

# LAHU NYI (RED LAHU) RITES FOR ESTABLISHING A NEW VILLAGE

ANTHONY R. WALKER\*

Dedicated to the memory of Paul Ca.Htaw<sup>▼</sup>,  
loyal assistant and friend, who was born in  
Burma's Chin Hills some 40 years ago and  
murdered in north Thailand early in 1980.

## 1. Introduction

During a four-year research period among the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Lahu in the hills of north Thailand (1966-70),<sup>1</sup> I was fortunate to be able to record and translate a substantial corpus of prayer texts applicable to various ritual occasions. Intrinsically valuable as "oral literature", these prayer texts also have helped me greatly in deciphering Lahu ideas about the supernatural world and their place in relation to it.

It is important, I believe, to make this poetic expression of a preliterate mountain people of northern Southeast Asia available to oriental, ethnological and allied scholarship. To this end, and as another step towards a substantial monograph on the Lahu people among whom I worked,<sup>2</sup> I have published many of these texts with their ethnographic background in scholarly journals. The result is a series of articles, each one focusing on a certain ritual occasion and giving the texts (in Lahu and in English translation) of the prayers used at that time. Although the present contribution is written to stand by itself, it could better be read in conjunction with my previously-published work.<sup>3</sup>

For readers unfamiliar with Lahu society and culture, I preface this account of the rites for establishing a village with some short notes on the Lahu people in general,<sup>4</sup>

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1. My research was centred in the districts of Phrao (Chiang Mai province) and Wiang Pa Pao (Chiang Rai province). I set up house in one Lahu Nyi village and made visits to two neighbouring communities. At this time I held the position of "research officer" at the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai. I record here my gratitude to the Director of the Tribal Research Centre, Khun Wanat Bhruksasri, and all his staff. Thanks go also to my wife, Pauline Hetland Walker, for editing this paper and drawing the illustrative figures.
2. So far, my major study of these Lahu is a two-volume mimeographed report to the Royal Thai Government (Walker 1970b).
3. See bibliography at the end of this article.
4. Further ethnographic data on the Lahu people may be found in Telford (1937), Jones (1967), Walker (1969, 1970b, 1975a, 1975b, 1975g, 1979a, 1983a) and Bradley (1979:1-18, 37-61). A sometimes evocative, but not always accurate, account of Lahu life can be found in the novel by Hamilton-Merritt (1973).

on the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) in particular, and on the relevant aspects of Lahu Nyi material culture, namely the domestic buildings and sacred centre of the village. It is only against this physical backdrop that the rites, and the prayers used in them, can properly be understood.

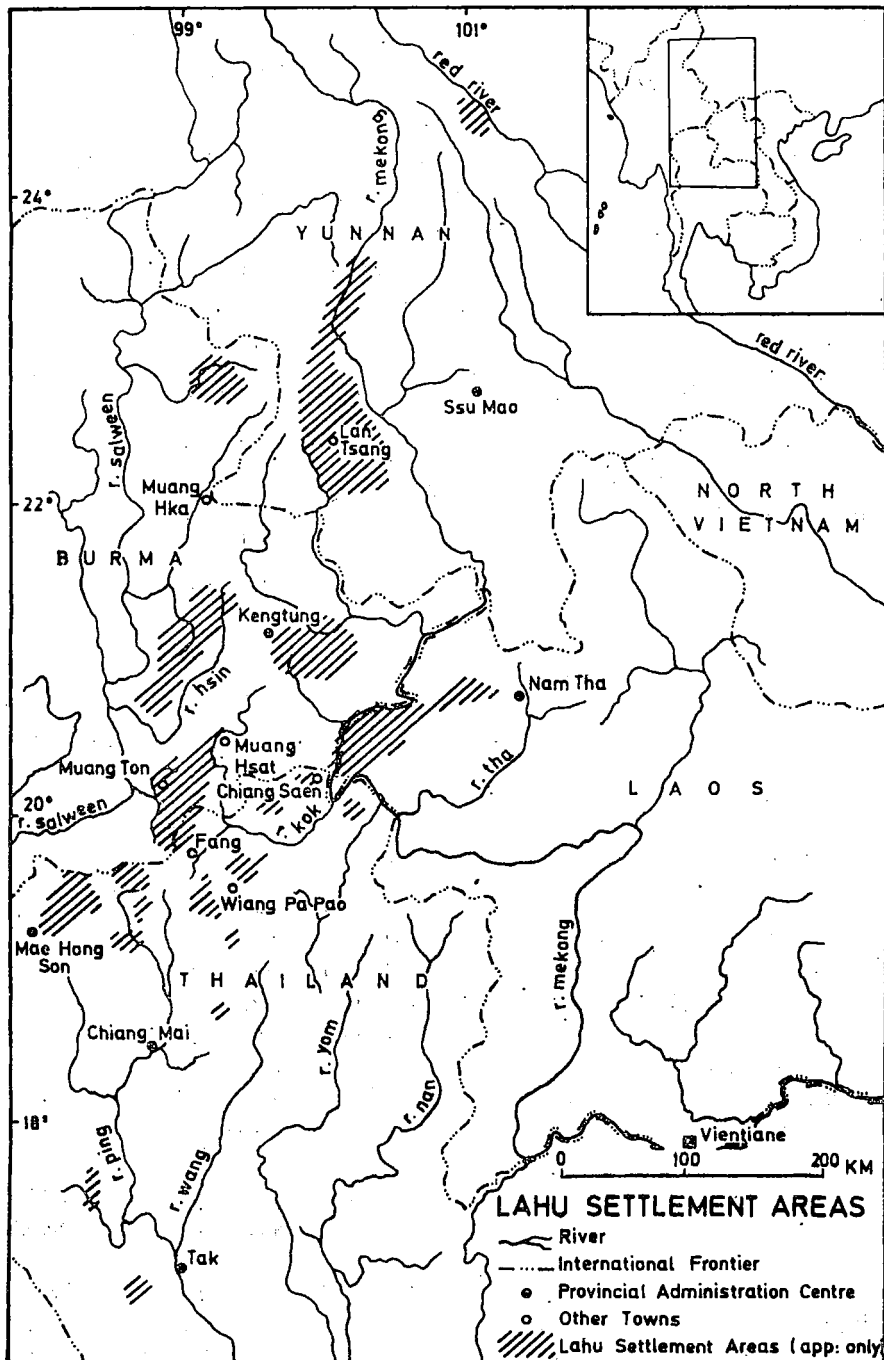
## 2. The Lahu People

The Lahu are one of a great many linguistically and culturally distinct minority peoples who inhabit the rugged mountains of the so-called "Golden Triangle" (map). This territory falls within the political jurisdiction of four nations--China, Burma, Laos and Thailand--but it has a greater geographical and ethnic homogeneity than its political fragmentation would suggest. The region is characterised by rugged hills or mountains, interspersed with narrow alluvial valleys. And everywhere the valleys are occupied predominantly by Tai-speaking peoples:<sup>5</sup> irrigated-rice farmers, long-time adherents of the Theravada school of Buddhism, participants in a literate tradition and, despite the considerable autonomy of their village communities, politically organized during the pre-modern period into more-or-less independent princedoms, called *muang*. The highlands which surround these Tai-occupied valleys are, by contrast, the home of a great number of so-called "tribal" peoples,<sup>6</sup> speaking a heterogeneous collection of languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman, Mon-Khmer and Meo-Yao families.<sup>7</sup> But it is not merely their linguistic diversity which distinguishes the upland peoples from their lowland Tai neighbours. The uplanders are swidden, or slash-and-burn, hill farmers; they are not, for the most part, formal adherents of Theravada Buddhism (although Buddhist ideas and practices have penetrated their cultures); they possess no tradition of

5. I use the term "Tai" to refer to any group speaking a Tai (or Daic) language; "Thai" refers either to a citizen of the modern kingdom of Thailand or, adjectivally, to something belonging to that kingdom, e.g., the northern Thai hills.

6. "Hill tribes" is a common designation for the upland peoples of northern Southeast Asia, but I am reluctant to use the term. "Tribe" usually connotes people who have some form of supra-local political organization, considerable cultural uniformity and common occupancy of a definite territory. None of these features is usually true for the uplanders of northern Southeast Asia. The term also perpetuates the notion that uplanders are completely separate from lowlanders, while in reality the two sets of peoples usually are intimately involved with one another. I prefer to call these people "hill folk" or "upland peoples", thus shifting the emphasis from sociological to ecological criteria.

7. For some idea of the linguistic complexity of this region, see LeBar *et al.*, compilers, "Ethnolinguistic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia", a map to accompany LeBar *et al.* (1964). But even this is a gross, although cartographically necessary, oversimplification of the situation on the ground.



literacy predating the invention of scripts by Christian missionaries;<sup>8</sup> and they have no political institutions beyond the village community or, at most, the cluster of neighbouring village communities (*cf.* Kandre 1967:616; Walker 1975b:117).

The Lahu are one such minority group. Originally located wholly in China's Yunnan province (still their population centre), some Lahu during the 19th century began moving southwards into territories which are now part of Burma and Laos and, subsequently, into what is now the northern region of the Kingdom of Thailand. There were two principal motives for this expansion over the borders of the Middle Kingdom: a desire to escape from Imperial "pacification" measures directed at them as "barbarians" of the frontier regions, and the need to find new farming lands as the soils of southern Yunnan became overworked (*cf.* Walker 1975a:332-33, 1975b:113-114).

Today in China there are 300,000 Lahu living in the far southwest of Yunnan province (*BR* 1980; *CP* 1981). Here, in 1953, China's new communist administration set up for them the "Lan-ts'ang Lahu People's Autonomous Area", redesignated an "Autonomous County" or *hsien* the following year (*SCMP* 1953; Ch'en 1964: 46-8). South of the Chinese border, in Burma's Federated Shan State, estimates of the Lahu population vary from 40,000 to 230,000.<sup>9</sup> Only a few thousand Lahu live in Laos, in the far western corner, and their numbers have probably decreased in the past two or three years as several Lahu communities have crossed over into Thailand to escape political unrest following the communist victory in Laos.<sup>10</sup> In Thailand, where information on the Lahu population is both accurate and up-to-date, there are now 35,500 of these people distributed through 290 villages (Lewis 1980a:1). Finally, there may be a remnant Lahu community, numbering less than 2,000, in northern Vietnam.<sup>11</sup>

8. A minor exception among the hill people living in Thailand are the Yao or Iu Mien people, whose spirit-specialists read from ritual texts written in standard Chinese characters (*cf.* Shiratori 1975, 1978:232). Further north, in China, the Yi or Lolo people have their own ideographic script (*cf.* Vial 1898), as do the Na-khi or Moso (*cf.* Rock, 1968:42-45).
9. Lewis (1980a:1) gives a low estimate of 205,000 and a high of 230,000 Lahu in Burma, but he cites no authority. Ten years ago, Lewis (1970:80) was of the view that there were 80,000 Lahu in Burma, while a Burmese publication (*BSPP* 1970:47) claimed only 40,000 Lahu. In the light of these widely conflicting estimates, we can only hope for a detailed census to be taken to resolve the problem.
10. A decade ago, Lewis (1969) suggested that the Lahu population of Laos was 5,000. His recent estimate (1980a:1) is that it is now between 8,000 and 10,000. Again he cites no evidence for his estimate.
11. In 1948 the Chinese anthropologist, Ruey Yih-fu (1948:1), stated that there were Lahu living in the mountains "north of Tonkin". More recently, a Vietnamese scholar, Vuong Hoang Tuyen (1974:170-79) (also in a French edition 1973:176-85) has reported a group

Like most upland minority peoples of this part of the world, the Lahu occupy no continuous stretch of territory which, either geographically or politically, could be called "Lahuland". Even in the Lan-ts'ang autonomous county named for them, Lahu share the hills with communities of other affiliation: principally Wa, but also a few Aini and Yi (Lolo). The valley inhabitants in that "Lahu" county are predominantly Tai (Shan), with a few Han Chinese government and party officials and shopkeepers.<sup>12</sup> In Burma, Laos and Thailand a similar pattern emerges, with different combinations of hill peoples, but always a Tai-speaking lowland majority. The Lahu, therefore, constitute a cultural category rather than a discrete socio-political group. In other words, all Lahu (so far as I can determine) recognize a common cultural heritage, a common "Lahu-ness"; but this does not mean that they could, or would necessarily wish to, organize themselves into a single Lahu polity.

The name "Lahu" (La<sup>˥</sup> hu<sub>˥</sub>)<sup>13</sup>, which is what these people call themselves, is of uncertain meaning. I have never come across a Lahu who could explain it for me. Two slightly different stories from the pens of Chinese journalists link the name with tiger hunting, but both interpretations are problematical and very likely they are no more than Chinese folk etymologies.<sup>14</sup> Two other names are frequently used for this people. One is "Mussur", a Shan (Tai Yai) word derived from the Burmese *moksa*

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of people "secluded in the remotest corners of the mountains", who are commonly known as Co Sung, but who call themselves "La Hu". Vuong reports that these Co Sung or La Hu, according to their own traditions, came originally from China, and he hints at a possible connexion between them and the present Lahu peoples of Yunnan. Unfortunately, Vuong's short ethnographic summary lacks any linguistic material which would enable us to relate the Co Sung to the larger Lahu ethnolinguistic group with certainty.

Interestingly, Lewis (1980a:1) in his recent survey of the Lahu population includes 1,500 as living in Vietnam. He gives the same figure for both "lower" and "higher" estimates, from which I deduce that he is certain of his datum. But he does not cite the source for his information on Lahu in Vietnam.

12. I have built a composite picture using information from a variety of sources. They are: (i) Lahu informants now living in Thailand who once knew the Lan-ts'ang area; (ii) Professor Ruey Yih-fu of the Academia Sinica (Taiwan), who once studied the Lan-ts'ang Lahu (see Ruey 1954, still the major work on the physical anthropology of the Lahu); and (iii) a New China News Agency release (SCMP 1953).
13. See note 25 below, regarding tones and tone marks. In writing the ethnonym "Lahu" and the subgroup names "Lahu Nyi" etc, I have joined the syllables "La" and "hu" and omitted tone marks, conforming to the usual practice in the ethnographic record.
14. One author (KM 1957) writes:

In old times, when the different Lahu tribes (perhaps he means village communities) used to hunt together, whenever they caught a tiger—*la* in Lahu—they would divide the meat and eat it together at a special place called *hu*; therefore they call themselves "Lahu".

"hunter".<sup>15</sup> It is well-received by Lahu who, whether tiger-hunters or not, pride themselves on prowess in the pursuit of wild game. The second name is Lo-hei (傣黑) traditionally used by Chinese for Lahu in Yunnan. It seems to have derogatory connotations<sup>16</sup> and has now officially been dropped by the Chinese authorities in favour of the indigenous "Lahu" (拉祜) (cf. SCMP 1953).

Lahu speak a Tibeto-Burman language. To be precise, it is a member of the Central Loloish branch of the Lolo-Burmese subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>17</sup> Its closest relative among the Loloish languages is Lisu, the language of a neighbouring upland group. Lahu also has close lexical affinities with Akha, the language of another

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While it is true enough that *la*<sup>v</sup> (high falling tone) means "tiger", I have no evidence that *hu* (very low tone) means "a special place where tiger flesh is eaten". The second etymology appeared in the *Yun-nan Jih-pao* (*Yunnan Daily*) of 23 May 1958. I have not seen this article but it is cited by Lemoine (1978: 848), who writes:

Leur nom, La Hou, signifierait en chinois : *la* (ou *lie*) "chasseur", *hou*, "(de) tigre"; et l'auteur de cette ingénieuse étymologie... ajoute que la chasse occupe encore une grande place dans leurs activités annuelles, bien qu'ils soient déjà passés au stade de la production agricole...

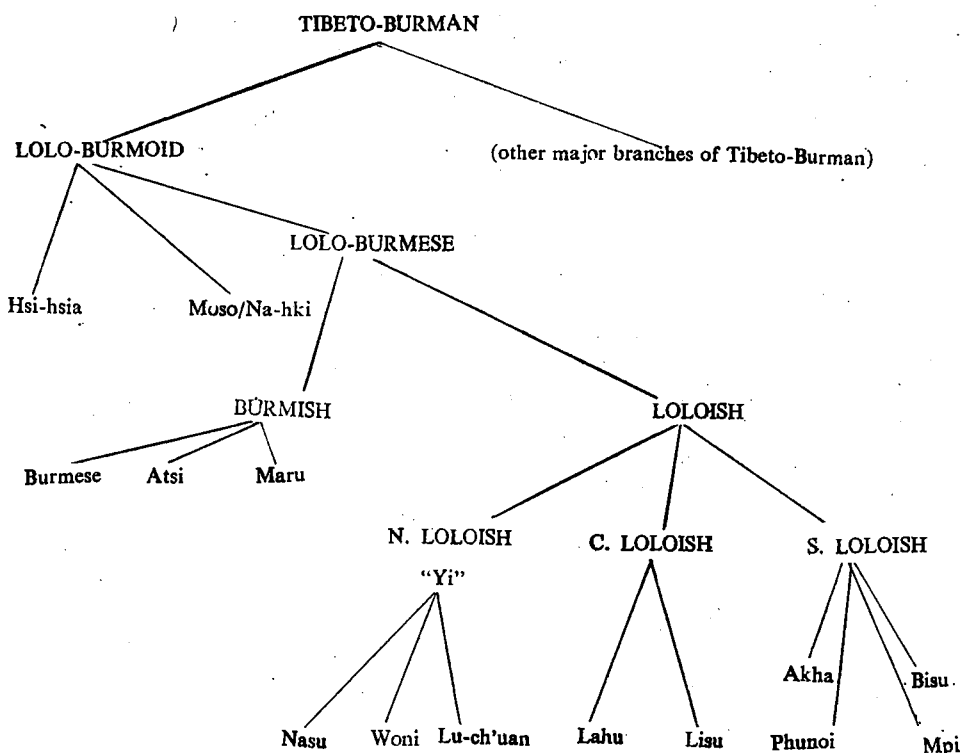
15. This name "Mussur" has frequently led writers to confuse the Lahu with the Moso (Na-hki) people of the Tibetan borderlands. In this connexion see Walker (1980b:243n13).
16. Thus Scott and Hardiman (1900:579) quote a report to the effect that the Chinese use the name Lo-hei (Scott and Hardiman spell it "Loheirh") "out of pure mischief". Their informant maintained that "La'hu would have been an equally easy sound, but to the Chinese mind it would not have been so appropriate a designation, for it would not have conveyed the contemptuous meaning of Loheirh." "Blackness" is said to be the connotation of this name. Chinese anthropologist Ruey Yih-fu (1948:1) also implies that "Lo-hei" is somehow derogatory, for he says that although these people are referred to by this name, it is more polite to address them as "Hei-chia" (黑家), literally "Black family". As the word "black" (*hei*, 黑) is present in both impolite and polite names, it is difficult to accept that it necessarily implies "barbarity", as has sometimes been thought.
17. The definitive study on the Lahu language is Matisoff (1973), which replaces the grammatical sections of an earlier work by Telford and Saya David (1938). There is also a Lahu language instruction book by a missionary with experience among this people (Peet 1961). Finally, there is an excellent recent publication on the dialects of Lahu (Bradley 1979).

