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# LAHU NYI (RED LAHU) RITES TO PROPITIATE THE HILL SPIRIT

## Ethnographic Notes and Lahu Texts

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The main purpose of this article is to record, both in the original language and in English translation, six Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) prayer texts used in propitiating the spirits of the hills where these people live<sup>1</sup>. To place the prayers in context I begin with a sketch of the Lahu people and their views of the supernatural. I shall also describe the manual aspects of the propitiatory rites. I recorded the texts and ethnographic observations among Lahu Nyi villagers in the hills of northern Thailand during 1966–70<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Readers with more than a passing interest in the ritual idiom of the Lahu Nyi people are referred to my earlier papers on the subject: (1) "The La<sup>h</sup>Hu<sup>h</sup> Nyi<sup>h</sup> (Red La<sup>h</sup>Hu<sup>h</sup>) New Year Celebrations", *J. Siam Soc.* LVIII, 1, 1970, 1–44; (2) "Blessing Feasts and Ancestor Propitiation among the Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu)", *J. Siam Soc.* LX, 1, 1972, 345–73; (3) "Aw<sup>h</sup> Ha<sup>h</sup> Hku<sup>h</sup> Ve: The Lahu Nyi Rite for the Recall of a Wandering Soul", *JRAS* 1972, 1, 16–29; (4) "Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) New Year Texts—I", *J. Siam Soc.* LXII, 1, 1974, 1–26; (5) "Three Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Marriage Prayers: Lahu Texts and Ethnographic Notes", *JRAS* 1974, 1, 44–9; (6) "Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Tests of Innocence: Ethnographic Notes and Lahu Texts", *Acta Orientalia* XXXVI, 1974, 209–24; (7) "Sheh-kaw Shi-nyi: A Lahu Nyi Agricultural Festival", in *Farmers in the Hills: Ethnographic Notes on the Upland Peoples of North Thailand*, Anthony R. Walker ed., Penang, Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 1974, 139–48; (8) "The Renaming and Ritual Adoption of a Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Child: A Lahu Text and Ethnographic Background", *J. Asian & African Studies* (Tokyo) 1975, 10, 183–9; (9) "Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) New Year Texts-II", *J. Siam Soc.* LXIII, 2, 1975, 161–98; (10) "A Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rite of Divorce: A Lahu Text and Ethnographic Background", *Acta Orientalia* XXXVII, 1975, xxx–xx; (11) "Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) New Year Texts-III", *J. Siam Soc.* LXIV, 1, 1976, 1–xxx; (12) "Jaw Te meh<sup>h</sup> Jaw<sup>h</sup> Ve: Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rites of Spirit Exorcism in North Thailand", *Anthropos* LXXI, 2, 1976, 1–46; (13) "Mvuh<sup>h</sup> Nyi Ne<sup>h</sup> Cai<sup>h</sup> Ve: A Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rite to Propitiate the Sun Spirit: Ethnographic Notes and Lahu Texts", *Acta Ethnographica* XXV, 1–2, 1976, xxx–xx; (14) "Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Funerary Chants: Two Lahu Texts with a Brief Ethnographic Introduction", *JRAS* [forthcoming]; (15) "A Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Prayer at Childbirth: Lahu Text and Brief Ethnographic Note", *J. Siam Soc.* LXIV, 2, 1976, xxx–xx; (16) "A La<sup>h</sup> Mi<sup>h</sup> Shi<sup>h</sup> Jaw Ne<sup>h</sup> Cai<sup>h</sup> Ve: A Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rite to Propitiate the Rainbow Spirit: Lahu Text with Brief Ethnographic Commentary", *J. Siam Soc.* LXV, 1, 1977 [forthcoming].

<sup>2</sup> My anthropological research was carried out primarily in Phrao and Wiang Pa Pao districts (Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces respectively), while I was Research Officer at the Tribal Research Centre, Chiang Mai. My thanks go to the Director of the Centre,

*The Lahu People*<sup>3</sup>

The Tibeto-Burman-speaking Lahu people live in small village communities which are widely scattered through the mountainous regions where China and Thailand meet Burma and Laos (map). Accurate population counts in these areas are virtually unobtainable, but I would guess that the Lahu total about 300,000 people. By far the majority, perhaps about 200,000, live in Chinese territory<sup>4</sup>. Their predominance in an area along the river Lan-ts'ang (Mekong) has been recognized by the Chinese government with the establishment in 1953 of the Lan-ts'ang Lahu Peoples Autonomous County<sup>5</sup>. In Burma's Shan State there may be as many as 80,000 Lahu<sup>6</sup>, while another 5,000 or so live across the border in the northermost corner of Laos<sup>7</sup>. For Thailand we have the most up-to-date and probably most

Khun Wanat Bhruksasri, and my Thai research counterpart, Khun Sanit Wongsprasert, for much assistance. For editing and typing this paper I thank my wife, Pauline Hetland Walker.

<sup>3</sup> Further ethnographic data on the Lahu may be found in J. H. Telford's "Animism in Kengtung State", *J. Burma Research Soc.* XXVII, 2, 1937, 86–238; Delmos J. Jones' Cultural Variation among Six Lahu Villages, Northern Thailand, PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1967; and my *Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Village Society and Economy in North Thailand*, Chiang Mai, Tribal Research Centre, 1970, 1–77; "The Lahu of the Yunnan-Indochina Borderlands: An introduction", *Folk* XVI–XVII, 1974–5, 329–44; and "The Lahu People: An Introduction", in *Farmers in the Hills* (cf. note 1 above), 111–26.

<sup>4</sup> The 1965 edition of *Jen-min Shou-ts'e [People's Handbook]* gives the Lahu population within the People's Republic of China as 180,000 (George Moseley, *The Party and the National Question in China*, MIT Press, Cambridge [Mass.] & London, 1966, 162).

<sup>5</sup> "Lahu Nationality Autonomous People's Government Set Up in Lantsang in Yunnan", *Survey of the China Mainland Press*, U.S. Consulate-General, Hong Kong, 1953, item no. 554 (translated from New China News Agency, Kunming, 16 April 1953). See also, Ch'en Yin, "La-hu Tsu [Lahu Race]", *Min-tsu T'uan-chieh [Nationalities' Solidarity]* (Peking), 1964, no. 4, 46–8.

<sup>6</sup> Paul W. Lewis, *Introducing the Hill Tribes of Thailand*, Chiang Mai, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1970, 80. A fairly recent Burmese publication, *Pyi thaung su myan na naing ngan taing yin tha yin kye hku yo ya da le theun san mya (shan) [Cultural and Traditional Custom of the Nationalities of the Union of Burma (Shan State)]*, Central Organizing Committee, Burma Socialist Party Programme, Rangoon, 1970 (first edition 1968), 47, gives the Lahu population in the "Southern Shan State, Kengtun" as 40,000 "according to the 1955 census." This is probably an underenumeration.

<sup>7</sup> An estimate by Paul W. Lewis in his "Lahus—Ethnographic Survey", unpublished lecture notes for the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University.

accurate population figures for Lahu. Here they number a little more than 16,000 and are spread through about eighty villages<sup>8</sup>.

Like most mountain-dwelling minority peoples in this part of the world, the Lahu occupy no continuous stretch of territory which either geographically or politically could be termed "Lahuland". Even in Lan-ts'ang County, where they are most concentrated, Lahu villages are found interspersed with those of other hill peoples, principally Ka-wa (Wa), Aini and Yi (Lolo), while the lowlanders are for the most part T'ai (Shan). In Burmese territory Lahu villages are interspersed mostly with those of Akha, Wa and Lisu, in Laos with Yao and Akha and in Thailand with Yao, Meo, Lisu, Akha and Karen. In Burma, Laos and Thailand, as in China, their immediate lowland neighbours are mostly T'ai-speaking peoples.

Each Lahu village is headed by its own *hk'a^sheh\_hpa*<sup>9</sup> or "master of the village", who is assisted in leadership by an informal council of respected old men. These elders, of whom the village priest is frequently the most influential, also act as a check on the personal powers of the headman. In some areas a Lahu headman has jurisdiction over neighbouring village

<sup>8</sup> 16,389 "according to the census of 1970-73 of Tribal Research Centre, Chian Mai" (Sanit Wongsprasert, "Lahu Trade and Commerce", *J. Siam Soc.* LXIII, 2, 199-218, p. 199 n. 3).

<sup>9</sup> Lahu words in this article are transcribed in an orthography devised by American Baptist missionaries in Burma and Yunnan. This is the most widely used Lahu writing system outside the People's Republic of China, where a "reformed" romanization has been introduced by the government (Ma Hsueh-liang, "New Scripts for China's Minorities", *China Reconstructs* XI, 8, 1962, 24-7; New China News Agency, "New Languages Advance Culture of Minorities in Southwest China", 1964, 27 Feb., Daily News Release Item no. 022606). The Lahu among whom I worked were illiterate, but two Lahu Christians helped me to record the texts which appear here.

