Sha^- La^- Te Ve: The Building of a Merit Shelter Among the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) of the Northern Thai Uplands

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INTRODUCTION
In a previous contribution to this journal (Walker 1984), I described in some detail the three Great Merit Days (shi^- nyi lon^-) observed by the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) people among whom I lived in the hills of north Thailand. In this article I examine an important ritual event which follows immediately after at least one, and sometimes all, of these shi^- nyi lon^-.

This is the construction of a rest shelter along the pathway to a Lahu Nyi village. The shelter is built with the principal objective of obtaining merit or blessings (Lahu aw^ bon, from Tai^ bun “merit”) by providing a place of rest and shelter for the footweary traveler. The Lahu have certainly borrowed their custom from their lowland neighbors, the Buddhist Tai, who build similar shelters—and bridges as well—for exactly the same reason. Indeed the Lahu word for their merit hut, sha^- la^, is of Tai origin and refers, initially, to the pavilions erected in temple courtyards for pilgrims, and thence to any kind of rest hut built elsewhere for the benefit of tired travelers (cf. Kingshill 1960: 95; 302, s.v., sa-la).

While the ideological and practical origin of the Lahu sha^- la^- is clearly Buddhist, these Lahu Nyi villagers have surrounded its construction with an essentially Lahu ritual idiom and supporting ideology. Thus, as with the shi^- nyi lon^- festivals described in my earlier paper, the making of a merit hut shows how non-Buddhist hill people adopt and adapt aspects of their lowland Tai neighbors' Buddhist culture, without themselves becoming fully integrated into that culture.

In order to understand the wider context of the ritual activity described in this paper, the reader should certainly study the introductory
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remarks presented in the previous article (Walker 1984: 275–278) and preferably also examine my other works on Lahu ritual.

SHA" LA" TE VE: BUILDING A MERIT SHELTER

The Lahu Nyi follow a lunar calendar, dividing each month into the period of the waxing and the period of the waning moon. The day of the new moon and the day of the full moon, which begin these two periods, are days of socially-enforced rest and ritual celebration (cf. Walker 1981). They are called shi˘ nyi or merit days. In addition, the Lahu Nyi in northern Thailand celebrate three shi˘ nyi lon˘ or “great merit days” (cf. Walker 1984) to mark three important events in their agricultural year: the conclusion of the firing of their new swiddens, the harvesting of their first side crops (maize and others), and the harvesting of the first rice. Unlike an ordinary shi˘ nyi, the great lunar festivals occupy two days rather than one. And, on the third day, the villagers may decide to put up a merit shelter.

The great lunar festivals, incidentally, have names which are derived from Tai festivals that occur at about the same time. The Lahu names are Sheh` haw` shi˘ nyi, Hkao` shi˘ nyi and Aw` shi˘ nyi, corresponding to the Northern Thai New Year, the beginning of the Buddhist “lenten” season and the end of that season (see below, Text 1-B, n. 30).

Fig. 1. Building a merit shelter stretching over pathway leading to the village.
The tasks related to sha" la" te ve ("making the sha" la"") begin early on the day after a two-day great lunar festival. When the villagers have breakfasted, a work party comprising a man from every household sets out for the place where the headman, after consultation with other village elders, has determined that the shelter is to be erected. They take with them the percussion instruments kept in the village temple (cf. Walker 1981: 671–679): drum (ca_k'o_), gong (bo lo k'o_) and cymbals (cheh heh"). The man or boy who carries the gong beats it as the party walks to the work site. The women remain at home to prepare the noon meal, which they will later carry to the new merit shelter. Each household is expected to kill a chicken and prepare rice and chicken curry for the feast.

The sha" la", an open structure of bamboo and wood, has a roof

Fig. 2. The white wooden posts are called haw mo" taweh_; the pendant is a meh ca" la" shaweh_; at left, man with lighted beewax candle prays to the local hill spirit.
which extends over the pathway (Fig. 1). On each side of this shelter the workers set up two, or sometimes three, kaw mo taweh or ritual posts (Fig. 2), an altar (hti-) comprising a bamboo mat atop a wooden post (Fig. 3), and a bamboo pole with a pendant made of split bamboo (Fig. 2). The two altars will later hold food offerings for the spirits (Fig. 6, 9). The pendants, called meh ca la shaweh, are stylized centipedes (meh ca la "centipede," shaweh "pendant"). The centipede is associated with the spirits (perhaps because of its painful "bite"); the same word, che ve, is used for the "bite" of spirits) and is here offered to the local hill spirit (hh'aw ne), who through propitiation becomes the guardian spirit of the locality. The symbolism of the ritual posts or kaw mo taweh, usually offered to G'ui sha but here said to be gifts to the spirits, is uncertain. The headman of my study community told me that the three cuts on the posts for this occasion represent three wishes of the community: that the rice crop should not be destroyed by insects, that the people should not be killed, and that there should be no sickness. Posts and altars are decorated with red paper streamers attached to bamboo sticks. These ca ca (Fig. 3) are offerings for the spirits, and I was told that red is a particularly appropriate color for the spirits. Directly in front of the left-hand altar, a small half-section of bamboo resembling a feeding trough is placed on two forked sticks (Fig. 4). Inside this "trough" are placed long grasses and a noose made of grass, representing bait and a rope snare for the souls (aw ha) of the wild animals. Called va lu k'u (va "trap," lu k'u "hollow object"), the tiny trough and its contents symbolize the villagers' desire for game.

The sha la itself, which is dedicated to G'ui sha rather than to the spirits, is decorated with white rather than red paper streamers. Attached to the main upright supports of the hut are small half-sections of bamboo which will later contain food offerings for G'ui sha (Fig. 5).

It takes three to four hours to build the merit shelter and prepare the necessary ritual paraphernalia (Fig. 10). By the time all is ready, the women will have arrived with the food, and the rites which dedicate the various offerings to G'ui sha and the spirits can begin.

Each woman places some grains of cooked rice and a little relish in each of the nine small bamboo sections attached to the main uprights of the merit shelter. (Maize cobs and other newly-harvested crops are added when the ceremony follows hkae shi nyi, and rice sheaves when it follows aw shi nyi). Next the women make similar offerings at the two spirit altars. Beeswax candles brought by every household are then lighted and placed on each offering receptacle. Once all these are alight, the headman and senior priest (to bo pa) take other beeswax
Fig. 3. Woman placing her offerings on the hti (altar) for the local hill spirit.

