

REVIEW ARTICLE

Gordon Young, *The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand (A Socio-Ethnological Report)*. Bangkok: The Siam Society. 5th edition, 1974. xiv+96 pp., 98 photographs.

It is a good measure of the continuing popularity of Gordon Young's small book on the northern hill peoples that our Society has seen fit to publish a fifth, only slightly revised, edition of the work. The book first appeared in 1961 under the imprint of USOM (United States Operations Mission, Bangkok) for whom the author was working at the time. The following year our Society published a second edition, to which it added a third in 1966, a fourth in 1969 and now a fifth in 1974.

During the thirteen years since Gordon Young wrote this book some thirty-odd professional anthropologists have worked among the northern hill peoples.¹ But to this day it is Young's book rather than the work of the professionals which remains not merely the only acceptable popular introduction to this ethnographic area, but also the standard anthropological text.² And yet, as I am sure Young would be the first to admit, *The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand* is far from being a work of professional anthropology.

Oliver Gordon Young (his first name is dropped in all but the first edition) is the grandson of the late William Marcus Young (1861-1936), pioneer American Baptist missionary among the Lahu people, first in the

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- 1) See *Social Science and Related Research in Northern Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Tribal Research Centre, Bulletin no. 2. s.a. [1972?].
 - 2) The northern hill peoples, among others, are treated in a recent U.S. Army publication, *Minority Groups in Thailand*, Washington D.C.: Headquarters, Dept. of the Army, 1972. But besides its limited availability, this work suffers from being a library study conducted by people who, though skilled as library detectives, seldom have sufficient personal experience of the area to evaluate the data they discover. A book of data papers which I have edited, *Farmers in the Hills: Upland Societies in North Thailand*, has recently been published in Penang. But this too is largely a library project, conducted by three of my students and myself and published primarily for the benefit of our students at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

former Shan State of Kengtung and then across the border in Bana, in the southwest of China's Yunnan province.³ Gordon Young's father, Harold, and his uncle, Vincent Young, followed in their father's footsteps and worked as missionaries, particularly among the Lahu and Wa peoples.⁴ Gordon Young was born in China in 1927. His earliest years were spent in the mission field and Lahu was the first language he learned to speak. Since then he has spent most of his life in northern Southeast Asia, and his knowledge of the peoples, the flora and particularly the fauna of the area is widely recognized.⁵ Gordon Young's qualifications to talk of the hills of southern Yunnan, the Burmese Shan State, Laos and north Thailand are thus considerable. He and his younger brother, William, are possibly the only westerners who have ever been able to claim Lahu as their native tongue. And besides Lahu, Gordon Young speaks several other languages of both the hill peoples and the valley-dwellers in this part of the world.

But despite Young's indisputable knowledge of the northern uplands and their peoples, he has had no training in anthropology or in the rigours of ethnographic observation. Consequently, by professional standards *The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand* is rather seriously defective both in the data themselves and in the manner of their presentation. Of course it may be argued that the book should not be judged by professional standards. That I do so is indicative of the importance the

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- 3) See A.H. Henderson, "William M. Young, D.D.", *The Burma News* XLIX no. 5 (May 1936), pp. 76-7; J.H. Telford, "William M. Young, D.D.", *The Burma News* XLIX no. 6 (June 1936), p. 90; and J.C. Robbins, "The Passing of a Missionary Pioneer", *The Watchman-Examiner*, April 30, 1936, p. 527.
 - 4) For a brief account of the American Baptist Mission's work among Lahu and Wa in Burma and south China see Saw Aung Din and E.E. Sowards, "Work among Lahus, Was, Akhas" in Maung Shwe Wa, G. and E.E. Sowards, eds., *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, Rangoon: Board of Publications, Burma Baptist Mission, 1963.
 - 5) Gordon Young has also written a delightful book on his experiences as a hunter and game-collector in the northern Thai hills: *Tracks of an Intruder*, London: Souvenir Press, 1967. In his love of the hunt and his great knowledge of wild-life Gordon is a true son of the Lahu, who are known to their lowland neighbours as the "Mussur" or "hunters".

professionals still attach to this work. Seldom, in fact, does one pick up a report, thesis, book or article on upland society in the north which makes no reference to Gordon Young's book.