The Lahu language has seven tones: five open (long vowel) and two checked (short vowel, ending in a glottal stop). These are indicated at the end of syllables as follows:

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

Further details of this orthography can be found in J. H. Telford and Saya David, *Handbook of the Lahu (Muhso) Language and English-Lahu Dictionary*, Rangoon, Government Press, 1938, 6-7, and James A. Matisoff, "Note on the Orthography of Lahu" in my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*, xxxiii-v.

In writing the names "Lahu" and "Lahu Nyi" (*Lã hu<sub>-</sub> Nyi<sup>-</sup>*) without tone marks I conform to the usual practice in the ethnographic record.



communities both of his own and of other ethnic affiliations. Elsewhere the Lahu *hk'a'sheh*—*hpa'* is subordinate within his area to a neighbouring headman, either Lahu or non-Lahu. Generally the senior authority in an area is the leader of the community which pioneered that particular stretch of hill country. Many Lahu headmen have also traditionally maintained political links with the leaders of the dominant T'ai-speaking valley peoples. Today hill village leaders are incorporated to varying degrees within the local administrative structures of their respective countries.

Lahu village society lacks clan, lineage or other corporate groups based on descent principles. The fundamental unit is the autonomous household. Such households stay together in village communities for a variety of reasons including economic convenience, kinship and marriage ties, or simply from long association. But these ties are more or less brittle and Lahu communities frequently break up, with some households leaving to join other communities or establish new villages elsewhere.

In common with the majority of hill peoples of northern Southeast Asia and southwestern China, the Lahu are traditionally slash-and-burn or "swidden" aciculturalists<sup>10</sup>. Villages must be moved as the farmers exhaust the fertility of the surrounding soils. Most Lahu seem to have produced, as many still do, a single subsistence crop: dry hill rice, and a variety of cash crops including chillies, opium poppy, cotton and medicinal herbs. Among the Lahu Nyi community I studied in north Thailand the agricultural year is fourteen months long. It begins in January with the selection and clearing of new fields and ends in February of the following year when the last of the opium is harvested. Lahu spend most of their working lives engaged in agricultural tasks: cutting and burning forest land, dibbling and planting on steep stony slopes, pulling weeds, harvesting crops and carrying heavy loads over long distances<sup>11</sup>.

"Lahu", a name whose meaning and derivation are unknown, is what these people call themselves. Their Chinese neighbours popularly refer to them as "Lo-hei", but this usage is now disfavoured in China, apparently

<sup>10</sup> "Swidden" is an old English dialect word meaning "a burned clearing". It was resurrected by E. Ekwall in his "'Slash-and-burn' Cultivation: A Contribution to Anthropological Terminology", *Man* LV, 1955, 135–6, and is now widely used, particularly among anthropologists, to refer not only to the fields themselves but also to the type of agricultural technology otherwise known as "slash-and-burn" or "shifting" cultivation.

<sup>11</sup> A detailed account of the agricultural cycle of a particular Lahu Nyi village in north Thailand can be found in vol. 2 of my *Lahu Nyi Village Society and Economy*, 348–444. A synopsis of the data presented there is my "The Swidden Economy of a Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Village Community in North Thailand", *Folk* XVIII, 1976, xxx–xx.

because of derogatory connotations, and has been replaced officially by the indigenous name<sup>12</sup>. The T'ai-speaking peoples call the Lahu "Mussur", a Shan word meaning "hunter". Since Lahu are well known among both their hill and valley neighbours as enthusiastic and skillful trackers and shots, the designation is apt and the Lahu seem content with their Shan name.

Within the main category of Lahu are many subgroups or divisions. There are Lahu Na (Black Lahu) and Lahu Shi (Yellow Lahu), Lahu Hpu (White Lahu) and Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu), Lahu Sheh Leh and Lahu La Ba (meanings unknown), and many more besides<sup>13</sup>. Just how these divisions have arisen among the Lahu and why some of them bear colour names is unknown. History, geography and language suggest an ancient cleavage between Black and Yellow Lahu, and probably other divisions represent more recent breakaways from these two major groups<sup>14</sup>. There is evidence from modern times that religious factionalism is one of the reasons for the emergence of divisions among the Lahu<sup>15</sup>. Colour names for social groups are a common enough feature throughout Asia, but the symbolic connotations of a given colour vary widely<sup>16</sup>, and those of the names Black, Yellow, White and Red Lahu are still improperly understood<sup>17</sup>. Various combinations of dialectal, cultural and social differences distinguish one Lahu division from another, but all apparently recognize a common identity as *La'hu-ya'*, "the Lahu people". Generally speaking, each Lahu village is occupied by members of a single division, who marry either within that village itself or among neighbouring villages of the same divisional identification. Sometimes Lahu

<sup>12</sup> *Survey of the China Mainland Press*, 1953, no. 554.

<sup>13</sup> For details see my "The Division of the Lahu People", *J. Siam Soc.*, LXII, 2, 250–64, and David Bradley, *Lahu Dialects and Proto-Loloish*, PhD thesis, London University, 1975, 13ff. The tonal identification of these names is *Na'*, *Shi*, *Hpu*, *Nyi'*, *Sheh Leh'* and *La' Ba'*.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, "Divisions", 258–61.

<sup>15</sup> Bradley, *Lahu Dialects*, 54–5.

<sup>16</sup> See Jairus Banaji, *Ethnology and Social and Symbolic Structures in Inner Asia and the Western and Central Himalayas with Special Reference to the Problem of the Origin of the Caste System*, B. Litt. thesis, Oxford University, 1972.

<sup>17</sup> A common assumption is that they refer to the dominant colour of the people's clothes (cf. R. G. Woodthorpe, "The Country of the Shans", *The Geog. J.* VII, 6, 577–602, p. 597). This may be true for the Lahu Nyi or Red Lahu, but I have found no good evidence that the designations "Black" and "Yellow" Lahu refer to costume. And even the case of the Red Lahu is disputed. Certainly my own Lahu Nyi informants indicated that their name derived from the bright red stripes of the women's blouses and sarongs, but Gordon Young (*The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand*, Bangkok, Siam Society, 1962, 9) claims that "Lahu Nyi" is a direct translation of the Shan and Northern Thai "Mussur Daeng", in which *daeng* "red" refers to "rawness" rather than to the colour of dress.

of different divisions intermarry, and a single Lahu village may be occupied by more than a single division. But such cases are the exception rather than the norm.

The Lahu Nyi, whom I studied, are confined to the southern areas of Lahu settlement; that is, the Burmese Shan State and North Thailand. In the Shan State they are found in large numbers in the districts of Muan Tsat and Muang Ton, east of the River Hsim. In Thailand they are found primarily in Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces. I was told by Lahu informants in Thailand, themselves refugees from Burma, that the Lahu Nyi are the second largest Lahu division in Burmese territory, the Lahu Na being numerically dominant there. In Thai territory the Nyi are clearly the largest division, with some 10,000 or over 60 percent of the total Lahu population of 16,000.

In terms of religion, Lahu ideas and practices have been much influenced by religious traditions emanating from the lowlands, particularly the Hinayana Buddhism of their T'ai-speaking neighbours. Buddhist-derived ideas such as merit and demerit, rebirth, and the sanctity of all sentient beings have penetrated deeply into the Lahu worldview, although no more than a small minority of these people are formal adherents of the Buddhist religion. To a lesser degree, and mostly among Lahu in Yunnan, certain ideas and practices of popular Chinese religion, including elements of Mahayana Buddhism and the celebration of Chinese folk festivals, seem to have been accepted by some Lahu communities. But information available on these Chinese Lahu is so meagre that I can make no definite statement on this subject. For about a century, Lahu in parts of North Thailand, in the Burmese Shan State and in Yunnan have been subjected to the proselytizing of Christian missionaries and today there are active Protestant (mainly Baptist) and Roman Catholic Lahu communities in Burma and Thailand. Again, it is difficult to gauge the state or extent of Lahu Christian communities in Yunnan.

Traditional Lahu religious ideas include a highly-developed notion of a supreme and creating Being whom they call *G'ui. sha* (etymology obscure), and a great number of spirits, some reasonably good, others quite bad, but all more or less untrustworthy. Spirits are said to dwell almost everywhere: in the sky, in heavenly bodies, in water, in the forest and sometimes in people too.

Lahu think of man (*chaw ya'*) as comprising physical body (*aw. to*) and spiritual counterpart (*aw. ha*). Sometimes this spiritual counterpart is conceived as a single entity, sometimes as a plurality. Sickness, if no natural cause is apparent, is frequently interpreted as the result of injury to, or loss of, the spiritual counterpart. Treatment may involve recalling the soul to its

proper abode or propitiating the spirit which is deemed to have attacked it<sup>18</sup>. When a normal death or, as Lahu say, “good death” occurs, the spiritual counterpart is said to leave the physical body and journey to the land of the dead, after which it may sooner or later be reborn as another human. But after a “bad death” (murder, suicide, death in childbirth, accident, or any death that involves bleeding) the spiritual counterpart is supposedly transformed into one of several malicious spirits<sup>19</sup>.