Fig. 4. Replica trough and noose in front of altar, symbolizing bait and snare for wild animals (see also Fig. 7).
candles in their right hand (Fig. 6, 7), light them, and station themselves at the altars on either side of the sha' la' (it does not matter which man chooses which altar). Squatting in front of their respective altars the headman and priest pray, to the accompaniment of drum, gong and cymbals.

Both men address the local hill spirit, but their prayers differ according to the altar at which they are offered. The man at the right-hand altar asks the guardian hill spirit to create blessings or merit (aw ban) in exchange for the offerings which the village community has provided. He asks the spirit to watch over the workers in the fields and protect the crops from wild animals, and he requests that the supply of food and drink may never be exhausted. Texts 1-A and 1-B are examples of this prayer recited by different men.
Fig. 6. Village headman praying to local hill spirit; maize cobs, beans, sweet potatoes, cooked rice and salt comprise the offerings.

TEXT 1-A

1. O" O", ya ni ky hax Meh Hpa te~ fu te~ a dau ve, ka_ haw Meh Hpa_ a g'aw', Meh Hpa_ hk'aw teh hk'aw g'aw' hta_ haw, ha_ Meh Hpa_ hk'aw teh hk'aw g'aw' hta_ haw, ca ti' ca ma_ la_ meu' hta_ haw, sha' la' bon shaw' u' shaw' meh_ k'aw_ pa_ leh sha' la' hon, sha' la' shi' k'aw_ mui_ leh ka_ haw.

2. Ha_ hk'aw sheh_ law_ sheh_ hpa', Meh Hpa_ hk'aw teh hk'aw g'aw ka_ haw ve_ hk'aw sheh_ law_ sheh_ hpa' ka_ haw ve_ can_ ha_ can_ meu'

1. Oh today, this village here at Mae Hpa hill once again exchanges this merit shelter built with wood [cut by axes made by] the blacksmith's own hands; we once again make this merit shelter here at this place.

2. Ha, master of the hills and of the streams here at Mae Hpa hill, master of the hills and of the streams, lord of the village, lord of the country
3. Every person of the village here at Mae Hpa, the right-hand group, once again working together with the same pure intention, has prepared many different kinds of offerings made by their own hands; ha, we place [these offerings] under you; stretch out your feet and receive [these offerings], stretch out your hands and receive [them].

4. Lord of this place, master of the hills and the streams here at this place, ha, you who are all-knowing, all-true, when the people are working with their hands on the farms, they ask that you carefully look upon them and order that they be separated [from all misfortune].

5. Ha, please also let [our fields] be separated from all wild animals; order that they bypass [our fields].

6. When we are farming our lands, if we work for one day in the fields may the food not be finished in ten days; if we work for one year in the fields may the drink not be exhausted in ten years; ha, this boon once again create and put upon us.

7. Ha, you who can create three times in one day, you who can create three times in one night, lord of this place; lord of this place, the Mae Hpa side, search for and create for every person, the big and the small, every household, the boon of a great yield, [so that] the food may not finish, the drink may not be exhausted.

8. Every person, every household has prepared all kinds of offerings made by our own hands and has come to put them here at this place.
THE BUILDING OF A MERIT SHELTER: RED LAHU

1. Today, here under this Mae Saluam hill, [the people] of the headman's right-hand side once again work together, united by the same pure thoughts; the people of the left-hand side once again work together, united by the same pure thoughts; they give [offerings to you]; they once again make a merit shelter here at this place.

2. Oh, my whole group once again take up cooked rice prepared by our own hands and once again pray and once again offer [it to you]; we once again offer chillies and salt, we once again pray and put [our prayer] to the master of the hill top, we once again put [our prayer] to the master of the stream source.

3. Oh, I once again pray, my whole group once again presents these ten thousand, these one million offerings prepared by our own hands; we once again ride under the great prince of this place and we once again present these ten thousand, these one million offerings prepared by our own hands; stretch out your feet and once again take [these offerings], come down from the heavens to earth and once again take [them]; from earth once again take [them] to the heavens.

4. Oh, our whole group, united by the same pure intention, once again makes offerings and puts them before the master of the hill top; we once again put them before the master of the stream source.

5. Today and hereafter, when [the
members of our group are travelling or farming, at home or at work, traveling, searching for something or at home, once again separate, divide and protect us from wild animals; once again separate, divide and shield us from men of evil intent; once again divide and protect us from malicious spirits also; 29 open up and bestow upon us [the boon of] untroubled thoughts.

6. This year, at this "entering" phansa, 29 oh, this year, at this sand-heaping vassa, 31 we once again make offerings; master of the hill top, master of the stream source, lord who lives on the hill, lord who lives in the stream, oh you once again receive this cooked rice and cooked water 29 prepared by our own hands, once again ride on [your] white elephant, [your] white horse; 31 I once again offer these ten thousand, these one million offerings made by our own hands; stretch out your feet and receive, stretch out your hands and receive.

7. I make offerings this one time, [so] today and hereafter when we are searching for game, let us have success; also when we are working in the fields, once again separate us from points of iron and points of copper, once again separate us from points of wood; 34 when we are walking around the village or along the streams, do not strike us with all kinds of sickness.

8. Today and hereafter, when we are traveling or searching for something, if wild animals are walking around the top of the hill, take them and put them at the bottom of the hill; if they are walking around the bottom of the hill, take them and put them at the top of the hill; do not strike anyone of my group with any kind of trouble.

9. Oh, I once again make offerings at...
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10. If we work for one day in the fields, may the food not be exhausted in ten days; oh, if we work for one year in the fields, may the food not be exhausted in ten years.

11. Great lord, you who can watch [over us], can order [for us] and place [boons] upon us; this year you can look upon and care for all the animals, great lord, big lord of this place, you who can watch over, shield and look after [all of us].

12. When we are travelling, when we are working in the fields, you can take care of us; look upon, shield and take care of the people's side, the farming side and the animals' side.

13. Let us have no troubled thoughts; the whole group makes offering; here at this place [we search for] your blessings; oh, today and hereafter watch over, look upon and take care of the people's side and the animals' side also.

14. Do not strike [anyone] with any kind of misfortune; for the people's side and the animals' side order protection from death and sickness.

15. Here at this place stretch out your feet, stretch out your hands and receive these ten thousand, these one million offerings prepared by our own hands.