The Lolo-Burmese languages are characterized "by the radical simplification of initial consonant clusters and the disappearance of most syllable-final consonant contrasts, compensated for by a proliferation of tones" (Matisoff 1973:xxxix). Lahu, lacking both initial consonant clusters and final consonants, but possessing a total of nine vowels and seven tones, is an excellent example of such developments in the Lolo-Burmese languages.

people who are near upland neighbours of the Lahu in both Burma and Thailand. But recent linguistic work demonstrates that Akha belongs to the Southern, rather than the Central, Loloish group.<sup>18</sup>

The writing of Lahu is, by most accounts, relatively recent.<sup>19</sup> Three scripts, all based on the Latin alphabet, are used by various Lahu communities today. One was developed in Burma and used also in Yunnan (and, more recently, in Thailand) by

18. Personal communication, James A. Matisoff, Penang, 1977. This serves to correct my earlier statement (Walker 1976g:430n 5). The following diagram shows where Lahu falls within the Tibeto-Burman language family. (In connexion with n. 15 above, note how distant Lahu is from Moso or Na-hki.)



19. Nineteenth century reports from the Burmese Shan State and southern Yunnan (H. Walker 1895:59; Henri d'Orleans 1898:108) suggested that the Lahu did in fact have some form of written character. And there is a report from William Young (1914:23), pioneer American Baptist missionary among the Lahu, to the effect that "the Lahu... have a tradition which they firmly believe that they had a written language and they insist that copies of their books are still in existence to the north." It is tempting to link this reported Lahu tradition with the literature of the Lolo or Yi people (above, note 8) with whom, as we can see from the above diagram, the Lahu share definite linguistic affiliations. However, modern research among Lahu communities in Yunnan, Burma and Thailand has uncovered no evidence of a

the American Baptist missionaries.<sup>20</sup> Another was introduced by Roman Catholic missionaries in Burma and is now used by Catholic converts, still mostly in Burma but a few also in Thailand.<sup>21</sup> Finally there is a "reformed" romanization, based on the Baptist orthography and developed by Chinese linguists associated with the Central Institute of Nationalities in Peking (NCNA 1964).<sup>22</sup> In this article I use the "Baptist" romanization, this being the Lahu writing system most widely used outside China and the one which I used for my field research.

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traditional Lahu writing system. A Chinese linguist, Ma Hsueh-liang (1962: 27), writes of Lahu in Yunnan that "the Lahus, who previously had no writing for their language, used to keep records with notched sticks." In fact, this use of notched sticks was reported among some Lahu in Yunnan as late as 1957 (KM 1957). The earliest recorded attempt to reduce Lahu to writing dates from around the first decade of this century and was the work of Karen assistants to the American Baptist missionaries then working among the Lahu. The script adopted for Lahu by these Karen was that in which their own Christian literature was written, namely a Burmese-based orthography (personal communication, Rev. Dr. Paul Lewis, Chiang Mai, 1970).

20. The first person known to have reduced Lahu to writing in a Roman script was H.H. Tilbe, an American Baptist missionary in Burma. This he accomplished in 1906-7, producing a hymnbook and a catechism which the missionaries heralded as "the beginnings of Lahu literature" (see Anonymous 1907:484; Telford *s.a.* (1927 ?). Tilbe's romanization was subsequently improved by other missionaries: James Telford, Vincent Young and Paul Lewis, and has been used extensively for both religious and secular literature by Lahu Christians in Burma and China. Good examples of the religious literature are Telford (1949), V. Young (*s.a.*) and Lewis (1962). (Although it is convenient to cite these three editions of the *New Testament* under the missionary-translator's names, each one was assisted by several Lahu religious leaders, to the extent that some of them might not claim the major role in the translation.) Secular literature includes school textbooks (*cf.* Telford 1939; Anonymous 1959), books which teach Lahu to speak and write Thai (Lewis 1970a, 1971) and, for a time, a Lahu magazine (*LHLT* 1969-71).

Some of the Lahu Christian literature published in Burma was sent across the border into China for the use of Lahu Christians there. Other books were published in China itself. Thus, when Professor Ruey Yi-fu visited the Lahu in Yunnan in the winter of 1934-5 (personal communication, Taipei, 1980), he acquired two examples of Lahu Christian literature, one published in Rangoon (ABM 1925) and the other in Chefoo, North China (Anonymous *s.a.*)

21. Examples of the Roman Catholic orthography for Lahu include RCMPT (1952, 1959). With the movement of some Catholic Lahu across the Burmese border into Thailand and the development of a Catholic mission to the Lahu based in Fang, Chiang Mai province, north Thailand (see Urbani 1970, Zimbaldi 1977), books in the Roman Catholic orthography are now being published in Thailand for the first time, for example, RCMPF (*s.a.*:1 and 2).
22. An example of this script may be found in Giljarevskij and Grivnin (1964:151). Bradley (1979:214) cites two books written in the reformed romanization which were published in Yunnan in 1958 (Anonymous 1958a, 1958b). I have seen neither myself.



### 3. The Lahu Nyi or Red Lahu

Within the major ethno-linguistic category of Lahu are many subdivisions. These include Lahu Na (Black Lahu), Lahu Shi (Yellow), Lahu Hpu (White), Lahu Nyi (Red), Lahu Sheh Leh (meaning unknown) and many more (*cf.* Walker 1974d; Bradley 1979:37-43).<sup>23</sup> Just how these divisions have arisen among the Lahu and why some of them bear colour names is unknown. History, geography and language suggest an ancient cleavage between Black and Yellow Lahu, and probably other divisions represent more recent breakaways from these two major groups. Evidence from modern times suggests that religious factionalism is one of the reasons for the emergence of new subgroups among the Lahu. Various combinations of dialectal, cultural and social differences distinguish one Lahu division from another, a fact which mitigates against generalizations about "the Lahu". And yet, as I have already noted, all Lahu do seem to recognize some kind of common ethnic identity and are, in fact, much more likely to identify themselves as Lahu *ya'* "Lahu people" than as a particular subgroup such as Lahu Nyi "Red Lahu".<sup>24</sup>

In the field, although not in the library, my own studies of the Lahu people have been focused on the Lahu Nyi division. In Thailand, where I conducted my fieldwork, Lahu Nyi are the most numerous division of this people, numbering around 16,000 individuals scattered through 155 villages (Lewis 1980a: 9). This represents about 46%

23. Tonal identifications (see note 25): La<sup>˥</sup> Hu<sup>˥</sup> Na<sup>˥</sup>, Shi, Hpu, Nyi<sup>˥</sup>, Sheh Leh<sup>˥</sup>.

24. Lewis (1980a:3) writes, "At some point in time the term Red Lahu (La<sup>˥</sup> Hu<sup>˥</sup> Nyi<sup>˥</sup>) began to be used for this group, probably due to the fact that the women have quite a bit of red cloth in their outfits. They do *not* refer to themselves in this way, and from what I can tell do not like to be called this." Lewis (p. 4) suggests that we try to avoid the term "Red", particularly because some Thai conclude that "Red" Lahu must be communist Lahu, since those Meo (Hmong in their own language) who sympathize with the Communist Party of Thailand are labelled "Red Meo".

Because the Lahu Nyi are an offshoot of the Lahu Na or Black Lahu, a fission which took place in the southern areas of Lahu settlement (*cf.* Walker 1974d: 260-61), they are sometimes called Lahu Meu Teu (*meu<sup>˥</sup> teu<sup>˥</sup>*, "southern country", from Shan). Lewis therefore seems to prefer the usage "Black/Southern (Red)" when describing the Lahu Nyi.

My field data confirm Lewis's view that the Lahu Nyi do not ordinarily use the designation "Nyi" but refer to themselves only as "Lahu people" (*cf.* Walker 1974d: 255). But I have used the designation Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) in my publications because I need a term which distinguishes them from other subdivisions of the Lahu people. And my informants did not object to this designation, which *they themselves* used when it became essential to distinguish themselves from Lahu Na, Lahu Shi or some other branch of the Lahu people. (The Lahu Nyi with whom I lived never used the term La<sup>˥</sup> Hu<sup>˥</sup> Meu<sup>˥</sup> Teu<sup>˥</sup>, although I have heard it among Red Lahu recently arrived from Burma.) Thus I retain the usage "Lahu Nyi" in this paper, as being less unwieldy and less confusing than "Black/Southern (Red) Lahu".

of the 35,000 or so Lahu who live in Thailand. There are also an undetermined number of Lahu Nyi across the border, mostly in the Burmese districts of Muang Hsat and Muang Ton, and all of them east of the river Hsin. But there are no Lahu Nyi in the northerly areas of Lahu settlement in Burma, nor apparently in Laos. And there are certainly no Lahu Nyi in China. Available evidence suggests that the Lahu Nyi are an offshoot of the numerically greater and territorially more dispersed Lahu Na, the latter often considered the premier Lahu division and sometimes called the "Great Lahu" (Scott and Hardiman 1900 : 580; Ruey 1948 : 1; Young 1962 : 9). The dialects of these two divisions are extremely close, and it would appear that the Lahu Nyi broke away from the main Lahu Na division comparatively recently, perhaps within the last century and a half (Young 1962 : 9), and that the segmentation occurred in Burma rather than in the Yunnanese homeland. This, at any rate, would help account for the absence of Lahu Nyi in China or anywhere north of Muang Hsat and Muang Ton.

#### 4. The Lahu Nyi Village : Its Houses and Its Temple

Headed by its own *hk'a^ sheh\_hpa<sup>25</sup>* or "master (*sheh\_hpa^*) of the village (*hk'a^*)" and the older household heads or *yeh, sheh\_hpa^* (*yeh*, "house"), the Lahu Nyi village (Pl. 1) in Thailand averages about 16 households and 102 people. Some settlements are much bigger than this; one had 87 households and 525 people in 1979 (Khankeaw and Lewis 1979 : 6). Others are no more than tiny hamlets of five or six houses sheltering 30 or so people.

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25. As mentioned earlier, Lahu words here are transcribed in the orthography devised by American Baptist missionaries in Burma and Yunnan. Supra- and sub-script marks after each syllable indicate the seven tones of Lahu. There are five open tones (long vowel) and two checked tones (short vowel ending in a glottal stop). The tones are indicated as follows :

- superscript wedge (*ca<sup>^</sup>*) : high-falling open tone
- subscript wedge (*ca<sub>^</sub>*) : low-falling open tone
- superscript straight line (*ca<sup>—</sup>*) : high-rising open tone
- subscript straight line (*ca<sub>—</sub>*) : very low open tone
- no mark (*ca*) : mid-level open tone
- superscript circumflex (*ca<sup>^</sup>*) : high tone, checked
- subscript circumflex (*ca<sub>^</sub>*) : low tone, checked

Further details of this orthography may be found in Telford and Saya David (1938) and in Matisoff (1970). See also n. 20 above.

Lahu Nyi have no clan, lineage or other corporate groups based on descent principles. The fundamental social group is the autonomous household, comprising the inhabitants (averaging just over six) of a single domestic dwelling. Such households form village communities and remain together for a variety of reasons including bilateral kinship ties, marriage connexions, friendship and simple economic convenience. But these links are brittle and Lahu Nyi communities frequently break up, with some households leaving to join other communities or to establish new villages elsewhere (Walker 1975a:334-5, 1975b:117).

As among the majority of upland peoples of northern Southeast Asia, Lahu Nyi agriculture takes the form of "pioneer" swiddening. This means that, at least under ideal circumstances, a high percentage of the fields under cultivation at a given time have been cut that very year from climax or near-climax vegetation.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, villages seldom remain on the same site for more than a decade<sup>27</sup> and the Lahu have a long tradition of semi-regular migration in search of new and more fertile soils under climax vegetation.

Perhaps because of their mobility, Lahu tend not to build very durable houses, nor to fill their homes with many material possessions. Apart from unharvested crops, most of a Lahu family's property can easily be picked up and carried away on the backs of humans or horses and their villages usually have an air of impermanence. Seldom does one find a solidly-built teak house made to last for more than a generation, as is the norm in the lowland settlements of the sedentary Tai. Lahu Nyi houses, built mostly of bamboo, with wood only for the main supports, are thatched with grass or leaves. If the harvests have been good and the community has prospered, aluminium sheet roofing may replace the traditional thatchwork, but even these metal roofs can be dismantled and transported on horseback with other household goods. A status symbol, the aluminium roof tends to make the house uncomfortable in the hot months but is extremely useful during the long rainy season.

Interestingly, Lahu Nyi houses, unlike those of neighbouring peoples like the Akha, Lisu and Karen, have no subsidiary roofing to protect the front and rear walls of the building against the wind-driven rain which frequently lashes against them

26. A detailed account of the agricultural cycle of the Lahu Nyi village in which I lived may be found in Walker (1970b:348-444, 1976h). See also Wongspraserit (1975).

27. Non-economic reasons could necessitate a move long before this, particularly unfriendly neighbours or recurring sickness interpreted by ritual specialists as the work of malicious powers.

during the monsoon (fig. 1). A legend accounts for this seeming oversight, as follows:<sup>28</sup>

A long time ago a Lahu brother and sister were living together. The sister, no matter what game she bagged, always shared it equally with her brother. One day, when his sister was not at home, the brother caught a porcupine, but did not divide up its flesh. When the sister

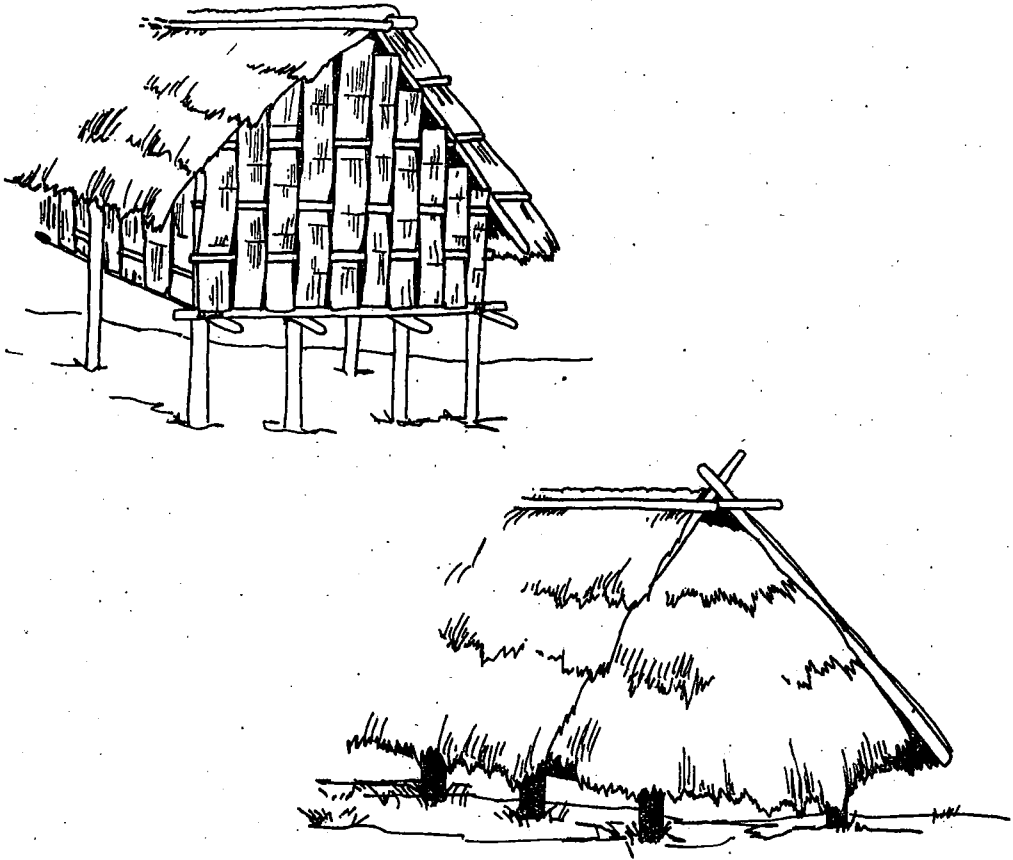


Fig. 1 Comparison of roof types : Lahu Nyi house (left), Karen (right)

28. This is the Lahu text, followed as closely as possible in my translation :

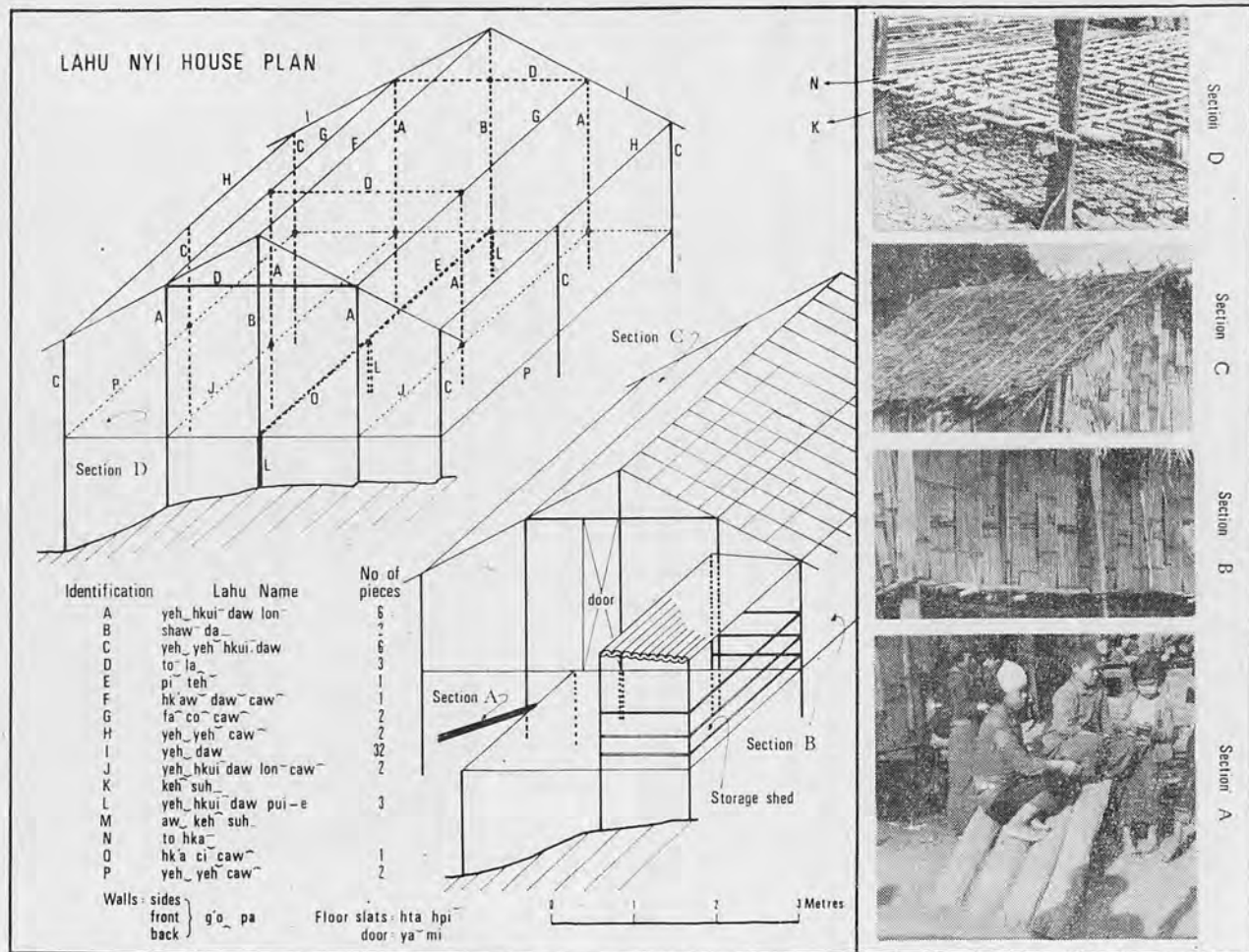
A shoe La hu aw, u hpa aw, nu, ma chi te geh cheh ve yo. Aw, nu, ma sha lai ceu, g'a k'o, peh, ca pi ve yo. Te nyi hta aw, nu, ma ma cheh hta, aw, u hpa chi fa pu te hkeh g'a leh aw, nu, ma hta, ma ca pi ve yo. Aw, nu, ma chi k'aw, la leh fa pu aw, mvuh ui, lon hk'a, suh suh ve hta, maw, leh : "Nga, g'a ve aw, mvuh chi hi neh yaw hta, ca pi ve, yaw ve aw, mvuh chi hui ui ka, ma ca la, ma da, ma cheh o' k'o ta leh, mvuh nyi keh hpaw hpaw k'ai ve ce. Chi pa taw La hu yeh, te k'o, nyi hpaw g'aw, ma na. Te nyi aw, nu, ma k'aw, la k'o, te tguh leh cheh pi k'o ve yo. Chi beu, cho, hk'a, cheh ve aw, u hpa ya de de yo.