In order to deal effectively with their supernaturals – to honour *G’ui. sha* and to propitiate or exorcise the spirits – Lahu villages frequently have several ritual specialists. Among the Lahu Nyi I studied, there was always a sharp distinction between specialists involved with the worship of *G’ui. sha*, whose role is highly respected, and those who deal with the spirits, whose task commands scant respect despite its importance to the community. In addition to these technicians of the sacred there are oracles, who in trance become, as Lahu say, “joined as with a rope to *G’ui. sha*” and thus able to reveal the wishes of the supreme supernatural to their fellow villagers.

Whether directed towards *G’ui. sha* or a spirit, Lahu religious practices on some occasions involve the whole village community and sometimes no more than a single household or individual. The calendrical rites (for the new and full moon every month, the New Year, and the major agricultural events) require the participation of the whole community. Rites directed towards a particular spirit, whether prophylactic (like the propitiation of the hill spirit before clearing a field) or curative (like the rite to be described below) usually involve only the officiating spirit specialist and members of the household concerned.

### *Spirits and Spirit Propitiation*

The overriding characteristic of Lahu spirits seems to be their capriciousness. Few of these supernaturals are so thoroughly malevolent that Lahu need tread always in mortal fear of them, but most of them must be treated with circumspection lest an accidental offense bring down a spirit’s wrath. Some spirits are propitiated at regular intervals, others on occasions (such as the

<sup>18</sup> See my “*Aw. Ha Hku Ve: The Lahu Nyi Rite for the Recall of a Wandering Soul*”, *JRAS*, 1972, 1, 16–29; and – for one example of propitiation – “*Mvuh~ Nyi Ne~ Cai Ve: A Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rite to Propitiate the Sun Spirit: Ethnographic Notes and Lahu Texts*”, *Acta Ethnographica* XXV, 1–2, 1976, xxx–xx.

<sup>19</sup> See my “*Jaw Te Meh. Jaw. Ve: Lahu Nyi (Red Lahu) Rites of Spirit Exorcism in North Thailand*”, *Anthropos* LXXI, 2, 197, xxx–xx.

felling of trees) when the people want to do something that might annoy a particular spirit. But even such precautions are not always effective, for a spirit may "bite" (*che .ve*) for a small and unrealized provocation.

The usual sign of a spirit's attack is sickness. Some spirits bring specific ailments, like the sun spirit who causes a person to suffer a sharp stabbing pain in the centre of the forehead, the lightning spirit who makes the skin itch and the hands and feet swell, and the rainbow spirit whose bite produces a jaundiced complexion. Others, such as the hill spirit and the water spirit, are not associated with any specific complaint. In cases where the symptoms are readily traceable to a particular spirit it is an easy matter to determine the appropriate curative ritual. But when the illness could have been caused by any of several spirits it may be necessary to ask a medium to ascertain, in trance, which spirit is responsible<sup>20</sup>. Then the sick person can engage a spirit specialist to take whatever ritual action is required.

Most Lahu Nyi villages which I have visited have at least one and sometimes several men who are conversant with the propitiation of the spirits. Such men are known as *ne` te sheh\_ hpa`* (*ne`* "spirits", *te* "to do, to be concerned with", *sheh\_ hpa`* "master, expert"). Seldom is one man familiar with all the propitiatory and exorcistic rites which are performed for the community, so that among several specialists (perhaps from neighbouring villages as well) the sick person must seek the one who regularly performs the rite he requires. Spirit specialists learn their art by watching the performances of a recognized master, thus learning both the manual and verbal aspects of the various rites. Although, as I noted earlier, spirit specialists command less respect than do those concerned with *G'ui. sha*, their role nonetheless has its rewards. Spirit specialists usually charge for their services and the size of their fee will depend on the difficulty of the rite. For the minor rite of propitiating the hill spirit, the fee is traditionally stated as one Indian silver rupee, while for the major rite (which is performed only if the minor one proves ineffective) the fee varies from one to three rupees. Indian silver rupees were once the main form of currency in the hills of the Burma-Thailand border, and traditional fines and fees are still quoted in terms of them. Actual payment among Lahu Nyi in Thailand is in modern Thai currency or the equivalent in opium. For this purpose, one rupee is reckoned at six Thai baht (U.S. 30 cents), although the real value of

<sup>20</sup> Lahu villagers do not attribute all sickness to the supernatural. If a person suffers stomach ache after over-eating, he does not think a spirit has attacked him. And sickness in an elderly person is likely to be attributed to generally failing health rather than to any supernatural cause. But sickness which strikes an otherwise healthy individual, and for which the Lahu have no ready explanation in natural terms, is generally attributed to malicious spirits.



the silver rupee is much more. Opium is a common form of payment because so many spirit specialists are addicted to it. Indeed I have frequently heard Lahu say that only an opium addict, impoverished and needing the drug, would willingly deal with the spirits.

### *The Propitiation of the Hill Spirit*

Lahu Nyi believe each hillside to be the residence of a spirit. Such supernatural beings are known by the generic term *hk'aw ne'* (*hk'aw* "hill", *ne'* "spirit"). Because the hillsides are covered in forest (except where cleared for farming), the *hk'aw ne'* may also be termed *heh pui- hk'aw ne'* or forest spirits (*heh pui- hk'aw* "forest"). Like most Lahu spirits, the *hk'aw ne'* have an ambivalent nature and may be either benevolent or malevolent. When the resident hill spirit accepts the propitiatory offering of a farmer wishing to clear a field, it becomes a protective locality spirit. On the other hand, *hk'aw ne'* are easily offended by persons who intrude on their territory and may then "bite" those who have unwittingly angered them. The rite to seek the hill spirit's permission to cut a new field and the rite to ask it to remove a sickness are quite distinct. Here I am concerned only with the latter.

If a Lahu Nyi villager has been in the forest to hunt, collect wood, or for any other reason, and if he falls sick on his return home, he is likely to suspect that he has fallen victim to the *hk'aw ne'*. Alternatively a sick villager, consulting a medium to learn the source of his affliction, may be told that the *hk'aw ne'* has attacked him because of such-and-such an act that offended the spirit. Once the agent of his illness has been identified, the sick person will request a specialist to perform the appropriate propitiatory rite. This is known as *hk'aw ne' cai. ve* "to propitiate or make offerings to (*cai. ve*) the hill spirit"<sup>21</sup>. If this rite fails to bring relief, a second and more elaborate propitiatory rite may be required. This is known as *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve*. I was offered several interpretations of the verb *shaw. ve* in this context. All my informants agreed that it carried the general meaning of "presenting offerings". Some volunteered that it referred specifically to the presentation of both uncooked and cooked rice on this occasion (only uncooked rice is given during the *cai. ve* rite). Others said that it simply means "to present *many* offerings", and certainly more are donated for the *shaw. ve* than for the *cai. ve* rite.

<sup>21</sup> *Cai. ve* seems also to have the meaning of "sending someone else [i.e. the spirit specialist] on one's behalf to make offerings".



Here I shall describe the *hk'aw ne' cai. ve* rite and give the texts associated with it before moving on to the major propitiation, the *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve*.

### 1. *Hk'aw Ne' Cai. Ve*: The Minor Propitiatory Rite

The *hk'aw ne' cai. ve* rite takes place in the forest. If the sick person was working at a specific location — felling a tree or collecting honey, for example — just before he fell sick, the rite will be held at that very place. But if he was roaming far and wide over the hills, the rite will be performed a little way from the village in the direction where he was walking. I was told by informants in my study village that there is a ritual procedure which enables a specialist to determine exactly the direction in which he should propitiate the spirit. But this is now rarely employed among the Lahu I studied, and the only man I have met who knows the rite claims no faith in its efficacy. The rite, which is known as *taw' hte. nyi ve*<sup>22</sup>, involves the invocation of *Pi ya'*, a fierce and powerful spirit who is regarded as patron of spirit specialists<sup>23</sup>, and the consultation of a cloth oracle.

A person wishing to consult the cloth oracle must first send offerings to a specialist conversant with the rite who is called a *maw- taw' hte. pa-* (*maw-* “doctor”, *pa-* male suffix). The offerings, I was told, comprise a cup of uncooked rice and a pair of beeswax candles. Having accepted the offerings, the specialist takes his headcloth and measures on it a length of exactly one *htu*: the distance from thumb-tip to second finger-tip when the hand is stretched out. He folds the cloth at the point reached by the tip of his second finger. He then prays to *Pi ya'* (see Text 1 below) saying, “If the sick man has offended the hill spirit in such-and-such a direction, then let the length which I have measured out increase; but if no offence has been committed in that direction, let the length of the measured cloth remain unchanged.” At the conclusion of his prayer the specialist measures his folded cloth. Indeed he takes three measurements, all of which must be the same for him to accept the oracle. If the three measurements reveal no change in the length of the cloth, the specialist knows that no offence was committed in the direction indicated. He therefore repeats his prayer to *Pi ya'* and names another direction. If the three measurements show that the folded cloth is more than one *htu* long, the specialist knows that the hill

<sup>22</sup> The meaning of *taw' hte. nyi ve* is obscure. I was told that the verb *taw' ve* means “to learn by heart, to remember”. The verb *hte. ve* is used for “striking” a match. *Nyi ve* means “to see”. But none of this seems to clarify the meaning of the phrase as a whole.