The book is divided into sections (one might call them chapters, but they are not numbered) which deal respectively with the Akha, Lahu (three sections), Lisu, Meo, Yao, Lawa, Kha Mu, Htin and Kha Haw, Mrabri, Karen (four sections) and Haw Chinese peoples. The data for each ethnic group or, in the case of the Lahu and Karen, division of an ethnic group, are presented under a number of subheadings, viz. "affiliation", "location", "population", "language", "religion", "villages", "physical description", "economy", "contact", "social customs", "village government" and "trends". The subheadings do not necessarily appear in the same sequence for each of the groups discussed nor are all of them inevitably used. The advantage of this procedure is that it facilitates rapid reference which, in the absence of an index, is useful. The disadvantage is that it makes for a disjointed presentation. One never gets a rounded view of what life is really like in those northern hills. The fact that there is neither an introduction nor a concluding section to the book only emphasizes its "bits and pieces" nature. And the data which appear under each head vary considerably both in their quantity and quality. Thus, for example, we are offered a page and a half on the religion of the Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na and eleven lines on that of the Lahu Shehleh, while for the Lahu Shi there is no "religion" head at all.

Although Young thanks a number of people, mostly American missionaries, for their "constructive criticisms and valuable information" (p. v), the book is essentially a report of what the author himself has seen and heard during his extensive travels in the northern uplands. Basically it is a collection of fieldnotes. Young made no attempt to survey the substantial, if qualitatively uneven, literature available when he wrote the book thirteen years ago and in this new edition makes no attempt to survey the mass of data collected by those thirty or so anthropologists who have lived in hill communities over the past decade. At the very least, it would not have been difficult in this new edition to have given a guide to further reading, for many of the recent reports and publications are accessible to members of our Society.

In this fifth edition as in earlier ones, some revisions have certainly been made and these are much appreciated. But considering the amount of new data available to him, I would suggest that Young could have done much more.

Population statistics, fortunately, have been updated on the basis of 1973 figures and Young has noted in particular (p. 1) that his original estimate of the Akha population as 25,000 scattered in 88 villages⁶ was way off the mark. Recent counts, as he notes in the new edition, indicate around 9,900 in 75 villages. Similar revisions have been made for all the groups, except that the figure of 650 (1962 p. 24) for the Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu) has been left unchanged in the text of the new edition (p. 24), although corrected to 600 in Table 1 (p. 89).

A number of rather more substantial emendations have been made throughout the text. The first section, on the Akha, contains several much-needed revisions. It is good that Young has removed his original statement that "Each Akha village or a circle of villages has an official 'male' or 'Aw Shaw' whose duty it is to prepare all virgins for marriage by deflowering them at certain ceremonies each year" (1962 p. 6).⁷ According to all ethnographers who have worked with them, Akha strongly deny that this is or ever was their custom.⁸ Indeed it is almost certainly a Lahu tall story, the very term *aw shaw* being Lahu, not Akha. I assume Young heard it, as I have myself, not from Akha but from Lahu friends. It is also good that some of the worst kind of travelogue reporting has been removed. No longer must we read that the Akha are "a malodorous and filthy people on the whole" (1962 p. 3), and the statement in early editions that "The Akha are not a friendly people on the whole" (1962 p. 5) has happily (particularly for those of us who

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- 6) 1962 edition, p. 1 (the 1961 edition is unavailable in Penang). Subsequent citations of early editions will appear in the text; where no year is given the reference is to the edition under review.
- 7) In the 1966 edition (p. 6) Young changed present tense to past in this sentence and added "This custom is now practically out of use."
- 8) See in particular, Paul Lewis, *Ethnographic Notes on the Akha of Burma*, New Haven: HRAF, vol. IV, pp. 843-4.

have enjoyed their hospitality) been amended to "The typical, remote-living Akha are a timidly friendly people on the whole" (p. 5). But some of the revisions are cosmetic at best. For example, where the second edition (1962 p. 7) has "The morals are high, since marriage is so easy and also because virgins cannot be defiled until the 'Male' has first pronounced them marriagable", the removal of the reference to "the 'Male' " in subsequent editions (1966 p. 7, 1974 p. 7) leaves the sentence reading "The morals are high, since marriage is so easy and also because virgins cannot be defiled." Insofar as this implies that premarital sexual liaisons are not permissible in this society, it is still incorrect.⁹

However, it is not the Akha section which I want to treat in the most detail in this review, but rather the three Lahu sections and particularly the first on the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) and Lahu Na (Black Lahu). These are the people I happen to know best; they are also the people with whom Young has the most intimate contacts going back to his childhood in southwestern China. For the latter reason in particular, it seems fair that my judgement of Young's book should rest rather heavily on the Lahu data.