returned home and saw that the hairs [*i.e.* the quills] of the porcupine were so long, she said, "Even when I get small hairs, I give him some of the flesh to eat. His hairs are so big and so long, but he does not share the flesh. He is no good. I will not live together with him." So saying, she went away to the east. It is for this reason that, when a Lahu builds a house, he must not cover the ends. One day, so it is said, the sister [*i.e.* her descendants] may return and then they will build an extension to the house and give it to her to live in. Today, all the people living here are descendants of the brother.<sup>29</sup>

Lahu Nyi houses (Pl. 2; Fig. 2) are raised on stout wooden piles, both to facilitate drainage and to bar access to the domestic animals which roam the village area--chickens, ducks, pigs, cows, horses, the odd goat and perhaps a mule. Many of

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29. Interestingly, Harold Young (*s.a.*:4), son of the American Baptist pioneer missionary among the Lahu, William Marcus Young, and longtime resident among the Lahu of Yunnan and Burma, attributes a similar story to the supposed separation of the Lahu and Karen people. He writes :

Through a misunderstanding within their own ranks, the two brotherly tribes Lahu and Karen were finally separated and weakened. Before this, both groups had regarded the chiefs of their respective tribes with the same respect, and paid the same tribute to each. It was the custom to set aside a portion of the meat taken during the hunt for each chief. One day the Lahu hunters shot a large sambar deer and sent a portion of the meat to the Karen chief. The following day the hunt was not successful. After hunting all day, the only animal shot was a porcupine. As usual they divided up the meat and sent a share to the Karen chief with a large quill sticking in it. When the Karens saw the small portion of meat, with a very large hair on it, they thought they had been cheated, for surely an animal with hair of that size should be very large! They said to the Lahu, "Yesterday you sent our chief a large portion of meat from the day's chase, and the hairs sticking to the wrappers were very small, but today you have sent only a very small portion, yet the hair is that of a great animal. Why have you cheated our chief in this way and thus shown your disloyalty?" The Lahu tried their best to explain that the porcupine was a small animal with very large quills, but the Karens would not believe them. After the dispute the Karens took their women and children and all their livestock and left for the south.



the houses are also fenced for further protection against the depredations of village animals, especially the cows. Lahu cows munch thatchwork, blankets and clothing with equal appetite and will even push their heads through the split bamboo walls or flooring to reach a tasty garment.

On an exterior porch, made of wooden planks, are one or two small sheds in which the household's firewood and bamboo water-containers are stored. The house door opens onto this porch and access from the ground is provided by a ramp consisting of one or more stout wooden planks, carefully notched to prevent people slipping on them during the rainy season.

House interiors (Fig. 3) vary only slightly. There is one main room, whose focal point is an earthen fireplace (Pl. 3). Across the centre of the floor runs a

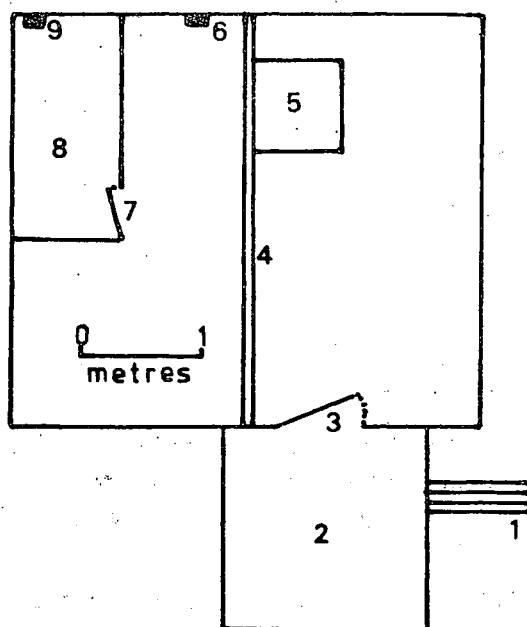


Fig. 3 Floorplan of house interior

1. steps
2. verandah
3. main door
4. central floor beam
5. fireplace
6. divine headman's offering shelf  
(in village headman's house only)
7. door
8. household head's room
9. house spirit altar

wooden beam, which supports the central roof posts at the front and the back of the building, and on one side is the wood-framed square of packed earth on which the fire is built. Over this fireplace, suspended by split-bamboo ropes from the roof beams, is a large rack used for many purposes, but particularly for drying chillies. The fireplace may be constructed on either side of the central roof beam but, whichever side is chosen, the opposite side becomes the household head's side where he partitions a small sleeping

room for himself and his wife. On his side, against the back wall of the house, he keeps a shrine to the *yeh, ne*<sup>v</sup> or guardian spirit of the house (*yeh*, "house", *ne*<sup>v</sup> "spirit"). The shrine is a small wooden shelf supported by a single wooden post about 1.5 metres high (Fig. 4). On it are placed two small porcelain cups of Chinese design,

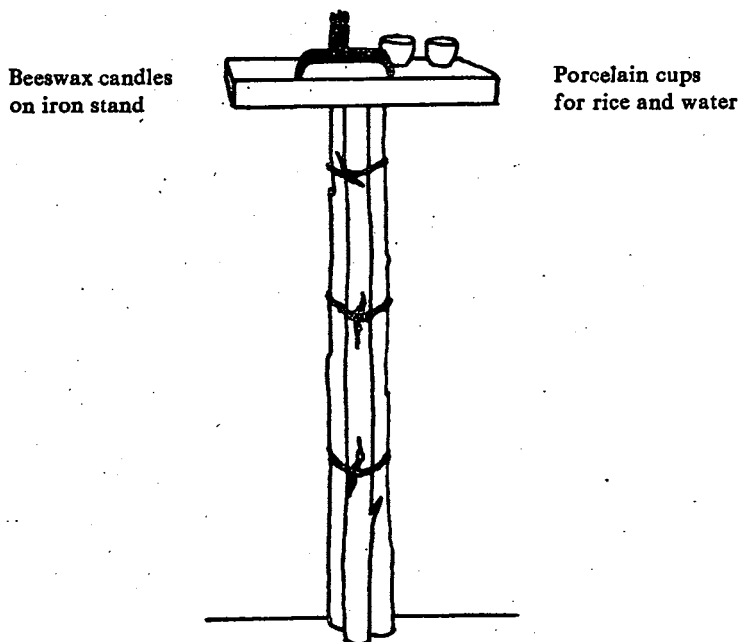


Fig. 4 House Spirit altar

the one containing cooked rice and the other water: offerings for the house spirit. Known as *ba la ka-eh*\_, this spirit altar is located in the part of the house opposite to that containing the fireplace because, some say, the spirit is offended by the smell of cooking meat.

Besides the room for the household head and his wife, others may be added as their children marry and bring spouses to live in the house. Since these Lahu practice both viri- and uxori-local residence, a household not infrequently includes an married son and/or married daughter with spouse and offspring.

Lahu Nyi villages frequently are sited on long narrow spurs, with the individual houses erected roughly on either side of a main thoroughfare (Fig. 5). Houses are not of uniform size, as smaller or poorer households tend to build more modest homes. But the differences are hardly great and a Lahu Nyi village appears, at least on first sight, to consist of houses of more or less the same size.



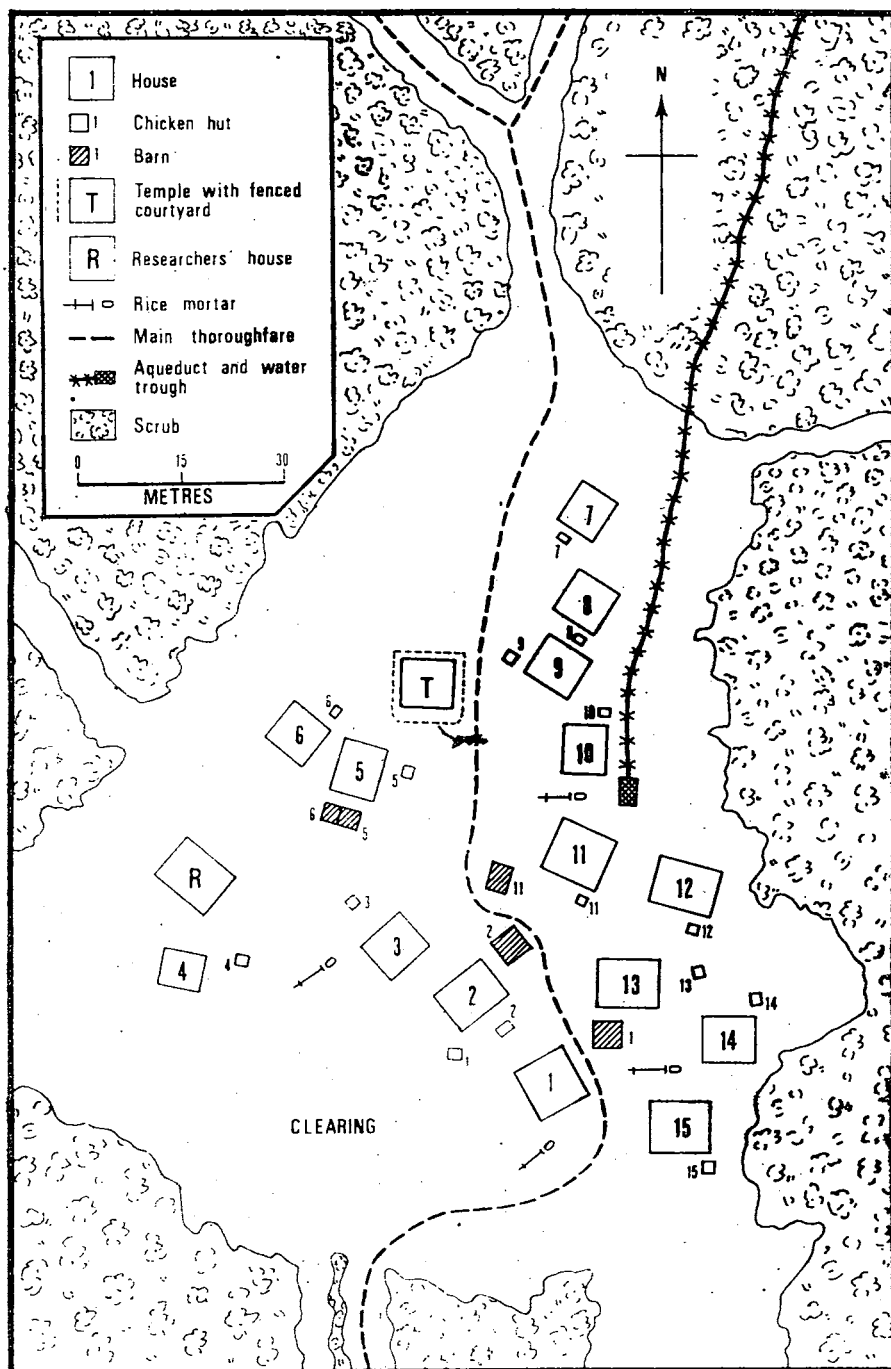


Fig. 5 Plan of Lahu Nyi village studied by author

In contrast to the look-alike domestic houses, there may be another building in the village, set apart and of altogether different appearance from the others. This is the *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>v</sub>*, or "palace house" (*haw<sup>-</sup>*, a Shan prince's palace), which is the village temple (Pl. 4). Here the Lahu Nyi villagers offer worship to their supreme deity *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha*.<sup>30</sup> Emphasizing the "royal" symbolism of the *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>v</sub>*, the principal ritual furniture in it--an object that looks like a three-tiered altar (Fig. 6)--is called *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha va caw<sub>-</sub>tcuh* or "*G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha*'s throne" (*chaw<sub>-</sub>tcuh* "chair")

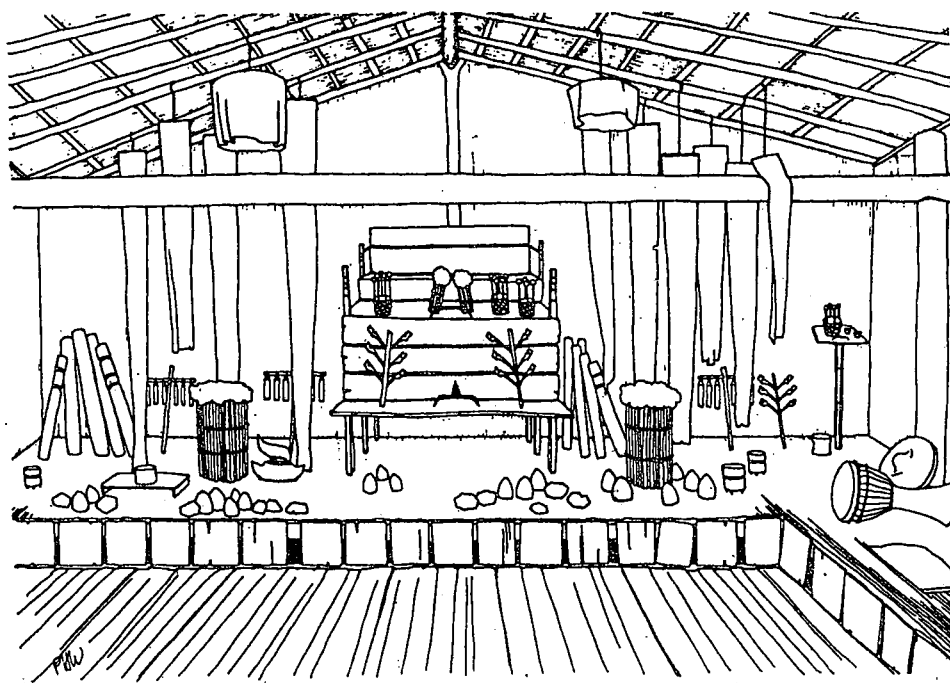


Fig. 6 Interior of the *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>v</sub>*

Not all Lahu Nyi villages have such temples. Whether they do or not depends on whether there is any man competent to fulfill the role of senior priest or *to bo pa<sub>-</sub>* (probably, *to* from *aw<sub>v</sub>*, *to* "body" and *bo* from *aw<sub>v</sub>*, *bo* "meritorious", hence "meritorious body"; *pa<sub>-</sub>* is the male suffix). Where there is no such man and no *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>v</sub>*, the centre of ritual observance is a small shrine against a tree at the uphill end of the village, dedicated to the resident locality spirit on whose territory the village is believed to be sited.

30. The etymology of the word *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* is obscure (cf. Walker 1980b : 244 n36).

Where there is a *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>v</sub>*, that building is clearly the ritual focus of the village. On the twice-monthly festivals associated with the new and full moon, the *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>v</sub>* becomes the centre of ritual activity, including dancing, in honour of *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* (cf. Walker 1975d:139-142, 1981b). The Lahu ritual dance is vigorous and entails much stamping of feet and springing into the air. For this reason many (but not all) *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>v</sub>* are built on the ground rather than on piles as are the ordinary houses.

When not in use the temple is closed, but access is not forbidden. A stout wooden fence surrounds the building and encloses a front courtyard in which stand a number of tall bamboos, each with a strip of white or yellow cloth on top. These flags, called *hto<sup>v</sup> pa<sub>-</sub>* (a loan-word from Shan), are believed to attract good fortune and dispel all evil from the village.<sup>31</sup> White, representing purity, is the principal hue associated with the all-pure *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha*; yellow, the colour of the Buddhist monk's robes, has also come to be associated with *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* by these Lahu, probably because of their centuries of contact with Buddhist neighbours in the lowlands.

Also in the front courtyard of the *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>v</sub>* are a number of roughly carved posts (Fig. 7) called *kaw mo<sup>v</sup> taweh<sub>-</sub>* (etymology unknown). Some people (not Lahu Nyi) have suggested that these posts have phallic connotations, but I believe they are more likely to be additional symbols of *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha*'s royalty, probably copied from the *Tai lak muang* or "city posts" which are "erected in the name of the highest political authority", among other reasons (Terwiel 1978 : 159).

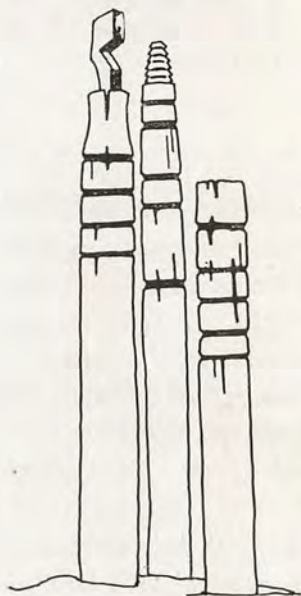


Fig. 7 *Kaw mo<sup>v</sup> taweh<sub>-</sub>* sacred posts outside the village temple

31. The use of such flags among the Lahu Nyi almost certainly derives from the practice of their lowland Buddhist neighbours, the Tai peoples, who hang flags outside their temples. Among the Tai such flags are called *tung chai* "victory flags" and are set up, according to the famous Thai folklorist, Rajadon (1967:179), "to avert ill or evil spirits and secure good fortune". This corresponds exactly to the Lahu conception of their *hto<sup>v</sup> pa<sub>-</sub>*.