<sup>23</sup> See my “*Jaw Te Meh. Jaw. Ve*”, xxx.

spirit should be propitiated in the last-named direction. The text of one such prayer, as I recorded it from the lone man in my study village who knew the rite, is as follows:

Text 1<sup>24</sup>

1. Ha, a<sup>-</sup>, ya. shaw<sup>-</sup> pui. taw<sup>^</sup>a<sup>-</sup> hk'aw ga. g'a haw, shaw<sup>~</sup> taw<sup>^</sup>a<sup>-</sup> g'aw ga. g'a haw, no<sup>~</sup> lo g'ui. ya<sup>~</sup> Pi tcuh. Kui<sup>-</sup> tcuh pa<sup>-</sup>, no<sup>~</sup> ve Pi shi<sup>-</sup> kui., chaw ya<sup>~</sup> ce<sup>-</sup>ma<sup>~</sup> g'a leh naw. leh ce<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> o meh<sup>-</sup>, hpa htu.
2. A<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>~</sup> te<sup>~</sup> hpaw<sup>~</sup> paw<sup>-</sup>ya. leh hpi<sup>^</sup> k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, hpa htu hpa hta. hk'e la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, hpa htu chi suh zuh. la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>.
3. Ma<sup>~</sup> ya. k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, a<sup>-</sup> k'a<sup>-</sup> ceh k'aw. ga. la<sup>~</sup>.
4. A<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>~</sup> te<sup>~</sup> hpaw<sup>~</sup> leh ya. law le<sup>~</sup> k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, Pi ya<sup>~</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti. pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, ta ti. hpfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, hpa htu hpa hta. hk'e la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, a ci<sup>-</sup> fui<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, chi<sup>-</sup>a sha<sup>-</sup> hki<sup>^</sup>sha. ca<sup>^</sup>mui. ve, sha<sup>-</sup> hki<sup>^</sup>sha. sheu<sup>-</sup> mui. ve.
5. Chaw ya<sup>~</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti. ma<sup>~</sup> caw. leh ta ti. ma<sup>~</sup> caw. leh a<sup>-</sup>, no<sup>~</sup> Pi ya<sup>~</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti. pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, Kui<sup>-</sup> ya<sup>~</sup> ta ti. pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, pi zuh. sheh hk'aw. zuh. g'a ve, Kui<sup>-</sup> zuh. sheh ba<sup>~</sup> zuh. g'a ve, a<sup>-</sup>, ce<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> o meh<sup>-</sup>.
6. Ya. nyi chaw ya<sup>~</sup> ce<sup>-</sup> leh ma<sup>~</sup> g'a leh nga. hkaw<sup>-</sup> leh Pi ya<sup>~</sup> Kui<sup>-</sup> ya<sup>~</sup> naw. hkui hk'aw la. hk'aw ga. g'a ve.
7. O<sup>~</sup> te<sup>~</sup> hpaw<sup>~</sup> paw<sup>-</sup> leh ya. g'a k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, hpa htu hpa hta. hk'e la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, hpa htu zuh. la<sup>~</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, chi hta. sha<sup>-</sup> hki<sup>^</sup>sha<sup>-</sup> ca<sup>^</sup>, sha<sup>-</sup> hki<sup>^</sup>sha. sheu<sup>-</sup> mui. ve eu sha o<sup>-</sup>.
8. Sheh<sup>^</sup> paw<sup>^</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> he<sup>^</sup> ve k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, sheh<sup>^</sup> paw<sup>^</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> he<sup>^</sup> k'o<sup>^</sup> k'o, nga. ho<sup>-</sup> ti. ma<sup>~</sup> caw., ta ti. ma<sup>~</sup> caw., na. ma<sup>-</sup> ka peu<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> caw., a<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>~</sup> te<sup>~</sup> hpaw<sup>~</sup> leh ya. g'a k'o<sup>^</sup>k'o, hpa htu hpa hta. k'aw. hk'e la<sup>~</sup> a<sup>-</sup> sheh hta<sup>~</sup> hk'e le<sup>~</sup>, o<sup>-</sup> sha.

Text 1 – Translation<sup>25</sup>

1. On this morning when the morning star can shine into the house, at the time when the morning star shines everywhere, I measure this cloth; oh divine *Pi ya<sup>~</sup>* up there, omniscient *Pi ya<sup>~</sup>*, we people here cannot know anything, you alone can know all.

<sup>24</sup> In order to facilitate reference and comparison of the Lahu text with my English translation, I have broken this and subsequent texts into verses. No such divisions are recognized by the people themselves.

<sup>25</sup> The language of Lahu Nyi prayers is very different from that of everyday speech. It makes use of a number of poetic devices such as rhyming couplets, elaborate metaphors, and certain set phrases (e.g. *yo. law le<sup>~</sup> k'o<sup>^</sup> k'o*) which have no translatable meaning but in Lahu are repeated simply because they are "good to hear". Poetry such as this is difficult to render into English without sacrificing much of its flavour, but I have tried to keep as close to the Lahu words as possible.

2. Oh, if the mistake [was committed]<sup>26</sup> over there at that side, let the distance which I have measured out on this cloth increase.
3. If there has been no mistake, oh let my finger reach once again to exactly the same place.
4. Oh, if the mistake [was committed] over there at that side, you all-knowing *Pi yã*, all-true *Pi yã*, let the distance which I have measured out on this cloth increase, separate a little [the point to which I measured before and the new point]; this oracle I consult.
5. We people here have no knowledge, no honesty, oh *Pi yã* up there who knows everything, who is all-true, *Kui\_ yã*<sup>27</sup> who knows everything, who is all-true; *Pi yã* who slept for three years, *Kui\_ yã* who slept for three years<sup>28</sup>, oh please help me.
6. Today we people here cannot know the truth, so I ask you to help me; I reach into your feet and into your hands, oh *Pi yã Kui\_ yã*.
7. If the mistake [was committed] over there at that side, let the distance which I have measured out on this cloth increase; this oracle I consult.
8. It must be measured three times, it must be measured three times; I cannot know the truth, I have no honesty, really I have not; oh if the mistake was committed over there at that side, let the distance I measure out on this cloth be the same as before<sup>29</sup>.

At the appropriate location the spirit specialist erects a small offering post known as a *shõ lõ* (fig. 1). This post, about 1.5 metres high, has a deep double cleft, with two small sticks (about 20 cm long) inserted horizontally to keep the slits open. In the cleft, above the crossed sticks, the specialist places a leaf cup called an *u- cu\_ lũ*, into which he puts offerings for the offended *hk'aw nẽ*. These include a pair of beeswax candles and some grains of raw husked rice. Next, the specialist decorates the offering post by inserting into the top of it, underneath the leaf cup, a number of

<sup>26</sup> Words in brackets do not appear in the Lahu but are implied.

<sup>27</sup> *Kui\_ yã* is the second part of the couplet *Pi yã Kui\_ yã* and refers to *Pi yã*.

<sup>28</sup> This alludes to a Lahu origin myth which relates that when *G'ui\_ sha*, the Creator, made the earth it was soft and muddy, unfit for human habitation. *G'ui\_ sha* therefore summoned *Pi yã* and for three years fed him on a diet of copper and iron. Strengthened by this diet, *Pi yã* magically solidified the earth by shooting his power, like lightning, against it.

<sup>29</sup> That is, "let it be the same for three consecutive measurements" to prove the oracle correct.

pointed bamboo sticks with strips of white cloth attached. These decorative "flags" are called *ca. ca.* Two additional pointed bamboo sticks are inserted to hold chains made of small rings of shaved bamboo. Such chains are known as *na— g'aw~ na— ju.* and are said to represent earrings. These offerings, informants say, will please the spirit. Around the bamboo sticks the specialist hangs a length of white cotton string (*a— mo hkeh*), which is not an offering but rather a "conductor". Through this string the spiritual counterpart of the sick man, which may have been captured by the spirit, can be returned to its rightful owner. Thus when the specialist recites the propitiatory prayer he requests the *kh'aw ne~* to release the spiritual counterpart and send it back to the piece of string. At the conclusion of the propitiatory rite, the specialist will remove this string from the offering post and take it back to his client's house where he will bind it around the sick man's wrist. At this time, it is believed, the spiritual counterpart will re-enter the man's body and will be prevented from subsequent escape by the string.

