following table illustrates the types of Lahu goods which were sold to Khon Muang at different times of the year.

Although the traders supplied a considerable quantity of goods, the Lahu sometimes went to market themselves. They might do this if some time elapsed between traders' visits, or if they were dissatisfied with the quality of the traders' goods. When the Lahu went down the valleys for other than trade reasons--to seek medical attention, or to visit the government's district office, or distant kinsmen--they often brought goods such as fish or rice-cakes with them when they returned. Such visits by Lahu to the lowlands were infrequent compared with the frequency of visits by Khon Muang to Pang Fan. During June 1968 to May 1969, Lahu individuals made in our study a total of 137 trips to the lowlands. As there were 148 Lahu at Pang Fan, this means that on

Table 3
Seasonal Sales of Goods by Lahu to Khon Muang

Month	Category of Items						
	Chilli	Opium	Pigs	Spinach	Livestock	Sesame*	Chestnuts*
Jan.	x	x	x	x	—	—	—
Feb.	x	x	—	—	—	x	—
Mar.	x	x	x	—	—	—	—
Aprl.	x	x	x	—	—	—	—
May	x	x	x	—	—	—	—
June	x	x	—	—	x	—	—
July	—	x	—	—	—	—	—
Aug.	—	x	—	—	x	—	—
Sept.	x	x	x	—	—	—	x
Oct.	x	x	—	x	—	—	—
Nov.	x	—	—	x	x	—	—
Dec.	x	—	x	x	x	x	—

Note: x represents supply of items

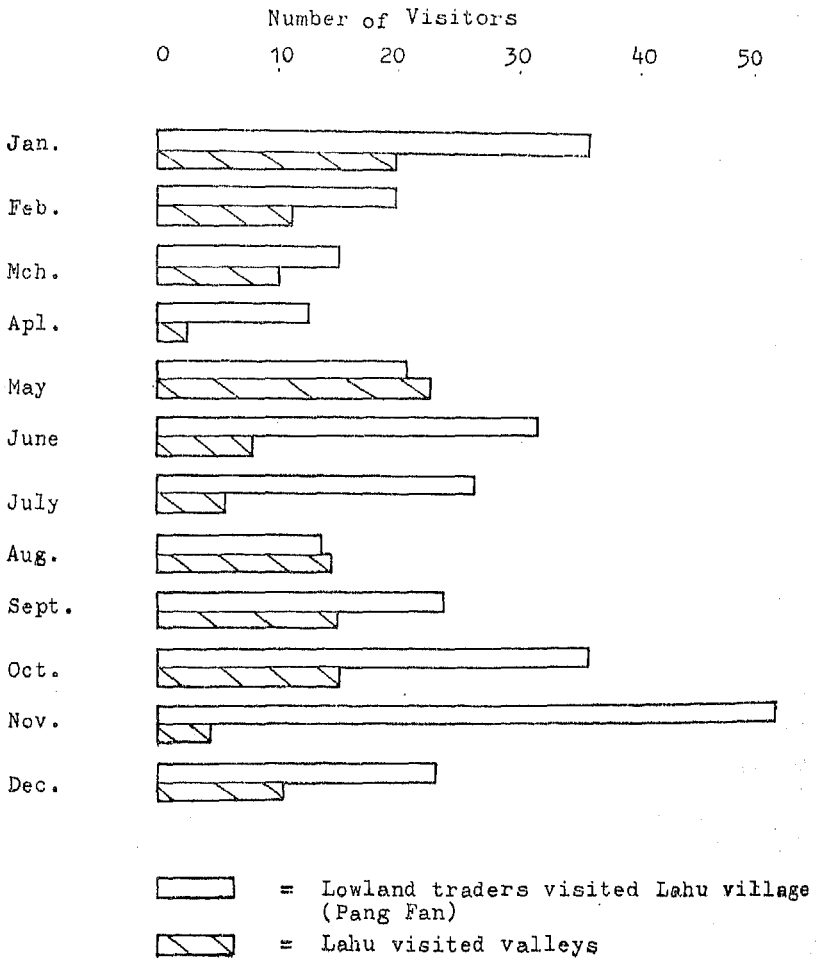
average an individual made 0.9 trips to the lowlands in the 1 year period. During the same period, lowlanders visited the village for 417 men/visits. Most of these visitors originated from *tambon* Pa tum and Panai.

Diagram Two illustrates the frequency of visits of lowlanders to Pang Fan, and Lahu to the lowlands on a month to month basis.

* Sesame and chestnuts to the value of about 50 baht (US. \$2.50) constituted the sum total of the annual yield.

Diagram Two

The Exchange of Visits between Uplands and Lowlands in
Study Area (June 1968-May 1969)



-The quality of the Lahu/Khon Muang relationships.

In the S'kaw Karen/Khon Muang relationship in Chom Thong District, Marlowe found the use of the term *siso* or *sio* to refer to most of the Khon Muang farmers or farmer-traders who carried certain reciprocal rights and obligations (1969:58). This term was rarely used between the Lahu and the lowlanders. Similarly, the Lahu/Khon Muang used the term '*khon kui-e kun*' or "acquaintances" to refer to each other. But, the Lahu would call their trade-partners '*khon Kui-e kun*'; a term not applied to the irregular lowland traders.

In some respects, trade cemented the Lahu and Khon Muang people together in a harmonious relationship. It was not, however a relationship without points of conflict. I shall, in this section, first discuss the positive aspects of this relationship before discussing the friction which sometimes arose.

Usually, lowland trade-partners spent one to two nights in a Lahu village while on their visits. Some carried glutinous rice along with them because they did not like the ordinary rice which the Lahu served. Often visitors were treated to special meals containing pork or the flesh of barking deer.

