

Shi⁻ Nyi Lon⁻ : Great Merit Days among the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) of North Thailand

By

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INTRODUCTION

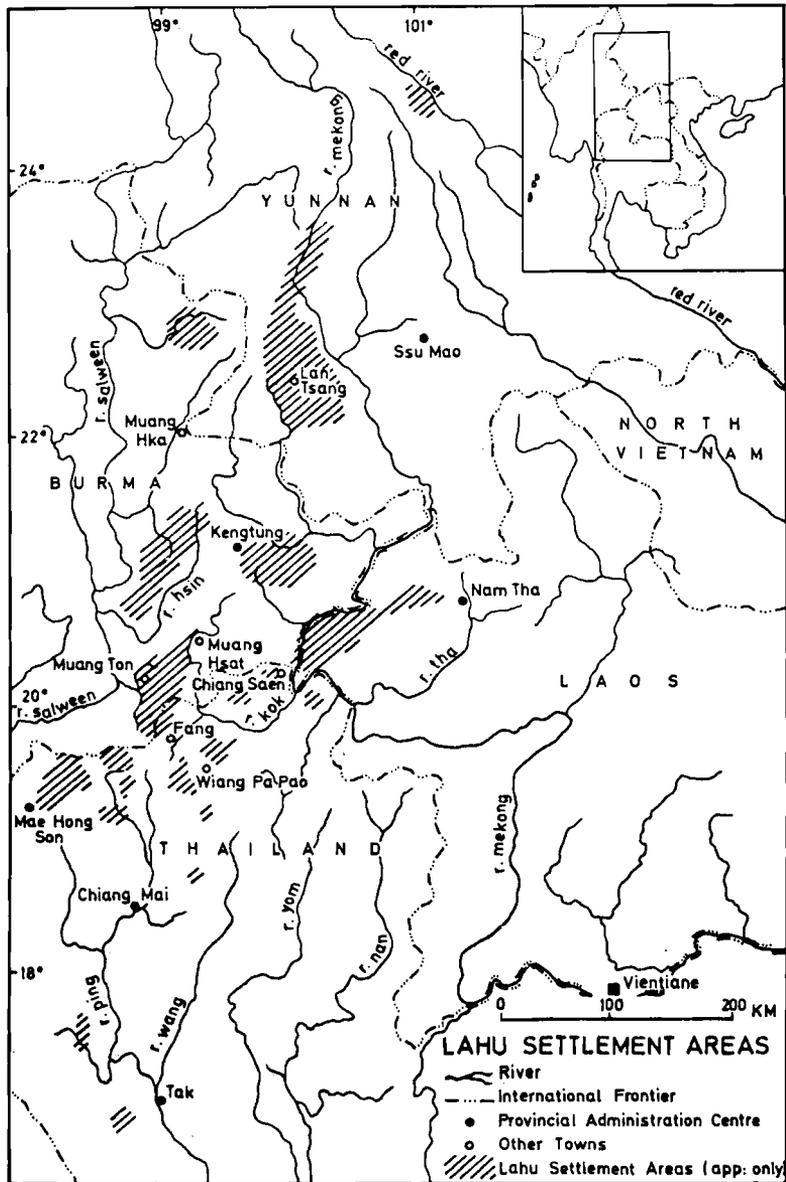
This article describes three major ritual occasions in the annual ceremonial cycle of the Lahu Nyi, or Red Lahu, hill people among whom I lived for a number of years in the late 1960s.¹ It also presents, both in the original and in translation, the texts of the prayers recited on such occasions.² The occasions in question are called *shi⁻ nyi lon⁻*³ or “great merit days.”

In a previous publication (Walker 1981b), I described in some detail the twice-monthly *shi⁻ nyi* or ordinary “merit days.” These days of the new and full moon are occasions when Lahu Nyi villagers make a special effort to restore good relations with the supernatural world, both by accumulating *aw₋ bon* “merit, blessings,” and by ridding themselves of *ve⁻ ba⁻* “demerit, sin.” At the same time, through ritual, these Lahu Nyi villagers reaffirm their village-wide communal identity and so modify, to some degree, the intense household orientation of everyday life.

In my previous paper I also noted that many of the ideas underlying the Lahu Nyi celebration of merit days can be traced to their lowland neighbors, the Theravada Buddhist Tai⁴ peoples. Nevertheless, both the Lahu ritual practices and their supporting ideology constitute a distinctively Lahu adaptation of Tai custom. The Lahu practices relating to the three “great merit days” are likewise much influenced by lowland Buddhist custom and, like the earlier-described *shi⁻ nyi* rites, provide a fascinating example of how non-Buddhist hill people in this part of northern Southeast Asia adopt and adapt aspects of the lowlanders’ Buddhist culture without necessarily themselves becoming

fully integrated into that culture.

The Lahu are one of many culturally distinct minority peoples inhabiting the rugged hill country where China's far southwestern province of Yunnan meets the Southeast Asian states of Burma and Laos, with Thailand only a few hundred kilometers away (see Map).



Originally located wholly in Yunnan (still their population center),⁵ some Lahu during the nineteenth century—if not earlier—began moving southwards into territories which are now part of Burma and Laos⁶ and, subsequently, into what is now the northern region of the kingdom of Thailand. The desire to escape imperial Chinese “pacification” measures directed at them as “barbarians” of the frontier regions, and a need for new farming lands, seem to have been the principal motives for the move (cf. Walker 1975a: 332–33; 1975b: 113–114).

Today there are some 37,500 Lahu living in Thailand, of whom about 48 per cent are Lahu Nyi or Red Lahu (Lewis and Lewis 1983: 4). These people are scattered through about 160 hill villages whose economic base is, for the most part, the shifting cultivation of a subsistence hill-rice crop and a number of cash crops, of which opium and chillies are probably the most important (cf. Walker 1976h).

Lahu Nyi villages are led by headmen called *hk'a sheh_hpa* “master” (*sheh_hpa*) “of the village” (*hk'a*), whose authority is supported or modified by that of the village elders and ritual practitioners. Such village communities are usually quite small, averaging only seventeen households per village. The average number of persons per household is just over six (Lewis and Lewis 1983: 13).

In Thailand the overwhelming majority of Lahu Nyi follow a traditional ideology of the supernatural world which includes belief in the existence of a great number of spirits, generically termed *ne*. Many of these are associated with natural phenomena such as hills, streams, sun, lightning and rainbow (cf. Walker 1977b: 63; 1976g: 437–438; 1976c: 167–168; 1977c: 212–213; 1977d: 227–229). Lahu Nyi do not regard such powers as invariably malicious but, because they are sure that nature spirits can attack people, they propitiate them either to prevent or to remove misfortune (cf. Walker 1976a for examples of prophylactic rites and 1977a for a remedial one). Other spirits have the capacity to guard people, their houses, their crops and their animals. Most important of these guardian spirits are the *yeh_ne* or house spirit (cf. Walker 1977e) and *G'ui_fu*, sometimes called *ne_lon* “the great spirit,” who is said to protect the village (cf. Walker 1981b: 668–669, n. 7). Other spirits important to these Lahu Nyi are those of the ancestors who have passed peacefully into the land of the dead (cf. Walker 1972b) and those of people who, because they suffered a “bad” (unnatural, violent) death, are thought always to be trying to bring others to the same miserable end (cf. Walker 1976a: 381).

Besides the spirits or *ne*, the Lahu Nyi believe in a supreme and creating divinity called *G'ui_sha* (etymology obscure, cf. Walker 1980d: 56, n. 12). Among the Lahu Nyi I studied, *G'ui_sha* is conceived

sometimes as an anthropomorphic deity, appropriately addressed in prayer as *A pa G'ui sha* "Father *G'ui sha*", and at other times as a category of supernatural being which embraces a number of named divinities like, for example, *Ai ma*, a goddess and creator of the earth (cf. Walker 1981b: 669 and n. 9).