All preparations complete, the spirit specialist squats down in front of the offering post and prays to the hill spirit. The sick person is not present. The specialist asks the *hk'aw ne~* to release his client's soul and to forgive any offence he may have committed. Two versions of this prayer, recorded from different specialists in my study village, are presented below.

#### Text 2-A

1. A—, O—, O—, *cao. maw cao. tu~*, *cao. ui. cao. yaw~ cho. ka. ve*, *cao. pa^ cao. keh cho. ka. ve*, *hk'aw teh law. teh mui sheh— hpa~*, *a—*, *cho. ka. chaw ya~ suh^ htu haw^ htu*, *suh^ g'aw. haw^ g'aw. ve*; *cho. ka. naw. sho hk'aw^ kui~ hk'aw^ keu ga*, *hpu ca^ shi ca^ g'aw g'a k'o^ k'o*, *a ci— paweh— la~ va~ la~ she—!*
2. *Chaw ya~ ho— ti. ma~ caw.*, *ka ti. ma~ caw. leh chaw ya~ ta~ yu. tu. ta~ yu. hka— la~*, *ya. nyi ti ngeu~ ti hka~ taw^ leh cho. ka. cao. maw hk'aw teh mui sheh— hpa~*, *cao. maw law. teh mui sheh— hpa~*, *naw— hkui hk'aw la. hk'aw shu. la~ ve yo. meh—!*
3. *Ya. nyi a ci— paweh— la~ va~ la~ she— meh—*, *la. meu~ peh~ haw— aw~ ku*, *ca. ca— aw~ to taw^ leh hk'aw teh mui sheh— hpa~*, *cao. maw ho— ti. pfuh~ sheh— hpa~*, *ka ti. pfuh~ sheh— hpa~*, *naw. hkui hk'aw la. hk'aw k'aw. shu. k'aw. va~ leh a ci— paweh— la~ va~ la~ she—!*
4. *Ta~ yu. tu. ta~ yu. hka— la~*, *o—*, *chaw ya~ ho— ti. a~ caw.*, *ka~ ti. a~ caw.*, *o—*, *o—*, *paweh— la~ va~ la~ she— meh—!*

## Text 2-A – Translation

1. Oh lord, great lord, powerful lord of this place<sup>30</sup>, you who sit on the hills and in the dales; oh here this man has been cutting the trees<sup>31</sup>; here at this place, if you have put [this man's soul]<sup>32</sup> into your iron prison, into your copper prison, if you have caught [this soul] in your silver chains, in your golden chains, please release it!
2. This man has no knowledge, no truth, so do not punish this man; today I bring for you this silver altar, this golden altar<sup>33</sup>; lord of this place, who sits on the hills, lord who sits in the dales, gather up [all these offerings] into your feet and into your hands!
3. Today please release [this man's soul]; I bring for you four pairs of beeswax candles, four flags<sup>34</sup>, made by my own hands; you who sit on the hills, all-knowing lord, all-true lord, once again gather up [all these offerings] into your feet and into your hands and please release [this soul]!
4. Do not punish [this man], oh this man has no knowledge, no truth, please release [his soul]!

## Text 2-B

1. O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, ya<sup>-</sup> nyi yo<sup>-</sup> law le<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup>, Meh Hpa<sup>-</sup> hk'aw ne<sup>-</sup> law<sup>-</sup> ne<sup>-</sup> ka<sup>-</sup> ve, cao<sup>-</sup> na hti<sup>-</sup> chi yo<sup>-</sup> law le<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup>, ya<sup>-</sup> chi la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>-</sup>, a<sup>-</sup>, peh<sup>-</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> te<sup>-</sup> ku taw<sup>-</sup> leh sho<sup>-</sup> lo<sup>-</sup> ngeu<sup>-</sup> sho<sup>-</sup> lo<sup>-</sup> hka<sup>-</sup> taw<sup>-</sup> leh nga<sup>-</sup> hta<sup>-</sup> tcuh g'a leh ca<sup>-</sup> hk'a taw<sup>-</sup> leh ka<sup>-</sup> haw naw<sup>-</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> naw<sup>-</sup> hta<sup>-</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> g'a ve yo<sup>-</sup> law le<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup>.
2. Meh hpa<sup>-</sup> hk'aw ne<sup>-</sup> law<sup>-</sup> ne<sup>-</sup>, ya<sup>-</sup> chi ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> ta ti<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>-</sup> leh ta ti<sup>-</sup> ta hk'a<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>-</sup> leh naw<sup>-</sup> hta<sup>-</sup> ya<sup>-</sup> g'a ji<sup>-</sup> g'a caw<sup>-</sup> yo<sup>-</sup> law le<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup>, chaw ha va<sup>-</sup> ha k'o<sup>-</sup>, paweh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup> va<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup> she<sup>-</sup>!
3. Ta<sup>-</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> tu<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>-</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> hka<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, cao<sup>-</sup> na hti<sup>-</sup> naw<sup>-</sup> yo<sup>-</sup> law le<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup> k'o<sup>-</sup>, ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> ta ti<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>-</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>-</sup>, ta ti<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>-</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>-</sup>, chaw ya<sup>-</sup> meh<sup>-</sup> cu<sup>-</sup> nu<sup>-</sup> leh na<sup>-</sup> paw a<sup>-</sup> ka<sup>-</sup> pui<sup>-</sup>, meh<sup>-</sup> shi<sup>-</sup> a<sup>-</sup> maw<sup>-</sup> pui<sup>-</sup> leh hkui<sup>-</sup> g'a

<sup>30</sup> Like their lowland neighbours, the Buddhist Northern Thai (or Yuan) people, the Lahu Nyi address their locality spirits by the Thai (and Shan) title *Cao* "Lord". In this connexion see Andrew Turton, "Matrilineal Descent Groups and Spirit Cults of the Thai-Yuan in Northern Thailand", *J. Siam Soc.* LX, 2, 1972, 217–56, pp. 244ff.

<sup>31</sup> That is, "by cutting trees in the forest this man has offended you".

<sup>32</sup> The Lahu word *aw ha* is perhaps more usefully translated as "spiritual counterpart" or "spiritual essence", but for brevity and style I retain here the more usual translation "soul".

<sup>33</sup> He refers to the wooden offering post.

<sup>34</sup> Used because it has a pleasant sound, the number "four" has no necessary relationship to the number of candles and flags actually offered.

nga˘ g'a yo˘ law le˘ k'o˘ k'o, nga˘ la˘ meu˘ peh˘ haw˘ taw˘ leh hkaw˘  
 leh naw˘ hkui hk'aw ga˘, hkaw˘ leh naw˘ la˘ hk'aw ga˘ o, ya˘ nyi k'o˘  
 k'o, paweh˘ la˘ va˘ la˘ ce˘!

4. Chaw ha yo˘ law le˘ k'o˘ k'o, ma˘ mo cu˘ ca˘ chi hk'o˘ hta˘ k'aw˘  
 hpeh˘ leh k'aw˘ k'aw˘ la, ta˘ yu˘ tu˘ ta˘ yu˘ hka˘ la˘!
5. Mvuh˘ ka˘ mi˘ ka˘ ta˘ peu la˘, mi˘ ka˘ mvuh˘ ka˘ ta˘ peu la˘!
6. Sho chu˘ kui˘ chu˘ tcuh˘ g'a k'o, sho chu˘ g'aw˘ la˘!
7. Sho hk'aw˘ keu g'a k'o, sho hk'aw˘ g'aw˘ hpeh˘ la˘, shi hk'aw˘ keu g'a  
 k'o, shi hk'aw˘ g'aw˘ hpeh˘ la˘!
8. A˘, mvuh˘ meh˘ g'aw g'a k'o, mvuh˘ meh˘ le˘ la˘, haw meh˘ g'aw g'a  
 k'o, haw meh˘ le˘ la˘!
9. Chaw ya˘ chaw hk'aw˘ ma˘ shi˘ leh ho˘ ti˘ a˘ caw˘ leh ta ti˘ a˘ caw˘ leh,  
 a˘, a pa a e naw˘ yo˘ law le˘ k'o˘ k'o, nga˘ meh˘ hpfuh˘ nyi maw˘ leh  
 paweh˘ la˘ va˘ la˘ she˘, o˘, o˘!

#### Text 2-B – Translation

1. Oh today, spirit of Meh Hpa hill, lord of this place, this man brings for you one pair of beeswax candles made by his own hands, he brings for you this silver offering post, this golden offering post; he sends me [to make these offerings on his behalf], he brings this rice and here at this place he begs your forgiveness.
2. Spirit of Mae Hpa hill, this man has no knowledge, he has no honesty; if he has offended you, please release [his soul]!
3. Do not punish [this man] oh lord, yo who are all-knowing, you who are all-true, this man is deaf, he is blind; he has disobeyed you [so] I bring for you these beeswax candles made by my own hands and beg your forgiveness, I reach out and put [these offerings] into your feet, I reach out and put [these offerings] into your hands; today please release [this man's soul]!
4. Release this man's soul and send it back along this white cotton string, do not punish [this man]!
5. Do not send [this man's soul] into the air, do not send it into the earth!
6. If [you have] pierced [this man's soul] with an iron point, with a copper point, take out the iron point, copper point!
7. If [you have] put [this man's soul] into a iron prison, open up the iron prison; if [you have] put [it] into a golden prison, open up the golden prison!
8. If [this man] has offended you at the rear side of your horse, release [his soul] at the rear side of your horse; if [this man] has offended you at the



rear side of your elephant, release [his soul] at the rear side of your elephant<sup>35</sup>!

