

# RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN A HILL KAREN COMMUNITY OF NORTHWESTERN CHIANG MAI PROVINCE

KUMIKO YAMAMOTO

DAITO BUNKA UNIVERSITY  
HIGASHIMATSUYAMA-SHI, SAITAMA-KEN 335, JAPAN

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is primarily concerned with describing the conceptual universe and ritual which is the basis of social behavior and governs various communal and individual activities of Sgaw Karen life in Northwestern Chiang Mai Province in Thailand.

Among supernatural beings, two, *M̄x̄ xa:* and *Kɔ: k' ca:*, are discussed in detail here because they are regarded by the Karen as the two greatest competitive Supreme Beings. *M̄x̄ xa:* is believed to be the ethnical Guardian Deity, for whose ritual management the female head of household is responsible; *Kɔ: k' ca:* is the highest-ranked territorial deity, who is ritually contacted by males and governs the surroundings of the village—the focus of male activities in traditional Karen life. *M̄x̄ xa:* and its rite are inherited through the maternal lineage and serve to institutionalize Karen society in terms of marriage, while *Kɔ: k' ca:* is inherited through the paternal lineage and regulates all traditional male activities, as well as succession to the office of headman, under whose management the village functions as the largest social unit of the Karen.

The religious rites and conduct have changed significantly during the last several decades in the research area, particularly in the world of *Kɔ: k' ca:*—the male domain—influenced by the processes of sedentarization and deforestation. These behavioral changes are presented in this paper to shed some light on Karen religious change.

## II. BACKGROUND DATA

Karen in Me kha pu community,<sup>1</sup> where this research was conducted, believe that their ancestors moved there about two hundred years ago (1785-95), coming originally from the source of the Salween river in Burma. Their main occupations were hunting and swidden cultivation, and their settlement was frequently moved when fields were shifted.

Wet-rice cultivation is estimated to have been initiated approximately 120 years ago (1865-70), beginning a new stage in Karen life. The construction of wet-rice fields accelerated their sedentarization and encouraged the establishment of permanent ownership of the land used for wet-rice fields. Buffaloes and cows, which were introduced along with wet-rice cultivation, were raised by men and subsequently became their valuable property (cf. IV-B-1). Most of the present headmen in the community can trace their genealogy back to one of the wet-rice field founders.

During the last fifty years, other ethnic groups such as Meo and Thai immigrated into the area around the community. Because of the increase in population, the decline of natural resources occurred first with water and second with wild animals and plants. Scarcity of available land caused the interval of field rotation in swidden cultivation to be shortened, and also the area of the wet-rice field owned by individual households to be reduced through inheritance.

During the last decade the Karen have become more and more involved in contacts with other ethnic groups, not only through the recent change to a cash economy but also through the Thai governmental administration. Nowadays the migratory life style survives only in the custom of frequent rebuilding of their bamboo houses in the villages (cf. III-D-5).

### III. THE REALMS OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

#### A. Guardian Deity, *Mw xa*:

According to folktales (Yoshimatsu 1989), *Mw xa* is the supernatural being who succeeded the Creator-God, *Zwa*,<sup>2</sup> as caretaker of the Karen. In return, *Mw xa* requires to be fed with pigs and chickens. The feeding ritual is called *ɔ xɛ*, synonymous with the Karen religion, and considered by many scholars as a belief unique to Karen (Iijima 1971, 1979; Marshall 1922; Mischung 1980).

This Guardian Deity, in its place of existence on the way between the worlds of the dead and the living, serves as presider over birth; that is, has responsibility for those going out of the realm of the dead into the realm of the living. Anyone who wants to go out must notify the Deity, before leaving, not only of the length and the purpose of the stay but also of the prospective way of making a living in this world. The Deity writes a life span given by each on the fontanel of the head, though it is invisible to mortals. The moment of expiration is the time of return to the world of the dead.

Thus, the Karen conceptualize the world into two realms: this sphere and the other sphere, both of which are connected by a long journey. 'Departure' in the other world means 'birth' to this world, 'death' in this world means 'return' to the other world. The original home, therefore, is the realm of the dead, residents of which go out to the human world for various reasons. However, after expiration of the life span signed by the Deity on the fontanel, all, without any exception, must go back to the original world.

The original world is believed to be the reverse of the human world; the sun and the moon rise from the west and set in the east, trees grow upside down, and rivers flow from the mouth to the source.<sup>3</sup> The ways of living are, however, the same as those of the human world, which is symbolically demonstrated by funeral offerings.

Although all humans are supposed to come back to the realm of the dead immediately after death in this world, some are unwillingly left behind in the human world and became malicious spirits which devour human beings. These are individuals who have met accidental death and died before the date of return expected by the Deity, which includes those who die a violent death, usually accompanied by bloodshed; also included are miscarried babies. They are not allowed to come back until the stated time of their return comes. During the waiting period they must find food in this world by attacking human beings.

It is believed that only a soul (*k' la:*) can gain access to both realms of the Karen world. One Karen is inhabited by 37 souls,<sup>4</sup> among which one original soul leads the rest. The original soul is identified as a human-like being living in the other sphere; when it intends to be born as a human being, it must call on and inform the Guardian Deity of its departure through birth into this world. After birth, it resides on the fontanel of a person, and the other 36 souls inhabit the body. The original soul in this world is identified with personality;

that is, it stays on the fontanel of the owner as long as the owner lives in this world.

The other 36 souls are in pairs, each of which is made up of animal components.<sup>5</sup> Though all of the 18 pairs are supposed to stay with the original soul in their owner's body, they are fond of wandering about and easily leave the body, sometimes being caught by malicious spirits or getting lost on the way; they may freely trespass between the boundary of the two realms. Since their absence causes sickness in their owner, the main concern of Karen curing is to call back these souls and tie them to the owner's body.

The original souls in the realm of the dead sometimes contact human beings in this world through dreams. Some of the original souls come to ask permission in advance from future parents before being born into this world. Not only before going out (birth) but also after coming back (death), the original souls in the realm of the dead can stay in contact with the living. The parents can demand to be fed by their children on behalf of the Deity not only while living in this world but also after returning to the realm of the dead. The rite of feeding the parents is called *ɔ xɛ*, a ritual unique to the Karen.

#### B. The *ɔ xɛ* ritual for the Guardian Deity

##### 1. Residential Pattern

Before discussing the *ɔ xɛ* ritual,<sup>6</sup> the residential pattern of the Karen must be explained, because a house serves as the ritual center for the rite.

A wedding ceremony is held in the bride's village. The groom moves into her village and is obliged to live in her parental house for at least one year after marriage. Though the couple is free to select any site they prefer at the end of this period, they usually build the house close to that of the wife's parents. The parents may live with the youngest daughter and her husband for their lifetime after elder children move out.

Though not all of the husbands live in their wives' villages, about eight out of ten women in the community live in their parental villages after marriage. The Karen residential patterns, therefore, can be roughly classified into matrilineal residence. This residential pattern facilitates the performance of the rite.