The crucial ideological distinction which Lahu Nyi make between *G'ui sha* and the *ne* is reflected in the ritual organization of many villages, where the offices of priest and spirit specialist are quite distinct. Priests, of whom there are several grades (cf. Walker 1982b), mediate between the people and *G'ui sha*. The most important of these priests is called the *to bo pa* (probably, *to* from *aw to* "body" and *bo* from *aw bon* "meritorious," hence "meritorious body"; *pa* is the male suffix). His principal concern is to lead the villagers in worshipping *G'ui sha* in the village temple (cf. Walker 1981b: 671-79). The office of priest, of whatever grade, is always held in higher esteem than that of spirit specialist or *ne te sheh hpa* (*ne* "spirits," *te* "to do, to be concerned with," *sheh hpa* "master, expert"). More often than not, in my experience, these spirit specialists are addicted to opium; Lahu say none but an opium addict would be so foolhardy as to make a regular practice of dealing with the *ne*. Nonetheless, Lahu traditionalists cannot conceive of life without the assistance of their spirit specialists.

GREAT MERIT DAYS

Each of the three *shi nyi lon* not only marks a phase of the moon, as do all other *shi nyi*, but also is associated with a particular event in the annual agricultural cycle: the completion of the burning of the new swiddens, the harvesting of the first crops of the year and the beginning of the rice harvest, the major domestic crop of these people.⁷

The three "great" *shi nyi*, each of which is a two-day affair, encompass all the ritual activities of an ordinary, single, merit day, as well as others specific to themselves. Because, as mentioned above, I have already published a detailed description of the rites of an ordinary *shi nyi*, I will do no more than adumbrate them in this paper.

The rites associated with a merit day begin on the eve of that day with three events: a ceremonial mixing of water and handwashing by women and girls, the presentation of uncooked rice grains to the wife of the village's senior priest or *to bo pa*, and ritual dancing in the *haw yeh* or village temple.

The elaborate and important water-mixing and handwashing rite (cf. Walker 1981b: 681-683 for details) is in the charge of a female ritual official called the *la shaw ma* (etymology obscure). From every house-

hold a female representative brings her own vessel of water and pours some into the common vessel held by the *la shaw_ma*. This mixing of water symbolizes the unity of the village community. The *la shaw_ma* now pours the "mixed" water onto ritual paraphernalia both in the headman's house and in the temple, thus purifying these ritual objects and so making them acceptable to the supernatural world. Finally, the *la shaw_ma* with the "mixed" water, and each woman or girl in turn with her own water, wash each other's hands. This reciprocal handwashing symbolizes the cleansing of the community's sins.

Sometime during the eve of *shi_nyi*, each household presents a little uncooked rice to the *to bo pa*'s wife, who later cooks this, together with her own household rice. On the next day the *to bo pa* will offer this "mixed" rice—again symbolizing the unity of the village community—to *G'ui_fu*, the guardian spirit of the village.

After darkness falls on *shi_nyi* eve, the village temple becomes the center of dancing in honor of *G'ui_sha*.

On *shi_nyi* itself, food offerings are presented to *G'ui_fu* in the temple, as well as to the protective spirit of every household, its *yeh_ne* (*yeh* "house"). Some of the villagers make special ritual objects to be offered to *G'ui_sha* in the temple, and there is more water-mixing, handwashing and dancing.

Before the *to bo pa* eats his morning meal, he takes cooked rice (the "mixed" rice from all the households), water and beeswax candles⁸ to the temple. Here he places a little rice and water in the small porcelain cups which sit on *G'ui_fu*'s altar at the right-hand corner of the temple, lights beeswax candles and beats the temple gong, as he formally offers these gifts to the spirit (cf. Walker 1981b: 684–691, Texts 1–A, 1–B, 1–C).

About the same time as the priest is praying to *G'ui_fu*, each household head makes offerings to his own house spirit. Those who know the ritual words—usually the older men—will also recite a prayer while making the offering (cf. Walker 1981b: 692–695, Texts 2–A, 2–B).

After the morning meal, the womenfolk repeat the water-mixing and handwashing rite, while some other villagers occupy themselves in making special offerings for *G'ui_sha*. These include replica flowers and offering-baskets made of split bamboo, cones of sun-baked mud, and ordinary stones (cf. Walker 1981b: figs. 3, 5). The flowers and baskets are, Lahu say, just like those real flowers and silver bowls which lowlanders offer in their Buddha temples. The stone and mud offerings, on the other hand, symbolize the donor's desire that his life, or the lives of his family members, will be as strong and enduring as rock

and soil.

Apart from ritual activity, a merit day is mostly passed in rest or pleasant talk with friends and neighbors. Sometimes people will take the opportunity to visit their relatives in other villages. Some people may occupy themselves with odd jobs around the house, but work in the fields and hunting are positively forbidden (cf. Walker 1981b: 679–681, esp. n. 17).

In the early evening, the womenfolk perform the water rite for the third and final time and the *to bo pa* and household heads, respectively, again honor the village and house guardian spirits. Later in the evening the *to bo pa* goes to the temple and formally offers all the special ritual gifts from the boon-seekers to *G'ui sha*, using a special offertory prayer as he does so (cf. Walker 1981b: 696–703, Texts 3–A, 3–B).

The rites of the ordinary *shi nyi* end, sometimes late in the night, with more dancing in the village temple.

With these rites of an ordinary *shi nyi* in mind, we may now turn to the detailed report of the special rites associated with each of the three “great *shi nyi*.”

1. *Sheh Kaw Shi Nyi*

The first of the annual great *shi nyi* festivals falls on the full moon of the seventh month of the Northern Thai (Tai Yuan) calendar (March–April), after the Lahu Nyi villagers have fired their new swiddens (cf. Walker 1976h: 160–161). This is the last full moon before the Northern Thai celebrate their New Year (*songkran*), and the Lahu festival takes its name from one of the rituals which Tai perform during *songkran*. *Sheh* means “sand” and *kaw* “to make into a heap,” the whole referring to the Tai New Year custom of carrying sand from a river- or stream-bed to a temple courtyard and there modelling it into miniature temples (cf. Tambiah 1970: 154 for a description of the practice in northeastern Thailand). The Lahu Nyi also use sand for their festival, but for them a totally different idea is represented. *Sheh kaw shi nyi* is the time of the year when they pray to *G'ui sha*, the highest of all the supernatural powers in which they believe, to cleanse them of the sins or demerit which they have amassed by being the agents of death for so many small animals and insects trapped in their burning swiddens. The idea that the taking of life is demeritorious is clearly derived from Buddhist neighbors rather than from among the Lahu themselves, for the Lahu accept proudly the name “Mussur,” “the hunters,” which the Tai people give them and they honor most highly

their *baw^ˆ sheh_ˉ hpa[˜]* or “expert gunmen” (*baw^ˆ ve* “to shoot,” *sheh_ˉ hpa[˜]* “master, expert”).

The ritual activities associated with *sheh[˜] kaw_ˉ shi[˜] nyi* begin on the eve of the day before the new moon day (those of an ordinary *shi[˜] nyi* begin on the eve of the new moon day itself). At this time the *to bo pa_ˉ*, or senior village priest, supervises the preparation and erection of new *kaw mo[˜] taweh_ˉ* in the temple courtyard. These *kaw mo[˜] taweh_ˉ* (etymology obscure) are wooden posts, roughly carved and incised at their tops, which the Lahu interpret in several different ways (cf. Walker 1981a: 673–674), but which may well be derived from the Tai *lak muang*, or city posts, which symbolize high political authority (cf. Terwiel 1978). In the Lahu context the posts may symbolize the supreme authority of *G'ui_ˉ sha*. (The temple itself, it should be remembered, is called *haw^ˉ yeh_ˉ; haw^ˉ*, “a Shan prince's palace,” signifies the spiritual “royalty” of *G'ui_ˉ sha*.)

Each *kaw mo[˜] taweh_ˉ* is fashioned from a single tree trunk (Fig. 1),



Fig. 1. Preparing a new *kaw mo[˜] taweh_ˉ* or temple post.



Fig. 2. Decorating the newly-erected *kaw mõ taweh_*.

from which the bark must be stripped. In this way, Lahu say, the earthly *kaw mõ taweh_* symbolizes *G'ui sha's* white (or golden) stone *kaw mõ taweh_* in the heavens (cf. Walker 1981b: 637; also text 1-A, verse 3 and 1-C, verse 5 below). Once the posts have been erected in the temple courtyard, a bamboo stake is set up beside each one and to this bamboo the villagers attach foliage and paper streamers (Fig. 2). Beyond their decorative function, I could discover no explanation for the foliage and paper streamers.

While a number of the menfolk are thus engaged in preparing the *kaw mõ taweh_*, women representatives of each household perform a ritual exchange of water and handwashing as on the eve of an ordinary *shĩ nyi*.