9. This man has no knowledge, he has no truth, no honesty; o father, oh mother<sup>36</sup>, look into my face and release [this soul]!

With the recitation of the propitiatory prayer, the *hk'aw ne' cai. ve* rite is completed. The spirit specialist leaves all the offerings where they are but takes the white string back to his client's house, where he will bind it around the wrist of the afflicted person.

## 2. *Hk'aw Ne' Shaw. Ve*: The major Propitiatory Rite

The major rite to propitiate the hill spirit is performed only when the minor one has failed to remove a person's affliction. As with the minor *cai. ve* rite, the *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve* ceremony takes place in the forest, either at the exact place where it is thought that the spirit was offended, or in the general direction in which the sick person was moving when his offence might have been committed.

The ritual paraphernalia required for a performance of the *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve* rite is more elaborate than that for the earlier ceremony. This time, instead of a single offering post, the officiating specialist must make one or two *hti*—, altars comprising a woven bamboo mat supported by four bamboo legs. (One specialist told me that only a single *hti*— is necessary, but all others maintained that two should be made.) One altar is about 1.5 metres high; the other is slightly lower and placed in front of the first altar (Fig. 2). At each side of the altar or altars the specialist erects a long bamboo pole from which he suspends two pendants made of bamboo: a symbolic centipede and a symbolic earring. The centipede pendant, known as a *meh ca' la' shaweh.* (*meh ca' la'* “centipede”, *shaweh.* “pendant”), is particularly associated with the spirits, perhaps because both centipede and spirit have a painful bite. The earring or *na— g'aw' na— ju.* (*na— g'aw'* “earring”; *na— ju.* completes the poetic couplet meaning “earring”) consists of bamboo rings linked in a chain. My informants could attach no symbolism to the earring other than the fact that it is supposed to “please” the spirits. The altars are also decorated with the small flags called *ca. ca—*.

<sup>35</sup> Except in this text, I have not heard of a horse and elephant being associated with hill spirits. But in a rite to exorcise other kinds of spirits, the specialist offers them a model elephant and horse which he has carved from the root of a wild banana tree (see my “*Jaw Te meh. Jaw. Ve*”, xx).

<sup>36</sup> This is simply a poetic way of addressing the hill spirit.

On the altar or altars the specialist places offerings: beeswax candles, cooked and raw rice, a few chilli peppers, grains of salt, a little tobacco, imitation coins, and chicken flesh. The use of beeswax candles, chillies, salt, raw rice and tobacco is common to many Lahu Nyi spirit ceremonies. But cooked rice, replica coins, and the flesh of a sacrificial chicken are offered only during the more important rites.

I was told that the cooked rice is presented because the spirit was obviously dissatisfied with the raw grains offered during the earlier and minor rite of propitiation. The imitation coins are given with the idea of "buying back" the spiritual counterpart of the sick man, which the spirit is thought to have captured. Fashioned from pieces of scrap iron, some of these "coins" are covered with lime to resemble silver while others are burned in a fire until they turn brownish and are said to resemble gold. As to the number of such coins which should be prepared, informants' views varied greatly. One man suggested a thousand, another thirty and yet another sixteen. I suspect that this, as so much else in Lahu Nyi ritual detail, is actually left to the whim of the officiating specialist.

As for the offering of chicken flesh, the household of the person for whom the rite is to be performed must provide two fowl: a cock and a hen. These birds the specialist takes along with him to the spot chosen for the ceremony. Here he slaughters one of them, while the other will be released into the forest at the conclusion of the rite. Which bird is slaughtered seems once again to depend upon the whim of the officiating specialist. I questioned four elders of my study community on this matter; two maintained that the hen should be killed, one said it should be the cock and one that it did not matter one way or the other. All agreed, however, that the slaughtered bird is for the spirit to eat, while the other is released for the spirit to look after and breed from. Preferably the live bird should have white plumage, as this is said to make the spirit happy.

If the specialist has erected two altars, he puts the chicken flesh, cooked rice and imitation coins on the lower one and all the remaining offerings on the other. Also on the lower altar he places a length of white cotton string. As in the earlier rite, the spirit is requested to return the sick man's spiritual counterpart to this string which will later be tied around his wrist. All these preparations complete, the specialist recites the propitiatory prayer. Two examples of this recitation, recorded from different specialists, are given below.

#### Text 3—A

1. Ha O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, O<sup>-</sup>, cho<sup>-</sup>ka<sup>-</sup>cao<sup>-</sup>maw ho<sup>-</sup> ti. pfuh<sup>~</sup>sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>,cao<sup>-</sup>maw  
ka ti. pfuh<sup>~</sup>sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>,cho<sup>-</sup>ka<sup>-</sup>ya<sup>-</sup> nyi nga<sup>-</sup>hti<sup>-</sup> ngeu<sup>~</sup>hti<sup>-</sup> hka<sup>~</sup>taw<sup>^</sup>  
leh cho<sup>-</sup>ka<sup>-</sup> haw la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup>hkaw<sup>-</sup> lu<sup>-</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> tan<sup>~</sup>taw<sup>^</sup> leh naw<sup>-</sup>hkui

- haw<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> k'aw<sup>-</sup> ga<sup>-</sup> leh la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> ca<sup>-</sup> ca<sup>-</sup> aw<sup>~</sup> to, peh<sup>~</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> aw<sup>~</sup> ku  
taw<sup>^</sup> la<sup>~</sup>.
2. A<sup>-</sup>, cao<sup>-</sup> maw ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, ta ti<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, mvuh<sup>-</sup>  
g'a cheh<sup>~</sup> htaw<sup>~</sup>, neh<sup>-</sup> g'a la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> lu<sup>-</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> tan<sup>~</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>.
  3. Chaw ya<sup>~</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> caw<sup>-</sup> ka ti<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> caw<sup>-</sup> leh, a<sup>-</sup>, chaw ya<sup>~</sup> hta<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup>  
tu<sup>-</sup>, ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> hka<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>.
  4. Naw<sup>-</sup> sho hk'aw<sup>^</sup> keu g'a k'o, sho hk'aw<sup>^</sup> geu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, kui<sup>~</sup> hk'aw<sup>^</sup> keu  
ga k'o, kui<sup>~</sup> hk'aw<sup>^</sup> geu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>.
  5. U<sup>-</sup> leh hpu g'o<sup>-</sup> ju<sup>^</sup> g'a k'o, hpu g'o<sup>-</sup> shu la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, a ci<sup>-</sup> paweh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> va<sup>~</sup>  
la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>!
  6. Ya<sup>-</sup> nyi hkaw<sup>-</sup> tan<sup>~</sup> te<sup>~</sup> mui<sup>-</sup> te<sup>~</sup> hin<sup>-</sup> taw<sup>^</sup> leh naw<sup>-</sup> hkui haw<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup>  
haw<sup>-</sup> ga<sup>-</sup> ve.
  7. Cao<sup>-</sup> maw hk'aw<sup>-</sup> teh mui sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>, cao<sup>-</sup> maw law<sup>-</sup> teh mui sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>,  
hk'aw<sup>-</sup> teh mui htaw<sup>~</sup> neh<sup>-</sup> g'a la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> peh<sup>~</sup> ve<sup>^</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, law<sup>-</sup> teh  
mui g'a htaw<sup>~</sup> neh<sup>-</sup> g'a la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> aw<sup>-</sup> ve<sup>^</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, a ci<sup>-</sup> paweh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>  
va<sup>~</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>!
  8. Ya<sup>-</sup> shaw<sup>-</sup> la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> lu<sup>-</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> tan<sup>~</sup> taw<sup>^</sup> leh naw<sup>-</sup> hkui haw<sup>-</sup>  
la<sup>-</sup> haw<sup>-</sup> k'aw<sup>-</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> leh k'aw<sup>-</sup> cai<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> ve yo<sup>-</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>-</sup>, o<sup>-</sup>, paweh<sup>-</sup>  
la<sup>~</sup> va<sup>~</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup> meh<sup>-</sup>!
  9. Ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> tu<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> hka<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>, chaw ya<sup>~</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> caw<sup>-</sup>, ta ti<sup>-</sup> ma<sup>~</sup> caw<sup>-</sup>,  
naw<sup>-</sup> ho<sup>-</sup> ti<sup>-</sup> ta ti<sup>-</sup> pfuh<sup>~</sup> sheh<sup>-</sup> hpa<sup>~</sup>.
  10. A<sup>-</sup>, hk'aw<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>^</sup> hk'aw<sup>-</sup> ya<sup>-</sup> leh ku<sup>-</sup> g'a eu<sup>-</sup> g'a htaw<sup>~</sup> ya<sup>-</sup> g'a ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>, ji<sup>^</sup>  
g'a ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>.
  11. Hk'aw<sup>-</sup> ta<sup>^</sup> hk'aw<sup>-</sup> ya<sup>-</sup>, suh<sup>^</sup> g'aw<sup>-</sup> haw<sup>^</sup> g'aw<sup>-</sup> htaw<sup>~</sup> ya<sup>-</sup> g'a ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> ji<sup>^</sup>  
g'a ta<sup>~</sup> yu<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup>, naw<sup>-</sup> a ci<sup>-</sup> paweh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> va<sup>~</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>!
  12. Ya<sup>-</sup> nyi la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> peh<sup>~</sup> ve<sup>^</sup> aw<sup>-</sup> ve<sup>^</sup> ha<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, la<sup>-</sup> meu<sup>~</sup> hkaw<sup>-</sup> lu<sup>-</sup>  
hkaw<sup>-</sup> tan<sup>~</sup> chi ma ve ha<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup>, paweh<sup>-</sup> la<sup>~</sup> va<sup>~</sup> la<sup>~</sup> she<sup>-</sup> o<sup>-</sup>, paweh<sup>-</sup>  
la<sup>~</sup> o meh<sup>-</sup>!