##### 2. Concept

The *ɔ xɛ* is the ritual performed by a married couple to commune with their parents on behalf of the Guardian Deity. The primary unit for the ritual performance is a nuclear family, though it may be enlarged by the maternal descendants (cf. participants). In the rite, three supernatural beings are involved; the Deity, the parental original souls, and the spirits named *na:ci:si:na:ci:thɔ*,<sup>7</sup> which spirits are regarded as dependents of the Deity and described as greedy, hungry spiritual beings incessantly importuning the Deity for food.

Because of the badgering by these malicious spirits for food, the Deity orders the original souls of parents to

collect food from their children. To satisfy the request, the parental souls unwillingly make one of their descendants sick to inform their married children of the demand. The food obtained from the children is passed on by the parental souls to the Deity, who feeds the malicious spirits with it.

The addressees in a rite, however, differ, depending upon whether the parents are alive or not. In case of no living parents, a small amount of the food, which is regarded as the ritual offering that the deceased parents carry back with them, is placed on the floor, and the performing child addresses in prayer the original souls of the parents, together with the Deity and the malicious spirits. When the parents are still alive, the ritual offering is eaten by both parents, and they pray to their own original souls, which serve to contact the Deity for the performing child's sake, together with the other two supernatural beings. If only one parent is alive, half of the food is eaten by that living parent, and the rest is placed on the floor as the share of the deceased one. Then the living parent prays to his/her own original soul and the deceased spouse's soul (both of which work as intermediaries for the performing child), as well as to the other two.

The family members to whom the parents can send a 'message' through sickness are, basically, the members of the nuclear family of each of their married children; that is, their child, their child's spouse, and their child's unmarried children.<sup>8</sup> Though the rite has bilateral attributes—since it can be performed by either a wife or a husband with her/his own parents—it predominantly shows the significance of the female side with regard to participants, ritual place, sacrificial animals, and priority of performance.

The participants in the rite expand along the matrilineage, because all children are regarded as belonging not to the father, but to the mother. Children's spouses and sons' children are accordingly excluded from the rite. Thus, the practice of matrilocal residence can be considered related, in some respects, to performance of the rite. In order to observe the practices of the rite, in addition to matrilocality, sons should live in adjacent villages, which in fact is a common practice among Karen men.

If the performing couple does not have any living parents, the attendants at the rite include the couple, all their sons, all their daughters (accompanying their children), and all their daughters' daughters (accompanying their children), and so on. If the performing couple has living parents, the wife/husband invites her/his own parents, who perform the role of intermediaries, in addition to the members as listed above.

The rite is performed in the house of the responsible couple, and the house, along with the fireplace and the cooking utensils, in and by which ritual communing and contact are carried out, is definitely identified with the wife and is densely surrounded with rules of the rite. It is also destroyed after the owner (wife) dies. Karen men, therefore, often comment on the rite as identified with the 'house spirit,' for which their wives are responsible.

A newly-married couple first buys one chicken and one pig, which are specified only for ritual use and which

must be replaced by one of the animal's female offspring after the parental one is sacrificed in the rite. The chicken and pig 'marked' as sacrificial are regarded as the wife's belongings and are served only at her rite, while the husband may sacrifice any chicken or pig at his rite. These 'marked' animals are surrounded by as many regulations as the house is, and after the wife's death they are killed to accompany her to the realm of the dead.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the wife at all times performs the rite prior to the husband. There are four forms of the rite, which lasts from one to four nights. In any of them, the wife must precede the husband, and the sacrifice of a chicken must precede that of a pig. In addition, both members of the couple must take part in the course of the rite in the case that the 'marked' pig is sacrificed. The four forms are as follows: 1) the sacrifice of a chicken by a wife (one night), 2) the sacrifice of a chicken by a wife and by a husband (two nights), 3) the sacrifice of a chicken and a pig by a wife and of a chicken by a husband (three nights), 4) the sacrifices of a chicken and of a pig by a wife and also by a husband (four nights.).

A Karen man and a woman are qualified to perform the rite after establishing their own household through marriage; they acquire the primary ritual body (a nuclear family), the representative of which is the wife, after marriage. The practice of the rite is, as already mentioned, predominantly governed by the wife; however, the ritual contact (prayer) is usually made by the husband, and the husband is the one who eats first among the family members in the ritual communion (cf. III-B-3).

The wife and the husband at the same time belong to their respective mothers, as children. The man thus affiliates to two different groups—that of his wife and that of his mother—due to the ritual representation of the woman, though the priority is naturally given to his own household: that is, the group of his wife.

### 3. Procedures

Due to the sacrifice to the ethnic Guardian Deity, the ritual serves to preserve Karen tradition, stressed in the form of wearing Karen dress, cooking Karen curry, using Karen cooking utensils, etc.

The following is a description of a sacrifice of a pig by a wife performed by a couple without living parents:

- 1) The wife cooks rice.
- 2) Outside the house, the wife holds the hind legs of her 'marked' pig and the husband slaughters it.
- 3) The husband brings the pig inside the family room and prays to the three supernatural beings (cf. III-B-2).
- 4) Taking the pig outside again, the husband removes the intestines, which the wife cleans, and then burns off the hair on the fire.
- 5) Coming back into the room, the father cuts the pig into large pieces.
- 6) The wife cooks the pig in a curry.
- 7) The wife prepares the table with the pig's head in the middle and rice around it.



Fig. 1 Commune in the  $\alpha$ :  $x\epsilon$  rite. 3. Procedures, 8).