The temple itself is entered through the single door which opens from the front courtyard. Inside (Fig. 8), there is only one room. The "*G'ui, sha* throne" is located against the back wall. In front of this is an open dancing space. To the right of the throne, also against the wall, is an altar dedicated to *G'ui, fu*\_, guardian spirit of the village community and supernatural intermediary between the villagers and *G'ui, sha*. On this altar are two small porcelain cups of Chinese design which hold, respectively, offerings of rice and water placed in them by the senior priest on the lunar festival days (cf. Walker 1981b).

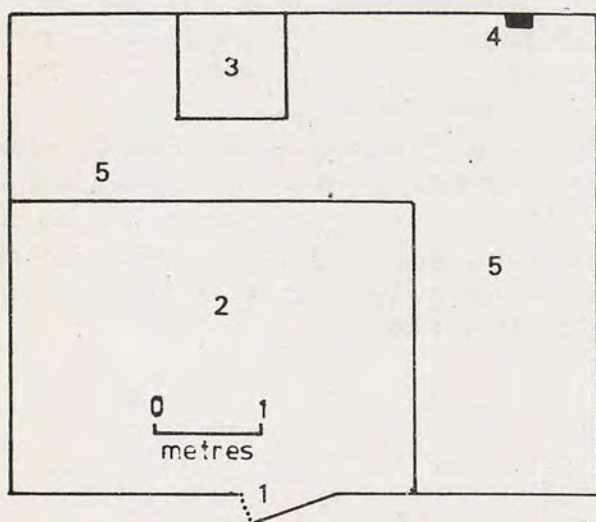


Fig. 8 Interior plan of  
*haw-yeh*

1. door
2. dancing place
3. *G'ui, sha* throne
4. *G'ui, fu*\_altar
5. raised platform

Long strips of white and yellow cloth, as well as a number of cloth umbrellas, hang from the rafters. The strips of cloth bear the same name, *hto<sup>v</sup> pa*\_, as those attached to the bamboos outside the building, but inside they are meant only, it seems, as gifts to *G'ui, sha*. The umbrellas, *hpa<sub>h</sub> mi<sup>v</sup> bo* (*hpa<sub>h</sub>* "cloth", *mi<sup>v</sup> bo* ?), are also said to be offerings to *G'ui, sha*. But as the umbrella is a symbol of royalty among the Tai peoples (an emblem ultimately derived from India), the *hpa<sub>h</sub> mi<sup>v</sup> bo* probably, like so many Lahu Nyi ritual objects, are copied from Tai prototypes and symbolize again the royalty of *G'ui, sha*, together with the "throne" and wooden posts. But I did not hear such an explanation from Lahu themselves.

To the left of the throne is a small wooden trough, *baw\_ ti<sub>h</sub> keh<sup>v</sup>* (etymology unknown), containing water, from which a rudely-carved bird, *co ngeh<sup>h</sup>* "life bird", is drinking. Those few informants who could offer any explanation (beyond *aw, li* "custom") for the "life bird" said only that *G'ui, sha* owns such a bird which "cries out" (*byuh<sub>v</sub> ve*) for the long life of the villagers.

Directly to the right and left of the throne are various ritual objects made by the villagers and presented to the *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>h</sub>*, with requests that *G'ui, sha* grant them boons of various kinds, particularly recovery from sickness and freedom from poverty. These offerings include *ha<sup>-</sup> pui*: stones, *mi, co*: conical objects fashioned from red mud, and *kaw mo<sup>o</sup> taweh<sub>-</sub>* of two designs: uncarved lengths of stripped wood as well as small replicas of the carved wooden posts outside the temple. The sun-baked mud *mi, co*, literally "earth life", symbolize the donor's wish that he and his household members may enjoy unending and undecaying life, like that of the earth from which the offerings are made. The *ha<sup>-</sup> pui*, ordinary stones, symbolize the desire for life as strong and enduring as stone. The wooden *kaw mo<sup>o</sup> taweh<sub>-</sub>* are said to have the same significance as those larger ones in the temple courtyard. Two other ritual offerings, made from bamboo, are called *hto<sup>o</sup> hi<sup>-</sup>* and *ku, ti<sub>h</sub>* (fig. 9a, b). Nobody was able to explain to me the meaning of the *hto<sup>o</sup> hi<sup>-</sup>* (*hto<sup>o</sup>* "flag", *hi<sup>-</sup>* from *aw, hi<sup>-</sup>* "custom").<sup>32</sup> The *ku, ti<sub>h</sub>* (etymology unknown) was said to represent a flower, like those offered by devotees at Buddhist temples.

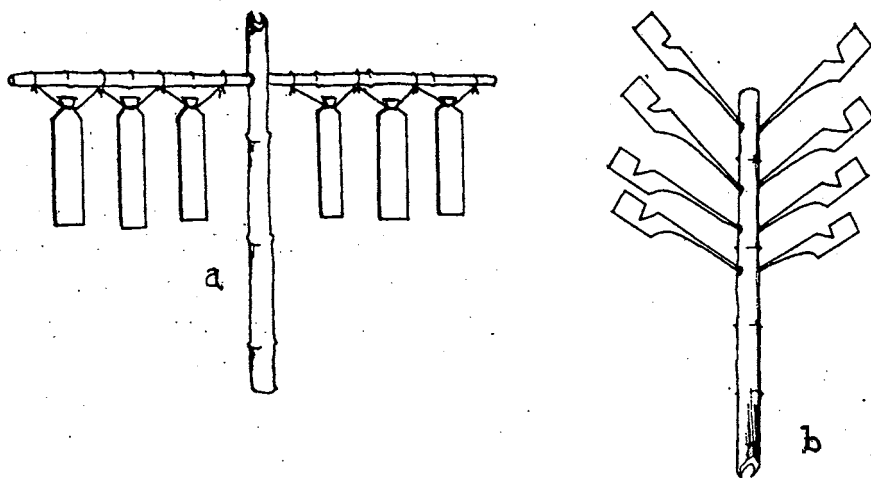


Fig. 9 Ritual offerings

a) *hto<sup>o</sup> hi<sup>-</sup>* (length approx. 30 cm.)

b) *ku, ti<sub>h</sub>* (height approx. 30 cm.)

32. *Aw, hi<sup>-</sup>* is an alternative word for "custom". The more usual term is *aw, li<sup>o</sup>*.

Other than the domestic dwellings and the village temple (if there is one), there are few buildings in a Lahu Nyi village. Some households erect granaries near their houses, but others store their padi in large leaf-lined woven baskets which stand on the floor in the house itself. Almost every household raises fowl and has a chicken hut, built on stilts, in which the birds are kept at night (Pl. 6). Ponies are stabled underneath the house, but pigs and cattle are permitted to wander around the village as they please. There are usually no pig sties or cattle pens, although such enclosures are beginning to be built in villages presently being contacted by government agricultural and husbandry experts.

Large wooden mortars for husking grain are considered public property and several are available around the village area (Pl. 5). Especially during the rainy months of the monsoon season, a rough shelter may be erected over each mortar so that people can continue working despite the weather.

Water is channelled into the village from a spring or stream, often several hundred metres away, by a simple but effective bamboo aqueduct. Sections of bamboo, halved longitudinally and placed end to end, form a long narrow trough. Forked sticks approximately two metres high, one at each end of every section, support the aqueduct high enough to prevent the water being fouled by the domestic animals.

### 5. Choosing a New Village Site

Lahu Nyi must take into account several factors--some mundane, others supernatural--when choosing the site for a new village. Practical considerations include topography, elevation, the availability of water and of building materials (especially bamboo), the characteristics of surrounding soils and the friendliness of neighbouring peoples. As for the supernatural factors, Lahu Nyi consider whether or not malicious spirits reside in or near the proposed site and whether or not the resident locality spirit accepts the intrusion into its territory.

As shifting cultivators, Lahu Nyi re-site their villages primarily for agricultural reasons; their first concern, therefore, is for soil fertility.<sup>33</sup> Another important factor is whether the neighbouring peoples, both in the hills and in the nearby lowlands, are friendly, tolerant or hostile. In the hills, one cannot move into a new area--unless it is

33. For a discussion of the factors which Lahu Nyi farmers take into account when evaluating new soils, see Walker (1976h:156-9).

entirely uninhabited--without first eliciting the response of neighbouring hill communities. Sometimes it may be necessary for newcomers to acknowledge the political supremacy of the community which pioneered the area, no matter what ethnic affiliation that pioneer community may have. (In the area where I conducted my field-work, the Lahu were regarded as the pioneers and a neighbouring Lisu community recognized the headman of the largest Lahu village as their *hpa<sup>ˊ</sup> ya<sup>ˊ</sup>*, a Shan, or Tai Yai, title of headmanship; cf. Walker 1969:44-6, 1970b:141-3). It may also be necessary to seek the approval of lowland officialdom before settling into a new area, since the hill country is in law, if not always in reality, under the jurisdiction of the national government.<sup>34</sup> Seldom will a Lahu Nyi community risk establishing a new village against the wishes of potential neighbours, either in the hills or in the lowlands.

Given an area with good soils and friendly--or at least tolerant--neighbours, the community elders will turn their attention to the choice of an actual site for settlement. Generally (there are exceptions) they look for a gently-sloping spur, and there are both practical and supernatural reasons for doing so. Good drainage is one advantage of a high site; on low-lying land, waterlogging is a major problem during the long wet season (June to October). The more conservative Lahu Nyi cite another reason for avoiding low-lying areas: they are pathways for the spirits or *ne<sup>ˊ</sup>*, who will be angered if their movement is blocked by human habitations. Angry spirits, it is believed, "bite" (*che<sup>ˊ</sup> ve*) offenders and make them sick.<sup>35</sup>

The proximity of a perennial stream or spring is essential, as is the presence of suitable building materials for the houses. Since wood, as well as grass and leaves for thatching, is widely available in the hill country, the main consideration here is whether or not there is sufficient bamboo nearby. Lahu material culture depends greatly on bamboo; it is inconceivable for these people to live in an area where it is unobtainable.

If the community happens to cultivate (as do most Lahu Nyi in Thailand) dry rice for subsistence and opium poppy (*Papavar somniferum*) as a cash crop,<sup>36</sup> then the

34. For an account of the relations between hillmen (such as Lahu) and the government in Thailand, see Walker (1980d).

35. For more information on Lahu Nyi concepts of spirits and on their spirit-specialists, see Walker (1976a:379-83, 1976g:435-7 [this article is marred by the printers' omission of most of the tone marks]; 1977c 210-12).

36. For an account of the production and use of opium among the Lahu Nyi I studied, see Walker (1980c).

ideal village site will be at an elevation of around 1,200 metres (4,000 feet). Living at this elevation, the villagers have access both to high, cool land (to which the strains of opium poppy cultivated in northern Southeast Asia are best adapted) and to lower land (which, these Lahu maintain, suits the higher-yielding rice varieties among their seed stocks). But villages are not invariably located at this ideal elevation. Sometimes, for example, a Lahu Nyi community will site its village below 1,200 metres and have its poppy fields far away up in the hills--as much as a day's walk from the settlement. At least on paper, poppy cultivation is illegal,<sup>37</sup> and this arrangement may prevent unwelcome strangers from locating the fields. The farmers build substantial field huts, enabling them to stay for days or weeks away from the main village. On the other hand, the village may be located far above 1,200 metres. The people then will either walk down to their rice fields where, again, they will build substantial field huts, or they will stay in the high country and rely on lower-yielding varieties of padi which can tolerate high elevations. And Lahu Nyi are not so wedded to the opium poppy that they will not consider abandoning its cultivation if alternative economic opportunities are available at lower elevations. Thus, some communities have moved right down into the foothills and onto the fringes of the Tai-occupied valleys. Here they have taken to irrigated-rice cultivation and the production of cash crops like cotton, sesame and chilli peppers, which are better adapted to the lowland environment (*cf.* Wongsprasert 1977).

We turn now to the supernatural factors to be taken into account when siting a new village. Apart from avoiding the "spirit paths", or gullies, already mentioned, Lahu Nyi will also refrain from settling on a site previously occupied, whether by their own people or by people whom they call *A<sup>-</sup>va<sub>v</sub>*. Such old village sites are feared because, it is believed, they might be occupied by the malicious spirits of the former

37. The smoking and sale of opium was declared illegal by the Royal Thai Government in 1958, and cultivation of poppy was prohibited in the following year (see McCoy 1973 : 144; Geddes 1976 : 202). From fairly early on, however, the authorities realized that a precipitate ban on opium production in the hills would cause immense economic hardship among the hill farmers, thereby giving them cause and encouragement to become hostile to the central government. The prevailing view remains that the poppy-growing peoples, like the Lahu Nyi described in this article, should be weaned gently from opium production through crop substitution; in the meantime the government authorities do not, for the most part, demand strict adherence to the law prohibiting poppy cultivation. But there have been cases of unscrupulous officials using the letter of the law to squeeze money from the hillmen.



occupants—specifically, the spirits of those people who suffered “bad” (violent, bloody, or otherwise unnatural) deaths. Such persons, according to Lahu Nyi belief, are transformed at death into particularly spiteful spirits who, themselves barred from the peace of the land of the respected ancestors and even from being reincarnated either in human or in animal form, are ever anxious to cause others to join them in their eternal suffering (cf. Walker 1976a:381). Although I made no formal enquiries on this topic, I suspect old Lahu village sites are feared because the spirits of the “bad dead” are most likely to harm those closest to them: kinsmen (*aw, vi<sup>-</sup> aw, nyi*) if at all possible and, failing these, any fellow Lahu. Regarding the Lahu Nyi fear of sites which they say were once occupied by *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>*, my information is more specific. Among the many different categories of spirit or *ne<sup>v</sup>* which the Lahu recognize (cf. Walker 1976a : 378–82, 1976c, 1976g, 1977a, b, c, d, 1978a, 1979b, 1980a, b, 1981a, 1982a), one is called the *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub> ne<sup>v</sup>*, the spirit of the *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>* people (cf. Walker 1981c). *A<sup>-</sup> va* is the name by which Lahu have traditionally known the Wa (in Chinese, Ka-Wa, 佤) people of the Sino-Burmese border. But in Thailand they use this ethnonym for the Austroasiatic-speaking people whom the Tai of this region designate as Lewa or Lua<sup>?</sup>. Conventional wisdom among the Lahu Nyi in Thailand is that the *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>*, who used to live in these hills were Buddhists.<sup>38</sup> Thus, when Lahu unearth the remains of an old Buddhist shrine, as they sometime do when preparing a new field, they regard the site as having been occupied by *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>*. And since this means that the place is probably now the residence of an *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub> ne<sup>v</sup>*, a rather malicious spirit, they will avoid settling there.

Spirits of the *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>* people and of Lahu who have died bad deaths may be avoided by locating the new village well away from sites thought to harbour such malicious beings. But there is one spirit which cannot be avoided. This is the resident locality spirit, belonging to the genus *hk'aw ne<sup>v</sup>* or “hill spirit” (*hk'aw* “hill”). Lahu

38. The Lua<sup>?</sup> people presently living in the hills of north Thailand are, for the most part, no more than nominal Buddhists, although those who have moved down into the valleys are as Buddhist as are their Tai Yuan, or Northern Thai, neighbours (Kunstadter 1965:26–7). The nominal Lua<sup>?</sup> Buddhists in the mountains believe that they were once more orthodox in their Buddhism—even that it was their ancestors who built Wat Chedi Luang, the oldest Buddhist temple in Chiang Mai (Kunstadter 1965:26). As for the Wa of the Burma-China borderlands, these are frequently categorised by the Shan people (Tai Yai) as “Wild Wa” and “Tame Wa”, corresponding to those Wa who remain outside the Buddhist fold and those who have accepted some form of Buddhism, however nominal (Scott and Hardiman 1900:393–94). Thus, the Lahu idea that the *A<sup>-</sup> va<sub>v</sub>* were a Buddhist people has a good deal of truth.

Nyi believe each hillside to be the preserve of a particular *hk'aw ne* which, if necessary, they will identify by the name of that hill<sup>39</sup> and address by the Tai honorific *Cao, maw* "Prince". But a local hill spirit only becomes important (so requiring a name and a title) to these Lahu when they undertake some kind of activity on the territory deemed to be under the spirit's control. Such activity might involve hunting, cutting wood, preparing a new field,<sup>40</sup> or building a new village. There is always a chance, Lahu think, that the spirit will resent the incursion onto its territory and will take revenge by "biting" the intruders. The result of such biting is manifested in physical illness. On the other hand, it is also believed that this potentially spiteful spirit may be won over by a polite and respectful request for permission to enter its territory; then it may become a force for positive good, acting as the guardian spirit of those people who have correctly propitiated it.