Once the *kaw mõ taweh_* are in place, a representative from every household in the village brings offerings on a woven mat tray or enamel basin (Fig. 3). These comprise beeswax candles, a few husked but uncooked grains of rice and a plate of puffed rice mixed with grains



Fig. 3. Bringing offerings of rice grains and puffed rice to the temple courtyard.

of sand. A little of the sand and puffed rice is placed at the base of every *kaw mõ taweh* (Fig. 4) and every temple flagpost (cf. Walker 1981b: 671, 673 concerning the latter). The sand particles and the grains of puffed rice, my Lahu informants told me, represent all the *vẽ bã* or "demerit" they have incurred and which they hope will now be removed from them. At this same time, those villagers who so desire may present a new bamboo flag pole with streamer on top, either to the temple or to the house of one of the ritual specialists associated with the temple: the *to bo pa*, *sa la pa* or *la shaw pa* (cf. Walker 1981b: 670-671).

Around 7 p.m., as the light begins to fail, representatives from every household in the village gather in the temple courtyard, each with a handful of raw rice. Now the village headman and the *to bo pa*, often accompanied by other village elders, collect the beeswax candles brought by the villagers and, squatting in front of the new



Fig. 4. Placing mixture of rice grains and sand at the base of a *kaw mo^ˇ taweh₋*.

temple posts, each holding a bunch of lighted candles in his hand (Fig. 5), they pray for the prosperity of the whole community. As the elders begin to pray, everybody else who is present throws some of his or her rice grains into the air. This is said to be an offering to *G'ui₋ sha*, expressing the hope that the donors will receive an abundant yield from the padi seeds they will soon plant. The beating of a gong accompanies the elders' chant. Texts 1-A, 1-B and 1-C record three versions of this prayer.

TEXT 1-A⁹

1. Sha! O! Chi hk'aw_^ te^ˇ hk'aw_^
ve nga₋ te^ˇ mo₋ te^ˇ cu^ˇ ve cho₋
ka₋ shai^ˇ laweh₋ shai^ˇ hin⁻, suh[^]
hpu kaw mo^ˇ taw[^] leh cho₋ ka₋
haw; a, cho₋ ka₋ haw te^ˇ mo₋ te^ˇ
cu^ˇ, shai^ˇ lan₋ shai^ˇ hin⁻ chu[^] g'a

1. *Sha!* This year my whole community here at this place brings these one hundred, these one thousand particles of sand, these white wooden *kaw mo^ˇ taweh₋*; oh here at this place, the whole com-



Fig. 5. Elders praying in front of newly-erected *kaw mo³ taweh₂*.

ve cho₂ ka₂ haw.

2. No³ lo g'ui₂ ma a daw³, no³ lo me³ law ka ti₂ ka sheh³ hpa³, te³ pe³u₂ k'aw₂ pa³ leh hk'a₂ ga³ chi g'a³ hk'o³ hta₂, te³ nyi mui₂ ve, chi nyi ca³ leh a³ pe³u₂, te³ hk'aw₂ mui₂ ve, chi hk'aw₂ ca³ ma³ pe³u₂ ve, chi bon hpaw leh ta₂ la³ she₂, chi shi³ ji³ leh ta₂ la³ meh₂.
3. A yu₂ co me³u₂ hk'o³ hta₂ k'o³ k'o, no³ g'a ha³ hpu kaw mo³ chi co k'aw₂ ji³ leh neh co ya³ co hk'o³ hta₂ k'aw₂ ta₂ la³ meh₂.
4. K'aw³ co leh k'aw³ va₂ sha³, hpa³ ka₂ ma ka₂, ya³ ka₂ du₂ ka₂, ce³ ka₂ ca₂ ka₂, ma³ g'a daw³ hki³ kui₂, ma³ g'a daw³ ha₂ kui₂ ve ti³, chi bon k'aw₂ ji³ leh ta₂ la³ she₂ meh₂; hk'a₂ g'a³ chi g'a³, ku₂ k'aw₂ ku₂ hk'o³, ui₂ ka₂ i ka₂ chi ma ve hk'o³ hta₂ haw ve.
2. Oh Divine Headman up there,¹⁰ you whose mouth holds only the truth, once again order but one word upon each one of us that if we work for one day in the fields, the food may not be exhausted in ten days; if we work for one year in the fields, the food may not be exhausted in ten years; this boon alone order upon us, with this blessing enwrap us.
3. May the life of the white stone *kaw mo³ taweh₂* up there once again cover the lives of the womenfolk and the lives of the menfolk; [this boon]¹¹ once again bestow upon us.
4. With this boon alone once again enwrap us, that the husbands and the wives, the children and the grandchildren and all the animals [enjoy] nine lives, nine lenten seasons,¹² [that we] suffer from no troubled thoughts—every one of us—the big and the small.

5. A, mui_u ca_u va_u ca_u te_u hpaw_u
ka_u ve, aw_u bon aw_u shi_u, no_u ka
ho_u ka pa_u hpa_u leh hk'a_u g'a_u chi
g'a_u hk'o_u hta_u hpa_u leh ta_u la_u
meh_u.
6. Te_u nyi mui_u ve, chi nyi ca_u ma_u
peu_u, te_u hk'aw_u mui_u ve, chi
hk'aw_u ca_u ma_u peu_u ve, hk'a_u g'a_u
chi g'a_u hk'o_u hta_u ji_u leh ta_u la_u
meh_u; sha!
5. Oh, when we are working in the
fields, you up there, the one who
holds fortune, create and bestow
merit¹⁸ upon every one of us.
6. Enwrap every one of us [with the
boon that] if we work for one day
in the fields, the food may not be
exhausted in ten days; if we work
for one year in the fields, the food
may not be exhausted in ten years.

TEXT 1-B

1. O_u, O_u, ya_u nyi a daw_u hk'a_u ma
aw_u ce_u, a, sheh_u kaw_u hpa_u sha_u
chi yo_u law k'o_u k'o_u, a, chi hk'aw_u
sheh_u kaw_u ve yo_u law k'o_u k'o_u,
ya_u nyi tan_u o_u k'ai ve yo_u law
k'o_u k'o_u, hk'a_u ma a daw_u, to bo
hk'a_u ma aw_u ce_u ve yo_u law le_u
k'o_u k'o_u, la_u meu_u, a, ca_u ce_u daw_u
ce_u taw_u leh hkaw_u lu_u hkaw_u tan_u
chi ma taw_u la_u.
2. Chi hk'aw_u ti g'a ve yo_u law le_u
k'o_u k'o_u, maw_u ce_u je_u ce_u ve, a,
Ai ma mi_u hpa_u sheh_u ma, A pa
mvuh_u hpa_u sheh_u hpa_u ka, shaw_u
yaw_u ma zuh_u k'aw_u hk'aw_u law_u,
hkui_u yaw_u nu_u yaw_u k'aw_u hk'a_u
jaw_u, ce_u sheh_u hk'a sheh_u hpa_u,
hkui taw_u la_u taw_u hk'a_u suh hk'a
deh_u k'aw_u je leh hk'aw_u g'a_u chi
g'a_u, a daw_u hk'a_u ma aw_u ce_u,
hk'a_u g'o_u chi g'o_u ve.
3. A, a daw_u hk'a_u ma aw_u ce_u ce ve,
na_u beu_u suh_u chi suh_u ceu_u ve
ka_u, k'aw_u taw_u k'aw_u suh_u leh po_u
pi_u.
4. Ya_u nyi tan_u o_u k'ai ve, chi hk'aw_u
ti g'a ve yo_u law le_u k'o_u k'o_u, na_u
beu_u suh_u chi suh_u yan_u, shaw_u
ba_u ma ba_u u_u hta_u k'aw_u po_u leh
hk'aw_u na_u ta_u hki_u, ma_u g'a daw_u
g'a leh hk'aw_u g'o_u chi g'o_u ve yo_u
law le_u k'o_u k'o_u.
5. Neh hpu ya_u hpu la_u meu_u hk'o_u
hta_u, peh_u hpu k'eh hpu hk'o_u
hta_u taw_u leh ca_u ce_u daw_u ce_u
k'aw_u taw_u la_u.
1. Oh today, within the four corners
of the headman's village, oh at this
sheh_u kaw_u festival, oh this year at
this *sheh_u kaw_u* festival, today and
hereafter within the four corners of
the headman's village, the *to bo
pa_u*'s village, we present this food
and drink prepared by our own
hands, and we present all these
ritual offerings.¹⁴
2. This year when we plant every
kind of crop, oh *Ai ma*, Creator
of the Earth, and Father, Creator
of the Heavens also,¹⁵ you who
create the nine baskets of fertility,¹⁶
carefully once again follow our
footprints and our handprints¹⁷ and
once again cover every one of us
within the four corners of the
headman's village, every household.
3. Oh once again shield and let pass
from the four corners of the head-
man's village the seventy-seven
kinds of sickness.¹⁸
4. Today and hereafter, this year when
we plant [our crops], once again
protect us from the seventy-seven
kinds of sickness, from sharp points
of wood; let there be no accident
among the members of any house-
hold.
5. The womenfolk and the menfolk
present these pure¹⁹ beeswax candles
made by their own hands, they
once again present all kinds of food
and all kinds of drink.