16. Let us have no troubled thoughts; we once again prepare this white wooden [sha~ la"], we once again
While one of the elders prays in this fashion at the right-hand

Fig. 7. Village headman praying to local hill spirit for success in the hunt (see also Fig. 4).
altar (Fig. 6), the man at the left-hand altar (Fig. 7) is praying to the same spirit, as keeper of all the wild animals in the area, requesting that the villagers may enjoy success in the hunt. Two examples of this prayer are given as Texts 2-A and 2-B below.

**TEXT 2-A**

1. O’, O”, ka haw Meh Hpa te’ hpaw’ yo’ law le’ k’o’ k’o, ha, chaw ya’ chi ve ka haw Meh Hpa te’ hpaw’ ve, la meu’ hkaw’ lu’ hkaw’ tan’, ce ce cu cu, k’aw’ te leh naw u’ naw va’ hta’ k’aw’ ta g’a ve.

2. Ha, sha hu nga’ hu sheh hpa’, va pa va ma hu sheh hpa’, tsuh pa tsuh ma hu sheh hpa’, hkui’ xuh pa hku’ zhuh ma hu sheh hpa’ ka haw ve, cao maw cao tu’ ka haw ve, ha, ci’ ga leh ma ca meu’ ca’ la’ meh.

3. La meu’ hkaw’ lu’ hkaw’ tan’ chi ma te leh law ca’ hk’a’ ca’ ve ce’ meh, ka haw Meh Hpa te’ fu’ te’ a daw’ ve yo’ law.

4. Ha, va pa va ma hu sheh hpa’ yo’ law k’o’ k’o, sho ca’ kui’ ca’ hpeh leh nga’ g’u’ ta la meh.

5. Ha, sho meu’ kui’ meu’ hta haw g’a hpeh’ la’, sho ba’ kui’ ba’ hta haw’ g’a hpeh’ la’.

6. Ka haw ve, va shi’ g’a leh ma ca meu’ ca’ la’, te’ keu’ k’o, a vi a pa hku’ taw’ ga’ leh te’ keu k’o, mi’ hu ya’ hu ga’ la’.

7. Ka haw la meu’ hkaw’ lu’ hkaw’ tan’ chi ma k’aw’ ta leh, ha, law ca’ hk’a’ ca’ ve, ka haw cao maw cao’ tu’, cao ba cao meu la haw, kao ca lao ca’ ca’ haw la’ meh.

8. Oh, here at Mae Hpa, these people of Mae Hpa have made with their own hands these many different kinds of offerings; once again they place them before you.

9. Oh you who look after the wild animals and the fish, you who look after the male and the female wild pigs, you who look after the male and female barking deer, you who look after the male and the female sambar deer, lord of this place, oh, give us a little [game] to eat.

10. The people of Mae Hpa village have made all these offerings with their own hands and they beg [for game] to eat.

11. Ha, you who keep the male and the female wild pigs, tie them in iron chains, in copper chains, and put them in front of us.

12. Ha, release [the game] on iron points, on copper points; release [them] on iron points, on copper points.

13. Here at this place let us get the boon of a wild pig; we beg [for game] to eat; with one half [of the flesh] we will follow the custom of the elder relatives and of the fathers, one half we want for our wives and children.

14. Here at this place we once again put offerings made by our own hands, ha, we beg [for game] to eat; lord of this place, lord of the village, lord of the country here at this place, let other people speak of our good fortune [in the hunt].
Fig. 8. Wrist-binding at conclusion of ceremony, symbolizing the binding of blessings into the body of the recipient.

TEXT 2-n

1. O" ya_nyi ka_haw Ho_Pa_Fa" cao_ba_cao_meu" chi ma ve, ne" chi ne" ya", cao_maw cao_tu" ka_haw ve, nga_la_meu" hkaw" lu" hkaw" tan" chi ma ve g'a veu la" o.

2. La_meu" ui_ve i ve leh peh" haw_naw_hk'aw" g'a veu la" o.

3. Ka_haw Ho_Pa_Fa" te" hpaw" ve, sha_hu nga" hu sheh_hpa", tsuh_pa_tsuh ma, va_pa_va ma, hku" zuh_pa_, hku" zuh_ma hu sheh_hpa", ka_haw Ho_Pa_Fa" te".

1. Oh today, here at this place, lord of the village, lord of the country at Huey Pang Farn,41 and all you spirits, you children of spirits, you lords of this place, I bring for you all these offerings made by my own hand.

2. I bring for you [all these offerings], large and small, made by my own hand, and these beeswax candles.

3. Here at Huey Pang Farn, you who look after the animals and the fish, you who look after the male barking deer and the female barking deer, you who look after the male wild
pigs and the female wild pigs, you who look after the male sambar deer and the female sambar deer; drive [your animals] here to Huey Pang Farm and release them onto the points of our spears, onto the barrels of our guns.

4. Cover [the animals'] eyes with leaves, drive them here and release them; tie them with your iron chain, with your copper chain and let them wait [for us].

5. We people take these offerings and reach to you at this place, you great lord, lord of the village, lord of the country, stretch out your feet, stretch out your hands and receive [our offerings].

The guardian spirit of the locality having thus been propitiated, the officiating elders turn their attention to G'ui sha, the highest of all supernatural beings whom the Lahu recognize. They move to the sha la itself, light fresh beeswax candles and, praying in unison this time, offer

Fig. 9. Offerings to hill spirit: sweet potatoes, yams, chillies, cooked rice, etc. (See also Fig. 3)
Fig. 10. The completed sha" la" or merit shelter; senior priest at center offering the shelter and its contents to the supreme supernatural G'ui_ sha.

the shelter and its contents to G'ui_ sha (Fig. 10). Texts 3-A, B, C, D are examples of prayers appropriate for this occasion.

**Text 3-A**

1. Ha, ka_ haw ya_ nyi Mch Hpa_ hk'aw teh hk'aw g'aw' chi hts_ haw yo_ law k'o_ k'o_ Mch Hpa_ te_ fu_ te_ a daw' ve, ca li_ ca ma la_ meu_ chi hts_ haw yo_ law, shaw' hpu shaw' u_ shaw' meh_ k'aw_ pa_ leh ka_ haw a g'aw' Meh Hpa_ hk'aw teh hk'aw g'aw' hts_ haw, sha" la" bon sha" la" shi" k'aw_ mui_ ve.

2. Uj_ ka_ i ka_ daw" hpu tc_ ca" k'aw_ mui_ leh, hu_ ya_ nyi mui_ ca" va" ca", mui_ hk'o_ va" hk'o_ chi hts_ haw, mui_ suh" va" suh" k'aw_ taw" leh sha" la" bon sha" la" shi" k'aw_ mui_ , k'aw_ sha" ve.