Thus, before setting up a new village, Lahu Nyi take care to propitiate the resident locality spirit. This they do in a short and simple rite at which the headman officiates. Before the men begin clearing the undergrowth and trees, the headman goes to a high spot above the proposed site and there erects a small offering post known as a *sho<sup>~</sup> lo<sup>^</sup>* (Fig. 10). The post, about 1.5 metres high, has a deep double cleft, with two

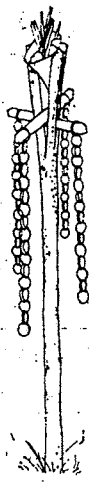


Fig. 10 A *sho<sup>~</sup> lo<sup>^</sup>* (offering post)  
with *u<sup>-</sup> cu<sup>-</sup> lu<sup>^</sup>* (leaf cup)

39. This name is almost always of Tai origin, as a hill usually takes the name of the major stream which flows from it.

40. For an account of the propitiation of the hill spirit before felling a new swidden, see Walker (1978a).

small sticks (about 20 centimetres long) inserted to keep the slits open. In the cleft, above the crossed sticks, the headman inserts a leaf cup, called an *u<sup>-</sup>cu<sup>-</sup>lu<sup>v</sup>*, in which he puts a few unlit beeswax candles and some uncooked grains of rice. These are offerings for the spirit. All is now ready for his recitation of the appropriate propitiatory prayer. In this, the headman informs the resident locality spirit that he wants to establish a new village here and he offers the beeswax candles and rice grains in payment for the place, requesting the spirit to move its residence away from the site of the proposed village. The following text, recorded for me by a former headman of my study community, shows in detail the nature of the prayer.<sup>41</sup>

#### TEXT ONE : HEADMAN'S PRAYER TO THE LOCALITY SPIRIT

1. Ha<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, hk'aw chi te<sup>v</sup> hk'aw, nyi, te<sup>v</sup> mo<sup>-</sup> te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup> ve cho, ka, haw la, meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ aw<sup>-</sup> ve ^ taw<sup>^</sup> leh cho, ka, vui, cheh<sup>v</sup> pa cheh<sup>v</sup> ve meh<sup>-</sup>.
2. Cho, ka, naw, hkui haw<sup>-</sup> la, haw<sup>-</sup> vui, te pa te ve, a<sup>-</sup>, cao, maw cao, tu<sup>v</sup>, cao, ui, cao, yaw<sup>v</sup>, cao, pa ^ cao, keh-o, naw, cheh<sup>v</sup> kui, caw, kui, caw<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, aw, kui aw, na a ci<sup>-</sup> ci<sup>-</sup> la<sup>v</sup> she<sup>-</sup>.
3. Cao, maw ho<sup>-</sup> ti, pfuh<sup>v</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>, ta ti, pfuh<sup>v</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>, chaw ya<sup>v</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti, ma<sup>v</sup> caw, ta ti, ma<sup>v</sup> caw, leh a<sup>-</sup>, nyi, te<sup>v</sup> mo<sup>-</sup> te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup> la, meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ aw<sup>-</sup> ve ^ taw<sup>^</sup> leh peh<sup>v</sup> hkaw<sup>v</sup> naw hkaw<sup>v</sup> taw<sup>^</sup> leh cho, ka, cao, maw hk'aw teh mui sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>, naw, hkui haw<sup>-</sup> la, haw<sup>-</sup> ga, ve.
4. Cho, ka, k'o ^ k'o, naw, cheh<sup>v</sup> kui, caw, kui, caw<sup>v</sup> g'a k'o ^ k'o, aw, kui aw, na a ci<sup>-</sup> ci<sup>-</sup> la<sup>v</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, to kui to na ci<sup>-</sup> la<sup>v</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, hk'aw u<sup>-</sup> hk'aw meh<sup>-</sup>.
5. A<sup>-</sup>, vui, te pa te ve, nyi, te<sup>v</sup> mo<sup>-</sup> te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup> ve vui, te pa te ve.
6. Sho meu<sup>v</sup> kui<sup>v</sup> meu<sup>v</sup> ka, naw, taw<sup>-</sup> naw, suh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>v</sup>, shaw<sup>v</sup> meu<sup>v</sup> ma meu<sup>v</sup> ka, naw, taw<sup>-</sup> naw, suh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>v</sup>, hpe<sup>v</sup> la sha hpa, la, hteh<sup>-</sup>-o, ca<sup>-</sup> ca<sup>-</sup> leh meu<sup>v</sup> ka, naw, taw<sup>-</sup> naw, suh<sup>-</sup> leh po, la<sup>v</sup>, te<sup>v</sup> nyi sheh<sup>^</sup> yan<sup>v</sup>, te<sup>v</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> sheh<sup>^</sup> yan<sup>v</sup> hk'a g'a<sup>v</sup> chi g'a<sup>v</sup> hk'o<sup>v</sup> hta, haw.
7. A<sup>-</sup>, hk'aw, g'a<sup>v</sup> ka, hkui ta<sup>v</sup> lu, la, ta<sup>v</sup> lu, la<sup>v</sup>, hk'aw, g'a<sup>v</sup> ka, ma<sup>v</sup> g'a ya, mui, ve, naw, ho<sup>-</sup> ti, caw, sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>, peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ aw<sup>-</sup> ve ^ taw<sup>^</sup> leh naw, hkui haw<sup>-</sup> la, haw<sup>-</sup> ga, ve.

41. See note 25 above regarding tone marks. For convenience of reference between the Lahu and English versions I have broken the texts-into verses. No such divisions are recognized by the Lahu themselves.

8. Nyi, te<sup>v</sup> mo\_\_ te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup>, te<sup>v</sup> mo\_\_ te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup> ve, ya, nyi cho, ka, hk'aw chi te<sup>v</sup> hk'aw vui, te pa te ve.
9. Yeh, te hk'a ^ te law, te cheh<sup>v</sup> ve, cho, ka, hpa<sup>v</sup> ya<sup>v</sup> te cheh<sup>v</sup> ve, a\_\_, naw, cheh<sup>v</sup> kui, caw<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ci\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> she\_\_ meh\_\_.
10. O\_\_, O\_\_, aw, kui aw, na ci\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> she\_\_, cao, yaw<sup>v</sup> cao, pa ^, cao, keh-o cho, ka, ve.

### TEXT ONE -- TRANSLATION

1. Oh, ho<sup>42</sup>, we people of this community bring for you here at this place beautiful beeswax candles and beautiful rice<sup>43</sup> prepared by our own hands; here at this place we buy, we barter, this hill in order to live here.
  2. Here at this place, under your feet and under your hands,<sup>44</sup> we buy and we barter [this hill];<sup>45</sup> oh, Prince, Great Prince, Pure Prince, if your dwelling place is here, please move to the bottom or to the top [of this area].
  3. All-knowing Prince, all-true person, we people cannot know all things, cannot be true; oh we of this community bring for you these beautiful beeswax candles and this beautiful rice prepared by our own hands, we bring for you these beeswax candles;<sup>46</sup> oh Prince of this place, you who sit upon the bends in the hills,<sup>47</sup> we reach under your feet and under your hands.
  4. If you have your dwelling-place here at this place, please move to the bottom or to the top [of this area], please move to the bottom or to the top of this place, to the top of the hill or to the bottom of the hill.
- 
42. Lahu prayers frequently begin with conventional introductory sounds which carry no meaning.
43. *Peh<sup>v</sup> ve^aw\_\_ ve^* is one of the poetic couplets which abound in Lahu prayers. Literally it means "beeswax-candle flower, cooked-rice flower" (*peh<sup>v</sup>* from *peh<sup>v</sup> haw* "beeswax candle", *ve^* from *aw<sup>v</sup> ve^* "flower", *aw\_\_* "cooked rice").
44. This couplet is an exaggerated expression of humility, a common device used by Lahu when dealing with the supernatural powers. With respect to the supreme being, *G'ui, sha*, the humility usually is sincere enough, but when directed to a spirit it is probably just a ploy to obtain one's own ends. Lahu call it *ne<sup>v</sup> hta, he, ve* "lying to the spirit".
45. Words in brackets do not appear in the Lahu original but are implied.
46. The Lahu uses a pair of couplets: *peh<sup>v</sup> ve^ aw\_\_ ve^* (see n. 43) and *peh<sup>v</sup> hkaw<sup>v</sup> naw<sup>v</sup> hkaw<sup>v</sup>* "beeswax candle" (the two parts of this couplet cannot be translated separately; *hkaw<sup>v</sup>* is a classifier, and *naw<sup>v</sup>* means "something sticky"—but I am unsure whether this translation would be appropriate here).
47. This is simply for poetic effect. It does not indicate any preferred locale on the part of the spirit.

5. Oh, we buy, we barter [this place]; we of this community buy and barter [this place].
6. Three times in one day and three times in one night shield and protect each one of us from the points of iron, the points of copper,<sup>48</sup> shield and protect us all from points of wood;<sup>49</sup> shield, protect and save us all from sickness and death by [sharp] points.
7. Oh do not break the hands of anyone of us, do not break the legs of anyone of us; we do not wrong you, you who know all things; we bring for you beautiful beeswax candles and beautiful rice, we reach under your feet and under your hands.
8. We of this community, today, here at his place, buy and barter this hill.
9. The whole village community will live here, the *hpa<sup>v</sup> ya<sup>v</sup>*<sup>50</sup> will live here; oh, if you have your dwelling place here, please move away.
10. Oh, Oh, please move to the bottom or to the top [of this place], oh Prince, pure Prince of this place.

Only after this simple rite has been performed may the villagers get down to the job of clearing the new site, provided the day is right. The Lahu Nyi whom I studied would avoid beginning such operations on two specific days: *la<sup>v</sup> nyi* or "tiger day" and *mvuh<sup>v</sup> nyi* or "horse day".<sup>51</sup> Because the presiding animals are fierce or strong, it is said that beginning work on either of these days would invite injury from knives, axes, bamboo and wood during the felling operation. The new and full moon days (*shi<sup>-</sup> nyi* "merit days") are also avoided, for these are days of prescribed rest and ritual observance (cf. Walker 1981b). But apart from these, there are no restrictions.

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48. A poetic reference to the knives and axes which will be used to clear the site.

49. That is, "May the trees which we cut not hurt us".

50. As noted earlier, *hpa<sup>v</sup> ya<sup>v</sup>* is a Shan title, indicating that the headman has several village communities under his jurisdiction. But here it is used only for poetic effect, referring to the ordinary village headman (*hk'a<sup>^</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>*), who may or may not also hold the rank of *hpa<sup>v</sup> ya<sup>v</sup>*.

51. The Lahu follow a twelve day cycle, each day named for a presiding animal. Many Asian peoples (cf. Davis 1976: 11)--most notably, of course, the Chinese--use a duodenary system in reckoning years, days and even hours, and usually each unit in the cycle is named for an animal. Although some Lahu (cf. Young s.a.: 75) follow a 12-year cycle, the Lahu I studied

If there is a *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>u</sub>* at the old village site, before abandoning this settlement the *to bo pa<sub>u</sub>*, or senior village priest, will enter the *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>u</sub>*, light beeswax candles at the altar to *G'ui, fu<sub>u</sub>*, and inform this village guardian of the community's intention to move. I recorded two versions of the priest's prayer at this time. The first version goes as follows:

#### TEXT TWO (A) : PRIEST'S PRAYER TO *G'UI, FU<sub>u</sub>*

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, ya<sub>u</sub> nyi yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, G'ui, fu<sub>u</sub> tcuh ya<sup>v</sup> chi yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, nga<sub>u</sub> o<sup>v</sup> aw<sub>u</sub> hk'a ^ suh<sup>-</sup> teh<sub>u</sub> ve yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o.
2. A<sup>-</sup>, a daw<sup>v</sup> la<sub>u</sub> shaw daw<sup>v</sup> chi ma ve, to bo la<sub>u</sub> shaw daw<sup>v</sup> chi ma ve, daw<sup>v</sup> hpu te<sup>v</sup> hk'a<sup>v</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh ga<sup>v</sup> hpu te<sup>v</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh ma<sup>v</sup> ya<sub>u</sub> da<sub>u</sub> leh daw<sup>v</sup> te<sup>v</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh ga<sup>v</sup> te<sup>v</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh ui<sub>u</sub> ka<sub>u</sub> i ka<sub>u</sub> nga<sub>u</sub> hui chi ma ve yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o.
3. Ya<sub>u</sub> nyi hk'a ^ pi<sub>u</sub> chi a<sub>u</sub> ma<sup>v</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> o leh o<sup>v</sup> te<sup>v</sup> hk'a ^ k'aw<sub>u</sub> teh<sub>u</sub> ve yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o.
4. A<sup>-</sup>, hk'a<sub>u</sub> g'a<sup>v</sup> chi g'a<sup>v</sup> daw<sup>v</sup> hpu te<sup>v</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh ga<sup>v</sup> hpu te<sup>v</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>u</sub> leh paw hku<sup>v</sup> hta<sub>u</sub> ma<sup>v</sup> g'a<sup>v</sup> leh a daw<sup>v</sup> hta<sub>u</sub> ma<sup>v</sup> g'a<sup>v</sup> leh chaw ka<sub>u</sub> chi ma ve yo<sub>u</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o.

observe a duodenary cycle only of days, not of years. The presiding animals in the Lahu system correspond closely to those in the Chinese system; probably they were once identical. The Lahu animals are as follows:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1) <i>Fa<sup>^</sup> nyi</i>      | Rat day  |
| 2) <i>Nu nyi</i>                  | Ox day   |
| 3) <i>La<sup>v</sup> nyi</i>      | Tiger day  |
| 4) <i>Htaw<sup>v</sup> la nyi</i> | Meaning unknown to my informants, but Young (s.a. : 75) has "rabbit day", which is almost certainly correct, since the rabbit appears in this position in the Chinese system   |
| 5) <i>Law<sup>v</sup> nyi</i>     | Mule day (but this is probably a new interpretation; <i>law<sup>v</sup></i> must originally have been a Lahu attempt to pronounce the Chinese <i>lóng</i> "dragon", as this is "dragon day" in the Chinese system)                         |
| 6) <i>Tsuh nyi</i>                | Barking deer day (but other Lahu have <i>suh nyi</i> which is surely borrowed from the Chinese <i>shé</i> "snake", for "snake day". The Lahu Nyi form is an attempt to provide a new animal referent, as <i>suh</i> means "death" in Lahu) |
| 7) <i>Mvuh<sup>v</sup> nyi</i>    | Horse day  |
| 8) <i>Yaw<sub>u</sub> nyi</i>     | Sheep day  |
| 9) <i>Maw<sub>u</sub> nyi</i>     | Monkey day   |
| 10) <i>G'a<sup>^</sup> nyi</i>    | Fowl day   |
| 11) <i>Hpu<sup>i</sup> nyi</i>    | Dog day  |
| 12) <i>Va<sub>u</sub> nyi</i>     | Pig day  |

5. Daw<sup>˥</sup> te<sup>˥</sup> shi\_\_ ti<sup>˥</sup>, ga<sup>˥</sup> te<sup>˥</sup> shi\_\_ ti<sup>˥</sup>, te<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup> ya<sup>˥</sup> k'o, nyi<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup> yaw ve hk'e, daw<sup>˥</sup> hpu te<sup>˥</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>˥</sup> mui, leh ne<sup>˥</sup> ka, chi ma ve, ka ho\_\_ ha hpa\_\_ ka, daw<sup>˥</sup> hpu te<sup>˥</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>˥</sup> mui, leh ga<sup>˥</sup> hpu te<sup>˥</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>˥</sup> mui, leh a daw<sup>˥</sup> hta, ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup>, to bo hta, ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup>.
6. A<sup>˥</sup>, suh ^ tsuh haw ^ tsuh yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ne<sup>˥</sup> chi ma ve yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, suh ^ meu<sup>˥</sup> ma meu<sup>˥</sup> hk'o ^ yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, suh ^ htu haw ^ htu, suh ^ chaw haw ^ chaw k'o, ta<sup>˥</sup> ya, ta<sup>˥</sup> ji ^ mui, la<sup>˥</sup>, ui, ka, i ka, chi ma ve, hk'a, g'a<sup>˥</sup> chi g'a<sup>˥</sup> hk'o ^ hta, aw, hpeh\_\_ ta<sup>˥</sup> caw, pi<sup>˥</sup>.
7. Suh ^ haw ^ yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, aw, ba, aw, ven<sup>˥</sup> ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a pi<sup>˥</sup>, ne<sup>˥</sup> chi ma ve k'o ^ k'o ka, aw, ba, aw, ven<sup>˥</sup> ta<sup>˥</sup> ta\_\_ da.
8. A<sup>˥</sup>, a daw<sup>˥</sup> bon ui, ve yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, a daw<sup>˥</sup> shi\_\_ ui, leh o<sup>˥</sup> te<sup>˥</sup> hk'a ^ teh\_\_ g'a ve yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, hki\_\_ kui, keh kui, ta<sup>˥</sup> caw, la<sup>˥</sup>.
9. Daw<sup>˥</sup> ha\_\_, zuh, hki\_\_ mui hki\_\_, a, zuh, hki\_\_ mui hki\_\_ kui, yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, a e na bo na ca\_\_ k'aw, taw, k'aw, suh\_\_ leh pon, pi<sup>˥</sup>, tu, hpe<sup>˥</sup> sha hpa\_\_ la, hta ^ ka, k'aw, taw, k'aw, suh\_\_ leh pon, pi<sup>˥</sup>.
10. Cheh<sup>˥</sup> sha caw, sha chi bon meh\_\_, shi\_\_ meh ti\_\_ k'aw, hpa\_\_ leh bon ui, shi\_\_ ui, k'aw, hpa\_\_ leh ga<sup>˥</sup> pi<sup>˥</sup>, daw<sup>˥</sup> hpu te<sup>˥</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>˥</sup> mui, leh ga<sup>˥</sup> hpu te<sup>˥</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>˥</sup>, a daw<sup>˥</sup> mo\_\_ ya<sup>˥</sup> chi ma ve, to bo mo\_\_ ya<sup>˥</sup> chi ma ve, hki\_\_ kui, keh kui, ma<sup>˥</sup> g'a maw, ve yo, law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o ^ k'o, bon ui, shi\_\_ ui, hk'o ^ hta, ti\_\_ hpa\_\_ leh je pi<sup>˥</sup> meh\_\_.
11. A pa Sha\_\_ ca ^ ka, O\_\_, O\_\_, hki\_\_ kui, ta<sup>˥</sup> caw, pi<sup>˥</sup> meh\_\_.

## TEXT TWO (A)- TRANSLATION

1. Oh, today, *G'ui, fu*, the [divine] servant, I will establish a new village yonder.
2. Oh, may all the headman's people, all the *to bo pa*'s people be united by the same pure thoughts; may there be no fighting among us; may we all be of the same mind, both the big and the small, all of us.
3. Today we shall leave this old village and establish a new village yonder.
4. Oh, may all of us be united by the same pure thoughts; let nobody defeat the *paw hku*,<sup>52</sup> let nobody defeat the headman, nor any of the villagers.

52. *Paw hku* probably comes from two Tai words. *paw* "father" and *hku* from *khun*, a title of respect, hence *paw hku* "honourable father". Among the Lahu Nyi it is another title for the senior priest or *to bo pa*.