The first point to note when examining Gordon Young's Lahu material—particularly that on the Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na—is that it represents an inside view, a view from within the culture itself. Thus far no complaint; but the problem, as I see it, is that this inside view is by no means representative of *all* Lahu or even of all Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na. It is specifically the view of the Lahu Na, and among them particularly of the Lahu Na Christians with whom Gordon Young grew up. This is why, I suggest, a number of Young's statements on the Lahu make little sense within the context of north Thailand where the Lahu Na are unrepresented except for a few Christians, immigrants from the Burmese Shan State. Thus, while it is true enough in terms of the whole Lahu people scattered through Yunnan, western Laos, the Burmese Shan State and north Thailand that the Lahu Na are the premier division (p. 9), in Thailand this is certainly not the case. It is by no

9) See, for example, Paul Lewis, *Introducing the Hill Tribes of Thailand*, Chiang Mai University, Faculty of Social Sciences (mimeographed), 1970, p. 37.

means true of Lahu in Thailand that they all look to the Lahu Na as some superior type of Lahu. Indeed many tend to view the Christian representatives of the Lahu Na as scarcely "La^v hu^v teh^v teh^v" ("real Lahu"), because they have abandoned many of the *chaw maw[^] aw^v li^v* or "customs of the ancients". But it is true that many a Lahu Na (and not without ethnological support) views his division as the premier Lahu group.

That Young's view is specifically that of the Black Lahu likely explains why, having noted the Tibeto-Burman linguistic affiliations of the Lahu people, he goes on to say that "Lahu traditions would place themselves closer to the Karens, having as they claim, been 'brothers of the same clans' at one time" (p. 9). What Lahu traditions? I have repeatedly questioned Lahu Nyi informants about this possible affiliation with Karen and have always received a clear denial. But it is a tradition I have heard from Gordon Young's father, the late Harold Young, and it appears to have its origin among Lahu Na in the Burmese Shan State. So far as I have been able to discover, Lahu views on their close affiliation with Karen were first reported from Kengtung by the Rev. Ba Te, a Karen assistant of Gordon Young's grandfather.¹⁰ This view seems to have been accepted by the senior Young.¹¹ Could it be an isolated tradition of a few Lahu in Kengtung which has been passed down the generations of Youngs, rather than a widely-accepted Lahu view?¹²

Another opinion which is probably derived from Christian Black Lahu is that Red Labu, called "Mussur Daeng" ("Red Hunters")¹³ by the

10) Ba Te, "Karens and Musos", *The News* XVIII no. 6 (June 1905), p. 26.

11) W.M. Young, "The Awakening at Keng Tung", *The Baptist Missionary Review* XI no. 12 (Dec 1905), p. 469. He writes: "A closer study reveals that the Karens and Lahu are but different branches of the same people."

12) I certainly have not come across any statement of possible Lahu-Karen affiliations elsewhere in the literature on either ethnic group.

13) "Mussur" (romanized in a multitude of ways) means "hunter", apparently not only in Shan but also in Wa, Palaung, Ruai and Rieng; cf. R.F. Johnston, *From Peking to Mandalay: A Journey from North China to Burma through Tibetan Ssuch'uan and Yunnan*, London: John Murray, 1908, p. 279 n.1. But according to another authority, the word is not Shan but derived from the Burmese word of the same meaning, *mokso*; cf. J.G. Scott's concluding note to R.G. Woodthorpe, "The Country of the Shans", *Geographical Journal* VII no. 6 (1896) p. 602.