3. Ha, k'aw_ sha" k'aw_ go" leh no_ g'a a pa ka ti_ ka shch" hpaw" incu"
k'aw, ta, g'a yo, law, a pa ka ti, ka sheh, hpaw, meu, k'aw, sha, k'aw, go, leh, ha, ya, nyi sha, la, bon sha, la, shi, k'aw, miu, ve, k'aw, sha, k'aw, go, hk'a yo, law, k'o, k'o, hk'a, g'a, chi g'a, ui, ka, i, ka, g'o, taw, g'o, g'a, ha, ca, ta, daw, ta, ca, li, daw, li, k'aw, ta, g'a.

4. Hk'a, g'a, chi g'a, hta, haw, ma, daw, ma, ha, ma, daw, ma, hki, g'a, ga, ha, ya, nyi hka, shi, pcu, chi hta, haw, sha, la, bon sha, la, shi, k'aw, miu, g'a, yo, law, k'o, k'o, ui, ka, i, ka, k'aw, sha, k'aw, go, leh, no, g'a, aw, na, a pa, ka ti, ka sheh, hpaw, meu, k'aw, ta, g'a.

5. Ha, hkui, ta, tu, ta, hpa, g'a, sheh, hpa, hku, yaw, nu, yaw, hpa, g'a, sheh, ma, yo, law, k'o, k'o, te, nyi, sheh, yan, leh, u, heh, meh, hku, ta, tu, ta, hkui, yaw, nu, yaw, k'aw, hpa, leh, ta, pi.

6. Hk'a, g'a, chi g'a, te, nyi, mui, leh, chi, nyi, ca, leh, a, pea, te, hku, aw, miu, leh, chi, hk'a, aw, daw, leh, a, yaw, ve, chi, bon, pa, leh, ga, pi.

7. No, g'a, ui, hpaw, mvuh, hpaw, ma, ha, sha, hti, bon, ma, ha, sha, hti, shi, kao, li, k'aw, bvuh, leh, ka, haw, Pi, ti, La, hu, a, g'aw, yeh, chi, hi, chi, hkui, ka, k'aw, ta, pi, meh, .

8. Hk'a, g'a, chi g'a, lta, haw, yo, law, k'o, k'o, ha, ca, leh, a, pea, daw, leh, a, yaw, ve, hk'a, g'a, chi g'a, hk'a, aw, naw, g'u, suh, ma, daw, ma, ha, ma, daw, ma, hki, ha, ko, keu, ko, na, k'o, ca, law, daw, law, ca, ti, daw, ti, te, nyi, sheh, yan, k'aw, hpaw, leh, ta, pi.

4. May every person have untroubled thoughts; today at the end of this hkao, shi, nyi, 46 we once again make this merit shelter, the big and the small once again make offerings and once again raise their hands and put [their prayers] to the side of the all-true, all-precious Father up there.

5. Oh, Father creator of fertility, Mother creator of fertility, 47 three times in one day once again create fertility and put it at the top of the fields, at the bottom of the fields.

6. This boon create and grant to every person that when we work for one day in the fields, the food may not be finished in ten days; if we work for one year in the fields, the drink may not be exhausted in ten years.

7. Once again cry out and bestow upon the Pi ti, Lahu, 48 who live on the hills and in the forests, the boon of great wealth like that of [the people of] the great towns yonder. 49

8. Three times in one day again open and bestow upon every person [the boon that] the food will not finish, the drink will never be exhausted; let no troubled thoughts befall any one of us, either in front or behind; oh, on the downhill side of the house and on the uphill side of the house, may there be enough to eat and enough to drink; may there always be enough to eat and drink.
9. Divine creator of all customs up there, creator of the nine kinds, the ten kinds [of things], oh, once again create and grant to us [the boon] that the food will always be sufficient, the drink will always be sufficient.

10. Today we once again make a merit shelter, we once again make offerings and we once again stretch out our hands; you who three times in one day and three times in one night create [boons] and split [misfortune from fortune], nine times in one day again cry out and grant to us that the old rice not finish until the new rice [is harvested].

11. May we have health and prosperity; this year at this hkaoot phansaa, every person once again presents every kind of offering made by his own hands.

12. Oh, once again separate and let pass from every one of us the side of death and the side of sickness; once again count and sweep away the side of poverty.

13. You up there, all-true, all-powerful Father, keeper of the Pi ti people, today I say but one word at this merit shelter, you are the one who can order and cleanse us from the ten kinds of sickness; I order but one word, you are the one who can order nine words and separate and let [all misfortune from us].

14. Oh, this year we once again make a merit shelter, once again count and let pass from every person sharp points of wood, count and let pass [from us] iron points and copper points, oh you who can shield and protect.

15. I once again order one word at this place; at this moment we build a merit shelter; in one day order that we be cleansed from the ten kinds, the nine kinds of sickness.
16. These people once again make offerings and once again put them at the side of the all-true, all-precious Father up there; oh, may every person this year suffer no decay nor grow any older, once again order and grant ten lifespans to the big and the small.

17. Nine times in one day, nine times in one night, may the eternal roll of cotton string\textsuperscript{58} at Father Sha\textsuperscript{57}'s right-hand side\textsuperscript{57} again cry out and again put [blessings] on the feet of the menfolk and of the womenfolk, again put [blessings] on their hands; this boon of health and prosperity alone give [to us all].
may eternal souls once again join
the weak souls of the womenfolk.63

TEXT 3-c

1. Oh, oh, this year at this *hkaot phan-

saad every person within the four
corners of the headman’s village,
within the four corners of the *to bo
pa’s66 village, every person, every
household this year offers this new
maize and these new chillies and
once again reaches to *G’ui_ *fu_, the
messenger,66 every household once
again meets together, all the people
once again meet together.

2. Oh Mother *Na bo na ca”,67 the solar
scribe and the lunar scribe,68 all of
you, female lunar scribe and male
solar scribe, watch over and shield
the top of the village and the bottom
of the village, every household.

3. Do not let the chillies and the maize
over-ripen.

4. Today and hereafter do not allow
disease to climb up on any person,
any field, the tops of the fields or the
bottoms of the fields, the chilli fields,
the maize fields, and if we plant
during one year, let there be [profits
to buy] enough clothing for ten
years; if we make one field let there
be enough food for ten years.