5. Let us all be of the same mind, let two men speak as one man; let us all be of the same pure mind; and you, oh spirits, and you, oh Creator,<sup>53</sup> grant that we may all be of the same pure mind; let nobody defeat the headman, let nobody defeat the *to bo pa* .
  6. Oh all you spirits of the great trees, when we fell the trees, when we slash the trees, do not fight with us; let us not be stabbed by sharp-pointed pieces of wood, the big and the small, all of us alike, protect us all from wounds.
  7. All you spirits, let us not acquire sins when we cut down the trees; do not put sins [upon us].
  8. Oh, may there be great merit for the headman, great merit for the headman<sup>54</sup> when we establish our new village yonder; may there be no misfortune at that place.
  9. Oh *Na bo na ca* ,<sup>55</sup> once again shield and protect us from all trouble, from troubled sleep and troubled sitting, from a place of troubled sleep, troubled sitting; from every misfortune, once again shield and protect us.
  10. May we enjoy health and prosperity, this boon alone bestow upon us, this great boon once again grant to us, let all the *to bo pa* 's people be of the same pure mind, let us see no misfortune, this great boon alone spread over us.
  11. Father *Sha* <sup>-</sup> *ca* <sup>56</sup>, you also let us not suffer a place of misfortune.
- A second version of this prayer to *G'ui, fu* goes as follows:

#### TEXT TWO (B) : PRIEST'S PRAYER TO *G'UI, FU* \_

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, *G'ui, fu* <sup>-</sup> *naw, yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, hk'a ^ chi a daw<sup>v</sup> pa<sup>-</sup>, hk'a ^ yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o chi hta<sup>^</sup>, hpaw e ve, ma<sup>v</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> o ve yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, o<sup>v</sup> te<sup>v</sup> hk'a<sup>v</sup> hk'a ^ suh<sup>-</sup> teh<sup>-</sup> ve yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, *G'ui, fu* <sup>-</sup> *naw, hta<sup>^</sup> a<sup>v</sup> la<sup>v</sup> ve yo<sup>^</sup>.**
  2. *Ui<sup>^</sup> ka<sup>^</sup> i ka<sup>^</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> sha<sup>-</sup> caw<sup>^</sup> sha ti<sup>-</sup> caw<sup>^</sup> ga<sup>v</sup>, zuh<sup>^</sup> sha mui sha ti<sup>-</sup> caw<sup>^</sup> ga<sup>v</sup> ve.*
53. "Creator" refers to *G'ui, sha*, the supreme divinity of the Lahu people, who is responsible for the creation of all things. But see n. 55 below.
  54. Repetitive only in English, this phrase in Lahu is a couplet, *a daw<sup>v</sup> bon ui<sup>^</sup>, a daw<sup>v</sup> shi<sup>-</sup> ui<sup>^</sup>.* While the usual term for headman is *hk'a<sup>^</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>v</sup>* or "master of the village", an alternate term is *a daw<sup>v</sup>* or "he who thinks" (on behalf of the village community), from *daw<sup>v</sup> ve* "to think". *Bon* is from *aw<sup>^</sup> bon* "merit", *ui<sup>^</sup>* means "great", and *shi<sup>-</sup>* is from *aw<sup>^</sup> shi<sup>-</sup>* "merit". *Aw<sup>^</sup> bon aw<sup>^</sup> shi<sup>-</sup>* is a couplet meaning "merit".
  55. *Na bo na ca* <sup>-</sup> is a poetic form of *Na bo ma*, itself another name for *Ai ma*, the female counterpart to the male *G'ui, sha*. *Ai ma* partakes in *G'ui, sha*'s divinity to the extent that both male and female together may be termed "*G'ui, sha*". In one version of the creation myth, *G'ui, sha* (see n. 53 above) creates the heavenly regions while *Ai ma* is responsible for the creation of the world (cf. Walker 1976a : 379).
  56. Here "Father *Sha* <sup>-</sup> *ca* <sup>^</sup>" refers to *G'ui, sha*. *Sha* <sup>-</sup> *ca* <sup>^</sup> is also the name of a Lahu culture hero who, although mortal, is said to have entered *G'ui, sha*'s heaven without having to die.



3. A<sup>-</sup>, chi a<sub>Λ</sub> mvuh<sup>ν</sup> mi<sub>Λ</sub> ma<sup>ν</sup> caw<sub>Λ</sub> leh o<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> mvuh<sup>ν</sup> mi<sub>Λ</sub> a<sub>Λ</sub> hkui<sup>ν</sup> ta<sub>Λ</sub> mui<sub>Λ</sub> ta<sub>Λ</sub> leh o<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> mvuh<sup>ν</sup> mi<sub>Λ</sub> aw<sub>Λ</sub> teh<sub>Λ</sub> g'a ve yo<sub>Λ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, naw<sub>Λ</sub> hta<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> hto a<sup>ν</sup> la<sup>ν</sup> a.
4. Naw<sub>Λ</sub> hta<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> pa<sup>ν</sup> veu leh ya<sup>ν</sup> ka<sub>Λ</sub> du<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> chi ma ve, hk'a ^ ma aw<sup>ν</sup> ce<sub>Λ</sub> ve, ui<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> i ka<sub>Λ</sub> chi ma ve, neh hpu ya<sup>ν</sup> hpu chi ma ve ka<sub>Λ</sub>, hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> ha<sub>Λ</sub> sha<sup>-</sup> leh hki<sup>-</sup> kui<sub>Λ</sub> keh kui<sub>Λ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> caw<sub>Λ</sub> la<sup>ν</sup>, daw<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>Λ</sub> leh ga<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>Λ</sub> leh hk'a ^ suh<sup>-</sup> teh<sub>Λ</sub> ve yo<sub>Λ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o.
5. A<sup>-</sup>, ce<sup>ν</sup> ka<sub>Λ</sub> ca<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> chi ma ve, ta<sup>ν</sup> faw ^ la<sup>ν</sup>, chaw ka<sub>Λ</sub> va<sup>ν</sup> ka<sub>Λ</sub> chi ma ve, ta<sup>ν</sup> faw ^ la<sup>ν</sup>, daw<sup>ν</sup> hpu te<sup>ν</sup> ca ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>Λ</sub> leh a daw<sup>ν</sup> la<sub>Λ</sub> shaw daw<sup>ν</sup> chi ma ve, to bo la<sub>Λ</sub> shaw daw<sup>ν</sup> chi ma ve, daw<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> hk'a ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>Λ</sub> leh ga<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> hk'a ^ ti<sup>-</sup> mui<sub>Λ</sub> leh ta<sup>ν</sup> hka ^ da<sub>Λ</sub> a, ta<sup>ν</sup> law<sub>Λ</sub> da<sub>Λ</sub>.
6. A daw<sup>ν</sup> hta<sub>Λ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> g'a<sup>ν</sup> pi<sup>ν</sup> law<sub>Λ</sub>, to bo hta<sub>Λ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> g'a<sup>ν</sup> pi<sup>ν</sup> yo<sub>Λ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, a daw<sup>ν</sup> hkaw<sup>ν</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> na pi<sup>ν</sup>, to bo hkaw<sup>ν</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> na pi<sup>ν</sup>.
7. Ui<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> i ka<sub>Λ</sub> chi ma ve, o<sup>ν</sup> te<sup>ν</sup> mvuh<sup>ν</sup> mi<sub>Λ</sub> a<sub>Λ</sub> te ve yo<sub>Λ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, a, hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> hto a<sup>ν</sup> la<sup>ν</sup> ve.
8. Hki<sup>-</sup> kui<sub>Λ</sub> keh kui<sub>Λ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> caw<sub>Λ</sub> meh<sub>Λ</sub>, G'ui<sub>Λ</sub> fu<sub>Λ</sub> touh ya<sup>ν</sup> ka<sub>Λ</sub>, ka ho<sup>-</sup> ka hpa<sub>Λ</sub> pa<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub>, te<sup>ν</sup> nyi sheh ^ yan<sup>ν</sup> hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> ha<sub>Λ</sub> sha<sup>-</sup> leh te<sup>ν</sup> nyi sheh ^ yan<sup>ν</sup> hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> lo<sub>Λ</sub> pi<sup>ν</sup>, ui<sub>Λ</sub> ka<sub>Λ</sub> i ka<sub>Λ</sub>, chi ma ve hta<sub>Λ</sub>, o<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>-</sup>, hk'a deh<sub>Λ</sub> nyi la<sup>ν</sup> meh<sub>Λ</sub>!

## TEXT TWO (B)-TRANSLATION

1. Oh, Oh, G'ui<sub>Λ</sub> fu<sub>Λ</sub>, this village, this headman's village, we shall now abandon, we shall no longer live here; we shall establish a new village yonder; of this, G'ui<sub>Λ</sub> fu<sub>Λ</sub>, I come to inform you.
2. May the big and the small alike enjoy nothing but good health and prosperity; may we have nothing but sound sleep and good sitting.

3. Oh, here we have no country; over there, in that country, we will establish our village and our fields; over there we can establish ourselves, of this I now carefully come to inform you.
4. You also come carefully with us, oh carefully guard over us all, over all the children of the village, the big and the small, the womenfolk and the menfolk; grant that we suffer no misfortune, let us all be of the same pure mind when we establish our new village.
5. Oh, do not punish the animals, do not punish the people; let us all be of the same pure mind; may all the headman's people, all the *to bo pa*'s people, be of the same pure mind; let there be no disorder, no dispute among us.
6. Do not punish the headman, do not punish the *to bo pa*; let the people listen to the headman's voice alone, let the people listen to the *to bo pa*'s voice alone.
7. All of us, the big and the small alike, will establish a new village in the country yonder; of this I carefully come to inform you.
8. Oh *G'ui, fu*, divine servant, let us have a place of no misfortune, oh Creator, you also, three times in one day carefully watch over us, three times in one night carefully guard us, the big and the small alike; oh carefully look upon us.

## 6. Selecting the Site for a House

When *G'ui, fu*, the village guardian, has been thus informed of the move, the villagers may begin considering where to build their individual houses at the new site. Headman and senior priest (*to bo pa*) have first choice of house sites, but otherwise there are no rules about precedence. Should any quarrel emerge, it is the headman's duty to reconcile the conflicting parties. But each household head must determine for himself whether or not the invisible world is favourably disposed to his choice.

Once he has selected a potential site, the household head constructs from strips of bamboo a ritual object known as a *leh<sup>-</sup>o<sup>-</sup>* (Pl. 12).<sup>57</sup> Among the Lahu, as among their lowland neighbours, the Tai peoples, this *leh<sup>-</sup>o<sup>-</sup>* has a variety of ritual functions; here it is an offering to the spirit of the locality (see Text Three verse 4) and also, according to one informant, a guard against evil spirits and sickness. The household head then lights beeswax candles and prays to the locality spirit. An example of his prayer which I recorded in my study village goes as follows :

### TEXT THREE : HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S PRAYER TO THE LOCALITY SPIRIT

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, yeh<sub>1</sub> kui<sub>1</sub> chi yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ne<sup>v</sup> cho<sub>1</sub> ka<sub>1</sub> ve yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ya<sub>1</sub> shaw<sup>-</sup> yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, nga<sub>1</sub> te<sup>v</sup> yeh<sub>1</sub> te<sup>v</sup> k'a ji a<sup>v</sup> ve, nga<sub>1</sub> yeh<sub>1</sub> te cheh<sup>v</sup> a teh<sub>1</sub>.
2. A<sup>-</sup> ne<sup>v</sup> chi yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ka<sub>1</sub> haw leh naw<sub>1</sub> maw<sup>v</sup> teh ta<sub>1</sub> ve yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, naw<sub>1</sub> ta ti<sub>1</sub> ta hka<sup>v</sup> pfuh<sup>v</sup> sheh<sub>1</sub> hpa<sup>v</sup>, yu<sub>1</sub> leh hpaw la<sup>v</sup> meh<sub>1</sub>.
3. A<sup>-</sup>, nga<sub>1</sub> ha<sub>1</sub> leh ma<sup>v</sup> pe<sub>1</sub> la<sup>v</sup> ve yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, zuh<sub>1</sub> ma zuh<sub>1</sub> mo hk'o ^ hta<sub>1</sub> yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, zuh<sub>1</sub> ma ^ leh nga<sub>1</sub> ha<sub>1</sub> pe<sub>1</sub> la<sup>v</sup> yo<sub>1</sub> law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, shaw<sup>-</sup> paw<sub>1</sub> k'o, nga<sub>1</sub> te<sup>v</sup> yeh<sub>1</sub> te<sup>v</sup> k'a yeh<sub>1</sub> te cheh<sup>v</sup> a.

57. *Leh<sup>-</sup>o<sup>-</sup>* comes from the Shan and Northern Thai, *ta-leo*, Central Thai, *cha-leo*. McFarland (1941: s.v. *cha-leo*) describes this ritual object as "A device made by folding and crossing thin bamboo strips to the shape of two equilateral triangles, so interlaced as to form a six-pointed figure, having open spaces between the slats. It serves many purposes... Two purposes McFarland mentions, "a charm to keep off evil spirits" and "a boundary mark", are identical with those of the Lahu *leh<sup>-</sup>o<sup>-</sup>*. Rajadon (1967: esp. 162-3) includes two sketches of the Thai *chaleo* and likewise mentions, among other uses, the *chaleo* "as a charm against evil spirits". Davis (1974: 3) translates the Northern Thai *taa laew* as "hawk's eye", and cites the Lannathai Chronicle, a folk history of north Thailand, in which a myth is presented to explain the origin of this symbolic object. A legendary king obtained the support of hawks in order to keep animals out of his people's fields. But when the hawks were wiped out through the anger of certain spirits, the king "decreed that all the people should plait strips of bamboo in the form of an eye, tie the eye to the end of a pole, and place the pole in their fields, saying at the same time, 'May the hawk watch over my fields!' The people have followed the custom ever since."

The use of the *leh<sup>-</sup>o<sup>-</sup>* as an offering to spirits (as specifically mentioned in Text Three verse 4) seems to be a peculiarly Lahu adaptation of what must surely be a Tai ritual object.

4. Nga, leh<sup>-</sup> o<sup>-</sup> chi ta, a, ve, nga, law, yu, hk'aw<sup>-</sup> yu, yo, a, naw, maw<sup>v</sup> teh ta, yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, yu, hpaw la<sup>v</sup>.
5. Ya, pui<sup>-</sup> ta, shaw<sup>-</sup> paw, k'ai ve yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o yeh, chi yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, mi, gui, ka, te<sup>v</sup> hk'a<sup>v</sup> aw, nga, law, leh yeh, te k'a te leh nga, mi<sup>v</sup> nga, ya<sup>v</sup> yeh, te cheh<sup>v</sup> a teh, te leh ya, pui<sup>-</sup> naw, hta, hto la<sup>v</sup> ve.
6. Naw, ho<sup>-</sup> ti, ta ti, pfuh<sup>v</sup> sheh, hpa<sup>v</sup> yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, naw, maw<sup>v</sup> teh ta, yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, yu, hpaw la<sup>v</sup>.
7. A, ya, pui<sup>-</sup> yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, zuh, ma ^ zuh, mo leh hki<sup>-</sup> kui, keh kui, caw, k'o, nga, ma<sup>v</sup> heu<sup>v</sup>.
8. Nga, ha, leh pe, la<sup>v</sup> yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, hki<sup>-</sup> kui, keh kui, ta<sup>v</sup> caw, la<sup>v</sup>, ya<sup>v</sup> du, hta, ta<sup>v</sup> g'a<sup>v</sup> la<sup>v</sup>.
9. A, bon meh, shi<sup>-</sup> meh, cheh<sup>v</sup> sha caw, sha yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, zuh, meh, mui meh, ma<sup>v</sup> g'a daw<sup>v</sup> ha, ga<sup>v</sup> hki<sup>-</sup> leh chi bon hk'o ^ hta, yeh, te k'a te ve, naw, hkaw<sup>v</sup> li<sup>-</sup> teh ta, k'o ^ k'o, yu, hk'aw, la<sup>v</sup>.
10. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, ya, pui<sup>-</sup> yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, zuh, ma ^ zuh, shu k'o ^ k'o, nga, ma<sup>v</sup> heu ^, ma<sup>v</sup> zuh, ma<sup>v</sup> leh cheh<sup>v</sup> sha caw, sha tu, yo, law le<sup>v</sup> k'o ^ k'o, te, chi<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>v</sup> maw, la<sup>v</sup>.

### TEXT THREE-TRANSLATION

1. Oh, oh, spirit of this house site, this morning my whole household will clear the site; I will make a house to live in.
2. Oh you spirit, if you have kept your property at this place, you who are all knowing, all-powerful, please take [your property] and move away.
3. Oh, if you do give [this site] to me, show me in my dreams; if you give [it] to me, tomorrow my whole household will build a house to live in.
4. I place this leh<sup>-</sup> o<sup>-</sup> [here] and I ask and I beg for [this site]; if you have placed your property here, please take it away.
5. From this evening, tomorrow morning and hereafter, I beg I may build a house on this earth here; my wife and my children will build a house to live in; this evening I come to inform you,

6. You who are all-knowing, all-seeing, if you have kept your property here, please take it and move away.
7. Oh, this evening, if I dream that this will be a troubled place, I do not want [this site].
8. If you give me this place, grant that it may not be a troubled place; let there be no misfortune to the children or to the grandchildren.
9. Oh [grant to us] good blessings, health and prosperity, sound sleep and comfortable sitting; let there be no trouble if I build my house here; if you have kept your property here, please take it back.
10. Oh, oh, this evening, if I have troubled dreams, I do not want [this site]; if there is to be health and prosperity, let me see nothing in my dreams.

As is clear from the text (verses 3, 7, 10), the household head's dreams during the night following this rite are crucial. If he has no dream, this is considered the most favourable omen that the site will be propitious (verse 10). But should he dream of soil, a hole in the ground or a lot of red colour, it is a bad omen, as is a dream of losing a fight or digging up a brush-tailed porcupine (*Atherurus macrourus*; Lahu, *fa<sup>h</sup> peh<sup>h</sup>*). These dreams suggest future ill health and misfortune and are taken to indicate the locality spirit's displeasure at the proposed use of its site. If he has such a dream, the household head will likely abandon this spot and search for another location. The symbolism of most of the dream omens is fairly obvious. The soil and hole in the ground suggest a grave, hence a death in the family. Red suggests blood, and so violent death. Losing a fight is obviously a sign of misfortune; but it is not clear to me why a vision of digging up a brush-tailed porcupine is considered inauspicious, especially as this animal is a favourite Lahu delicacy.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps its burrow also suggests a grave, but my informants simply said that it portended sickness in the family.

To make quite sure that the supernatural world favours the house site, the household head performs another rite on the day when building is to begin. Digging a

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58. Two varieties of porcupine were choice meats among these Lahu Nyi, viz. *fa<sup>h</sup> pu na<sup>h</sup>*, the Old World Porcupine (*Hystrix brachyurus*) and *fa<sup>h</sup> peh<sup>h</sup>*, the Brush-tailed Porcupine (*Atherurus macrourus*).

small hole at the site, he drops into it a number of raw rice grains, one for each member of the household, and covers them with a stone or piece of wood. The household head lights a pair of beeswax candles and recites the following prayer :

TEXT FOUR : HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S PRAYER  
TO THE LOCALITY SPIRIT JUST BEFORE  
STARTING TO BUILD THE HOUSE

1. Ha<sup>-</sup> ! O<sup>-</sup> ! O<sup>-</sup> ! Cao, ui, cao, yaw<sup>v</sup> cho, ka, ve, cao, maw cao, tu<sup>v</sup> cho, ka, ve, hpi<sup>-</sup> hku<sup>-</sup> na, hku<sup>-</sup> cho, ka, ve, ya, nyi nga, yeh, te k'a te ve ka, haw, la, meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ taw ^ leh la, meu<sup>v</sup> aw\_\_ ve ^ taw ^ leh yeh, te k'a te ve meh\_\_.
2. Ca, hk'a suh\_\_ shi\_\_ te leh ka, haw ca, hk'a te<sup>v</sup> hk'a k'o, chaw te<sup>v</sup> g'a<sup>v</sup> ve hta, tan\_\_ ve.
3. Yeh, te leh cheh<sup>v</sup> sha caw, sha kui, ve, cheh<sup>v</sup> leh chaw ma<sup>v</sup> lu, ma<sup>v</sup> she ^ tu, k'o, ca, hk'a chi te<sup>v</sup> hk'a ka, ta<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_ meh\_\_.
4. Ca, hk'a chi hta, sha<sup>-</sup> hke ^ sha<sup>-</sup> ca ^ mui, leh sha<sup>-</sup> hki ^ sha<sup>-</sup> she\_\_ mui, ve, a la, meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ aw\_\_ ve ^ taw ^ leh nga, yeh, te k'a te ve meh\_\_.
5. Cao, ui, cao, yaw<sup>v</sup> cho, ka, ve ceu, lao<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_.
6. Sha<sup>-</sup> hki ^ sha<sup>-</sup> ca ^ ta\_\_ ve, ca, hk'a chi hta, a<sup>-</sup>, te leh nga, cheh<sup>v</sup> leh chaw ma<sup>v</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> sha yo, k'o ^ k'o, naw, leh ma<sup>v</sup> te pe, la<sup>v</sup> ga<sup>v</sup> yo, law k'o ^ k'o, ca, hk'a chi meh\_\_ a\_\_ law meh\_\_.
7. Chi hta, nga, sha<sup>-</sup> hki ^ sha<sup>-</sup> ca ^ mui, ve, ca, hk'a chi leh ma<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_ yo, law k'o ^, nga, yeh, te k'a te ve.
8. La, meu<sup>v</sup> aw\_\_ ve ^ peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ taw ^ leh cao, ui, cao, yaw<sup>v</sup>, cao, pa ^ cao, keh cho, ka, hpi<sup>-</sup> hku<sup>-</sup> na, hku<sup>-</sup> cho, ka, hpi<sup>-</sup> ho\_\_-o hpi laweh\_\_ chi ma ve cho, ka, a hk'a deh, ceu, la<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_.
9. Nga, yeh, te k'a te ve ka, haw.