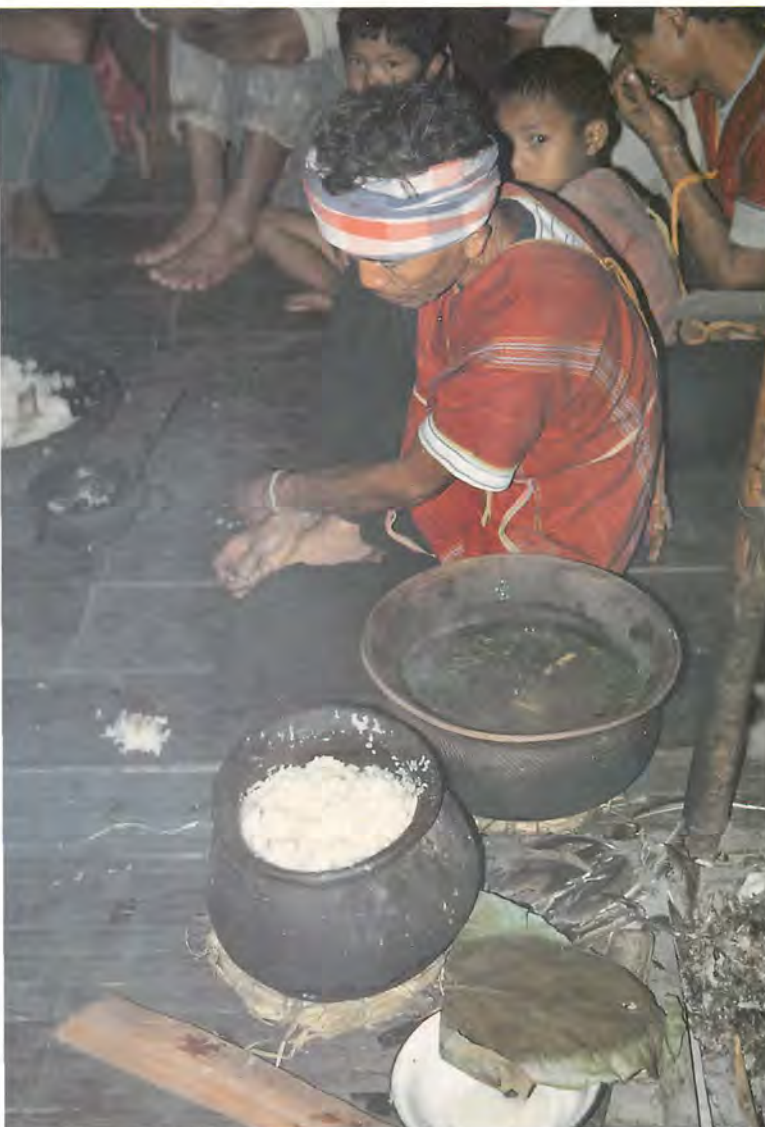


Fig. 2 Prayer in the  $\alpha$ :  $x\epsilon$  rite. 3. Procedures, 9).

- 8) The husband eats a small piece of pork and rice on the table, followed by the wife; then the children, from the eldest to the youngest, eat one after another. Grandchildren immediately follow their mothers from the eldest to the youngest as well.
- 9) After everybody eats, the husband places a piece of pork and rice on the floor, praying to the three supernatural beings.

There are, however, minor variations of the rites among the performing couples. The range of variation occurs because of the inheritance system of the rite. After marriage, a wife and a husband must make a decision as to what form her/his first rite will take. This form will then be followed in all future performances. When the couple establishes the forms, generally the wife succeeds to her mother's mode, and the husband to his father's. Each of their children, however, can inherit a mixed mode from their parents, by "choosing" procedural steps according to her/his preference. It is a common observation among the informants that the procedure of the rite has become easier and simpler as it has passed down through generations. Compared with the rites in other areas (Marshall 1922 : 248-54, Iijima 1979 : 107-112, Mischung 1980 : 82-84), the rites in this community place less stress on matrilineage and are more oriented towards a nuclear family.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Reasons for the Performance

##### a. At the Deity's request

Sickness and dreams are means by which the Deity notifies human beings of its demands. Lingering or serious illness is always a matter for consultation with a religious specialist, who decides the course of the rite by chicken-bone or rice-seed divination.

In addition, there is a 'vowed' rite. While the illness is occurring, one member of the responsible couple promises to hold a rite, asking the Deity to cure the patient or to put an end to the disturbance on the basis of a promised rite. After the patient is healed, the couple must perform the rite.

In the case of a request by the Deity, more than a two-day performance, including both that of the wife and of the husband, is required.

##### b. Troubles among the 'marked' animals

The Karen believe that abnormal behavior among domestic animals brings calamity upon the owner such as accidents in the forest, and that to avoid such calamity the owner must kill the 'misbehaving' animals. 'Misbehavior' includes such things as a crowing hen, false mating between animals of the same sex, delivery of either only female or only male offspring in animals which normally deliver multiple offspring, etc.

Killing an 'unmarked' animal which 'misbehaves' does not require any accompanying rite, but in the event of a 'misbehaving' 'marked' animal being killed, the family is necessarily expected to conduct the rite in order to avoid giving offense to the Deity. In the case of the 'marked' chicken, a one-day performance by the wife is satisfactory, while in the

case of the 'marked' pig, three days are required due to the rule of priority with regard to performance of the rite.

### c. Integration into the family

When a new element relative to the rite is introduced, a responsible couple should inform the Deity of its joining. These include a new stock of 'marked' animals, a new house, and a newborn baby.

If the stock of 'marked' chickens or pigs should die out, the couple must perform the rite integrating a new stock of the same kind into their family by making them ritually 'old.' In the case of the chicken, two days of the rite are performed, while in the case of the pig a full four-day rite is usually required, though a two-day performance can be substituted for it, with some restrictions.

One rule is introduced here for further clarification: because all children are affiliated with the mother, the mother is identified as the origin of the family and must ritually precede her children. However, since all the rites, except those caused by troubles among 'marked' chickens, require the husband's participation along with the wife's, the mother's ritual priority is, more exactly labeled, parental ritual priority, represented by the mother, over the children. When any new element is introduced, none of her children can perform the rite relating to it before the parents integrate it into the family or at least perform a rite containing it.

Therefore, in the case of the substitution of a two-day performance at the time the 'marked' pigs die out, the children are all restricted to only the chicken rite unless the parents perform any course of the pig rite.

When a couple builds a new house, they must perform the rite making a house 'old,' which is composed of two steps: a rite in the old house before it is destroyed and another rite in the new house after moving in. The rite to make the house 'old' serves to notify the Deity of a move, since the house is regarded as a ritual place to which the couple invites the Deity, together with the parental souls and the malicious spirits in the rite. Without this rite, neither wife nor husband is qualified to perform or attend any rite including that of their parents.

Because of the children's affiliation with the mother and the house being the wife's property, in the case of the wife's parents being alive it is they who must perform the rite for ritual integration of their daughter's new house before she performs the rite in her own house. It must be pointed out, however, that no one other than the wife's parents is allowed to perform the rite for the daughter; that is, even her maternal grandmother is definitely prohibited from taking any part in her granddaughter's rite, though the granddaughter is always required to attend the grandmother's rite.

The Karen rite can regulate the descendants expanding along matrilineage by means of religious obligations, but can never ascend backwards to more than the direct ancestors—the parents—of the performing couple regardless of lineage.<sup>11</sup>

A two-day performance of each step of the rite is said to be satisfactory to make the house 'old.' In case the

parents build a new house, however, none of children can perform the pig rite before the parents perform the rite containing it in their new house, as stated above.

The rite to make the house 'old' sometimes involves several families, due to combinations of the rules: disqualification of attendants, the house being the wife's property, the wife's priority over the husband, and the parental priority over the children in performing the rite. Such a rite can happen as follows: a couple wants to conduct their rite for any purpose and calls all their children to it; one of their married sons has just built a new house and hasn't finished a rite to make the house 'old' in that house yet, so that he is not qualified to attend the rite at his parental house; to perform the rite to make the house 'old,' the performance of his wife must be prior to his, and if one of her parents is still alive, that parent integrates the daughter's new house in her/his rite; if, in turn, one of the married sons has not yet finished a rite to make the house 'old' in a new house, it is repeated over again.

When a baby is born, the couple must perform the rite to make the baby 'old.' If the new mother's parents are still alive, they must perform the rite before their daughter does, due to the baby's belonging to the daughter and because of the ritual parental priority. Maternal grandparents, however, never take any part in the integration of their granddaughter's new-born baby, since the rite never ascends backwards to more than the parents of the performing couple as stated above. The two-day chicken rite is required for the rite to make the baby 'old.'