5. Oh we once again take and once
again present all these offerings
made by our own hands, these pure
beeswax candles; let these offering-
posts once again shield and once
again protect the tops of the fields
and the bottoms of the fields from
chilli disease and maize disease.

6. Every household, every person takes
a pair of beeswax candles and
reaches under *G’ui_ *fu_, messenger
of the *haw yeh,69 under the eternal
*G’ui_ *fu_, the all-precious *G’ui_ *fu_.

1. O”, O”, chi hk’aw_ hkaot hpa_ sha”
chi yo_ law le” k’o” k’o, a, a, daw
hk’a” ma aw” ce_ to bo hk’a” ma
aw” ce_, hk’aw_ g’a” chi g’a” leh
hk’a_ g’o_ chi g’o_ yo_ law le” k’o”
k’o, sha ma suh”, a” hpe_ suh” chi
hk’aw_ tan” leh G’ui_ *fu_ tcuh ya
chi hta_ k’aw_ ga_ la ve yo_ law le”
k’o” k’o, hk’a_ g’o_ chi g’o_ k’aw_
ceu_ leh hk’a_ g’a” chi g’a” hk’o”
hta_ k’aw_ ceu_ la”.

2. A, a e Na bo na ca”, mvuh” ni ci
le”, ha pa ce” le”, chi ma ve yo_ law
le” k’o” k’o leh pa ce” le” ma,
mvuh” ni ce” le” pa_ chi yo_ law
le” k’o” k’o, hk’a” u” hk’a” meh_
hk’a_ g’o_, chi g’o_ g’o_ ceu_ g’o

tau_ la”.

3. A, a” hpe_ yo_ law le” k’o” k’o, sha
ma yo_ law le” k’o” k’o, yaw” ta”
ve ta” te la” ce”.

4. Ya_ ni ce” o” k’ai ve yo_ law le”
k’o” k’o, hk’a_ g’a” chi g’a” ve,
hk’a_ pe” chi pe” hk’o” hta_, heh
u” heh meh_, a, a” hpe_ hko_ yo_ law
le” k’o” k’o, sha ma hk’o” yo_ law
le” k’o” k’o, te” hk’aw_ ti g’a
ve, chi hk’aw_ g’a” veu” ve, heh te”
pe” te g’a ve, chi hk’aw_ g’a ca” ve,
hpa” yu” hpa” ya” ma” ta” la”.

5. A, la_ meu” hkaw” lu” hkaw” tan”
chi ma ve yo_ law le” k’o” k’o, peh_
hpu hkeh hpu chi yo_ law le” k’o”
k’o, k’aw_ tau” k’aw_ sha” leh kaw
mo” ti”, kaw mo” sheh” chi ka
k’aw_ tau” k’aw_ suh” leh heh u”
heh mi, a” ape_ hpa” ya”, sha ma
hpa” ya” yo_ law le” k’o” k’o
k’aw_ tau” pi”.

6. Hk’aw_ g’o_ chi g’o_ yo_ law le”
k’o” k’o”, hk’a_ g’a” chi g’a”, peh_
haw_ te” g’a” te” ku tau” leh haw-
*fu_ tcuh ya” chi hta_, haw” *fu_
ti_ pfuh” sheh_ hpa”, haw-
*fu_ co co sheh” pfuh” sheh_ hpa” chi
haw ga_ la ve yo_ law le” k’o” k’o.
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7. Oh, we people have no wisdom, no truth, so G'ui, fu, the all-true, you who create [success in] the farm work, once again create and put [fertility] into our fields so that if we work for one day in the fields, the food will not finish in ten years; let us have great prosperity; this boon once again create [for us].

8. Father Sha~ ca" and you also, Mother Na bo na ca", you creators of the tops of the fields and the bottoms of the fields, create and grant [good fortune] for every household, every person.

Text 3-d

1. Oh today we make a merit shelter, and the big and the small within the four corners of the headman's village, within the four corners of the to bo pa's village, kill pigs and chickens and make a merit shelter.

2. Solar scribe and lunar scribe, Father Sha~ ca", the creator also, oh today, at this moment, [the altar] at the side of the water [we give to] the water spirit, the rock spirit; [the altar] at the right-hand side we give to the hill spirit, the dale spirit; [the merit shelter in] the middle we give to Father Sha~ ca".

3. All these sweet potatoes, all these things we have planted, [we offer] and we make a merit shelter; let us have food and drink.

4. Father Sha~ ca", when we are working in the fields, carefully once again teach us, once again help us; let every household have food and clothing, grant that all of us, equally, may have [these things].

5. Today and hereafter, when the hunters climb up to the top of the hill, oh let their guns very easily meet male sambar deer and female sambar deer, male wild pigs and...
female wild pigs, male barking deer and female barking deer.

6. Today and hereafter, the altar over there we give to the water spirit, the altar on the right-hand side we give to the spirit of the hills and dales; the altar in the middle, the merit shelter, we give to this Father "Sha-ca".

7. Father "Sha-ca", the creator, the all-wise, all-true, oh next year when we plant [our crops], may every person, every household suffer no troubled thoughts, may the food not finish, the clothing not be exhausted; at the top of the fields and at the bottom of the fields carefully create and give [this boon].

8. Father "Sha-ca", carefully shield, let pass from us and protect us from a troubled place.

9. At the top of the fields and at the bottom of the fields, when we plant [our crops], may every person, every household suffer no troubled thoughts, may the food and drink not finish; Father "Sha-ca", the creator, the all-knowing, all-true, carefully create, spread and bestow [this boon] on every person and every household, let everyone equally have enough to eat and to drink.

10. At the top of the fields and at the bottom of the fields, next year when we plant [our crops], let the food and drink not finish; Father "Sha-ca", the creator, the all-knowing, all-true, carefully create, spread and bestow [this boon] on every person and every household, let everyone equally have enough to eat and to drink.

11. Next year when we plant, let us have no troubled thoughts; the top of a pig and the bottom of a pig we carefully give [to you].

12. Let every household not suffer from troubled thoughts; this boon alone look for and carefully grant to us.

13. Ai ma, Na bo na ca-'; carefully teach and help every person that we have no troubled thoughts, and carefully shield and protect us from
k'o, sho meu’m kui’m meu’k’o, hk’a
deh_h_ leh suh’h pi”.
14. Zuh’a ma’ zuh’a mo tu’ k’o’ k’o,
ha deh_h_ leh suh’h leh pon_ pi”, hki” kui_ keh kui_ k’o
hk’a
deh_h_ leh suh’h leh pon_ pi”,
chi bon ti’ k’aw_ hpa_ leh chi shi
ti’ k’aw_ gu leh ta_ pi” meh_, a
pa Sha” ca”, O”! O”!