6. A, Ai ma k'aw_h hpa_h leh yo_h law le_h k'o^h k'o, A pa Sha⁻ ca^h k'aw_h hpa_h leh chi hk'aw_h ti g'a ve, ma_h ha_h ma_h g'aw_h bon, ma_h tu_h ma_h hka⁻ bon, chi bon hk'o^h hta^h k'aw_h ta_h leh ho_h pi_h.
7. Hk'a_h g'a_h chi g'a_h hk'o^h hta_h, hk'a_h g'o_h chi g'o_h ve, ku_h k'aw_h ku_h hki_h chi ma ve, o_h, o_h, cheh_h sha caw_h sha, k'aw_h ho_h pi_h meh_h, Sha!
6. This year when we plant [our crops], Oh *Ai ma* once again create, Father *Sha⁻ ca^h*²⁰ once again create [for us] the blessing of no troubles, the blessing of no poverty; once again grant and put over us this blessing.
7. Once again cover every person with health and prosperity, give [health and prosperity] to every household, every person.

TEXT 1-C

1. A, shaw_h hpu ca li⁻ ca ma_h la_h meu_h, shaw_h hpu kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h shehn⁻, to bo haw⁻ hpu la_h sha te_h ce_h meu_h hta_h, a, te_h yan_h k'aw_h sha_h leh no_h g'a A pa Sha⁻ ca^h la_h sha haw⁻ hpu, no_h g'a na_h pu_h haw⁻ shi⁻, kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h hka⁻ hpaw_h meu_h k'aw_h ta_h g'a.
2. Shaw_h hpu haw⁻ hpu kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h hka⁻ k'aw_h bvuh_h leh neh hpu ya_h hpu, ui_h ka_h i ka_h u⁻ hta_h, hk'a_h ho_h hk'a_h deh_h caw_h pi_h.
3. A, te_h nyi chi ceu_h k'aw_h ceu_h u⁻ hta_h taw_h g'a sheh_h hpa_h, shaw_h hpu kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h shehn⁻, taw_h ti_h taw_h hka⁻ no_h ve, te_h nyi k'aw_h suh^h k'aw_h bvuh_h leh hk'a^h ma aw_h ce_h, ho_h la_h mo_h sha_h chi ma u⁻ hta_h, hk'a_h ho_h hk'a_h keh_h ti⁻ caw_h pi_h.
4. Shaw_h hpu kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h shehn⁻ chi ve yo_h law, a, shaw_h hpu shaw_h co ma co k'aw_h bvuh_h, neh co ya_h co u⁻ hta_h ta_h g'a sheh_h hpa_h, no_h g'a aw_h na a pa ka ti_h ka shehn⁻ meu_h hta_h haw, a, nga_h te_h peu_h k'aw_h sha_h leh shaw_h hpu kaw mo⁻ taw_h ti_h taw_h shehn⁻ chi hta_h k'aw_h sha_h.
1. Oh, these shielding and precious²¹ white²² wooden *kaw mo⁻ taweh_h* [fashioned with knives made by] the village blacksmith's own hands, I once again offer at the right-hand side of the *to bo pa*'s white *haw⁻ yeh_h*; I once again make offerings and place [my offerings] at the shielding and precious *kaw mo⁻ taweh_h* at the right-hand side of Father *Sha⁻ ca^h*'s²³ silver and golden²⁴ *haw⁻ yeh_h* up there.
2. May these white wooden shielding and precious *kaw mo⁻ taweh_h* once again cry out [blessings upon] the womenfolk and the menfolk, the big and the small; carefully cover all of us [with this boon].
3. Oh you who can, in one day, shield us from the ten kinds, the nine kinds [of misfortune], may the white wooden *kaw mo⁻ taweh_h* up there nine times in one day again cry out [blessings upon] the whole community within the four corners of the village; grant and cover everybody [with this boon].
4. These shielding and precious white wooden *kaw mo⁻ taweh_h*, oh, may the life of these white wooden [*kaw mo⁻ taweh_h*] once again cry out [blessings upon us]; oh you who shield the lives of the womenfolk and the lives of the menfolk; to the side of the all-true, the all-precious Father up there I once

5. No^ˇ g'a pa_{la} haw⁻ hpu la_{sha} te^ˇ ce_{meu} hta_a, a ha⁻ shi kaw mo^ˇ co, te^ˇ nyi k'aw^ˇ co k'aw_{bvuh} leh te^ˇ ha⁻ k'aw^ˇ co k'aw_{suh} k'aw_{bvuh} leh neh hpu ya^ˇ hpu u⁻ hta_{ho} g'a sheh_{hpa}.
6. Aw_{na} a pa ka ti_{ka} pa[^] pfuh^ˇ hk'e, a, hk'a[^] ma aw^ˇ ce_{meu} hta_{ma} daw^ˇ ma^ˇ hki⁻; a, la_{sha} mo_{la} u⁻ hta_{taw} g'a sheh_{hpa}, la_{meh} mo_{hi} u⁻ hta_{keh} g'a sheh_{hpa}, shaw^ˇ hpu kaw mo^ˇ taw_{ti} taw_{shehn} yu_{leh} chi ceu_{k'aw} ceu_u hta_{taw} g'a shu g'a sheh_{hpa} yo_{law} k'o[^] k'o.
7. Nga_{ya} nyi ca li⁻ ca ma_{la} me_{chi} hta_{shaw} hpu kaw mo^ˇ taw_{ti} taw_{hka} k'aw_{ti} g'a.
8. To bo haw⁻ hpu la_{sha} te^ˇ ce_{meu} hta_{ui} ka_i ka_{daw} hpu te^ˇ ca[^] k'aw_{mui} sha^ˇ leh no^ˇ g'a a pa Pa_{la} haw⁻ hpu la_{sha} te^ˇ ce_{ha} shi k'aw mo^ˇ hpaw^ˇ me_{k'aw} ta_{g'a} yo_{law} k'o[^] k'o, no^ˇ g'a a pa Sha⁻ ca[^] la_{sha} haw⁻ shi.
9. A, Pa_{la} ha⁻ shi kaw mo^ˇ, te^ˇ nyi k'aw^ˇ co k'aw_{bvuh} leh neh co ya^ˇ co u⁻ hta_{ta} g'a, te^ˇ nyi yo_{law}.
10. A, nga_{k'aw} sha^ˇ leh naw_{hpaw} k'aw_{ta} g'a yo_{law}, naw_{nga} u⁻ te^ˇ peu_{k'aw} sha^ˇ leh la_{sha} mo_{la} u⁻ hta_{keh} g'a shu g'a sheh_{hpa}, chi ceu_{k'aw} ceu_u hta_{taw} g'a sheh_{hpa}, a, chi ceu_{k'aw} ceu_u hta_{taw} pi^ˇ, la_{sha} mo_{la} mo_{sha} u⁻ hta_{keh} g'a shu g'a sheh_{hpa}.
5. May the life of the golden stone *kaw mo^ˇ taweh* at the right-hand-side corner of Pa_{la}'s white haw⁻ yeh_{over there},²⁵ every day again cry out for nine lifespans, every night nine times again cry out for nine lifespans,²⁶ you protector of the womenfolk and of the menfolk.
6. Father above, the all-true, all-powerful, within the four corners of the village may there be no troubled thoughts, you who shield the whole right-hand-side group, you who purify the whole left-hand-side group,²⁷ take hold of the shielding and precious white wooden *kaw mo^ˇ taweh*, you who can shield [us from] and expel [from us] the ten kinds, the nine kinds [of misfortune].
7. Today I once again plant²⁸ the shielding and precious white wooden *kaw mo^ˇ taweh*.
8. The big and the small, united by the same pure intent, once again make offerings at the right-hand side of the *to bo pa*'s haw⁻ yeh_; they once again put their offerings at the right-hand-side corner of Father Pa_{la}'s white haw⁻ yeh_{over there}, at the side of the golden stone *kaw mo^ˇ taweh*.
9. Oh, may Pa_{la}'s golden stone *kaw mo^ˇ taweh* again cry out for nine lifespans for the womenfolk and for the menfolk.
10. Oh, I once again make offerings and place them at your side; you once again offer to me [this boon], you who purify and expel [all misfortune] from the right-hand group, you who shield [us from] the ten kinds, the nine kinds²⁹ [of misfortune], grant that we be shielded from the ten kinds, the nine kinds [of misfortune], you who can purify