## 5. Offenses Against the Guardian Deity

The Deity's wrath is believed to result in a prolonged sickness of a person in the offending family, or a new disease or insanity in one of the members of the rite; at worst, in death. The major offenses can be classified into four groups:

The most serious offense is concerned with the 'marked' animals. Selling or killing them without performing the rite or for other purposes is believed to be an inexcusable offense.

Secondly, it is an absolute requirement that all the procedures involved in the rite be observed in step-by-step order. The ritual order based on genealogical seniority is believed to be inviolable. While a newly-married couple has a chance to make minor changes at the time they inherit the rite, once they set their forms for it they must follow these established steps all their lives without any innovation or modification.

Thirdly, the observation of the rules must begin immediately after the couple decides to perform the rite. Any change of the schedule is believed to arouse the Deity's outrage.

Lastly, the Deity is seriously offended by ritual sharing between different households (with a few exceptions, in case of a mother and her daughters; see below). Because the house, along with a fireplace and cooking utensils, is regarded as belonging to the wife, a daughter-in-law is not allowed to share it with her mother-in-law; that is, the two different ritual managers must not perform the rite in the same ritual place.

Though daughters may temporarily or permanently stay in their parental house, their ritual sharing is restricted to a minimum by various rules, as follows :

The eldest daughter, who is expected to marry first among sisters, may share the fireplace and cooking utensils with her mother, in accordance with the genealogical seniority of the rite.<sup>12</sup> When the second daughter marries and is staying with her parents (even after the eldest daughter's period of residence ends and she has moved out of the house), the second daughter must build her own fireplace inside the family-room and obtain her own cooking utensils in order to be eligible to perform the rite for her own family. Then, because no more than two fireplaces are allowed in one house, when the third daughter marries, the parents must build a new house (effectively 'erasing' all previous ritual ties, including the sharing of the fireplace and cooking utensils with the eldest daughter). In the new house, the second daughter will share the main fireplace with her mother and the third daughter will make her own fireplace. However, if the mother continues to use the old cooking utensils she shared with the eldest daughter (in the old house), no other daughter can use them in their rites.

When the fourth daughter marries, the parents must again build a new house to avoid ritual sharing between the two households of the daughters, and one of the elder sisters is obliged to move out. Thus, the rite anticipates frequent rebuilding of the house (cf. II) and also functions to break the Karen into more nuclear families, rather than binding them into matrilineal extended families.

During the past five or six years the Karen in the community began to build permanent wooden houses instead of their traditional bamboo huts that are easily rebuilt. This is certainly going to lead to revision of the rite in the near future.

### C. Incest Taboo

The rite also regulates the incest taboo on marriage. It concerns itself with the kinship members up to second cousins. Marriage between the participants of the rite within four generations (the parents, their children, their daughters' children, and their daughters' daughters' children) is strictly prohibited, for these are considered as being of the same blood group.

The second group forbidden to intermarry consists of those whose parents attend the same rite, though they are no longer participants in it: the sons' children and the daughters' children do not intermarry; the sons' children of the third generation do not; the daughters' daughters' children and the daughter' sons' children do not intermarry; the daughters' sons' children in the fourth generation do not. Marriage among any of these is considered as inappropriate, for they are too close in the blood relationship, all of their parents belonging to the same members of the rite.

The third prohibited group is composed of those whose parents do not join the same members of the rite, even though their grandparents attend that rite: the daughters' children's children and the sons' children's children may not

intermarry; the sons' children's children may not. Marriage among these, however, is possible on condition that the prospective husband can be recognized as senior in their lineage ; otherwise, it is contrary to the order of participation in the rite, in which the husband eats prior to the wife (cf. III-B-3).

In short, the Karen define the relatives in the 'second degree' as those who are no longer included among the members of the rite, even though their parents attend. The Karen accept marriage among relatives in the 'third degree'—the children of those in the 'second degree'—on condition that the man is genealogically older than the woman.

Though this is the traditional incest taboo on marriage, it was admitted by the informants that the rules are becoming less strict as they are passed down through generations.<sup>13</sup> They explain that nowadays the young no longer fear the wrath of the Deity. Where incest is concerned, the 'penalty' can be barrenness of the couple, incessant sickness, or death in the family.

It is possible that—although it falls under the jurisdiction of the other Supreme Being (*Ko: k' ca:*)—the recent increase in the amount of pre-marital sexual intercourse may be leading to violation of the incest taboo among the young, because a young couple whose pre-marital sexual relationship was exposed is definitely expected by villagers to marry in order to make them a 'legitimate' couple in the society, regardless of their kinship (cf. IV-D).

## IV. THE TERRITORIAL DEITIES

### A. Territorial Spiritual 'Owners,' *K' ca* :

#### 1. Concepts

*K' ca:*, translated as "owner," can be divided into several groups according to the place which is owned: sky, ground, mountains and rivers. The first two are singular, as there is only one sky and ground in the world, to which not so much importance is attached in the Karen cosmology. Every mountain and river is believed, however, to be inhabited by its own spiritual owner. These 'mountain-owners' and 'river-owners' are all governed by the higher-ranked regional owners of their respective areas. A regional owner stays over every river-source and is superior to both the mountain-owner who inhabits the mountain in which the source is located and the river-owner who dwells in a river which originates from the same source.

These regional owners are all grouped under the Supreme regional owner (*Ko: k' ca:*).<sup>14</sup> The villagers consider a basin, together with the mountains surrounding it, as one "territory" or "country," which is inhabited by only one Supreme 'regional owner' who governs all other smaller 'regional owners' in its territory. The Supreme 'regional owner' stays over the largest river source, which is often considered to originate in the highest mountain in the territory. Each territory is given a name derived from its Supreme 'regional owner.'

Ritual contact with these 'owners' is limited to adult males; the rites are principally held by the male head of household (husband). All the villagers are, however, organized into the village-wide rites on behalf of the 'owners' by the headman, who is the patriarch of all the residents of his village.

## 2. Characteristics

The Supreme 'owner' is not the absolute deity but rather the spiritual pre-habitan of a territory; each of these is believed to have its own distinct character. The first arrivals in any basin and valley, therefore, must find out the disposition of the Supreme 'owner' of the territory through chicken-bone divination, especially in regard to the village-wide rites performed twice a year to win its good will.<sup>15</sup> The headman is the chief priest of the rites.

Being a territorial deity, the Supreme 'owner' governs and influences all the 'residents' in its territory. These include, in addition to human beings, animals, plants, natural things (e.g. rocks, soil, sand) and natural phenomena. Before moving out of or into the territory, it is obligatory to inform the Supreme 'owners' in the two territories concerned, in which the cases of marriage, of purchasing large domestic animals, or of going hunting into another territory are included.

Among the things which fall under the divine protection of the various 'owners', represented by the Supreme 'owner,' what concern the Karen above all are safety and food supply. It is believed that the 'owners' protect human beings from danger, especially in the forest, as long as humans worship them properly.

Although it includes game and edible plants obtained from the forest, the food supply is now predominantly connected with agriculture. All the annual ceremonies relating to cultivation emphasize asking divine protection of the 'owners' by making offerings to the Supreme 'owner' along with all other owners.