After the prayers, all partake of the food which the women have
spread out in the sha’ la’. When all have eaten, the villagers tie cotton
string around each other’s wrists (Fig. 8). This wrist-binding rite
symbolizes the passing of blessings from one person to another. The
people say it also stresses the unity of the village community (cf. Walker
1972: 359–360). It is not necessary for everybody to bind everyone
else’s wrist, but the elders of the community are especially requested to
bind the wrists of their juniors in order to pass on to them their blessings.
And it may be—although it is not necessary—that the elder will recite
a prayer when binding the wrist of a junior. Text Four below is an
example.

Text 4

1. Ha, a pa Sha’ ca’ mai’ mo co ca’
ha ca’ chi ve k’aw_ buvh_ leh ya”
hpu la_ chi la_ daw” u” hta_ k’aw_
ta_ pi” she_ ha, ya” hpu hkui chi”
hkui daw” u” hta_ k’aw_ ta_ pi”.

2. Ma” hpu’i” ma” htai”, ma” maw”
ma’ ha” ve, a pa mai’ mo co ca’
ha ca’ chi ve k’aw_ buvh_ leh ya”
hpu la_ chi la_ daw” u” hta_ k’aw_
ta_ pi”.

3. Ha, cheh” sha caw_ sha pi”, te” nyi
sheh” yan”, te” ha” sheh” yan”,
a pa ka ti_ ka pa” k’o” k’o, ya_ nyi
mai’ mo co ca’ ha ca’ chi k’aw_
buvh_ g’a yo_ law le” k’o’ k’o.

4. Ka’ haw ya” hpu la_ chi” la_ daw”
’ hta_ k’aw_ ta_ g’a, te” nyi le,
cheh” sha caw_ sha, chi bon pa’
leh ga pi”.

5. Ma” daw” ma” hki”, ma” daw” ma”
ha_ ha, hk’aw_ naw” g’u” suh”,
chaw ca_ ma’ g’a, ne” ca_ ma’ g’a,

sharp points of copper and sharp
points of iron.

14. Carefully shield and let pass from
us troubled sleep; carefully shield,
let pass and protect us from mis­
fortune; this boon alone once again
create and this boon alone once
again prepare and grant to us, oh
Father Sha’ ca’.

Text 4

1. Ha, a pa Sha” ca’ mai’ mo co ca’
ha ca’ chi ve k’aw_ buvh_ leh ya”
hpu la_ chi la_ daw” u” hta_ k’aw_
ta_ pi” she_ ha, ya” hpu hkui chi”
hkui daw” u” hta_ k’aw_ ta_ pi”.

2. Ma” hpu”i” ma” htai”, ma” maw”
ma’ ha” ve, a pa mai” mo co ca”
ha ca” chi ve k’aw_ buvh_ leh ya”
hpu la_ chi la_ daw” u” hta_ k’aw_
ta_ pi”.

3. Ha, cheh” sha caw_ sha pi”, te” nyi
sheh” yan”, te” ha” sheh” yan”,
a pa ka ti_ ka pa” k’o” k’o, ya_ nyi
mai’ mo co ca” ha ca” chi k’aw_
buvh_ g’a yo_ law le” k’o” k’o.

4. Ka’ haw ya” hpu la_ chi” la_ daw”
’ hta_ k’aw_ ta_ g’a, te” nyi le,
cheh” sha caw_ sha, chi bon pa”
leh ga pi”.

5. Ma” daw” ma” hki”, ma” daw” ma”
ha_ ha, hk’aw_ naw” g’u” suh”,
chaw ca_ ma” g’a, ne” ca_ ma” g’a,
The wrist-binding rite finished, the whole ritual sequence is at an end and the villagers set off for home. The time is usually mid-afternoon, around three o'clock. The merit shelter will be used as a place of temporary rest by the Lahu villagers themselves and by anyone else traveling along that pathway, until it falls down after a year or two. New merit shelters are built at least twice a year, following any of the three shi nyi lon or "great merit days". At such times the rites described above are repeated.

Concluding Note

The rites associated with the construction of a merit shelter manifest several important aspects of Lahu Nyi religious practice. Within one ceremony are found rites directed towards the supreme supernatural being of these people, G'ui sha, and others directed towards the spirits or ne. We have seen that the merit hut itself is for G'ui sha, while the resident hill spirit (hk'aw ne) of the locality is propitiated at two side altars. We find not only the priest but also the village headman acting in a ritual capacity. But perhaps the most interesting feature of all is that a lowland Buddhist practice—the building of a rest shelter to acquire merit—has been adopted by Lahu hillmen and adapted to their own ritual idiom. These Lahu build a sha la, not simply to gain merit, but also to ensure the blessings of G'ui sha and of the local hill spirit.

Notes

1. 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 ha, 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 (ca'): high-rising open tone
- subscript straight line (ca\_): very low open tone
- suprascript wedge (ca\~): 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

2. 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. Walker (1969, 1970b, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1983) contain introductory ethnographic data on the Lahu people.

3. “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 Khon Muang (in the rest of northern Thailand).

4. See the bibliography at the end of my previous article in Asian Folklore Studies for a more complete listing of my work on Lahu Nyi ritual (Walker 1984: 300-302).

5. The Lahu Nyi conception of their local guardian hill spirit and its relation to the general category of hill spirits is identical to that of their Khon Muang (Northern Thai) neighbors. Of the latter, Turton (1972: 245) writes, “… when forest is cut down, say to make a space for domestic use or cultivation, non-specific forest spirits become single specific locality spirits (cao tii).” Sometimes these Lahu Nyi themselves address their locality spirit by this ‘Tai’ term (in Lahu script, cao\~ tii.)

6. For convenience of reference between the Lahu original and my English translation, I have broken the texts into verses. No such divisions are recognized by the people themselves.

7. For “village” the Lahu original has the poetic couplet, te\~ fu\_ te\~ a daw\~ , literally “one Gfu\_fu\_ (the spirit protector of the village) one headman” (a daw\~ from daw\_ ve “to think” and so “he who thinks on behalf of the community,” i.e., its headman).

8. Mae Hpa (Lahu, Meh Hpa\_) is the Thai name of a stream. The hill on which the Lahu village is sited takes its name from this stream.