Shan and Northern Thai, resent the "red" designation because it "comes from a rude meaning of the word 'red', denoting 'rawness' rather than the color of the Lahu Nyi women's skirt, as popularly believed" (p. 9). But Young fails to account for the fact that the Red Lahu, in their own language, call themselves La^ˆ hu_ Nyi^ˉ, and *nyi^ˉ* in Lahu means "red". Secondly, the Lahu Nyi I know seem in no way dissatisfied with the appellation, although it is true that they usually prefer to call themselves simply La^ˆ hu_ ya^ˆ or "Lahu people" and only add the qualifying *nyi^ˉ* when pressed to distinguish themselves from other Lahu divisions.¹⁴ My own Lahu Nyi informants did indeed ascribe their name, both in their own language and in Shan/Northern Thai, to the colour of their womenfolk's dress. Whether or not this is the true etymology I cannot determine. The fact is that colour designations are widely used to identify ethnic divisions throughout northern Southeast Asia (and through Central Asia as far west as Turkey), but the connotations of particular colours vary considerably and are often difficult to determine.¹⁵

Yet another example of the Black Lahu bias of Young's writing concerns the importance of Ah Sha Fu Cu. He reports: "Thailand Lahu also follow teachings promulgated by a Lahu religious leader, who died about 1890 in Mong Ka, southern Yunnan[,] called 'Ah Sha Fu Cu'" (p. 11). This may be true, but there are many Lahu Nyi in north Thailand who seem never to have heard the name of Ah Sha Fu Cu. The people who do retain a semi-mythological account of this religious leader are the Lahu Na Christians, who see him as a kind of Lahu "John the Baptist", precursor and foreteller of the coming Christianity, a point which Young also notes (p. 11).

Young's Lahu data, therefore, seem to rest heavily on what he has learned from the Lahu Na Christians. Indeed, even the vocabulary used as general to both Lahu Na and Lahu Nyi is sometimes specific to the Na. Thus the "werewolves" (p. 10) are indeed called *taw* (*taw_a*) among

14) See my "Divisions of the Lahu People", *JSS* LXII part 2 (July 1974), p. 255.

15) See my "Divisions of the Lahu People", pp. 263-5. Also Jairus Banaji, *Ethnology and Social and Symbolic Structures in Inner Asia and the Western and Central Himalayas with Special Reference to the Problem of the Origin of the Caste System*. Oxford University B. Litt. thesis, 1972.

the Black Lahu, but they are *tsuh^m tsuh^v* in Red Lahu. ' But apart from this Christian Black Lahu bias in Young's data, we are still left with a number of ethnographic blunders which could have been caught if reference had been made to some of the more recent studies of these people.¹⁶

Young estimates that Lahu Nyi and Na have been living in Thailand "not more than fifty years" (p. 9), and Shehleh "some 40 years" (p. 20); the Lahu Shi, he writes, "are perhaps the newest comers of all the hill tribes represented in Thailand" (p. 24). But a British surveyor, McCarthy, visited a Lahu village in the hills above Fang in 1891 and an American missionary, McGilvary, started proselytizing in the hills above Wiang Pa Pao in that same year.¹⁷ (As a matter of fact, it was in 1891 that McGilvary baptized two Lahu boys,¹⁸ more than a decade before William Marcus Young reported his first Lahu convert in Kengtung,¹⁹ thus making north Thailand the location of the first recorded conversion of a Lahu to Christianity). It is clear then that Lahu have been living in Thai territory for at least 85 years and probably longer.

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- 16) See Delmos J. Jones, (a) "The Tribe, the Village, and Over-Generalization: Example of Black Lahu", Bangkok: National Research Council (unpublished report), 1966; (b) *Cultural Variation among Six Lahu Villages, Northern Thailand*, Cornell University Ph. D. thesis, 1967; (c) "The Multivillage Community: Village Segmentation and Coalescence in Northern Thailand", *Behavior Science Notes* III no. 3 (1968), pp. 149-174. Hans J. Spielmann, (a) Review of Jones's, *Cultural Variation*, *JSS* LVI part 2 (July 1968), pp. 295-7; (b) "Note on the Literature on the Lahu Shehleh and Lahu Na of Northern Thailand", *JSS* LVII part 2 (July 1969), pp. 321-32. Anthony R. Walker, (a) "Red Lahu Village Society: An Introductory Survey", in Peter Hinton, ed., *Tribesmen and Peasants in Northern Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Tribal Research Centre, 1969; (b) *Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Village Society and Economy in North Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Tribal Research Centre (2 vols mimeographed), 1970.
- 17) James McCarthy, *Surveying and Exploring in Siam*, London: John Murray, 1902, p. 130. Daniel McGilvary, *A Half Century among the Shans and Lao*, New York & London: Fleming Revell, 1912, p. 338.
- 18) *Among the Shans and Lao*, p. 338.
- 19) W.M. Young, "Shan Mission, Kengtung", *The News* XVII no. 12 (Dec 1904), p. 45.