The most elaborate rite performed by an individual family in order to ask for the divine protection of the Supreme 'owner' is called *lō ta* .:

## B. The *lō ta*: Rite for the 'Owners.'

*Lō ta* : is an annual sacrificial rite originally held in a dry-rice field by an individual household during the period between planting and harvest to win the good will of the 'owners' of the territory, by which the family's prosperity and welfare are assured.

### 1. Procedures

- a) The rite begins when the wife prepares for rice to be distilled into liquor.
- b) The morning of the rite, the husband builds an altar in the field, while the wife distills the liquor and cooks rice in the house.
- c) In the afternoon, the couple carries the offerings including liquor, rice and two chickens to the field.



Fig. 3 Prayer in the *lō ta*: rite. 1. Procedures, d).

- d) In the field, the husband puts the offerings on the altar and prays to the Supreme 'owners' along with other 'owners' not only of his territory but also of adjacent territories.
- e) The husband cuts the throats of the chickens and pours their blood on the altar, inviting all the 'owners' to come to have a feast.
- f) After cooking the chickens, the husband offers parts of the cooked chicken with the first scoop of rice, and prays to the 'owners' with liquor. (see next page.)
- g) After the prayer, the liquor is drunk by the husband, the wife, and the children from the eldest to the youngest.
- h) The family has a feast of chickens, rice and liquor in the field.
- i) Back at the altar after the feast, the husband prays to the 'owners' with liquor again, and the liquor is drunk up by all the family members from the husband and the wife to the children.

Though there is some minor variation, the basic offerings for these 'owners' are composed of liquor, rice and chickens.



Fig. 4 Offerings in the *lō ta*: rite. 1. Procedures, f).

Both rites for the Supreme 'owner' and for the Guardian Deity are characterized by a ritual communion of the family with the supernatural powers through offerings, but distinct differences in offerings can be observed.

Liquor is offered only for the Supreme 'owner.' The rice for the 'owner' should be the first scoop taken from the cooking pot before any human being eats. The sacrificial chickens for the 'owner' must be killed by cutting the throats, while those for the Guardian Deity must be strangled without any bloodshed. The 'owner' is pleased with blood, while the Deity is offended by it. The sacrificial chickens for the 'owner' must not be cut into pieces and be cooked without any ingredients, while those for the Deity should be cut into pieces, followed by a traditional cutting order.

During the prayer, the Karen man invites all the 'owners' that he can utter to enjoy the feast offered to them. The prayer usually goes from the Supreme 'owner' in his territory to others regardless of order. The Karen believe that the more 'owners' they invite, the more protection they can receive.

During prayer, all the attendants, including the wife and children, must press their palms together to express their worship to the 'owners.' The genealogically elder males,

however, do not necessarily press their palms together while a younger man prays, though women are all obligated to do so regardless of kinship due to their inaccessibility to these 'owners.'

The *lō ta*: rite for the Supreme 'owner' is greatly altered through the acquisition of the wet-rice field due to the Karen inheritance system based on dominant matrilineal residence.

A married couple is expected to own property jointly during their lifetime, though they clearly distinguish their shares and hold rights of disposition over them. Pigs and chickens are raised by women and regarded as female property, while elephants, buffaloes and cows are taken care of by men as their property (cf. II). After a wife's death, her house and her 'marked' chicken and pig are destroyed or killed in accordance with the rules of the Guardian Deity. In addition to these 'marked' animals, her chickens and pigs are all sold because of prohibition against their inheritance. Inheritable property, therefore, consists of large domestic animals and wet-rice fields.

Property is divided equally among all the children, though the child (usually the youngest daughter) who lives with the aged parents is given more than the others. At the



time of inheritance, daughters tend to receive the wet-rice fields, while sons receive the domestic animals, which can be explained by the dominant matrilineal residential pattern as well as the sexual distinctions between various types of property.

## 2. Shifts in Ritual Place

The qualification for inheriting the *lō ta*: rite of the dry-rice field is to be a married son who does not have an elder male relative of the paternal lineage in his village, because the 'elder' is expected to perform the rite prior to the 'younger,' and because the rite of the elder ritually covers those of the 'younger' of his lineage.

Most Karen men move out of their parental villages into their wives' villages after marriage and practice swidden cultivation in the mountains adjacent to their postmarital residence. Men in the generation of founders of wet-rice fields seldom lived with their 'elder' male relatives in the same villages, perhaps due to their highly migratory life styles (cf. II.) Most men at that time, accordingly, inherited the rites of the dry-rice field from their fathers and performed them in their own dry-rice fields.

The introduction of wet-rice cultivation, however, resulted in a shift of ritual place from dry-rice fields to wet-rice fields. The nature of the rite changed from migratory to sedentary along with the cultivation, and its rules of inheritance were gradually modified as well.

During the early period of wet-rice field construction, however, a shift in the place where the rite was performed did not always occur; rather, the founders of the wet-rice field performed duplicate rites at the irrigation dams (perhaps introduced along with wet-rice field construction<sup>16</sup>) in addition to those of the dry-rice fields. Then a shift in ritual place from dry-rice fields to wet-rice fields occurred.<sup>17</sup> The shift became more frequent as generations descended, and eventually, regardless of the place of the performance (dry-rice fields, wet-rice fields, or dams), all three came to be identified as the same kind of rite, and the performance of any one of them was considered as satisfactory to the ritual fulfillment.

Though the rite of the dry-rice field and of the wet-rice field has been always an individual family's rite (as the basic social unit for cultivation is a nuclear family), the rite at the dam sometimes involved a few households because they shared the river for irrigation. The ritual owner was the first man to construct the irrigation dam, following the tradition of showing respect for the first occupant in any area, and the other users participated in the rite together with him.

In addition, when the field was divided among the children on inheritance, plural households of the same lineage became involved in the performance of the rite. As a result, the traditional rules were necessarily revised (due to a sharing of the ritual place among siblings) into the current stipulation that, if brothers share the river for irrigation, only the eldest one was responsible for the inheritance of the rite, though all the siblings (or their male spouses) who share the dam are obligated to participate in it. This revision influ-

enced the rite of the wet-rice field to stress the importance of the eldest brother in the performance.

Though hardly any families practice the rite of the dry-rice field according to the original rules, it is generally accepted to be sufficient if the rite is inherited by at least one of the sons;<sup>18</sup> however, the elder brother is required to perform the rite prior to the younger brother if more than one of them is involved; significantly, the residential premise is now ignored, while the inheritance of the direct lineal descendant is emphasized more. According to the current version of the rules, if the eldest son inherits the rite, his younger brothers are all free from performing it regardless of their place of residence; on the other hand, if the youngest son inherits it, all his elder brothers are forced to perform the rite. Since the rite is for appeasing the Supreme 'owner,' if any of the brothers wishes to win its good will, he can start his own rite on condition that all his elder brothers perform the rite as well, though it is not always required that they perform the same kind.

## 3. Decline of the rite

Practice of the rite has declined sharply after the shift of ritual place from dry-rice fields to wet-rice fields (or dams).