9. The people “exchange” (pa\_ ve) the hut for blessings or merit.

10. The Lahu original has the couplet shaw\~ u\_ shaw\_ meh\_ “top of the wood, bottom of the wood,” instead of simply “wood.”

11. Words in brackets do not appear, but are implied, in the Lahu original.

12. The Lahu original uses the couplet sha\~ la\~ bon sha\~ la\~ shi\~ “many different kinds.” This refers to the hut, the ritual paraphernalia associated with it and the food offerings.
17. *Hkui che* . . . *la_ che* "feet stretch out, hands stretch out" is a poetic couplet, in no way to be taken literally.

18. That the man's prayer is made on behalf of somebody else (in this case, all the villagers) is indicated in Lahu by the word *ce* at the end of the sentence.

19. The couplet *to nu* to *sha* indicates the general category of wild animals.

20. *Mui_ ca* " va_ ca" is the poetic couplet which stands for "working in the fields."

21. *Aw_ hkwaw* "great yield", couplet *aw_ bon aw_ shi* "blessing, boon" (also "merit," but in this context "boon" is probably the best translation).

22. Literally, "put inside" (*keu ve*).

23. *Je^ ve* "to split," in this connexion means, I think, to split misfortune from fortune, sickness from health, poverty from wealth, and so on.

24. Mae Saluam (Lahu, Meh Sho_ Lo) is the Thai name of a stream from which the merit hut was erected on this occasion.

25. The Lahu uses the coupled phrases *la_ sha a dav_ hpu dav_ ca* and *la_ meh a ga_ sha hpu sha_ ca*. In fact, there are four couplets here: (1) *la_ sha* and *la_ meh* (right and left [see n. 14 above]), (2) *a dav* and *a ga* (both meaning "headman," and deriving from the coupled verbs *daw_ ve ga_ ve* "to think" [see n. 7 above]), (3) *daw_ hpu* and *ga_ hpu* (both meaning "thoughts," again from the coupled verbs *daw_ ve ga_ ve*), (4) *daw_ ca* and *sha_ ca* (thought rope and offering rope; *daw_ ve* "to think," *sha_ ve* "to offer," *ca* "rope").

26. "Master of the hill top . . . master of the stream source" (*hk'aw u_ hk'aw sheh_ hpa* . . . *law_ u_ law_ sheh_ hpa*) is a couplet, both parts of which refer to the resident hill spirit.

27. The verb *ci^ ve* "to ride" is used here only for poetic effect.

28. Here I translate *cao^ hpeu^ nga leh* very roughly as "great prince." *Cao_" is "lord" or "prince," a loan from Tai, but I do not understand the rest of the phrase. (*Nga* means "fish," but not, I think, in this context.)

29. "Men of evil intent . . . malicious spirits" is how I translate the phrases *chaw ca_ chaw law* and *ne ca_ ne law*. This is the meaning of the phrases, according to my informants, but they were unable to give me a satisfactory word-by-word translation.

30. *Phansaa* (Lahu, *hpa_ sha*) is the Tai form of the Pali *vassa* (Lahu, *va_ sha*). Frequently termed the "Buddhist Lent" in English, *phansaa* is the rainy season (late June to early October) when 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). The beginning of this period of retreat is known in Thailand as *khrao phansaa* because it is the time when the monks "enter" (*khrao*) their monasteries.

31. "Sand-heaping *vassa*" (Lahu, *sat kazv_ va_ sha*) represents the Lahu reciter's confusion of two different Tai festivals. *Sat kaw_" "sand-heaping" comes from a rite associated with the Northern Thai new year celebrations (*songkran*), when people customarily carry sand from a river- or stream-bed to a temple courtyard and there model it into miniature temples. This festival falls in March-April. On the other hand, *vassa*, as noted above, is the "Lenten" season which begins with the festival of *khrao phansaa* (see note above) in June-July and ends with the festival of *awk phansaa* (*awk* "out"), when the monks may leave their monasteries, in September-October. The Lahu Nyi celebrate all three Tai festivals (with changed meaning) as *shi_ nyi lon* or "great merit days" (cf. Walker 1984).

32. "Cooked rice, cooked water" (*aw_ meh g'ui_ meh*) is a poetic couplet. No
water of any kind is offered.

33. *Haw hpu meuh* hpu *hk'o*, *hta* haw *k'aw* ci: "Once again ride on your white elephant, white horse" means "Ride on these animals and come and receive our offerings."

34. "Points of iron and copper" (*sho meu* *kua*-*meu*) is a poetic reference to the knives, axes and other farming tools. "Points of wood" (*shaw*-*meu* *ma*-*meu*) means any piece of wood that might cause injury.

35. *Kaw mo* *taweh*: see description above, p. 54.

36. Although the Lahu text has only *va*, "pig," rather than *heh va* "wild pig" (*Sus scofa, Linn*.), the latter is clearly implied here.

37. *Tsuh* from *tsuh pt kaweh* "barking deer" (*Muntiacus muntjak, Zimmermann*).

38. *Hk u C zuh* "sambar deer" (*Cervus unicolor, Kerr*).

39. *Sho meu* *kua*-*meu* "iron points, copper points" may refer either to the iron spears which Lahu Nyi attach to bamboo spring traps, or to the barrels of the hunters' guns. The repetition is alleviated in the Lahu by the use of the paired couplets *sho meu* *kua*-*meu* and *sho ba* *kua*-*ba" which have the same meaning.

40. This is a poetic reference to the Lahu Nyi custom of dividing any large game animal which they bag, with special portions (see diagram) going to the village headman (4), senior priest (3), blacksmith (2), father-in-law of the man who shot the animal (5), people who help butcher the carcass (6), the man who shot the beast (1 and half of 8) and, finally, every household in the village (7 and half of 8).

41. *Huey Pang Fant* (Lahu, *Ho Pa Fant*) is literally "stream (huey) of the barking deer (fant) camp (pang)." This is the Tai name for an important stream near the Lahu Nyi village. The name indicates that lowlanders have camped here on hunting trips for the much-prized barking deer.

42. Here the Lahu text has *Meh hpa* te" *fu te" *a daw", literally "Meh Hpa one G'ui sh" one headman" (cf. n. 7).

43. The verb *go ve* "to raise the hand" refers to a common act of Lahu prayer, in which the supplicant lifts his right hand, in which he holds lighted beeswax candles.

44. "The all-true, all-precious Father up there" (*no" *g'a a pa ka ti* ka *sheh") is a reference to *G'ui sha", the supreme supernatural being.