Turning now to Young's comments on Lahu religious ideas, I would note that while most Lahu do indeed believe in a host of spirits (*ne*^v), I have found no evidence that they believe *all* inanimate objects are inhabited by spirits as Young tells us (p. 10). Further, among the Lahu Nyi I know, I have never come across the idea of "a 'hell' comprised of seven great dipping pots" (p. 10), nor, for that matter, the idea that "adultery, theft, debt and murder" are "the four unpardonable sins" (p. 10). As I learned it, all crimes are pardonable if the village headman can get the victim of an outrage to accept compensation. Certainly, after compensation has been paid and accepted, the headman (at least among the Lahu Nyi I know) performs a short rite, *ve*^v *ba*⁻ *keh* *ve*, to purify or cleanse the wrongdoer from his sins (*ve*^v *ba*⁻ "sins", *keh* *ve* "to cleanse, purify").

Of course Young's data may be applicable to some Lahu communities although not to all. And here lies the crux of the matter. In the hills of this part of the world, with their incredible mosaic of different ethnic groups, and divisions of ethnic groups, it is seldom possible to make detailed generalizations on the basis of ethnic labels such as "the Lahu", or even on the basis of such divisional names as Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na. Hill communities often have diverse histories of migration into Thailand and of contact with both their hill and valley neighbours. These variables frequently add up to radical differences in cultural traditions between divisions within a single ethnic group and even among village communities of the same division. This point is never brought out in Young's book, and it is certainly as applicable to the Meo, Yao, Karen and others as it is to the Lahu.

To continue with religion: Young writes of each Lahu house having "an altar at which the joss-sticks and beeswax candles are burned 'to please and humor the guardian good spirits'" (p. 11). In fact, among Lahu Nyi, this is a shrine to the *yeh*, *ne*^v or House Spirit and, although small bowls containing rice and water are placed on the altar and beeswax candles are burned, I have never seen Lahu Nyi use joss-sticks there. Young also writes (p. 11), falling into Burmese usage, of a "nat house" (*nat* from Burmese "a spirit") or "Kha-shuh" (*hk*[']*a*[^] *sheu* : *hk*[']*a*[^]

"village", *sheu*, etymology obscure). He does not mention that this shrine is dedicated to the presiding spirit of the locality nor that many Lahu Nyi villages do not honour the locality spirit in this way. These villages have, rather, a small temple building known as a *haw⁻yeh_v* (*haw⁻* from Shan, the palace of a Shan prince, *yeh_v* "house"; thus a "princely house") which is dedicated to the supreme Lahu supernatural, G'ui, sha. (Such temple buildings are, or at least were, common also among Lahu Na in Burma,²⁰ in whose dialect they are called *bon yeh_v* [*bon* "blessing, merit"].) The whole temple-based ritual, with its associated ritual specialists, is so important among Lahu Nyi communities in Thailand²¹ that it is a pity it merits no reference in Young's book.

Young's statement that "They [the Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na] have no ancestor worship or reverence rituals, but honor the living distinguished elders" (p. 12) might have been amended in this new edition, particularly in the light of my 1972 article in our Society's journal, "Blessing Feasts and Ancestor Propitiation among the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu)".²²

On the religious ideas and practices of the Lahu Shehleh Young's data are extremely thin. No mention is made of Shehleh ritual officials, the priest and spirit specialist, and their different roles in village society,²³ nor of the fenced dancing circle which is the ritual centre of the village, nor of the House Spirit shrines. We are told that the Shehleh "are very superstitious people, believing that it is most important to avoid loud noises and spectacular activities which might draw the attention of the evil spirits" (p. 20), but this gives us few real clues to Shehleh religion. The Lahu Shi data are even worse. Statements such as "The 'paw khu' (or religious leader) and the 'maw pa' [spirit specialist] practice many forms of exorcistic shamans and usually claim to have strong 'voodoo' powers" (p. 25) are probably as confused as they are confusing.