TEXT FOUR-TRANSLATION

1. Ha! Oh, oh, Great Prince of this place, Lord Spirit of this place, today I will make a house at this place; I bring for you these beautiful beeswax candles made by my own hand, I bring for you this beautiful rice made by my own hand; I will make a house.

2. I place here seven grains of rice, I put one grain of rice for each person [in my household].
3. If, when I make my house [at this place] we will be healthy, when we live here we will not sicken, let not a single grain of rice be lost.
4. I make this rice grain oracle, oh I bring these beautiful beeswax candles and this beautiful rice made by my own hand; I will build a house.
5. Great Prince of this place, come and look!
6. I place this oracle, I have prepared these rice grains; if, when we live here, the people will not be healthy, if you do not want me to make [my house] here, let these grains of rice be lost.
7. I make this oracle; if the rice grains are not lost, I will build my house.
8. I bring this beautiful rice and these beautiful beeswax candles made by my own hand, oh great Prince, Powerful Prince, Pure Prince, Lord Spirit of this place; all you spirits of the streams and spirits of the hills here at this place, come carefully and look!
9. Here I will make my house.

After praying thus, the household head uncovers the rice grains and observes whether any have been lost. If they are all there (no insect having managed to remove one in the short time of the prayer), it is regarded as a good omen and work on the house can begin; but if one has disappeared this is taken to indicate supernatural displeasure and the site will be abandoned.

Once the household head has received favourable omens (or rather, has not received unfavourable ones), work on the new house may begin. But some people will not start work on days they consider inauspicious; others seem not to care.<sup>59</sup> As when clearing the village site, they may avoid tiger day and dog day (see n. 51 above). One informant said the wood would hurt you, as if a tiger were biting or a horse kicking. In addition, *va, nyi*, or pig day, may be avoided. This is the day on which *Ai ma* (see n. 55 above) created the earth, and one informant declared it inappropriate to begin work on such an important day. The best days on which to begin the work,

59. Thus one man told me, "*Aw, nyi ca^ pa\_ ma^ he^ leh ma^ shi\_*" ("I am not a person who reckons the days, so I don't know" — or his words could be rendered "*We're not people who reckon the days, so we don't know*".)

this informant said, were *law<sup>v</sup> nyi*, or mule day<sup>60</sup> and *htaw<sup>v</sup> la nyi* (meaning unknown, but probably rabbit day). This man reckoned that if he began on mule day his household would prosper and if he started on *htaw<sup>v</sup> la nyi* he would become rich. But he could not link the name of the day to the (hoped-for) consequence. All informants agreed that it mattered not whether work began during the period of the waxing or the waning moon, but of course no work could be done on the new and full moon days, *shi<sup>-</sup> nyi* (see above, p. 177).

The house may be built of any wood except that of the *a yaw* tree, a variety of chestnut (*Lagerstoemia cylindrica*). This tall, straight tree, Lahu say, is particularly liable to be struck by lightning--and indeed these Lahu associate the tree with the *mvuh<sup>v</sup> hteh<sup>^</sup> ne<sup>v</sup>* or "lightning spirit" (cf. Walker 1977c : 214). If *a yaw* wood were used in house construction, Lahu Nyi say, it would invite lightning to strike the building. The menfolk usually cut the wood and bamboo building materials, while the women assemble the grass or leaves for the thatch, but there is no fixed division of labour in this respect.

It may take from one to three or four days to finish the house, depending on how much help is received from household members and friends. Then it is swept clean and the first important ritual of occupancy follows. Some member of the household (unstipulated) fetches water from the village supply and brings it into the house, saying, "*I<sup>v</sup> ka<sup>^</sup> hk'e, cheh<sup>v</sup> sha la<sup>v</sup> !*" (like water may we have good health!) or "*I<sup>v</sup> ka<sup>^</sup> hk'e le ma<sup>v</sup> na, ma<sup>v</sup> gaw, ga<sup>v</sup> !*" (like water may we suffer no sickness!). If the household has enough pigs, the household head may kill one for a feast to mark the completion of his house. I was told by the headman of the village in which I was living that it is highly appropriate to kill a pig on this occasion, for it will ensure success in the hunt for the men of the household.<sup>61</sup>

## 7. Entering a New House

In the evening of the first day of occupancy, a major rite must be performed during which the spirit protector of the house, the *yeh, ne<sup>v</sup>* or "house spirit" (cf. Walker 1977e) is invited to take up residence. The household head prepares beeswax

60. A second informant concurred in this view, while a third listed mule day as one of the inauspicious days.

61. His words were "*Yeh, suh<sup>-</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> te<sup>v</sup> nyi, va<sup>^</sup> caw<sup>v</sup> k'o ti ca<sup>v</sup> k'o, yeh, chi hta<sup>^</sup> cheh<sup>v</sup> hta<sup>v</sup>, heh<sup>^</sup> pui<sup>-</sup> hk'aw sha \_ g'a ca pui<sup>-</sup>a*" ("On the day of living in a new house, if one has a pig and kills it, when living in this house one will be able to bag many forest animals").



candles by twisting them together in pairs.<sup>62</sup> Lighting the candles, he places them at various parts of the house, particularly on the newly-prepared altar to the house spirit, but also on one or more of the principal upright house supports, cross beams and walls and on the earthen fireplace.<sup>63</sup> He now prays, asking to be forgiven for having cut down trees to build the house, and requesting health and prosperity for the household members in their new abode. I recorded three examples of this prayer, as follows:

TEXT FIVE (A) : HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S PRAYER  
WHEN ENTERING HIS NEW HOUSE

1. A<sup>-</sup>, ya<sub>h</sub> nyi, a<sup>-</sup>, ya<sub>h</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> ka<sub>h</sub> haw yeh<sub>h</sub> ma aw<sup>h</sup> ce<sub>h</sub> chi ve, shaw<sup>h</sup> suh<sup>-</sup> ma suh<sup>-</sup> k'aw<sub>h</sub> yu<sub>h</sub>, a<sup>-</sup>, shaw<sup>h</sup> hpu shaw<sup>h</sup> co, shaw<sup>h</sup> ba<sub>h</sub> shaw<sup>h</sup> ve<sup>h</sup> chi ve, ya<sub>h</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> ka<sub>h</sub> haw yeh<sub>h</sub> ma aw<sup>h</sup> ce<sub>h</sub> yeh<sub>h</sub> bon ta ti<sub>h</sub>, a<sup>-</sup>, shaw<sup>h</sup> ba<sub>h</sub> shaw<sup>h</sup> ve<sup>h</sup> chi ve, nga<sub>h</sub> la<sub>h</sub> meu<sup>h</sup> peh<sup>h</sup> ve ^ hkeh ve ^ k'aw<sub>h</sub> tu<sup>-</sup> leh peh<sup>h</sup> haw<sub>h</sub> k'aw<sub>h</sub> tu<sup>-</sup> leh chi ceu<sub>h</sub> k'aw<sup>h</sup> ceu<sub>h</sub> u<sup>-</sup> hta<sub>h</sub>, shaw<sup>h</sup> ba<sub>h</sub> ma ba<sub>h</sub> chi hta<sub>h</sub> haw, a<sup>-</sup>, tu<sup>-</sup> leh nga<sub>h</sub> te<sup>h</sup> peu<sub>h</sub> pa ^ g'a u<sup>-</sup> hta<sub>h</sub>, no<sup>h</sup> g'a k'aw<sup>h</sup> peu<sub>h</sub> pa ^ leh nga<sub>h</sub> u<sup>-</sup> nga<sub>h</sub> hpaw<sup>h</sup> k'aw<sup>h</sup> peu<sub>h</sub> pa ^ leh keh<sub>h</sub> la<sup>h</sup>.
2. Ya<sub>h</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>h</sub> hpaw<sup>h</sup> k'a hpaw<sup>h</sup> chi hta<sub>h</sub> haw, a<sup>-</sup>, yeh<sub>h</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> k'a suh<sup>-</sup> k'aw<sub>h</sub> ta ^ g'a yo<sub>h</sub> law k'o ^ k'o, ya<sub>h</sub> nyi tan<sub>h</sub> leh o<sup>h</sup> k'ai ve, cheh<sup>h</sup> sha caw<sub>h</sub> sha, zuh<sub>h</sub> sha mui sha ti<sup>-</sup> caw<sub>h</sub> la<sup>h</sup>, hk'aw<sub>h</sub> g'a<sup>h</sup> chi g'a<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> daw<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> ha<sub>h</sub>, ma<sup>h</sup> daw<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> hki<sup>-</sup>, yeh<sub>h</sub> ma aw<sup>h</sup> ce<sub>h</sub> chi haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sub>h</sub> chi te<sup>h</sup> yeh<sub>h</sub> yo<sub>h</sub> law k'o ^ k'o, a<sup>-</sup>, cheh<sup>h</sup> leh cheh<sup>h</sup> sha caw<sub>h</sub> sha ve, chi bon ti<sup>-</sup> pa ^ leh k'a la<sup>h</sup>.
3. Ma<sup>h</sup> daw<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> hki<sup>-</sup>, ma<sup>h</sup> daw<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> ha<sub>h</sub>, a<sup>-</sup>, hpa<sup>h</sup> ka<sub>h</sub> ma ka<sub>h</sub>, ya<sup>h</sup> ka<sub>h</sub> du<sub>h</sub> ka<sub>h</sub>, ma<sup>h</sup> gui<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> hpa<sup>h</sup> ^, neh ceh ya<sup>h</sup> ceh ma<sup>h</sup> gui<sup>h</sup> ma<sup>h</sup> hpa<sup>h</sup>, peh<sup>h</sup> ceh ma ceh ma<sup>h</sup> gui hk'e, chi bon ti<sup>-</sup> pa ^ leh k'a la<sup>h</sup> meh<sub>h</sub>.

62. The lighting of beeswax candles precedes many Lahu Nyi ritual observances. Indeed, so important is the use of these candles that Lahu Nyi frequently call themselves *peh<sup>h</sup> tu<sup>-</sup> pa<sub>h</sub>* or "beeswax burners" (*peh<sup>h</sup>* from *peh<sup>h</sup> haw<sub>h</sub>* "beeswax", *tu<sup>-</sup>* from *tu<sup>-</sup> ve* "to light", *pa<sub>h</sub>* the male suffix). The reason for the use of such candles varies from one informant to another and according to the rite in question. But there seems to be agreement that candles "please" the benevolent supernatural beings, making them more likely to grant boons. The beeswax is obtained by the Lahu themselves in the mountains. The wicks are made by twisting cotton wool which, among the Lahu I studied, was purchased from itinerant lowland traders. The soft, easily pliable beeswax is then molded with the fingers around a wick to make a thin candle about 5 or 6 cm. long. In use, two or more candles are twisted together for stability.

63. The supports are called *yeh<sub>h</sub> hkui<sup>-</sup> daw<sub>h</sub>*, cross beams are *to<sup>-</sup> la<sub>h</sub>*, walls are *g'o<sub>h</sub> pa<sub>h</sub>*, fireplace is *hk'a ci<sup>h</sup>*.

4. Ka, haw ya, nyi shaw<sup>v</sup> meu<sup>v</sup> ma meu<sup>v</sup>, shaw<sup>v</sup> vi<sup>v</sup> ma vi<sup>v</sup> chi ve ka, ya, pui<sup>-</sup> nga, te<sup>v</sup> peu, pa ^ g'a u<sup>-</sup> hta, k'aw<sup>v</sup> peu, nga, u<sup>-</sup> g'a pa ^ fui<sup>-</sup> leh po, la<sup>v</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>.
5. Ka, haw yeh, ma aw<sup>v</sup> ce, yeh, chi te<sup>v</sup> shi<sup>-</sup> yo, law k'o ^ k'o, ya, nyi nga, a<sup>-</sup>, yeh, suh<sup>-</sup> k'aw, ta ^ leh ka, haw cheh<sup>v</sup> sha caw, sha ga<sup>v</sup> leh yeh, ma aw<sup>v</sup> ce, chi haw<sup>-</sup>, daw<sup>v</sup> sha ga<sup>v</sup> sha ga<sup>v</sup> leh hk'aw, g'a<sup>v</sup> chi g'a<sup>v</sup> g'a<sup>v</sup> zuh, sha mui sha ga<sup>v</sup> leh ma<sup>v</sup> daw<sup>v</sup> ma<sup>v</sup> hki<sup>-</sup> ga<sup>v</sup>, ma<sup>v</sup> daw<sup>v</sup> ma<sup>v</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> ga<sup>v</sup>, a<sup>-</sup>, a<sup>-</sup>, ca<sup>v</sup> g'a meu<sup>v</sup> hkui, daw, g'a meu<sup>v</sup> meh, chi bon ti<sup>-</sup> pa ^ leh ka la<sup>v</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>.
6. Yeh, chi te<sup>v</sup> yeh, cheh<sup>v</sup> g'a yo, law k'o ^ k'o, chaw ca<sup>-</sup> chaw law<sup>v</sup> ma<sup>v</sup> g'a, ne<sup>v</sup> ca<sup>-</sup> ne<sup>v</sup> law<sup>v</sup> ma g'a, chi bon pa. ^ leh k'a la<sup>v</sup>.
7. Yeh, ma aw<sup>v</sup> ce, chi haw<sup>-</sup>, cheh<sup>v</sup> sha caw, sha, daw<sup>v</sup> sha ga<sup>v</sup> sha, ce<sup>v</sup> hu k'o, ce<sup>v</sup> mvuh a<sup>v</sup> pi, ce<sup>v</sup> hu k'o, ce<sup>v</sup> hk'a ^ ca, hk'a ^ a<sup>v</sup> law<sup>v</sup>, chi bon ti<sup>-</sup> pa ^ leh ka la<sup>v</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, yeh, chi te<sup>v</sup> yeh, yo, law k'o ^ k'o, zuh, sha mui sha, sha<sup>-</sup>!

#### TEXT FIVE (A)- TRANSLATION

1. Oh today, oh this evening, here within the four corners of this house [for which] I have once again taken new wood, oh, [to expiate my sin in destroying the life of] this wood; this evening, here within the four corners of this house, all-true Blessor of the House,<sup>64</sup> I once again light these beautiful beeswax candles made by my own hands, I once again light these beeswax candles; oh [to expiate my sin in destroying the life of these] ten kinds, nine kinds of woods,<sup>65</sup> I light [these beeswax candles]; oh you up there, I pray to you one time so you please nine times order the cleansing of my sins.
2. This evening we climb up into this house; today and hereafter may we enjoy good health, good sleeping and good sitting; oh may there be no misfortune to any of the people of this household; may we who live in this house enjoy good health; this boon once again order upon us.
3. May there be no misfortune; oh just as these [entwined] candles do not separate, may husband and wife not separate, may the children not separate, may wife and husband not separate; this boon alone order upon us.

64. That is, the house spirit.

65. "Ten kinds, nine kinds" simply means "many different kinds". The numbers are not to be taken literally.

4. Here today I once again pray, so nine times order that we be separated from sharp points of wood, from wooden blades.
5. Today I climb up into this new house, this house with four corners here; let us enjoy good health, let everybody sleep well and sit well; let there be no misfortune; oh may our food taste good to our lips; this boon alone order upon us.
6. May the people who live in this house not be killed by men of evil intent nor by malicious spirits;<sup>66</sup> this boon order upon us.
7. Let there be health and happiness within this house; may the hairs of the animals not fall down, may the animals not die;<sup>66</sup> this boon alone order upon us; may the people of this house sleep well and sit well.

TEXT FIVE (B) : HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S PRAYER  
WHEN ENTERING HIS NEW HOUSE

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, ya<sub>Δ</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, nga<sub>Δ</sub> te<sup>ν</sup> yeh<sub>Δ</sub> te<sup>ν</sup> k'a ve<sub>Δ</sub> yeh<sub>Δ</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> ta ^ ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o; a<sub>Δ</sub> yeh<sub>Δ</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> chi ta ^ ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o.
2. Shaw<sup>ν</sup> ne<sup>ν</sup> ma ne<sup>ν</sup> chi yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ya<sub>Δ</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> peh<sup>ν</sup> tu<sup>ν</sup> tu ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o; shaw<sup>ν</sup> ne<sup>ν</sup> ma ne<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, a<sub>Δ</sub> taw<sub>Δ</sub> leh suh<sup>-</sup> leh a pa Sha<sup>-</sup> ca ^ ka<sub>Δ</sub> k'aw<sub>Δ</sub> taw<sub>Δ</sub>, k'aw<sub>Δ</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> leh a e Na bo na ca<sup>-</sup> ka<sub>Δ</sub>; ya<sup>ν</sup> du<sub>Δ</sub>, a<sub>Δ</sub> te<sup>ν</sup> g'a<sup>ν</sup> la<sup>ν</sup> ce<sup>ν</sup>.
3. Suh ^ suh haw ^ suh ta<sub>Δ</sub> ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, shaw<sup>ν</sup> ne<sup>ν</sup> ma ne<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, ya<sub>Δ</sub> pui<sup>-</sup> peh<sup>ν</sup> tu<sup>ν</sup> ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, yeh<sub>Δ</sub> chi yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, nga<sub>Δ</sub> yeh<sub>Δ</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> ta ^ ve.
4. Ya<sub>Δ</sub> nyi tan<sup>-</sup> o<sup>ν</sup> k'ai ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, yeh<sub>Δ</sub> dui ^ k'a dui ^, eh<sup>-</sup> ho<sub>Δ</sub> eh<sup>-</sup> dui ^ htaw<sup>ν</sup>.
5. A<sub>Δ</sub> yeh<sub>Δ</sub> ne<sup>ν</sup> k'a ne<sup>ν</sup> ka<sub>Δ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> ya<sub>Δ</sub> mui<sub>Δ</sub> la<sup>ν</sup>, hki<sup>-</sup> kui<sub>Δ</sub> keh kui<sub>Δ</sub> ta<sup>ν</sup> caw<sub>Δ</sub> la<sup>ν</sup>.
6. Yeh<sub>Δ</sub> ta ^ k'a ta ^ ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, hk'a<sub>Δ</sub> g'a<sup>ν</sup> chi g'a<sup>ν</sup> htaw<sup>ν</sup> ta<sup>ν</sup> ya<sub>Δ</sub> mui<sub>Δ</sub> la<sup>ν</sup>, yeh<sub>Δ</sub> ne<sup>ν</sup> chi ka<sub>Δ</sub>.
7. A<sub>Δ</sub> ya<sub>Δ</sub> nyi tan<sup>-</sup> o<sup>ν</sup> k'ai ve yo<sub>Δ</sub> law le<sup>ν</sup> k'o ^ k'o, yeh<sub>Δ</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> chi ta ^ ve; ma<sup>ν</sup> g'a daw<sup>ν</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> ga<sup>ν</sup> hki<sup>-</sup> leh cheh<sup>ν</sup> sha caw<sub>Δ</sub> sha hk'o<sup>Δ</sup> hta<sub>Δ</sub> ti<sup>-</sup> caw<sub>Δ</sub> la<sup>ν</sup>.