11. Ca li⁻ ca ma_{la} me[~] shaw[~] hpu kaw mo[~] taw_{ti} taw_{sheh⁻} k'aw_{ti} g'a me[~] hta_{haw}; ui_{ka} i ka_{cheh[~]} sha caw_{sha}, daw[~] sha ga[~] sha, te[~] nyi k'aw[~] ceu_{k'aw[~]} yan_{u⁻} hta_{haw}, a, taw_{g'a} shu g'a sheh_{hpa[~]} yo_{law}.
12. No[~] g'a a pa Sha⁻ ca[^] la_{sha} na_{pu_{taw_{ti}}} taw_{meu[~]} no[~] ve, te[~] nyi k'aw[~] suh[^] k'aw_{bvuh_{leh}} ui_{ka} i ka_{u⁻} hta_{haw}, a, hk'a[^] ma aw[~] ce_{meu[~]} hta_{haw}, hk'a[^] teh hk'a[^] g'aw[~] u⁻ hta_{chi} ceu_{k'aw[~]} ceu_{u⁻} hta_{taw_{g'a}} shu g'a sheh_{hpa[~]}.
13. Aw_{na} a pa ka[~] ti_{ka[~]} pa[^] me[~] hta_{haw}, la_{sha} haw⁻ hpu kaw mo[~] co no[~] ve, te[~] nyi k'aw[~] suh[^] k'aw_{bvuh_{leh}} g'a pi[~], hk'a_{g'a[~]} chi g'a[~] u⁻ hta_{ui_{ka}} i ka_{cheh[~]} sha caw_{sha}, daw[~] sha ga[~] sha, ma[~] daw[~] ma[~] ha_{ma[~]} daw[~] ma[~] hki⁻, chi bon ti⁻ ga pi[~].
11. I once again plant at this place the shielding and precious white wooden *kaw mo[~] taweh_{le}* [fashioned from knives made by] the blacksmith's own hands; oh you who shield and expel [all misfortune], nine times in one day[grant that] the big and the small enjoy good health and easy thoughts.
12. May the eternal *meh_{taw_{le}}*³⁰ at Father *Sha⁻ ca[^]*'s right-hand side up there nine times in one day again cry out [blessings upon] the big and the small, oh you who can shield and who can expel the ten kinds, the nine kinds [of misfortune] from the four corners of the village, from the village place.
13. May the life of the *kaw mo[~] taweh_{le}* at the right-hand side of the all-true, all-powerful Father's white *haw⁻ yeh_{le}* up there, nine times in one day cry out and grant [the boon that] every person, the big and the small, enjoy good health and untroubled thoughts; this boon alone grant to us.

The prayer finished, everyone throws the remainder of his or her rice grains into the air. The crowd now disperses, but some people, especially the younger ones, return later in the evening to dance inside the temple in honor of *G'ui_{sha}*, as on ordinary *shi⁻ nyi* days.

On the following day, the first of the "great" *shi⁻ nyi* days, the ritual activities follow the same pattern as for an ordinary *shi⁻ nyi*. Before eating his morning meal the *to bo pa_{le}* makes offerings in the temple to *G'ui_{fu}*, the village protector, while household heads make similar offerings at their house spirit altars. After their morning meal female representatives from every household again perform the water exchange rite, and most households prepare and take ritual offerings to the temple. In the evening the *to bo pa_{le}* again prays to *G'ui_{fu}* and the household heads propitiate their house spirit, while the women repeat the handwashing rite. Later in the evening, the *to bo pa_{le}* ritually presents the villagers' offerings to *G'ui_{sha}* and there is likely to be more dancing in the temple.

The second day is the main day of the *sheh[~] kaw_{le}* festival, but



Fig. 6. *To bo pa_* praying in front of vegetarian foodstuffs inside the temple.

the rites are almost identical to those of the previous day. There is, however, one important addition. Each household prepares a noon meal of rice and *vegetarian* relishes, which it sends to the temple. The *to bo pa_* and headman light beeswax candles and pray to *G'ui_ sha* for the prosperity of the village community, using the same prayer recited previously in front of the *kaw mo_ taweh_* in the temple courtyard (Fig. 6). Then anyone who wishes may eat the vegetarian meal inside the temple. Afterwards, young people request their elders to bind their wrists with cotton string (*a_ mo hkeh*). This rite (Fig. 7) symbolizes the passing of the elders' blessings to the youngsters.³¹

2. *Hkao_ Shi_ Nyi*

The second great lunar festival falls on the full moon of the tenth month of the Northern Thai calendar (June–July) and is associated with the first harvesting of certain side crops. Like *sheh_ kaw_ shi_ nyi*, *hkao_ shi_ nyi* derives its name from a Buddhist festival celebrated by the Tai lowlanders at about the same time. This is *khrao phansa*, the beginning of what is popularly known as the Buddhist “Lent” (Thai, *phansa*), when the monks “enter” (Thai, *khrao*) the temples to remain there for the duration of the rainy season (cf. Kingshill 1960: 111; Tambiah 1970: 154–155). But, once again, the Lahu attach an en-



Fig. 7. Elder binding wrist of infant at the conclusion of the vegetarian meal inside the temple.

tirely different meaning to their own festival. This is the occasion on which they celebrate the first harvest of subsidiary crops, particularly maize but also chillies, sweet potatoes and several others.

The festival is organized in much the same manner as *sheh kaw shi nyi*. On the eve of the first of the two festival days there is no renewal of the temple posts, but a representative from each household brings beeswax candles, new maize cobs, a few chillies and some sweet potatoes to the temple (Fig. 8). Later in the evening the *to bo pa* comes to the temple and offers these gifts to *G'ui sha*, praying for the villagers' health and prosperity. An example of his prayer is recorded as Text 2 below.



Fig. 8. Young girl bringing sweet potato and pumpkin leaf offerings to the temple on *hkao_ shi_ nyi*.

TEXT 2

1. A, chi hk'aw_ hkao_ hpa_ sha_ chi hta_ yo_ law k'o^ k'o, sha ma suh_, hpeu^ meu_ ca_ k'aw_ tan_, a, mui_ suh_ va_ suh_ k'aw_ taw^ leh ka_ haw to bo haw_ hpu la_ sha te_ ce_ meu_ hta_ ta_ g'a yo_ law k'o^ k'o.
2. Te_ nyi sheh^ yan_ nga_ te_ peu_ sha_ g'a, no_ g'a Pa_ la_ haw_ hpu te_ ce_ meu_ hta_ k'aw_ ta_ g'a yo_ law k'o^ k'o.
3. No_ g'a Ai ma hkui_ yaw_ hu_ yaw_ ee_ sheh_ ma yo_ law k'o^ k'o, hkui_ ta nu_ ta k'aw_ hpaw leh hkui_ ta nu_ ta te_ nyi k'aw_ law_ k'aw_ hpaw leh te_ ha_ k'aw_ suh_
1. Oh, this year, this *hkao_ hpa_ sha_*,³² we once again offer new maize and new pumpkin leaves; oh, we bring the new fruits of the farms and place them at the right-hand side of the *to bo pa_*'s *haw_ yeh_*.³³
2. Three times in one day I make offerings and put them at the right-hand side of *Pa_ la_*'s white *haw_ yeh_* over there.³⁴
3. *Ai ma* up there, giver of fertility,³⁵ once again open your box of fertility, in one day open your nine boxes of fertility, in one night nine times again open them up; once again put