In reciprocation, when the Khon Muang had a major religious festival, they would send notes to each Lahu household inviting them to come down. The lowlanders also invited the hill people to donate some money to "make merit" when a Buddhist temple was being built or repaired. Some hill folk usually attended the lowland festivities. They slept over night in the Khon Muang villages, being given ceremonial rice-cakes and other special food to eat. Before they departed, the Khon Muang friends would wrap up some rice-cakes or cooked rice for a noon meal during the long walk home.

Although smoking opium was illegal in the plains, Lahu guests were ignored if they wanted to take a pipe during a visit to the lowlands. The lowlanders seemed anxious to make the Lahu feel "at home" as much as possible.

The Lahu were most anxious to visit the lowlands during the time of the year when the mango and jackfruit were ripe. Some lowlanders

sold their fruits to the Lahu at low prices, while others gave them as gifts. The Lahu would carry as much fruit back to their villages as their horses could carry.

The Lahu considered the Khon Muang to be highly knowledgeable and keenly sought all the information that they could about the outside world from them. When a visitor stayed over night in a Lahu house, he would have an attentive audience as he told stories of the world beyond the village. The villagers who had been present on these occasions would pass on the information they had heard to all other Lahu who were interested.²⁰

On the other hand, hostility between uplanders and lowlanders did arise most typically over the theft of Lahu livestock and possessions by Khon Muang, especially by Khon Muang who were irregular traders. When the Lahu's crops were stolen, they rarely reported the theft to the local government officials. The reason was that the Lahu felt that the officials would not be very active in seeking or punishing wrong-doers.

Conflict also arose between Lahu and Khon Muang on account of intrinsic cultural differences. One particular point of friction was over the drinking of spirits and gambling. Both of these were prohibited by Lahu custom, but some Khon Muang persisted in gambling and drinking while visiting Lahu communities. Arguments often arose when the village authorities tried to prevent this.

The Khon Muang who smoked opium was usually looked upon with suspicion. While the Lahu addict was allowed to take a pipe in the Khon Muang trade-partner's home when he went visiting, a trade-partner who became an opium addict, on the other hand, might be refused shelter and equipment for smoking opium if he wanted to take a pipe in the village. The Lahu believe that Khon Muang addicted to opium are robbers and trouble-makers.

20) These stories were not always very accurate. For example, a Khon Muang visitor told a Lahu that there had been many thunder-storms that year because the communists wanted to destroy the villages and towns of the region.

Khon Muang dietary habits also amazed and repelled the Lahu. The Khon Muang, for instance, ate Lahu animals which had died naturally, something the Lahu themselves would never do. Furthermore, the Khon Muang ate some species of plants and animals which are tabu to the Lahu.

Sometimes young lowland men tried to flirt with the Lahu girls when they were on visits. Unlike the Lisu who joined the Lahu boys to court the girls, the Khon Muang were shunned by the Lahu girls. Marriage between Lahu women and men from other ethnic groups occurred only when both sides were opium addicts.

It may be concluded that transactions within the village were important, but hedged around with customary constraints. Subsistence crops and domestic animals were exchanged on a reciprocal basis. Opium and large livestock were, on the other hand, often sold for profit between villagers. Interest was payable where transactions involved opium.

Exchange between the villagers and outsiders (Lahu, Lisu, Khon Muang, and others) was on a more strictly commercial basis. It usually took place between trading partners who had established a firm personal relationship. An exception to this rule were transactions involving goods of marginal importance to the Lahu, which were sold to them by virtual strangers. More often than not, lowland traders brought goods to the hills for sale; visits by Lahu to the lowlands for commercial purposes were comparatively infrequent.

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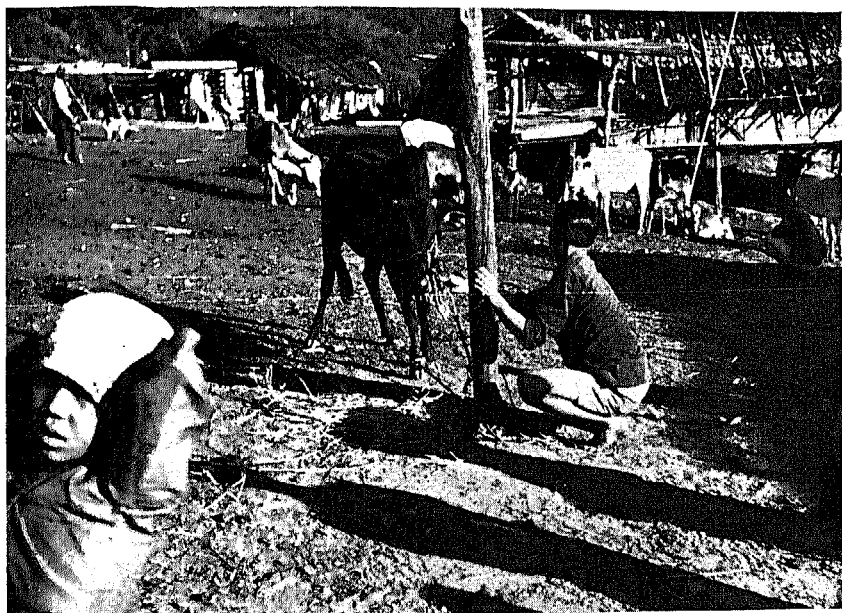
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An ox was sold to a Khon Muang trader, but it was very difficult for him to lead it to the lowland valley. In order to tame it, the specialist cattle trader gave the ox some rice straw upon which he had cast a spell.



A lowland trader bought a Lahu pig. After slaughtering it he sold the pork back to the villagers.