While the rite of the dry-rice field was being practiced, a place of performance was available anywhere; that is, any field which was cleared for dry-rice cultivation in a mountain could be used. Men's postmarital residence, therefore, did not influence the practice of the rites (due to the migratory feature of the rite of the dry-rice field); a married son could take a rite after his father's death to his own residence (usually his wife's village) and perform it in his dry-rice field on behalf of his family (by asking for divine protection from the 'owners' in that area) with the assistance of his wife. No contradiction occurred when the founders of the wet-rice field moved the place of the performance from dry-rice fields to wet-rice fields; they performed the rites for the sake of their own families in the wet-rice fields of their own, as they had done previously.

However, after the founders divided the field among their children, the rite of the wet-rice field came to contradict the original feature of this rite as a family one. The parents tend to give the wet-rice fields to the children who live near them or to the last child who lives with them in their old age; most of these are left to daughters. These daughters are, however, not qualified to perform or inherit any rites relative to the 'owners' (because these 'owners' definitely fall within the male domain). It is the sons who must inherit the rites from their fathers.

On the other hand, due to the attribute of the wet-rice field as fixed property, the place of the performance has become sedentary, and subsequently has become regarded as hereditary, too. Inheritance of the rite by a son without his own field occurred as a result. For example, one elder brother came back to his parental village to perform the rite in a wet-rice field of one of his younger siblings, mostly of his sisters. Thus, the rite became no longer exclusive for one's own family.

However, because the rite originally prohibits any

ritual sharing between different households, the younger sisters are not allowed to assist the preparation and performance of their elder brother's rite. The rite could be continued in the siblings' generation but would seldom be carried out in the cousin's generations, the practice eventually becoming obsolete.

### C. The Headman, *zi: kho:*

#### 1. Outline

As indicated, *zi: kho:*<sup>19</sup> ("the original one of the village") is the first person that moves into a village site; that is, he is the one who makes the first contact with the 'owners,' represented by the Supreme 'owner.' Because of this, he is responsible for winning the good will of these 'owners,' under whose divine protection his followers' prosperity and welfare are assured during their stays in his village. Because migration provides a chance to re-establish the relationship between a headman and 'owners,' the rites relative to them may be revised through migration, especially when the headman comes to contact a new Supreme 'owner;' that is, moving into a new basin. The office of headman is considered as hereditary; the eldest son living in the village is expected to succeed his father.

The most significant task of the headman is related to the annual village-wide rites held twice a year in order to win the good will of the Supreme 'owner.' The headman settles the date for the rites and performs each preparatory step of the rite prior to the villagers. Furthermore, on the day of the rite, he prays with liquor for divine protection of the families in each house of his village in turn. The headman fills the role of binding all nuclear families of his village to one ritual body.

He is requested to attend all the wedding ceremonies in his village and inform the 'owner' of the groom's moving into the territory. In the case of a rite begging for forgiveness for illicit sexual intercourse, which is believed to be one of the most serious offenses against the Supreme 'owner,' it is the headman who is responsible for appeasing the 'owner' and for performing the rite.

He might be considered as a village priest, but for his service and work he is rewarded only with respect by the residents of his village, which is explained by the other qualification for the headman; that is, he must be genealogically the eldest male—the patriarch of the villagers.

Before discussing the installation of the headman, shifts of village sites in this community will be briefly explained. The Karen did not change their settlement unless they were forced to move by circumstances beyond their control: frequent deaths, epidemics, unborn or newborn babies' deaths,<sup>20</sup> sudden unnatural death, prevalent sicknesses, or their headman's death. Even before establishing the current permanent villages in the middle of the 1950's, they sometimes stayed on the same sites for from ten to twenty years. The number of the houses was, however, at most fifteen, and usually less than ten, which originated with one couple or a few couples who were allied by marriage. The

office of headman was administered by the male head of household or the eldest head if plural families were involved (generally the eldest brother). The number of houses in the village increased as the generations went down; the children and grandchildren married and built their own houses in the village, or new residents came from other villages.

The death of the headman led to a lineal breakdown into branches. Because in Karen society the nuclear family is the primary social unit, his death means the disappearance of the pivot of the lineage. The departure of the residents from the village followed; some joined another village, and some established their own village with a new headman—usually the son of the late headman. The dispersal of the villagers due to the death of a headman, however, has not occurred since the middle of the 1950's, when most of their village-wide migration ended.<sup>21</sup>

#### 2. Installation of the Headman

Based on the history of village migration in this community, the installation of the headmen can be classified into three types. The first type occurs at the time of death of a headman whose married sons live in the same village. The eldest son living in the village is expected to succeed to the office of headman, since the position is considered as hereditary. All of the residents of the village must move out of the village site in order to 'erase' the spiritual tie established between the late headman and the 'owners.' The son moves out with 'younger' relatives of his lineage (while the elder ones join other villages) because being the patriarch is one of the qualifications for establishing a village of his own. He usually moves into a new site and builds his own village under the new spiritual contact he establishes with the 'owners.'

The second type of installation occurs when the villagers move out of their village with the headman. If some residents believe that the 'owners' do not favor the headman or some of the other villagers, not all of them are willing to follow the headman. The dissidents move out of the village with their supporters and join another village or build a new one under their own patriarch, who will establish a new spiritual tie with the 'owners' in a new site. This type of migration was frequently found in this community.

The third type occurs when a household moves out of its original village and builds a house alone on a site which no one else occupies; then they invite some 'younger' relatives to live with them in their neighborhood. The head of the first family subsequently becomes the headman of the new village because he is the first one that contacts the 'owners' in the area.

Since their village-wide migration ceased in the middle of the 1950's, the qualification of patriarch for headman has been gradually revised and relaxed.

#### 3. Revision of the Qualification

The generation of the present senior headmen's fathers strictly followed the rule of patriarchy to build and

maintain villages.<sup>22</sup> Genealogical seniority was an indispensable consideration for the family planning to move into a different village; the rule was applied even for the first and second cousin's generations. A couple was not allowed to move into a village when the headman was 'younger' than they; that is, all four lineages—both the husband's and the wife's paternal and maternal lineage—were required to be taken into account.

The first relaxation of the rules occurred from the female side, because women were originally excluded from the domain of the 'owners.' They were from the beginning allowed to stay in the village regardless of their genealogical seniority to the headman; elder sisters could live in their younger brother's village. However, once they married, their husbands were recognized as 'elder' male relatives to the headman, and subsequently were excluded from his village together with their wives.

This type of seniority (established by marriage of the headman's female relatives) became the first rule that was relaxed; the headman's elder sisters' husbands are now not prohibited from living in his village (even though they are the headman's 'elder' brothers) due to female inaccessibility to the 'owners.' The seniority of the men who married elder sisters of the headman's wife lost its importance as well for the same reason.

Though the seniority of females (represented by their husbands) to their male relatives was no longer taken into account, the seniority of males to their female relatives (including their husbands) is still considered important. The elder brothers of the headman's wife are considered as 'elders' who must not be allowed to stay in his village, and the male cousins whose fathers are the elder brothers of the headman's mother are not accepted either.