- k'aw_^ hpaw leh la_^ yu_^ mui_^ ca_^
 va_^ ca_^, mui_^ hk'a_^ va_^ hk'a_^ u_^
 hta_^ k'aw_^ ta_^ pi_^, hk'a_^ g'a_^ chi
 g'a_^, g'a_^ ca_^ g'a_^ daw_^ hk'a_^ shu_^.
4. A, chi hk'aw_^ hkao_^ hpa_^ sha_^ aw_^
 hk'aw_^ yo_^ law k'o_^ k'o_^, g'a_^ ca_^ g'a_^
 daw_^ hk'a_^ shu_^, chi bon ti_^ hpa_^
 leh keu pi_^.
5. No_^ g'a_^ g'ui_^ ma ka_^ ho_^ ka_^
 hpa_^ pa_^, a, chi ceu_^ k'aw_^ ceu_^
 u_^ hta_^ hpa_^ leh g'a_^ sheh_^ hpa_^
 yo_^ law k'o_^ k'o_^, naw_^ k'aw_^ hpa_^
 leh hk'ah k'a_^ chih k'a_^ u_^ hta_^,
 k'aw_^ ta_^ pi_^ meh_^.
6. A, chi hk'aw_^ hkao_^ hpa_^ sha_^ chi
 hta_^ yo_^ law k'o_^ k'o_^, chi ceu_^
 k'aw_^ ceu_^ u_^ hta_^ hpa_^ g'a_^ sheh_^
 hpa_^, te_^ nyi sheh_^ yan_^ k'aw_^
 hpa_^ leh ku_^ k'aw_^ ku_^ hki_^, a,
 ku_^ k'aw_^ ku_^ hki_^, a, ku_^ k'aw_^
 ku_^ hki_^, g'o_^ taw_^ g'o_^ g'a_^ u_^
 hta_^ k'aw_^ ta_^ pi_^.
7. La_^ yu_^ mui_^ hk'a_^ va_^ hk'a_^ u_^
 hta_^, ma_^ daw_^ ma_^ ha_^, ma_^ daw_^
 ma_^ hki_^, te_^ nyi mui_^ ve, chi nyi
 ca_^ leh ma_^ peu_^; te_^ hk'aw_^ mui_^
 ve, chi hk'aw_^ daw_^ leh a_^ yaw, a,
 chi bon hpaw leh ga_^ pi_^.
8. Ui_^ ka_^ i ka_^ u_^ hta_^ haw, daw_^
 sha ga_^ sha hk'a_^ shu_^ ti_^ caw_^ pi_^.
- fertility into the fields worked by
 our own hands, grant to all of us,
 each to the same degree, enough to
 eat and enough to drink.
4. Oh, this year, at this *hkao_^ hpa_^
 sha_^*, grant to all of us, each to the
 same degree, enough to eat and
 enough to drink; this boon alone
 create and bestow upon us.
5. You up there, divine fountainhead
 of fortune, creator of fortune, creator
 of the ten kinds, the nine kinds [of
 things],³⁶ once again create for us
 and bestow upon us all ways.³⁷
6. Oh, this year, this *hkao_^ hpa_^ sha_^*,
 you who create the ten kinds, the
 nine kinds [of things], three times
 in one day again create and bestow
 [every blessing] on every person,
 every household.
7. When we work in the fields, may
 we have untroubled thoughts; if we
 work for one day in the fields, may
 the food not finish in ten days; if
 we work for one year in the fields,
 may the drink not be exhausted in
 ten years; oh, this boon open up
 and grant to us.
8. May the big and the small, each
 one to the same degree, enjoy
 nothing but untroubled thoughts.

3. *Aw_^ Shi_^ Nyi*

The last of the *shi_^ nyi lon_^* festivals falls on the full moon of the first month of the Northern Thai calendar (September–October). It takes its name from the lowland festival of *awk phansa*, marking the end of the Buddhist “Lent,” when the monks are permitted to come out of (Thai, *awk*) their temples (cf. Tambiah 1970: 157). For the Lahu Nyi villagers, the festival signifies the maturation of the main rice crop. The rites associated with this festival are identical to those of *hkao_^ shi_^ nyi*, except that the offerings taken to the temple include newly-harvested rice (Fig. 9) in place of the maize, etc., of *hkao_^ shi_^ nyi*. Text 3 below records the prayer when the priest ritually presents the offerings



Fig. 9. Young girl placing offerings, including newly-harvested rice panicles, in front of the *G'ui sha* throne inside the temple.

to *G'ui sha* in the village temple. This particular example, apart from a passing reference to *aw shi nyi*, does not differ in content from the *to bo pa*'s offertory prayer on an ordinary *shi nyi* (cf. Walker 1981b: 700–703 for an example). Possibly another ritual specialist's prayer would be more topical.

TEXT 3

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. A, ya₂ nyi aw[^] hpa₂ sha⁻ chi hta₂
yo₂ law k'o[^] k'o, la₂ sha hk'a[^] ma
aw[~] ce₂ meu[~] hta₂ haw, mo₂ la₂
mo₂ sha[~] chi ma, ca li⁻ ca ma₂ la₂
meu[~] chi hta₂, shaw[~] hpu kaw
mo[~] taw₂ ti₂ taw₂ shehn⁻ k'aw₂
ta₂ g'a, a, va[~] chi pui tsuh₂ pui li⁻
ta₂ g'a, va[~] chi pui tsuh₂ li⁻ tsuh₂
ta₂ g'a, law⁻ bo co hpeu₂ co ve[^]</p> | <p>1. Oh, today, at this <i>aw hpa sha</i>,
all the people of the right hand,³⁸
here within the four corners of the
village, offer the shielding and
precious white wooden <i>kaw mo</i>
<i>taweh</i> [prepared with knives fash-
ioned by] the blacksmith's own
hands; oh, we offer these bamboo
<i>li tsuh</i>,³⁹ we once again offer</p> |
|--|---|