20) J.H. Telford, "Animism in Kengtung State", *Journal of the Burma Research Society* XXVII part 2 (1937), pp. 86-238. See p. 171.

21) See my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*, pp. 189-94, 202-24.

22) *JSS* LX part 1 (Jan 1972), pp. 345-73.

23) See Jones's *Cultural Variation*, pp. 75-8, and his "The Multivillage Community", p. 172n4.

Turning now to Young's descriptions of the physical layout of Lahu villages and of the appearance of the people themselves, we may first note that it is not true that all Lahu Nyi and Na villages in Thailand are on elevations above 3,000 feet (p. 12).²⁴ There are some villages at much lower elevations where the people have taken to cultivating irrigated rice in the narrow valleys of the foothills. It is not true that "The water source is generally a long way from the village and must be carried by women and children in bamboo joints and gourds" (p. 12). A characteristic feature of many a Lahu village is the bamboo aqueduct which channels water right into the centre of the village. And it is not inevitably the case that "houses... are clustered around the larger house of the headman or the paw khu" (p. 12). Lahu Nyi houses are frequently sited roughly on either side of a main village thoroughfare, at the uphill end of which is the village temple or, alternatively, a small shrine to the guardian Locality Spirit.²⁵ Whether or not the headman's and priest's houses are larger than those of their fellow villagers depends more on the size of their families than on their roles in the community. Furthermore, it is not true in Lahu Nyi houses that the fireplace "is always built in the middle of the house" (p. 12). Frequently it is sited close to the back wall.²⁶ Because of a great deal of inter-ethnic marriage (Lahu and Lisu, Lahu and Karen, Lahu and Khamu, Lahu and Thai, Lahu and Chinese), Young's statements about skin colour and body height (p. 12) should be accepted only with caution. And, although betel-chewing is common enough, it is far from true to say that "All of the adults chew betel nut habitually" (p. 13). Many never touch the stuff.

So far as Young's comments on Lahu agricultural practices are concerned, it is no longer true, alas, that "an old field is reclaimed in ten to fifteen years, if no new fields are available" (p. 14). The rise in population has brought about severe pressure on land resources and consequently more frequent return to old and insufficiently fallowed swiddens. Early-maturing rice is certainly *not* planted in September nor

24) The 1962 edition (p. 12) had "above 4,000 feet".

25) See village plan on p. 84 of my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*.

26) See house plan on p. 87 of my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*.

harvested in March (p. 14). In fact, it is usually planted in mid-April, about three to four weeks ahead of the main rice crop. The early rice begins to mature towards the end of July and has usually been harvested by the end of August. Young also might have noted that early rice is seen merely as a stop-gap between the end of the previous year's rice store and the harvesting of the new main crop. People who feel confident that their supplies will last the year seldom bother to plant early rice. Again, it is incorrect that the rice seeds are sown broadcast over the fields (p. 14). They are, in fact, planted by the dibble method, three to five seeds being dropped into small holes in the soil made with a metal dibble blade attached to a long bamboo pole.²⁷ Finally, I should point out that among all Lahu I have known in north Thailand, it is far from true to say that they have "a seven-day work week in which two or three days are devoted to hunting and trapping" (p. 14). Keen hunters that they most certainly are, no Lahu farmer I know could afford to devote so much time to hunting at the expense of his farm work. My Lahu friends would normally hunt during the early hours of darkness after a hard day's work in the fields. Seldom could they spend a whole day or more at the chase.

It is good that Young has removed the patently absurd statement of early editions to the effect that "The Lahu depend upon the plains-people only for salt" (1962 p. 14). The new edition, although vague, is more to the point in saying that "The Lahu now depend upon the plains-people for increasingly more things" (p. 14).²⁸ The fact is that, for so long as we have written records of them, and in all countries in which they have lived, Lahu have always relied on plainspeople to provide them with numerous items which their swidden-oriented economy does not allow them to produce for themselves.