At present, however, some of villagers give thought only to the seniority of the males in the paternal lineage of the headman. In this case, even an uncle who is a brother of the headman's mother can stay in the village.

Thus, interpretation of the patriarchy became varied among the villagers. In addition, some of them now attach more importance to the other qualification of the headman—first occupant of the village site. In the case of the installation of a new headman, they insist that the headman should be selected from the lineage of the second occupant's family if the first family does not have any eligible descendants. Thus, it is becoming more difficult to achieve a consensus about a 'legitimate' successor at the time of a headman's death. The authority of the headmen, as a result, is becoming weaker, and at worst, every family in the village could conceivably have a headman of its own whom they believe to be legitimate; the village would cease to function as a religious body.

#### D. Offenses Against 'Owners'

The 'owners,' represented by the Supreme 'owner,' are fond of refined manners; any kind of ill-mannered behavior by the residents, such as speaking indecent words or improper or immoral actions, offend them easily. They take

revenge on the offender by demonstrating their supernatural power or bringing natural disasters upon the offender.

In addition, the 'owners' strictly demand that creatures should stay just as they are; any human action suggesting delusion arouses their wrath. Among reported cases are those of people who teased wild animals by disguising them as other animals.

The 'owners' take revenge only on persons guilty of such misdeeds in principle. In the case of illicit sexual intercourse, however, their furious rage endangers all the residents of the village in which the sinful maiden lives, due to the Karen residential pattern. The headman of that village is responsible for performing a village-wide rite, at once to beg forgiveness and placate them, the Supreme 'owner' in particular, with the ritual sacrifice of one pig. Otherwise, all of the villagers are exposed to the danger of injury in the mountains.

The number of couples who have performed the rite to appease the wrath of the Supreme 'owner' has increased within the last fifty years. These days three out of ten married couples have experienced it, while in the headmen's generation, about one out of twenty performed the rite. It is possible that this increase may have caused earlier marriage among the younger generation<sup>23</sup> and also may have led to violation of the incest taboo regulated by the Guardian Deity, for marriage of the sinful couple is given the first priority in Karen society.

The *lō ta*: rite held by an individual family on behalf of the 'owners' must follow traditional step-by-step order just as the *o: xe*: rite for the Guardian Deity does. Any mistake in ceremonial procedures or an accident in a rite for the 'owners' requires repetition of the rite from the beginning.

The Supreme 'owner' is seriously offended by sharing (including that of ritual equipment) between households at the time of the preparation and performance of the *lō ta*: rite; the rite must strictly be managed by each household. Even sharing between the households of father and of son is prohibited; the son must inherit the rite from his father after the father's death. Sharing between father-in-law and son-in-law is, of course, tabooed; the son-in-law is not allowed to prepare or distill liquor to offer the 'owners' in the same house as his parent-in-law's, so he must build a new house in order to make preparation for his performance of the rite.

The Supreme 'owner' does not accept ritual sharing between different households even with the Guardian Deity. It is only between the husband and the wife that a bare balance between the two deities can be maintained, for the wife and the husband are the two powers, represented by the respective deities, in a single household.

The sharing between mother-in-law and son-in-law is accordingly prohibited, even if the father-in-law is freed from performing the *lō ta*: rite in accordance with its rules (cf. IV-B-2). If the son-in-law lives in his mother-in-law's house, he must move out of her house with his family and build a new house to perform his rite. The Supreme 'owner' and the Guardian Deity can by no means be reconciled in his mother-

in-law's house, because the Guardian Deity in that house is taken care of by the mother-in-law, whose household is different from that of the son-in-law. Distilling liquor in her fireplace—the fireplace of the different household—incur the wrath of both deities.

The prohibition against ritual sharing between households seems to be derived from the fact that the primary Karen social and religious unit is the nuclear family, or rather, the taboos concerning both deities accelerate the production of nuclear families by splitting both paternal and maternal lineage into branches.

The supernatural power of the Supreme 'owner' has greatly declined recently due to deforestation; some of the 'owners' simply disappeared because the sources of the rivers no longer exist. While the territory was densely covered by forest where dangerous wild animals wandered about, the 'owners' were feared and revered.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The Karen religion attaches importance to ritual communing with supernatural beings through which the Karen restore health or obtain safety and prosperity. The primary ritual unit of the performance is the nuclear family, because the prohibition against ritual sharing between households forces a split in the lineage into nuclear families and the establishment of their own households in order to acquire the primary ritual units for the practice of their religion.

Genealogical seniority is, however, another important factor in religious performances. Because the genealogical elders are given priority in the performance of the rites, the ritual units are sometimes enlarged secondarily along the lineage, which serves to strengthen the lineal ties among nuclear families.

Karen religion is characterized by its 'soberness'; that is, it never encourages the Karen to be 'enlightened' through trance or non-normal experience. Their religious knowledge must be obtained only through learning from a more knowledgeable elder person of the same lineage. Religious performance is conducted by repeating the instructed procedures without innovation. The 'first' of anything is accordingly given special recognition in the Karen world. However, the Karen are not totally bound to the 'first' performance of their ancestors, because they can 'start over' relatively easily and may revise the rites at the time of migration or of inheritance.

The Karen world was divided into two domains: the dwelling and its surroundings. Based on the division of labor, the men dealt with supernatural beings which governed the surroundings, while the women managed those of the dwelling (lineage). Because the male domain was still of a much more migratory nature than that of the female, the spiritual world of the men has been losing its footing in the process of deforestation and sedentarization.

The supernatural pre-habitants of the surroundings are believed to own certain divisions of nature. Since the Karen divide territory into basins along with their surrounding mountains, the 'owner' of the largest river-source in the

territory is considered as the Supreme regional 'owner,' with whom the villagers must concern themselves most. The Supreme 'owner' is responsible for all the residents in its territory, and what the Karen are concerned with above all is its powers to provide food and to assure safety in the territory.

The ritual communing with these 'owners' is performed by each household, and the rite is inherited from a father by his sons along the patrilineage. The annual periodic rites relative to cultivation are all conducted in order to ask for their divine protection. The *lō ta*: is the most elaborate rite held by an individual family on behalf of the Supreme 'owner.'

Acquisition of the wet-rice field has altered the performance of the *lō ta*: rite. When wet-rice fields were constructed, they began to shift the place of the performance from dry-rice fields to wet-rice fields. Due to the wet-rice field being fixed property, the sacrificial place of the rite became hereditary, while the fields tended to be divided among daughters who stayed near their parents. As a result, performance of the rite without a field occurred after inheritance. This rite was altered into a rite held not for one's own family but for another's, and the practice of the rite is gradually disappearing.

The headman is the first male occupant that made contact with the regional 'owner.' His tasks are to win and to maintain the good will of the 'owner' for the sake of his followers. Being the patriarch, he serves as priest to bind all the nuclear families of his village to one ritual body in the rites for the Supreme 'owner.' Sedentarization has influenced the office of headman as well.