66. This is the general meaning, according to my informants, of the coupled phrases *chaw ca*, *chaw law<sup>ν</sup> ma<sup>ν</sup> g'a* and *ne<sup>ν</sup> ca*, *ne<sup>ν</sup> law<sup>ν</sup> ma g'a* (*chaw* "people", *ne<sup>ν</sup>* "spirits"). I was unable to obtain a satisfactory word-by-word analysis.

8. Ya<sup>˥</sup> du, a ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup> ce<sup>˥</sup>, chi ma ve hta<sub>˥</sub>, ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup> la<sup>˥</sup>; hki<sup>˥</sup> kui, keh<sup>˥</sup> kui, ta<sup>˥</sup> caw<sub>˥</sub> la<sup>˥</sup>.
9. A, yeh<sub>˥</sub> suh<sup>˥</sup> chi ta<sup>˥</sup> ve yo<sub>˥</sub> law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup>, kao<sub>˥</sub> ca<sub>˥</sub> lao ca<sub>˥</sub> hk'o<sup>˥</sup> hta<sub>˥</sub> ti<sup>˥</sup> caw<sub>˥</sub> la<sup>˥</sup>; daw<sup>˥</sup> ha<sub>˥</sub> ga<sup>˥</sup> hki<sup>˥</sup> ta<sup>˥</sup> caw<sub>˥</sub> la<sup>˥</sup>.
10. Ui<sub>˥</sub> ka<sub>˥</sub> i ka<sub>˥</sub> chi ma ve, te<sup>˥</sup> yeh<sub>˥</sub> te k'a<sub>˥</sub> ya<sup>˥</sup> ka<sub>˥</sub> du<sub>˥</sub> ka<sub>˥</sub> chi ma ve, daw<sup>˥</sup> ha<sub>˥</sub> ga<sup>˥</sup> hki<sup>˥</sup> ta<sup>˥</sup> g'a<sup>˥</sup> la<sup>˥</sup>.
11. Ya<sub>˥</sub> nyi tan<sub>˥</sub> o<sup>˥</sup> k'ai ve yo<sub>˥</sub> law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup>, a, ca<sup>˥</sup> leh a<sub>˥</sub> peu<sub>˥</sub>, veu<sub>˥</sub> leh a<sup>˥</sup> peu<sub>˥</sub> ti<sup>˥</sup> caw<sub>˥</sub> la<sup>˥</sup>.
12. Yeh<sub>˥</sub> suh<sup>˥</sup> k'a suh<sup>˥</sup> ta<sup>˥</sup> ve yo<sub>˥</sub> law le<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup> k'o<sup>˥</sup>, a pa Sha<sup>˥</sup> ca<sup>˥</sup> ka<sub>˥</sub>, mvuh<sup>˥</sup> nyi ce<sup>˥</sup> le<sup>˥</sup> ka<sub>˥</sub>, ha pa ce<sup>˥</sup> le<sup>˥</sup> ka<sub>˥</sub>, g'a ceu<sub>˥</sub> g'a taw<sup>˥</sup> la<sup>˥</sup>, cheh<sup>˥</sup> sha caw<sub>˥</sub> sha ti<sup>˥</sup> k'aw<sub>˥</sub> hpa<sub>˥</sub> leh ta<sub>˥</sub> la<sup>˥</sup>, O<sup>˥</sup> ! O<sup>˥</sup> !

#### TEXT FIVE (B) – TRANSLATION

1. Oh, this evening my whole household climbs up into this new house; oh, we climb up into this new house.
2. Spirit of the trees, this evening we light beeswax candles; spirit of the trees, shield and protect us, and Father *Sha<sup>˥</sup> ca<sup>˥</sup>* also, shield and protect us once again, and Mother *Na bo na ca* also;<sup>67</sup> let there be no trouble for the children or the grandchildren.
3. This wood is dead, oh spirit of the trees, so I light these beeswax candles [in recompense for killing this wood]; I climb up into this my new house.
4. Today and hereafter, may the sound of much happy conversation, the sound of chattering children be heard in this house.
5. Oh guardian spirit of the house also, do not fight with us; let there be no trouble at this place.
6. We climb up into this house, spirit of the house; let there be no dispute among any of the people [of this house].
7. Oh, from today and hereafter, we climb up into this new house; let there be no trouble, let us have only health and prosperity.

67. "Father *Sha<sup>˥</sup> ca<sup>˥</sup>*" (see n. 56 above) and *Na bo na* (see n. 55) refer to *G'ul<sub>˥</sub> sha* and his female counterpart, *Al ma*.

8. Let there be no misfortune to the children and the grandchildren; let there be no trouble at this place.
9. Oh, we climb up into this new house; let it be only that everyone talks of our good fortune; let there be no misfortune.
10. May the big and the small, all of them, this whole household, have no misfortune.
11. From today and hereafter, may the food never be exhausted, may the clothing never be exhausted, this [boon] alone let us have.
12. We climb up into this new house; Father *Sha<sup>-</sup> ca<sup>^</sup>* also, the solar assistant also, the lunar assistant also,<sup>68</sup> watch over and protect us; once again create for us nothing but health and prosperity, oh! oh!

TEXT FIVE (C) : HOUSEHOLD HEAD'S PRAYER  
WHEN ENTERING HIS NEW HOUSE

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, yeh<sub>v</sub> bon teh ma\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> yeh<sub>v</sub> ma aw<sup>v</sup> ce<sub>v</sub> ve, yeh<sub>v</sub> bon teh ma\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> naw<sub>v</sub> cho<sub>v</sub> ka<sub>v</sub>; la<sub>v</sub> meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ hkeh ve ^ aw\_\_ ve ^ tan<sup>v</sup> leh ya<sub>v</sub> nyi cho<sub>v</sub> ka<sub>v</sub>, ya<sub>v</sub> nyi naw<sub>v</sub> hkui haw<sup>-</sup> la<sub>v</sub> haw<sup>-</sup> ga<sub>v</sub> ve.
2. A<sup>-</sup>, ce<sup>v</sup> ka<sub>v</sub> ca<sub>v</sub> ka<sub>v</sub>, chaw ka<sub>v</sub> la<sup>v</sup> ka<sub>v</sub>, hpo ^ hpo ^ sha ^ sha ^ chi ma ve hk'o<sup>v</sup> hta<sub>v</sub>, naw<sub>v</sub> hk'a deh<sub>v</sub> nyi hk'a deh<sub>v</sub> ngeh<sup>v</sup> la<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_.
3. Hkui ta<sup>v</sup> lu<sub>v</sub>, la<sub>v</sub> ta<sup>v</sup> lu<sub>v</sub> la<sup>v</sup>; a, ma<sup>v</sup> g'a daw<sup>v</sup> hki<sup>-</sup> kui<sub>v</sub> ve, ma<sup>v</sup> g'a daw<sup>v</sup> ha\_\_ kui<sub>v</sub> ve, chi bon ti<sup>-</sup> k'aw<sub>v</sub> ji<sup>v</sup> leh ta\_\_ la<sup>v</sup>, chi shi<sup>-</sup> ji<sup>v</sup> leh ta\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> meh\_\_.
4. Nyi<sub>v</sub> te<sup>v</sup> mo\_\_ te<sup>v</sup> cu<sup>v</sup> ve yeh<sub>v</sub> ma chi haw<sub>v</sub>, a, yeh<sub>v</sub> ma aw<sup>v</sup> ce<sub>v</sub> yeh<sub>v</sub> bon teh ma\_\_ la<sup>v</sup> hpaw<sup>v</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> ga<sub>v</sub> ve, la<sub>v</sub> meu<sup>v</sup> peh<sup>v</sup> ve ^ hkeh ve ^ k'aw<sub>v</sub> ba leh cho<sub>v</sub> ka<sub>v</sub> ga<sub>v</sub> ve.
5. Hk'aw<sub>v</sub> g'a<sup>v</sup> chi g'a<sup>v</sup>, k'o\_\_ haw<sup>-</sup> k'o ce<sup>v</sup> ka<sub>v</sub> ca<sub>v</sub> ka<sub>v</sub>, chaw ka<sub>v</sub> la<sup>v</sup> ka<sub>v</sub> chi ma ve, hk'a deh<sub>v</sub> taw\_\_, hk'a deh<sub>v</sub> suh<sup>-</sup> leh po<sub>v</sub> la<sup>v</sup>, te<sup>v</sup> nyi sheh ^ yan<sup>v</sup>, te<sup>v</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> sheh ^ yan<sup>v</sup>, o<sup>-</sup>, keo<sub>v</sub>\_\_o.

68. Apart from their being "messengers" of *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* (*G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha ve tcuh ya<sup>v</sup>*), I could learn nothing about the solar and lunar assistants.

## TEXT FIVE (C) - TRANSLATION

1. Oh, oh, guardian spirit of the four corners of the house, you guardian spirit here at this place; today, here at this place, I offer to you these beautiful beeswax candles and this beautiful rice prepared by my own hands; today I reach under your feet and under your hands.
2. Oh please carefully watch over all the animals, all the people, the property, all of these.
3. Do not wound our feet, do not wound our hands; oh, may there be no misfortune; with this boon alone once again cover us, with this boon cover us.
4. We people of this household reach to you, oh guardian spirit of this house, and we once again light for you these beautiful beeswax candles made by our own hands.
5. Three times in one day, three times in one night, carefully protect and shield [from all misfortune] every person, all the animals underneath the house, all the household members.

8. Establishing a New *Haw<sup>-</sup>Yeh<sub>u</sub>* or Village Temple

There is no need to consult the supernatural world when siting a new *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>u</sub>* or village temple. Although I was given no reason why this should be so, I imagine it has something to do with the pre-eminence of *G'ui<sub>u</sub> sha* among all supernatural entities recognized by these Lahu. Since the village temple is explicitly "*G'ui<sub>u</sub> sha's* house", it would be inappropriate to ask a lesser supernatural being, the resident locality spirit, for permission to set up this building.

The *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>u</sub>* preferably is sited at the head of the village on the uphill side. At any rate, informants were agreed that it should never be built at the bottom of the village because, they said, "all bad and dirty things" flow down to the bottom of the village and the *haw<sup>-</sup>yeh<sub>u</sub>*, house of the supreme deity, should never be defiled by

locating it in such a place. If his house were thus defiled, it is said, *G'ui sha* would not listen to the voices of those who pray to him in this building.

There is no special day on which a *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh*, should be built, but again--as when constructing a house--the Lahu avoid tiger and horse day because of their connotations of violence, and pig day because of its association with the creation of the world. In addition some people said that if they were to start building a *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh*, on pig day the earth might tremble--that is, it would cause an earthquake. (This idea did not enter our discussion of house construction).

Every household in the village sends at least one male representative to assist with the building of the temple, and several will send more than one. Anybody with the requisite skill may prepare the furnishings; no persons are either specified for or excluded from such tasks.

Once the building and its appurtenances are ready, each household in the village sends along a representative, usually female, with rice and vegetable relishes (meat is not consumed in the temple), beeswax candles and other offerings. The *to bo pa* (senior priest) receives these offerings inside the new building, and the foodstuffs are set before "*G'ui sha*'s throne". The *to bo pa* then affixes beeswax candles to the poles which support the temple, to the walls and to the various ritual furnishings. He lights the candles (assisted by others if he so requests) and proceeds, in the presence of whichever villagers happen to be around, to pray to *G'ui sha*, informing the supreme being that the new *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh*, has been completed. While he prays, other men play the percussion instruments--gong, drum and cymbals--associated with temple worship among these Lahu Nyi. Here is the text of one such prayer by a *to bo pa* when dedicating a new *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh*.

TEXT SIX : PRIEST'S PRAYER TO *G'UI, SHA*  
IN NEW TEMPLE

1. O- ! O- ! Ha ! Ya, nyi hk'a ^ ma aw^ ce, chi hta, la, sha mo, la, mo, sha^  
chi ma ve, ca li- ca ma\_ la, meu^ shaw^ hpu, to bo haw- hpu sha^ yeh, k'aw,  
ti g'a.
2. Hk'a ^ maw te^ ce, meu^ hta, haw k'aw, sha leh, ha, ca li- ca ma\_ la, meu^  
va^ hpu haw- hpu sha^ yeh, k'aw, ti g'a yo, law.
3. Hk'a ^ ma aw^ ce, chi hta, ui, ka, i ka, daw^ hpu te^ ca ^ k'aw, mui,, ga^ hpu  
te^ she^ k'aw, mui,, ha, k'aw, go^, k'aw, sha^ leh no^ g'a a pa ka ti, kan^ pa ^  
hpaw^ meu^ k'aw, ta\_ g'a.
4. A pa ka ti, ka^ sheh- ka g'a sheh\_ hpa^, ha, la, meu^ hkaw- lu- hkaw- tan^  
chi ma k'aw, go^, k'aw, ta\_, k'aw, sha^ leh to bo haw- hpu sha^ yeh, hkui ka\_  
k'aw, ta\_ yo, law.
5. Te^ nyi sheh ^ yan^, ha, ui, ka, i ka, k'aw, sha^ leh no^ g'a aw, na a pa ka ti,  
ka^ sheh- hpaw^ meu^ k'aw, ta\_ g'a.
6. Ha, na\_ pu\_ bon pui bon law, ka sheh\_ hpa^, na\_ pu\_ shi- pui shi- law, ka  
sheh\_ ma, te^ nyi sheh ^ yan^, te^ ha- sheh ^ yan^ k'aw, ca leh ca g'a hpa\_  
g'a ta\_ g'a sheh\_ hpa^.
7. No^ g'a g'ui, ma a pa ka ti, kan^ pa ^ ta\_ g'a sheh\_ hpa^ yo, law k'o ^ k'o, ka,  
haw hk'a ^ ma aw^ ce, chi hta, haw, ha, hk'a ^ ma aw^ ce, meu^ hta, haw, ma  
daw^ ma^ hki-, ma^ daw^ ma^ ha\_, hk'a, g'a^ chi g'a^ ve yo, law, ui, ka, i ka,  
chi ma, cheh^ sha caw, sha, daw^ sha ga^ sha.



## TEXT SIX-TRANSLATION

1. Oh! Oh! Ha! Today, within the four corners of this village, the whole community once again plants<sup>69</sup> the *to bo pa\_*'s *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sup>-</sup>*,<sup>70</sup> with this white wood [cut with the knives and axes fashioned by the village] blacksmith's own hands.<sup>71</sup>
2. At one corner of the village<sup>72</sup>, we once again make offerings, we once again plant the white bamboo *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sup>-</sup>*. [cut with knives fashioned by the village] blacksmith's own hands.
3. Within the four corners of the village, the big and the small, joined by the same pure intention, once again stretch out their hands<sup>73</sup>, once again make offerings and once again put [their prayers and their offerings] at the side of the all-true, the all-powerful Father up there.<sup>74</sup>
4. All-true, all-precious Father, we once again stretch out our hands, we once again put [our prayers at your side], once again make offerings; we once again put all these offerings made by our own hands here at the foot of the *to bo pa\_*'s *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sup>-</sup>*.
5. Three times in one day, the big and the small once again make offerings and once again put [their offerings] at the side of the all-true, the all-powerful Father up there.

- 
69. Given the necessity to sink the main supports into the ground, the verb *ti ve* "to plant" is in this connexion quite appropriate.
  70. The *to bo pa\_*, as senior ritual functionary in a Lahu Nyi village, is primarily responsible for the operation of the *haw<sup>-</sup> yeh<sup>-</sup>*.
  71. The blacksmith, as the one who makes the farming tools and other implements, is recognized as one of the most important members of a Lahu Nyi village community.
  72. A poetic way of saying "here at this place".
  73. Holding lighted beeswax candles in the outstretched right hand is a customary manner of praying among these Lahu.
  74. This is a reference to *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* and clearly indicates the anthropomorphic and paternalistic nature of the deity, a concept which long predates the arrival of Christian missionaries among some of these people. The Christian converts, naturally enough, have readily identified *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* with the Semitic-derived Christian concept of the deity. But the traditional Lahu concept of *G'ui<sub>v</sub> sha* includes diffuse, impersonal and also bi-sexual aspects, as well as that made explicit in the appellation "all-powerful Father".

6. Ha! You who hold in your hands eternal merit, three times in one day, three times in one night, once again search [for merit to bestow upon us], oh you who search for, you who create and you who bestow [merit upon us].
7. You up there, the all-true, the all-powerful Divine Father, [grant us that] within the four corners of this village there be no troubled thoughts, [grant that] every person, the big and the small, may enjoy good health and prosperity, untroubled thoughts.

### 9. Concluding Comment

Against the ethnographic background of the Lahu hill people, and particularly of the Lahu Nyi, or Red Lahu, division of this ethnic group, my paper has recorded the process by which a Lahu Nyi village community relocates.

Since it has been my primary purpose to preserve and make available to other researchers the texts of prayers related to this process, a quick review of these texts may be in order here. They were :

- I. to the locality spirit, requesting permission to use its property for a new village
- II. to the guardian spirit of the old village, telling it about the intended move
- III, IV. to the locality spirit, requesting approval for the choice of house site
- V. to the house spirit, inviting it to move into the new house
- VI. to *G'ui sha*, the supreme supernatural being, dedicating the village temple.

Besides contributing a little to the ethnography of village settlement in highland Southeast Asia, I hope this paper has also given the reader a sense of the content and style of Lahu Nyi ritual poetry.

I shall be glad to hear from anyone who has comments or corrections to offer on any of the material (descriptive, interpretive or linguistic) which appears in this paper.

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1. Lahu Nyi village
2. House complex : dwelling (right, back); chicken hut (in front of dwelling);  
pig sty (right, front); grain pounder (front); granary (left)
3. House interior
4. *Haw' yeh*, or village temple
5. Grain pounder
6. Chicken hut





7. A main house support
8. Preparing hole for house support
9. Erecting main house supports
10. Laying split bamboo flooring
11. Thatching roof
12. Preparing *leh-o* or spirit guard



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