## Text 3-A – Translation

1. Oh lord of this place, you who know all things, lord who is all-true, here  
at this place I bring for you today a silver altar, a golden altar; I bring for  
you here at this place these offerings made by my own hand and I once  
again reach under your feet and under your hands; I bring for you these  
four flags and these four pairs of beeswax candles<sup>37</sup>.
2. Oh lord, you who know all things, you who are all-true, you who live in  
a high place, in this low place receive these offerings made by my own  
hand.

<sup>37</sup> See note 34 above.

3. This man does not know anything, he has no truth, so do not punish this man.
4. If you have put [this man's soul] into an iron prison, open up the iron prison; if you have put [his soul] into a copper prison, open up the copper prison.
5. If you have stabbed [this man's soul] while he was lying here, take out the silver needle, please release [this man's soul].
6. Today I bring for you these ten thousand, these one thousand offerings and I reach under your feet and under your hands.
7. Lord who sits on the corners of the hills, lord who sits on the corners of the dales, even though you sit on the corners of the dales receive at this low place this beautiful cooked rice prepared by my own hand and please release [this man's soul].
8. This morning I bring for you these offerings made by my own hand and I reach under your feet and under your hands; I beg your forgiveness and once again make offerings on this man's behalf; please release [this man's soul].
9. This man does not know anything, he has no truth, do not punish him, you who know all things, you who are all-true.
10. Oh, [if the mistake was committed] while climbing up or climbing down the hills, while calling out or drying out, do not punish the mistake.
11. [If the mistake was committed] while climbing up or climbing down the hills, while clearing the trees, do not punish the mistake; please release [this man's soul]!
12. Today, receive these beautiful beeswax candles and this beautiful cooked rice made by my own hand, receive all these offerings, oh please release [this man's soul]!

## Text 3-B

1. O-, O-, chaw chi yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, Meh Hpa. hk'aw ne~ law. ne~ hk'o~ hta., ya. nyi yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, peh~ haw\_ taw^ leh g'a^ te~ ceh taw^ leh hpu te~ pa~ taw^ leh hti\_ ngeu~ hti\_ hka~ taw^ leh naw. haw\_ ga. g'a ve, cao. na hti naw. hta. ga. g'a ve, cao. pu~ cao. va~, a-, hkaw\_ leh naw. hkui hk'aw ga. o, hkaw\_ leh naw. la hk'aw ga. o.
2. Hpu chi te~ hin\_ ve yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, chaw ha va~ ha yu. tu. yu. hka\_ ta\_ ve yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, k'aw. vui. hk'aw., k'aw. pa hk'aw. ve, hkaw\_ htu^ lao ve.
3. A-, chaw ya~ ho\_ ti. ma~ pfuh~ leh ka~ ti. ma~ pfuh~ leh nga. hta. tcuh g'a ve yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, nga. ho\_ ti. a~ pfuh~ leh nga. law. hk'aw. hk'a~ hk'aw. g'a ve yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, k'o, naw. yo. law le~ k'o^ k'o, nga. meh^ hpufuh~ hta. nyi leh paweh\_ la~ va~ la~ she\_.

4. Chaw ha yo. law le˘ k'o˘ k'o, sho hk'aw˘ keu g'a k'o, sho hk'aw˘ g'aw. leh hpeh˘ la˘, shi hk'aw˘ keu g'a k'o, shi hk'aw˘ g'aw. leh hpeh˘ la˘!
5. Sho chu˘ tcuh— g'a k'o, sho chu˘ g'aw. leh hpeh˘ la˘, hpu chu˘ tcuh— g'a k'o, hpu chu˘ g'aw. leh hpeh˘ la˘!
6. A—, chaw ha va˘ ha k'o˘ k'o, ta˘ yu. tu. ta˘ yu. hka— la˘, ma— mo cu˘ hpu˘ chi hk'o˘ hta. chaw leh k'aw. la, mvuh˘ ka— mi. ka— ta˘ peu la˘, hkaw— ve yo.
7. Hkaw— leh naw. hkui hk'aw ga. o, hkaw— leh naw. la. hk'aw ga. o.
8. A pa a e te leh nga. meh˘ hpfuh˘ nyi maw. leh a—, hpeh˘ la˘ she—, o—, o—, hkaw— leh naw. hkui hk'aw ga. o, hkaw— leh naw. la. hk'aw ga. o.

### Text 3-B – Translation

1. Oh today this man brings for you, oh spirit of Meh Hpa hill, these beeswax candles, he brings for you one pair of fowl, he brings for you one thousand silver pieces, he brings for you this silver altar, this golden altar and reaches to you, he reaches to you lord [of this place]; lord, he begs your forgiveness and reaches into your feet, he begs your forgiveness and reaches into your hands.
2. If you have punished him and are imprisoning this man's soul, [with these] one thousand silver pieces he buys back [his soul], he exchanges [this silver for his soul], he begs your forgiveness and [brings for you these metal pieces] covered with lime<sup>38</sup>.
3. Oh, this man has no knowledge, he has no truth, he has sent me on his behalf [to ask your forgiveness], I have no knowledge but I beg you [to return his soul], please look into my face and release [his soul].
4. If you have put this man's soul into an iron prison, open up the iron prison and release [it], if you have put [it] into a golden prison, release [it] from the golden prison.
5. If you have pierced [this soul] with an iron point, take out the iron point and release [it]; if you have pierced [it] with a silver point, take out the silver point and release [it].
6. Oh do not punish this man's soul, send it back along this white cotton string; do not send it into the sky or into the earth; I beg your forgiveness.
7. I beg your forgiveness and reach into your feet, I beg your forgiveness and reach into your hands.
8. Oh you who are father and mother, look into my face, oh release [this man's soul]; I beg your forgiveness and reach into your feet, I beg your forgiveness and reach into your hands.

<sup>38</sup> Refers to the imitation silver coins offered to the spirit.

At the conclusion of his prayer, the officiating specialist releases the remaining chicken, allowing it to wander away into the forest, probably to find its way back to the village if this is not too far away. He removes from the lower altar most of the flesh of the sacrificed fowl, leaving only the head, feet and entrails, and he also takes away the length of white string. All the other offerings are left on the altars. Returning to his client's house, the specialist binds his wrist with the string. The carcass of the sacrificial fowl is divided equally between the specialist and the sick person's household.