- k'aw_ˆ ta_ˆ g'a.
2. A, to bo haw_ˆ hpu la_ˆ meh_ˆ te_ˆ
ce_ˆ meu_ˆ hta_ˆ, Ai ma keh_ˆ tu
keh_ˆ g'aw_ˆ ta_ˆ g'a hpaw_ˆ meu_ˆ
yo_ˆ law k'o_ˆ k'o, a, hk'aw_ˆ hk'e
chi hk'e k'aw_ˆ sha_ˆ, hk'a_ˆ cu_ˆ chi
cu_ˆ k'aw_ˆ sha_ˆ leh no_ˆ g'a a pa
haw_ˆ hpu, Pa_ˆ la_ˆ haw_ˆ hpu, a,
Pa_ˆ la_ˆ haw_ˆ hpu hkui meu_ˆ k'aw_ˆ
ta_ˆ g'a.
 3. A, no_ˆ g'a Ai ma Pa_ˆ la_ˆ haw_ˆ
hpu la_ˆ sha te_ˆ ce_ˆ, na_ˆ pu_ˆ keh_ˆ
teh keh_ˆ g'aw_ˆ, no_ˆ ve keh_ˆ cu
keh_ˆ shehn_ˆ, te_ˆ ha_ˆ k'aw_ˆ suh_ˆ
k'aw_ˆ bvuh_ˆ leh la_ˆ mo_ˆ meh_ˆ sha_ˆ
u_ˆ hta_ˆ, keh_ˆ pi_ˆ meh_ˆ.
 4. A, g'ui_ˆ ma haw_ˆ shi la_ˆ meh_ˆ te_ˆ
ce_ˆ meu_ˆ hta_ˆ, no_ˆ g'a keh_ˆ tu
keh_ˆ g'aw_ˆ, keh_ˆ ti_ˆ keh_ˆ shehn_ˆ
no_ˆ ve, te_ˆ ha_ˆ k'aw_ˆ suh_ˆ k'aw_ˆ
bvuh_ˆ leh la_ˆ sha mo_ˆ hi_ˆ u_ˆ hta_ˆ
keh_ˆ pi_ˆ.
 5. Hk'aw_ˆ g'a_ˆ chi g'a_ˆ u_ˆ hta_ˆ, ma_ˆ
daw_ˆ ma_ˆ ha_ˆ, chi hk'aw_ˆ aw_ˆ
hpa_ˆ sha_ˆ chi hta_ˆ yo_ˆ law k'o_ˆ
k'o, ui_ˆ ka_ˆ i ka_ˆ, hk'a_ˆ ma aw_ˆ
ce_ˆ, mo_ˆ la_ˆ mo_ˆ sha_ˆ chi ma ve,
a, zuh_ˆ sha mui sha, cheh_ˆ sha
caw_ˆ sha, daw_ˆ sha ga_ˆ sha, chi
bon ti_ˆ pa_ˆ leh ga pi_ˆ.
 6. Ma_ˆ daw_ˆ ma_ˆ hki_ˆ, ma_ˆ daw_ˆ
ma_ˆ ha_ˆ, ui_ˆ ka_ˆ i ka_ˆ, te_ˆ nyi
k'aw_ˆ co k'aw_ˆ suh_ˆ k'aw_ˆ bvuh_ˆ
leh ho_ˆ pi_ˆ, a, a pa ka ti_ˆ ka_ˆ pa_ˆ
meu_ˆ hta_ˆ haw_ˆ, ma_ˆ daw_ˆ ma_ˆ
hki_ˆ, hk'aw_ˆ g'a_ˆ chi g'a_ˆ, ma_ˆ
hpui_ˆ ma_ˆ htai_ˆ, ma_ˆ maw_ˆ ma_ˆ
ha_ˆ k'aw_ˆ co chi co ga pi_ˆ.
 7. Hk'aw_ˆ g'a_ˆ chi g'a_ˆ, ui_ˆ ka_ˆ i ka_ˆ
chi beu_ˆ ka_ˆ, a pa bo peu_ˆ te_ˆ ka_ˆ,
Ai ma shi_ˆ peu_ˆ te_ˆ ka_ˆ te_ˆ ki_ˆ
meu_ˆ hta_ˆ, ka_ˆ ui_ˆ ki_ˆ ui_ˆ ti_ˆ caw_ˆ
pi_ˆ, ka_ˆ law_ˆ ki_ˆ law_ˆ ti_ˆ caw_ˆ pi_ˆ.
 8. Hk'a_ˆ g'a_ˆ chi g'a_ˆ hta_ˆ haw_ˆ, ma_ˆ
daw_ˆ ma_ˆ hki_ˆ, ma_ˆ daw_ˆ ma_ˆ
ha_ˆ, Ai ma mi_ˆ hk'a_ˆ a_ˆ peu_ˆ, a pa
mvuh_ˆ hk'a_ˆ a_ˆ peu_ˆ, neh hk'a_ˆ
- these *hpeu_ˆ k'o_ˆ*.⁴⁰
2. Oh, we once again put *Ai ma's li_ˆ tsuh_ˆ*⁴¹ at the left-hand side of the *to bo pa_ˆ's* white *haw_ˆ yeh_ˆ*; oh, we once again offer all kinds of things; every kind of thing⁴² we once again offer and once again put [our offerings] at the foot of Father's white *haw_ˆ yeh_ˆ* up there, *Pa_ˆ la_ˆ's* white *haw_ˆ yeh_ˆ*.⁴³
 3. Oh, may the eternal *keh_ˆ teh_ˆ*⁴⁴ at the right-hand side of *Ai ma* and *Pa_ˆ la_ˆ's* white *haw_ˆ yeh_ˆ* up there,⁴⁵ nine times in one night again cry out and grant purification to the whole group on the left-hand side.
 4. Oh, may the *li_ˆ tsuh_ˆ* up there,⁴⁶ at the left-hand side of *G'ui_ˆ sha_ˆ's* golden *haw_ˆ yeh_ˆ*, nine times in one night again cry out and grant purification to the whole group on the right-hand side.
 5. This year, at this *aw_ˆ hpa_ˆ sha_ˆ*, may every person, the big and the small within the four corners of the village, the whole group have no troubled thoughts, oh, may they sleep well and sit well, enjoy health and prosperity, easy thoughts; this boon alone once again order and grant to us.
 6. May the big and the small enjoy untroubled thoughts; nine times in one day cry out and cover [us with the boon of] nine lifespans; oh, all-true, all-powerful Father, grant to every one of us untroubled thoughts, let us never suffer decay, never grow old, let us have nine lifespans, ten lifespans.
 7. Now also, grant to every person, the big and the small, that we all have only Father's blessings, *Ai ma's* blessings, great good fortune.
 8. May each one of us have no troubled thoughts; as *Ai ma's* earth never ends, as Father's heaven never ends, may the lives of the women-

ya^ˇ hk'a^ˆ a^ˇ peu_ˇ a^ˇ lai, chi bon
ti^ˉ pa^ˆ leh ga pi^ˇ.

9. No^ˇ g'a a pa ka ti_ˇ ka^ˆ pa^ˆ, te^ˇ
nyi sheh^ˆ yan^ˇ k'aw_ˆ pa^ˆ leh
hk'aw_ˇ g'a^ˇ chi g'a^ˇ u^ˉ hta_ˆ k'aw_ˆ
ta_ˆ pi^ˇ, ma^ˇ daw^ˇ ma^ˇ hki^ˉ, ma^ˇ
daw^ˇ ma^ˇ ha_ˆ, hk'aw_ˇ g'a^ˇ chi
g'a^ˇ, hk'a^ˆ ma aw^ˉ ce_ˆ, mo_ˆ la_ˆ
mo_ˆ sha^ˇ chi ma ve, daw^ˇ sha ga^ˇ
sha, chi bon ti^ˉ pa^ˆ leh ga pi^ˇ.

folk and the lives of the menfolk
never end, never decay; this boon
alone order and grant to us.

9. May the all-true, all-powerful Fa-
ther up there three times in one
day again order and bestow upon
every person untroubled thoughts;
this boon only grant to everybody
within the four corners of the
village, the whole group, that we
all enjoy easy thoughts.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The preceding account of the three annual "great merit days" among the Lahu Nyi I studied in north Thailand is important, I suggest, not only as an addition to the ethnographic record of these people, but also because it suggests the extent to which non-Buddhist, non-Tai, hillmen in this part of northern Southeast Asia have adopted and adapted lowland ideology and custom. So great an impact has Tai culture made upon these Lahu that even if they did not at present enjoy any contact with Tai (in fact, of course, they do), one could not really begin to understand Lahu social and cultural norms without reference to the Tai background.

The texts which I have presented here provide, I hope, some insight into the rich oral literature of these mountain folk. As usual, I have given the original texts to ensure their preservation as well as to allow retranslation and reinterpretation in the future.

NOTES

1. My fieldwork among the Lahu Nyi in the districts of Phrao (Chiang Mai province) and Wiang Pa Pao (Chiang Rai province) was from 1966 to 1970. My thanks are due especially to Khun Wanat Bhruksasri and his staff at the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai. I thank my wife, Pauline Hetland Walker, for her help in preparing this manuscript.

2. This paper is best studied in conjunction with my other publications on Lahu Nyi ritual life, which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this article. Walker (1969, 1970b, 1974d, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1983a) contain introductory ethnographic data on the Lahu people.

3. Lahu words in this paper are transcribed according to a romanization developed by American Baptist missionaries in Burma and China. (The ethnonym itself is an exception; "Lahu" rather than *La^ˇ hu_ˆ* is common usage in the ethnological literature.) This orthography, still the most widely used among Lahu outside China, has supra- and sub-script marks after each syllable to indicate six of the seven tones of Lahu. There are five open tones (long vowel) and two checked (short vowel ending in a glottal stop), indicated as follows:

suprascript straight line ($cā$): high-rising open tone

subscript straight line ($ca_$): very low open tone

suprascript wedge ($câ$): high-falling open tone

subscript wedge ($ca_$): low-falling open tone

unmarked (ca): mid-level open tone

suprascript circumflex ($ca^$): high tone, checked

subscript circumflex ($ca_$): low tone, checked

4. "Tai" is used here to refer to any group speaking a Tai (or Daic) language; "Thai" is reserved for citizens of the modern nation state of Thailand. The Tai people with whom the Lahu Nyi are associated are mostly Shan (in Burma and Thailand's Mae Hong Son province) and Yuan, or Khon Muang (in the rest of northern Thailand).