Under the heading "social customs", Young gives us a very brief description indeed of the most complex series of Lahu rituals, those

27) For a detailed description of rice planting practices and an illustration of the dibble blade, see my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*, pp. 372-82.

28) For a list of goods imported into a Lahu village in the course of a year (1967) see table 102, p. 535 in my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*.

associated with the new year celebrations (pp. 15-16).²⁹ Furthermore, the account he does give is by no means general to all Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na communities. Thus, among the Lahu Nyi with whom I studied, the new year was the occasion not for "a three-to-four-day observance" (p. 15) but rather for rites spread out over eleven days. The elaborate courting customs associated with the new year in Young's account (p. 16), although widely reported and indeed remembered by older Lahu Nyi, are not so extensively practiced among the Lahu I know as they were in former days.

Marriages, at least the ones I witnessed among the Lahu Nyi, are performed not in the groom's parental house as Young suggests (p. 16) but invariably in that of the bride. And in referring to the groom's post-marital labour obligations, what does Young mean by "Thailand's Lahu usually settle for a cash settlement of from 300 to 1000 Baht in lieu of the son-in-lawship... but invariably the young man does not have this amount and must therefore serve his father-in-law for a period" (p. 16)? Does the young man pay or does he work? In the communities I studied, some men paid off their in-laws, others worked for them, and yet others paid off a part of their obligation and worked off the remainder. Perhaps this is what Young means too.

Young's description of the lunar festival dances³⁰ is, at least in the light of my own experience, overstated. He tells us that the young people "carry this dance to climaxes which become sensual, and end in exhausted, self-induced trances" and that an outsider, who "very seldom is allowed to witness these dances", "would be amazed to see the ability and terrible roughness with which both the girls and boys conduct themselves" (p. 17). During the course of my fieldwork I attended several dozen of these performances and, although the dancing is indeed frequently vigorous, in my study communities it was only certain people (usually elders with oracular abilities) who would enter a state of trance.

29) For an account of these among the Lahu Nyi see my "The La^v hu[—] Nyi[—] (Red La^v hu[—]) New Year Celebrations", *JSS* LVIII part 1 (Jan 1970), pp. 1-44.

30) He refers to the semi-monthly festivals of the new and full moon as "sabbaths". The Lahu call them *shi[—] nyi* (*shi[—]* from *aw^v shi[—]* "blessing, merit", *nyi* "day").

To give the impression that such ritual dances are invariably "all-night" affairs, "sensual" and "terribly rough", is to my mind a gross exaggeration. I have some evidence that the dance can be as Young has described it, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Under the heading "village government" Young has fortunately amended the statement in older editions that "Many Lahu villages in Thailand have little or no contact with Changwad, Amphur, or Tambol authorities" (1962 p. 17) to read in the new edition (p. 17) "Many Lahu villages in Thailand have increasing contacts" with such authorities. It is true that upland communities have much less contact with the organs of lowland government than do their lowland counterparts. But this may disguise an equally important fact, that contacts between Lahu villagers (and those of other ethnic groups) and the lowland authorities have an ancient if tenuous lineage. Thus the missionary McGilvary, reconnoitring in northern Siam in 1892, noted that eleven Lahu villages in the hills east of the Mekong river came under the jurisdiction of the rulers of Chiang Sen,³¹ while at about the same time (1891) the surveyor, McCarthy, reported that Lahu above the town of Fang paid "a trifling amount of wax as a tax, and are allowed free settlement" by the lowland authorities.³²

In this new edition, Young has retained the statement "Depending on the *particular clans concerned* [my emphasis], the headman may be self-established or selected by a council of elders" (p. 18). Considering the bilateral nature of the Lahu kinship system and the absence of such descent-based social groupings, I am mystified as to what Young means when he talks about Lahu "clans".

I have no evidence to support Young's statement that "For fornication... the suspected young couple will be whipped soundly and forced to marry" or that "Adultery is punishable on the spot by death when a couple is caught in the act" (p. 18). Among the Lahu I know, the former statement is quite inapplicable and the latter is true only if it is the wronged and irate marriage partner who discovers the unfaithful

31) *Among the Shans and Lao*, p. 341.