45. "Food custom, drink custom" (*ca li* *daw* li": *ca* ve "to eat," *daw* ve "to drink," *aw* li "custom") means the custom of making offerings to *G'ui sha*.

46. This prayer was recited at the construction of a merit hut following the festival of *hkao shi* nyi or "enter merit day." Corresponding to *khrao phansa*, the Tai festival which begins the Buddhist lenten season (see n. 30), *hkao* *shi* nyi is when Lahu Nyi celebrate their first harvest of the agricultural year: maize, chilies, sweet potatoes and several other side-crops (cf. Walker 1984).

47. *Ai ma* is a female deity, counterpart to the male *G'ui sha". At the same time she partakes in the latter's divinity in such a manner that she too may be termed " *G'ui sha" (cf. Walker 1976: 379-380; 1981b: 669, especially n. 9). *Ai ma* is sometimes
said to have created the earth, while Father G'ui_ sha created the heavens. As female, and as creator of the earth, Ai ma is particularly associated with fertility.

48. I do not know the meaning of Pi ti_ , but it is sometimes used in prayer language to stand for Lahu. Here the reciter uses the couplet Pi ti_ La~ hu_; elsewhere (e.g., v. 13), Pi ti_ pi ya" (ya~ "people").

49. Not without reason, Lahu mountaineers tend to view the lowland towns and cities as centres of wealth and material sophistication.

50. Chi ceu_ k'aw ceu_ "nine kinds ten kinds" is a poetic manner of saying "all kinds." Here, "all kinds of things"; v. 15 below, "all kinds of sickness."

51. See above, n. 23.

52. Hkao phansa_hkao_ shi~ nyi; see n. 30 and n. 46.

53. Hpar~ "side" here means "state, condition, time" (of death or sickness).

54. G'aw ve "count" here means "to consider, take note of" (with the intention of preventing).

55. Here translated "protect", suh~ ve is literally "side-step."

56. These Lahu Nyi conceive that everything that exists on earth must have its divine prototype in the heavens. Thus, as the Lahu use rolls of cotton string for the rite of wrist-binding (see below, p. 73 and Text 4), so the supreme deity, G'ui_ sha, possesses an "eternal roll of cotton string" (mai~ mo pui co law_) in his heavenly abode.

57. Here "Father Sha" ca~ "is used as an alternative name for G'ui_ sha. This is somewhat confusing, since Sha" ca~ is also the name of a Lahu culture hero (cf. Walker 1981: 679-681, n. 17).

58. "Top of the wood, bottom of the wood" (shaw~ u~ shaw~ meh_) is simply a poetic manner of talking about "wood" in general.


60. The "eternal life tree" (na_ pu_ co ceh_ co g'aw~) is said to be part of G'ui_ sha's possessions (G'ui_ sha ve maw_), but informants could not explain further. These Lahu Nyi also talk of a "tree of immortality" on the moon (they see the lunar shadows as a tree) and say that if only it were possible for a person to obtain a fragment of this tree, he or she would be free from sickness and death (cf. Walker 1970a: 12). Probably a similar idea is involved here.

61. The li~ tsuh_ (cf. Walker 1981b: 677-678, fig. 5b) is a ritual offering: a bundle (diameter about 10 cm.) of split-bamboo sticks with cotton wool on top. Li~ tsuh_ (from aw_ li~ "custom" and tsuh_ ve "to bind together") are placed in the village temple to cleanse the sins (ve~ ba") of their donors, but I do not know what they are supposed to symbolize. Ai ma's (see n. 47) "bejewelled and golden li~ tsuh_" (li~ sheh" li~ hka~), according to one of my informants, is to be found at the left-hand side of G'ui_ sha's haw_ yeh_ in the heavens (see n. 59).

62. This whole verse is an extended couplet of several pairs — tree: li~ tsuh_; Sha" ca~ (G'ui_ sha): Ai ma; right: left.

63. I think the reciter did not intend to single out women as "weak" in body and soul, but simply forgot to add the second part of this double couplet, namely ya~ hpu co mu" . . . ya~ hpu ha mu" "men weak lives, men weak souls."

64. See n. 52.

65. The to bo pa_ is the senior village priest, whose chief function is to act as intermediary between G'ui_ sha and the villagers by leading prayers and ritual activities in the village temple (cf. Walker 1982: 113-116).
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66. G'ui^_fu^., the spirit protector of the village, is sometimes said to be G'ui^_sha's messenger (G'ui^_sha ve tceu ya^_).

67. An alternative name for Ai ma (see n. 47).

68. The solar scribe (mvuh^_nyi ce^_le^) and the lunar scribe (ha pa ce^_le^) are said to be "G'ui^_sha's people" (G'ui^_sha ve ya^_), but beyond this I could discover nothing about them.

69. G'ui^_fu^._ (see n. 66) has an altar in the village temple or hau^_yeh^_ (cf. Walker 1981:676, fig. 4); hence the title hau^_fu^._ (short for hau^_yeh^_ G'ui^_fu^.) in this text.

70. "Great prosperity" is my translation of the paired couplets aw^_bvu^h aw^_ta^ and aw^_bvu^h aw^_law^., both of which mean "pile, heap" and refer to the expected yield of grain.

71. This is hyperbole, a common feature of Lahu Nyi prayers. Chickens, but no pigs, were slaughtered for this occasion.

72. Ka ho^_ku _hpa^_. "the creator" is another title for G'ui^_sha.

73. The translator of Lahu Nyi prayers frequently must decide whether to take words literally or read them only for their poetic effect. Here, what appears to be a simple statement of fact is only partially true. The middle building, that is the sha^_la^, or merit hut itself, is indeed an offering to G'ui^_sha. But both altars (ht^) are for the resident hill spirit, the one at the left (whether or not at the "side of the water") being given to this spirit as "keeper of the wild animals." Thus, in the context of this prayer, we are to read "water spirit, rock spirit" (law^_ne^_ha^_ne^) as no more than a couplet paired with "hill spirit, dale spirit" (hk'aw ne^_law^_ne^) for poetic effect. See also verse 6.

74. The Lahu has sha^_("game") maw (from mau^_pa^_"doctor"), the whole apparently meaning "a specialist in game" and so a "hunter."

75. The couplet va^_u^ va^_meh^_ "top of a pig, bottom of a pig" stands for "a whole pig."

76. See n. 47; n. 67.

77. See n. 56.

78. La^_chi^... hkui chi^ "hands... feet" is a poetic couplet, not to be taken literally.

79. See n. 29.

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