While the Karen lived a migratory life, the authority of the headman was always established through the 'reshuffling' of members at the time of migration. However, establishment of permanent village sites made it extremely difficult to select an 'authentic' successor of the headman, particularly at the time of the headman's death. The patriarchy, which used to be examined from both sides of the lineage of a couple, is at present restricted only to the patrilineage of a new headman. The authority of the headman has, naturally, declined. At worst, failure to select a successor has resulted in the village ceasing to function as a ritual body; subsequently, each nuclear family was no longer bound to the extended family ties represented by the male.

The Karen divided the conceptual universe into two realms—this sphere and the other sphere, which are connected by a long journey. The other sphere is considered as the original home, from which they depart through birth and to which they return after death. The original soul, which is identified with a person, is believed to move back and forth between the two realms together with the other 36 souls as its followers. In the other sphere, the Guardian Deity, who presides over departure, is notified of the length and the purpose of the stay in the human world by each original soul.

The Guardian Deity is also recognized as having become caretaker of the Karen after the Creator-God left the world, and in return the Deity was rewarded by being fed with pigs and chickens in the feeding ritual called *ɔ: xe:*. The

o: *xε*: rite is characterized by ritually communing with the Deity with parental original souls as intermediaries.

Though the rite is performed by either a wife or a husband, importance is predominantly attached to the wife. The sacrificial animals, the ritual place (house) and the participants (children) are all identified as the wife's belongings. The participants are therefore extended along the matrilineage after the children marry. In addition, the wife is always given priority over the husband in the performance of the rite.

Due to the role of parents as intermediaries and because of their priority over the children in the performance, the rite serves to strengthen the tie between parents and married children. Since the participants in the same rite are regarded as the same blood group, the rite provides an incest taboo regulating marriage. The world of the Guardian Deity, symbolized by women, still maintains its spiritual power because of its less migratory feature.

## ENDNOTES

1. The community is located in Bo Keo Sub-district, Samuang District, northwestern Chiang Mai Province. It is in a small basin and valley, at an altitude of approximately 1,000-1,100 meters above sea level. The research was conducted by the author for fourteen months in 1987 and 1988. This paper is based on "The Karen World," submitted to the National Research Council of Thailand as a final research report.

2. The sound /y/ changed into /z/ among the Karen in this community. *Zwa*: is a synonym of *Ywa*, who was identified by the early Baptist missionaries in the 19th century with the Creator-God Yahveh in the book of Genesis (Ota 1959 : 61-63).

3. All of these are chanted in one of the Karen funeral songs named *tha: ne: mu:* ("pointing at the sun"). This song is widely spread among Sgaw Karen (Marshall 1921 : 197-98, Mischung 1981 : 75-76).

4. The number of the souls reported varies among scholars : 32 by Kunstadter, Kesmanee and Pothi-art (1987 : 157) and 33 by Mischung (1980 : 57-58).

5. The components include "mouse," "bird," "pig," "cricket," "tiger," "dog," "monkey," "goat," "grasshopper," "butterfly," "snake," "bear," "chameleon," "lizard," "elephant," and "green bird." The remaining two are different according to sex: "white bird" and "flying squirrel" for men, "squirrel" and "civet cat" for women.

6. Though o : *xε* : is a synonym of o : *bwa*, the former stresses the communing within generations including the dead, and the latter emphasizes the communing among the living according to age in this community. Marshall reports that "Bgha (*bwa*)" is "the tutelary god of the family," and "each

family finds itself provided with a 'Bgha' of its own" (1922 : 248). Iijima describes the "bgha" as "ancestral spirits of kin groups called *dopuweh*; these groups perform the *oxe* (o: *xε*:) rites propitiating the "bgha" (1979 : 107). Mischung writes that "aü qui (o: *xε*:) or its synonym aü bga (o: *bwa*) means 'to eat jointly together (with the ancestors)' " (1980 : 82).

7. The spirits are unique to the Karen in this community, because to other Karen the deity who punishes the family members is referred as "Bgha" (cf. note 7); or some believe sickness is sent by a vengeful ancestor to a descendant (Mischung 1980 : 83-88).

8. However, sometimes, especially in the case of a lingering sickness, people believe that the 'message' may reach any of participants descending along the matrilineage regardless of their marital status.

9. The widower must build his own house and buy his own 'marked' animals to take the place of his deceased wife's and continue the practice of the rite; all of these are eventually destroyed at his death.

10. One example of this is as follows; the word "xeko," which indicates the leader of the rite who is the eldest female among the participants (Iijima 1979 : 110), is not used by the villagers in this community. They divide the rite into o: *xε*: *a mo* ("mother's rite") and o: *xε*: *a pa* ("father's rite"), each of which is performed and managed by the respective person.

11. The o: *xε*: rite is often defined as an ancestor cult (Keyes 1979 : 50; Iijima 1979 : 109-113; Marlowe 1979 : 173; Mischung 1980 : 101) [though Mischung points out that ritual contact is conducted with the direct ancestors—parents (1980 : 101)]. It must be noted that this is not, as least in this com-

munity, a precise definition of the rite, since here the rite functions to reinforce the relationship between the living parents and children (through the former serving as intermediaries) rather than that position ascending backwards in the genealogy.

12. If the younger daughter marries earlier than the elder ones and begins to use the main fireplace with her mother, none of the elder daughters is allowed to use any fireplace in the house, even to build a new one in the family-room, because it is contradictory to the order of participation in the rite.

13. Marlowe reports a bilateral incest taboo (which is equivalent to that reported by the middle-aged informants in this community) among the Karen in Chiang Mai Province (1979 : 178).

14. Marshall reports it as a lord of the water and land who rules over the lands of the earth and as superior to the spirits that preside over rivers and mountains (1922 : 225). Iijima describes it as a lord of water and land who stays just like ether in nature (1971 : 160). Mischung explains it as a 'mountain-owner' in the highest mountain.

15. The one is conducted at the beginning of the new year on the Karen lunar calendar, and the other occurs after the rice-transplanting but before the harvest. These are reported only among the Karen in Chiang Mai Province by Mischung (1980 : 127).

16. Methods for constructing wet-rice fields were learned from the Northern Thai, who held the rite for their spirits at the irrigation dams (Iijima 1971 : 136).

17. The informants gave a shorter distance to the village as their main reason for the shift.

18. In the current rules for the rites of wet-rice fields and dams, being married is no longer indispensable but only preferable as qualification. An unmarried son may inherit the rite if he is the only one that is available at his father's death.

19. The term is pronounced this way only by the Karen in this community and the adjacent areas. Most Sgaw Karen in other areas pronounce it as *i: kho:*.

20. Their souls become extremely dangerous spirits that bring death to human beings. They are believed to return to their villages after death, in which case no mortal can chase them away.

21. The informants explain it as being due to the fact that there is no longer an available site on which they can build a new village, because of overpopulation in the basin.

22. Kunstadter reports this rule as one reason for the instability of the Karen villages in the hills with respect to the spreading of the Karen population (1979 : 130).

23. Marriage above the age of fifty took the place of marriage in the early twenties and thirties. However, marriage below the age of thirty took place at the age of the late teens onward.

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