5. Some 300,000 Lahu live in China's far southwestern province of Yunnan (BR 1980; CP 1981).

6. Reliable demographic data on the Lahu in Burma and Laos are impossible to find. Recent figures are 106,000 for Burma and 6,500 for Laos (Lewis and Lewis 1983: 4); I have no means of determining their accuracy.

7. A detailed discussion of the agricultural technology of my principal study community is to be found in Walker (1970b: 348-445). A summary is in Walker (1976h: 155-174).

8. Beeswax candles are of major importance in Lahu Nyi ritual. Indeed, these people frequently label themselves $peĥ tu_ pa_$ or "beeswax burners" ($peĥ$ from $peĥ haw_$ "beeswax", $tu_$ from $tu_ ve$ "to light," $pa_$, the male suffix). For further comments on Lahu Nyi use of such candles, see Walker (1981b: 679 n. 16).

9. The Lahu texts, as in all my previous publications, have been broken into verses. This facilitates cross-reference between the Lahu original and my English translation. No such divisions are recognized by the Lahu themselves.

10. These Lahu Nyi conceive every important office (and thing) on earth to have its divine prototype in heaven (Walker 1981b: 671, 673, n. 13). It is appropriate on this occasion for the village headman to seek the aid of his heavenly prototype, $G'ui_ ma a daŵ$, the Divine Headman.

11. Words appearing in brackets in the English translation are those which are understood but not given in the original Lahu text.

12. "Nine lives, nine lenten seasons ($k'aŵ co leh k'aŵ va_ sha_$)" is a poetic couplet suggesting "a great length of time." The Lahu $va_ sha_$ is from the Pali, *vassa*, the rainy season. For three months, from the end of July to the end of October, Buddhist monks must "cease their wanderings and take up residence in their monastery, going out only under unusual circumstances (e.g., serious illness of a relative) from which they must return within seven days" (Lester 1973: 52-53). This period of retreat, known as *phansa* in Thai, is frequently termed the "Buddhist Lent" in English.

13. "Merit," Lahu $aw_ bon$, could also be translated here as "blessings."

14. $Hkaw_ lu_ hkaw_ tan̂$ is a couplet indicating all the ritual offerings together.

15. "Father, Creator of the Heavens ($A pa mvuĥ hpa_ sheh_ hpa_$)" is a reference to $G'ui_ sha$ as personified deity. " $Ai ma$, Creator of the Earth ($Ai ma mi_ hpa_ sheh_ ma_$)" is his female counterpart. For the myth of creation see Walker (1981b: 669). The term $G'ui_ sha$ is also used to refer collectively to several named deities.

16. As creator of our earth, and as female, $Ai ma$ is particularly associated with fertility. Here, "the nine baskets of fertility ($hkui_ yaw_ nu_ yaw_ k'aw_ hk'a_ jaw_$)" is simply poetic usage to indicate "all fertility."

17. "Carefully once again follow our footprints and our handprints (*hkui taw_ la_ taw_ hk'a~ suh hk'a deh_ k'aw_ je*)" is a poetic way of saying "wherever we go, whatever we do, please look after us."

18. "Seventy-seven kinds of sickness (*na_ beu_ suh_ chi suh_ ceu_*)" means simply "all sickness." See also verse 4.

19. Here I have chosen to translate *hpu* as "pure." Its first meaning is "white"; and it also means "silver."

20. According to the man who recited this prayer, *Sha^- ca^* here refers to *G'ui_ sha*, the personified, male, creating "Father God." But *Sha^- ca^* also is the name of a culture hero who entered *G'ui_ sha*'s heaven (and so partakes in *G'ui_ sha* as the diffused divinity) without first having to die (cf. Walker 1981b: 679-681, n. 17 for the *Sha^- ca^* legend).

21. "Shielding and precious" is how I translate the couplet *taw_ ti_ taw_ shehn^-*. *Taw_ ve* means "to impede," in this case "impede misfortune"; *shehn^-* means "jewel."

22. Here I have translated *hpu* as "white," but "pure" or "silver" would be equally appropriate.

23. See note 20.

24. "Silver and golden *haw_ yeh_ (haw_ hpu haw_ shi^-)*" is a couplet suggesting "precious, valuable, rich, beautiful."

25. I do not understand the meaning of *Pa_ la_* here. According to the context, it should refer to the personified Father *G'ui_ sha*, Lord of the Heavens. But the man who recited this prayer said he was referring to "the Great *Paw hku^-*'s temple." This "Great *Paw hku^-*" (in Lahu, *Paw hku^- lon^-*: *paw hku^-* from Shan, *paw* "father" and *hku^-* [*khun*], a title of respect; *lon^-* "great") is a particular Lahu religious leader who had messianic pretensions (cf. Walker 1974e: 703-705). He died in 1980.

26. To "cry out for nine lifespans (*k'aw_ co bvuh_ ve*)" means to "pray that all the villagers live for the number of years equivalent to nine lifetimes."

27. The "right-hand group (*la_ sha mo_ la_*)" comprises the menfolk, the "left-hand group (*la_ meh_ mo_ hi^-*)" the womenfolk; *mo_ la_ . . . mo_ hi^-* is a couplet.

28. "To plant the *kaw mo^- taweh_ (kaw mo^- ti g'a ve)*" means to set up the new posts in the temple courtyard.

29. "The ten kinds, the nine kinds (*chi ceu_ k'aw^- ceu_*)" means "all kinds (of misfortune)."

30. A *meh_ taw_ le^* is a two-pronged metal fork mounted on a roughly-carved wooden shaft (see Pl. 1h in Walker 1976a and Fig. 1 in Walker 1981b). It is used by spirit specialists to expel malicious spirits (cf. Walker 1976a: 416-417; 1981a: 144-146; 1981b: 699 n. 60).

31. For a description of this ritual wrist-binding in connection with a "Merit Feast" (*aw_ bon te ve*), see Walker (1972b: 359-360). There, the object was for guests to pass "blessings" or "merit" (*aw_ bon*) to the household which had sponsored the feast. On *shi^- nyi lon^-* the object is for elders to pass *aw_ bon* to younger people; the rite is otherwise identical.

32. *Hkao_* is the Lahu form of Thai *khrao* "to enter". *Hpa_ sha^-* is the Lahu form of Thai *phansa* "the lenten season" (See n. 12 above).

33. In fact, the offerings are placed in the temple on both sides of the *G'ui_ sha* throne.

34. See above, n. 25.

35. See above, n. 16.

36. That is, "all things."

37. "All ways (*hk'a hk'a^- chi hk'a^-*)" means "all modes (ways) of livelihood,"

viz., the way of farming, the way of animal husbandry, the way of hunting, etc.

38. That is, "all the menfolk." See verse 3 for "the whole group on the left-hand side", meaning "all the womenfolk."

39. *Li[~] tsuh_^* (from *aw_~ li[~]* "custom" and *tsuh_^ ve* "to bind together") are bundles of bamboo sticks with cotton wool on top (cf. Walker 1981b: 677-678; 1982b: 109). They are offerings given with the hope that sins (*ve[~] ba⁻*) will be cleansed (*keh₋ ve*); but beyond this statement of their purpose, I could not discover the symbolism of these *li[~] tsuh_^*.

40. The *hpeu₋ k'o₋* is another kind of offering (cf. Walker 1981b: 677), comprising a loosely-woven bamboo basket with slender sticks of bamboo topped by cotton wool fixed to it. The *hpeu₋ k'o₋*, Lahu Nyi sometimes say, represents a bowl of flowers such as Buddhists offer at their temples.

41. "*Ai ma*'s *li[~] tsuh_^*" are those *li[~] tsuh_^*, especially offered to *Ai ma*.

42. That is, "all the offerings."

43. See n. 25. Once again, the context clearly suggests that *Pa₋ la₋* is synonymous with *G'ui₋ sha*. But again, this was not the interpretation of the one who recited the text.

44. *Keh₋ teh*, literally "purification bench" (*keh₋ ve* "to purify, cleanse," *teh* "bench"), is a small wooden bench on which is placed a bamboo cup called *li[~] kaw[^]* or "custom cup." This cup is filled with water as part of the *shi⁻ nyi* offerings.

45. Since *Pa₋ la₋* here appears in conjunction with *Ai ma*, once again the name seems to refer to *G'ui₋ sha*, despite the reciter's view that it refers properly to the "Great *Paw hku[~]*"; see above n. 25.

46. That is, the divine prototype *li[~] tsuh_^*, see n. 10 above.

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