32) *Surveying and Exploring*, p. 130.

spouse *in flagrante delicto*, before others can intervene and bring the matter before the village headman.

Finally—so far as the Lahu Nyi and Na section is concerned—I should point out that my own informants had never even heard of the custom of burying any of their dead “face down” (p. 19).

But before condemning Young's material on every count listed above, I must repeat that it is extremely difficult to make valid generalizations about even a single division of the Lahu (such as the Lahu Nyi), so that some of what Young says may well apply to some Lahu communities in some places. What it most obviously does not do is apply to all Lahu Nyi and Na communities throughout northern Thailand. A review of Young's Lahu material half a dozen years ago pointed out that “In describing the religious attitudes and ceremonies, economic activities, and the political, social and religious organization he often does not make clear which group he is describing, the Nyi or Na or both”.³³ It is a pity that this criticism was not heeded in the new edition. But even if it had been, the author would still have found problems making generalizations valid for *all* Lahu Nyi or *all* Lahu Na.

Most of my criticisms have been levelled at Young's section on the Lahu Nyi and Lahu Na. I think this is fair enough since these are the two divisions he seems to know best. At any rate he gives fewer data on the Lahu Shehle and Lahu Shi. It seems that he is also less partial to these peoples. For example, he describes the Shehle as “less energetic and slower-moving than other Lahu and . . . not as attractive physically” (p. 21). The Lahu Shi he judges “a very handsome people” but “a less moral and lawful people than their related Lahu groups” (p. 25). These are, of course, just the kind of subjective observations that field ethnographers are constantly warned against making.

All in all, while welcoming the revisions (not to mention some of the new photographs) in this fifth edition of *The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand*, I hope I have made abundantly clear why I feel much more should and could have been done. The lesson which the professionals should learn from the republication of this book is that it is now high

33) Spielmann, “Literature on Lahu Shehle and Na”, pp. 323-4.

time that they got together and produced a more solid introduction to a fascinating and complex ethnographic region, an introduction useful alike to their colleagues and to non-anthropologists. The subject was broached at a symposium sponsored by the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai as long ago as 1967. Nothing has yet come of the idea. But I have no doubt that if the majority of anthropologists who have worked in the northern hills over the past decade were to contribute to a new introduction, an extremely valuable source book would emerge. Perhaps the Siam Society will consider sponsoring such a project?

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REVIEWS

Roger M. Smith, ed. *Southeast Asia: Documents of Political Development and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974). Glossary, Index, 608 pages.

This volume from the Cornell University Press is a continuing sequel to the series of books on Southeast Asia and is a linear descendant of Professor Kahin's *Government and Politics of Southeast Asia* (1959, 1964). However, due to the fact that Kahin's book is rather outdated, the utility of Smith's work is limited. An overarching picture of complex political change in Southeast Asia could not be adequately glimpsed from Smith and associates' presentation. The general terrain is mapped but serious gaps in the literature remains unattended.

Admittedly, under the format, a comprehensive inclusion of important political documents could not be done. As it stands, the book is quite a hefty volume and presumably is directed at students more than serious researchers with specialization in the field. The book's limited scope is useful to a general understanding of political phenomena and dynamics of Southeast Asia. However, no attempt was made to integrate or theorize about the diverse experiences of the various systems studied. Each contributor has been given a free hand in the selection and organization of documents.

In his preface, Professor Smith observes that countries in Southeast Asia face the problems of war, *coups d'état*, revolutions, and the common experience of the centrality of violence in political change. While scholars have been interested in the study of political violence in Southeast Asia, they must acknowledge the scarcity of primary data translated into English. Especially for the researcher whose mastery of languages is limited, prospects of undertaking a comparative study on a cross-societal level would appear doomed from the start. In this day and age where research funds are dwindling, and the scope of study must correspondingly be dictated by resources available, books and monographs in the genre of *Southeast Asia: Documents of Political Development and Change* are more than welcomed. Smith and associates are providing the academic community with invaluable service, and despite the scope of the book, it is hoped that other scholars would publicly share their collected