One of my informants, himself a spirit specialist, told me that if even the *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve* rite fails to bring relief to the sick person, a repeat performance may be tried with a pig offered instead of the two fowl. The pig, my informant said, must be killed in the forest near the location of the propitiatory rite and none of the meat is to be brought back to the village. Apparently the specialist butchers the pigs and roasts some of the pork on a spit over a fire he makes for this purpose. Then he puts some raw and some cooked flesh on the *hti*— altar, together with all the other offerings (except chicken) used in the usual *hk'aw ne' shaw. ve* rite. In his prayer the specialist mentions particularly the pig he has sacrificed for the spirit. The text of this prayer, as I recorded it from the sole man in my study village who claimed to know how to make such an offering, is as follows:

## Text 4

1. O—, O—, ne' ka. ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, a—, neh chi a— suh^ te' hkui ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, ka. to' g'a ve g'a te' hpaw' yo. law le' k'o^ k'o.
2. Chi' beu. hti— ngeu' hti— pa' haweh. taw^ leh hpu ngeu' hpu pa' taw^ leh a—, naw. hta. hkaw— ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o.
3. Va. chi te' hkeh naw. hta. hkaw— ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o.
4. Neh chi yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, aw. ha naw. hpeh ta— ve, naw. sho hk'aw^ kui' hk'aw^ keu g'a ve, a—, paweh— la' va' la' she—.
5. Va. chi te' hkeh-a ha. la' she—, la. shaw— hkaw— lu— hkaw— tan' chi ve, hpu nyi' pa' ve ha. la' ve.
6. A—, chaw chi ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, yaw' mi— a k'o^ k'o, yaw' k'aw. hpeh. ga' ce', aw. ya' aw. du. haw. ka— ve.
7. Nga. ha. la. shaw— hkaw— lu— hkaw— tan' pe— la' leh ka— naw. to k'aw. hkaw— la ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o.
8. Naw. shu mi' a yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, naw. hpeh' pi' she—, ta' yu. tu. ta' yu. hka— pi'.
9. Sho ca^ hpeh g'a k'o, sho ca^ hpeh' pi', kui' hk'aw^ keu g'a k'o, kui' hk'aw^ g'aw. leh hpeh' pi', shi hk'aw^ keu g'a k'o, shi hk'aw^ g'aw. leh hpeh' pi'.
10. Ya. nyi tan— o' k'ai ve yo. law le' k'o^ k'o, hkaw— lu— hkaw— tan' ha. pi', va. chi te' hkeh ve.



11. A<sup>-</sup>, yaw<sup>ˇ</sup> mi<sup>ˇ</sup>-a k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o, yaw<sup>ˇ</sup> ma<sup>ˇ</sup> ta. ce<sup>ˇ</sup>, aw. ya<sup>ˇ</sup> aw. du. ma<sup>ˇ</sup> ta. ce<sup>ˇ</sup>  
paweh— la<sup>ˇ</sup> va<sup>ˇ</sup> la<sup>ˇ</sup> she—.
12. Chaw ha chi yo. law le<sup>ˇ</sup>, k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o, naw. sho ca<sup>ˆ</sup> kui<sup>ˇ</sup> ca<sup>ˆ</sup> hpeh k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o,  
hk'a deh. hpeh<sup>ˇ</sup> la<sup>ˇ</sup> she—.
13. A<sup>-</sup>, nga. hkaw<sup>-</sup> leh naw. hkui hk'aw ga. o, hkaw<sup>-</sup> leh naw. la. hk'aw  
ga. o, ya. nyi tan— o<sup>ˇ</sup> k'ai ve yo. law le<sup>ˇ</sup> k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o, hpeh<sup>ˇ</sup> pi<sup>ˇ</sup> she—.
14. Ma<sup>-</sup> mo cu<sup>ˇ</sup> ca<sup>ˆ</sup> chi hk'o<sup>ˇ</sup> hta. yo. law le<sup>ˇ</sup> k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o, chaw ha chi yo. law  
le<sup>ˇ</sup> k'o<sup>ˆ</sup> k'o, chi hta. chaw k'aw. la, a<sup>-</sup>, paweh— la<sup>ˇ</sup> va<sup>ˇ</sup> la<sup>ˇ</sup> she—, o<sup>-</sup>!  
o<sup>-</sup>!

#### Text 4 – Translation

1. Oh spirit here at this place, oh, some time ago this woman passed by this place.
2. Now I bring for you a silver altar, I bring for you one thousand silver coins and I beg your forgiveness.
3. This pig [I bring for you] and I beg your forgiveness.
4. If you have caught this woman's soul and put it inside an iron prison, a copper prison, oh please release [it]!
5. Receive this pig, receive all these gifts, these two thousand silver pieces.
6. Oh, this man says he wishes to have his wife back again, the children are always crying<sup>39</sup>!
7. He has given me all these gifts, [so] I come here to beg your forgiveness.
8. Please release [the soul of] this person's wife, do not punish [her soul].
9. If you have caught [her soul] in an iron chain, remove the iron chain; if you have put [her soul] in a copper prison, open up the copper prison and release [it]; if you have put [her soul] inside a silver prison, open up the silver prison and release [it].
10. Today and hereafter, receive these offerings, this pig.
11. Oh, [this man] cannot be separated from his wife, these children cannot be separated from [their mother], please release [this woman's soul]!
12. If you have caught this person's soul in your iron chain, your copper chain, carefully release [it]!
13. Oh, I beg your forgiveness and reach into your feet, I beg your forgiveness and reach into your hands, today and hereafter please release [this woman's soul]!
14. Please release this person's soul onto this cotton string, let it come back following along [this string].

<sup>39</sup> The specialist says this to arouse the spirit's pity. It is not necessarily true that the sick woman is physically separated from her family.

With the end of this prayer the rite is concluded. The specialist may eat as much of the pork as he wishes, I was told, but he may not bring any of it back to the village. Although my notes do not make it clear, it is probable that the remainder is distributed among any of the sick person's household who care to attend the rite. The patient himself (or herself) will usually not be present at the propitiatory rite.

Should none of the ritual measures described in this paper produce the desired cure, several interpretations are possible. Perhaps the spirit was disinclined to accept the offerings. Maybe the specialist had insufficient power to obtain the spirit's ear. Or perhaps it was not this spirit but another that caused the affliction in the first place. In any event, there are enough explanations at hand to keep the Lahu villagers from abandoning their faith in ritual therapy.

Figure 1. A *sho~ lo^* (offering post)  
with *u^- cu\_ lu~* (leaf cup)

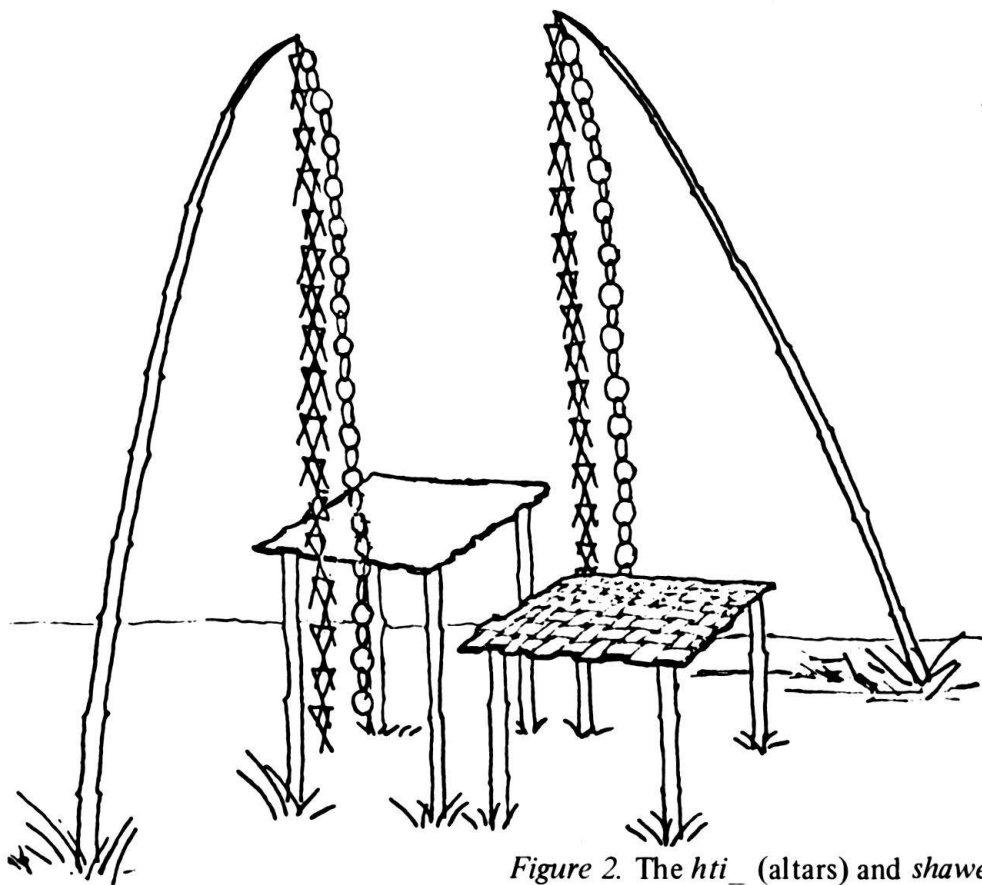
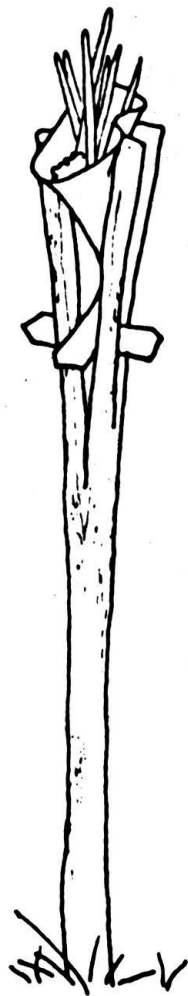


Figure 2. The *hti\_* (altars) and *shaweh~* (pendants)

